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Coach Chuck Rohe and the 1961 South Carolina cross country champions. Right: Standout sprinter Dave Segal.

THE STANDARD BEARERS

By Vince Moore

Led by a dynamic coach who knew how to bring out the best in his charges, a talented team came together 50 years ago and opened the door for championship athletics at Furman.

DAVE SEGAL WAS A 22-YEAR-OLD runner living in London, England, when he received an offer to attend a university he had never heard of in a part of the United States about which he was equally clueless. It was the summer of 1959, and Segal was being courted by a young American coach named Chuck Rohe, who headed the track and field program at Furman.

Segal was no ordinary runner, not by a long shot. A world-class sprinter, he had competed for the British Olympic team at the 1956 Summer Games in Melbourne, Australia, and he would represent Britain again at the 1960 Games in Rome. He was a two-time British champion in the 220-yard sprint and a silver medalist in two events at the 1958 European Championships. At the Rome Olympics, he would win a bronze medal as part of the 4x100-meter relay team.

But Rohe was no ordinary coach, either. Even though he was only 27 and a rookie

college coach when he arrived at Furman in 1957, he was building a program that was quickly becoming one of the best in the Southeast. And his contacts were good enough that he counted Peter Wilson, sports editor of the *London Daily Mirror*,

among his friends — which is how he and Segal came to be in touch with one another.

Now that Segal was in his early 20s and had his first Olympic Games behind him, he was interested in attending college in the United States.

A few years earlier he had received scholarship offers from such track powerhouses as the University of California, UCLA

and Villanova, but the timing wasn't right for him. Now, though, he had an offer from a small school in South Carolina, and he was intrigued from the very beginning, especially with this coach whose confident demeanor was evident even over the phone.

So Segal packed his bags and running shoes and crossed the Atlantic in January of 1960 to begin his college career.



For such a small school, Furman has accomplished some amazing things in the athletic arena. There are basketball's towering periods — the mid-'50s, featuring the high-scoring teams led by Frank Selvy '54 and Darrell Floyd '56, and the early '70s, with the powerhouse squads coached by Joe Williams. There is football's three-decade run of conference championships and national title game



appearances. There is golf's ultimate foursome of Betsy King '77, Beth Daniel '78, Brad Faxon '83 and Dottie Pepper '87. And there is men's soccer from the early 2000s, when future World Cup players Ricardo Clark '05 and Clint Dempsey '05 were on the Stone Stadium field at the same time.

But once Chuck Rohe placed a British Olympian at the center of his track and field program and began recruiting other strong sprinters, distance runners, high jumpers and pole vaulters from across the United States, he oversaw a period of athletic achievement at Furman that rivals anything that has occurred during the last 50 years.

The cross country and track and field teams of the early 1960s

not only produced Furman's first Southern Conference championships, but had few equals even in the Southeastern Conference or Atlantic Coast Conference. They went to the highly competitive Florida Relays each year and held their own. They defeated South Carolina, Clemson and The Citadel at the yearly state meet. According to Don Armstrong '63, captain of the team his junior and senior years, the University of Georgia wouldn't even put Furman on its schedule.

"There was no question that Furman had the best program in the Southeast at that time," says Rohe. "Louisiana State and Auburn probably had the best teams in the SEC, but they weren't as good as us."

Rohe's teams opened the door for championship athletics at Furman. The university had been a member

of the Southern Conference since 1952 without winning a championship. But that changed on February 25, 1961, when the men's indoor track and field team beat Virginia Military Institute, the three-time defending champion, for the university's first league title.

That was just the beginning. Furman also won the cross country title in 1961 and would go on to win the league's indoor and outdoor track and field championships in 1962 and 1963. In all, the cross country and track and field squads won Furman's first eight conference titles between 1961 and 1965.

"I can tell you why we were so good," Rohe says. "We had the best athletes, pure and simple. We were a well-rounded team, and we were able to score in most events. Those guys were just better than everybody else."

Segal performed like the Olympic-caliber athlete he was. Before graduating in 1963, he claimed nine individual conference championships and was instrumental in helping Furman to five league titles. As a senior he won the 60-yard, 100-yard and 220-yard dashes. He still holds Furman records in the 60-yard dash (6.2 seconds) and as a member of the mile relay team (3:17).

But he was not alone. Between 1958 and 1965, 29 Furman athletes earned all-conference status in cross country and indoor and outdoor track. They combined to claim first place in 72 events, with 41 of those titles coming during the golden period of 1961 through 1963.

Three members of the team during that era — runners Segal, Fleetwood Loustalot '65 and Dennis Patterson '63 — are in the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame. Other runners who won multiple events during their careers were Armstrong, Pat Anderson '65, Jim Martin '61, Avery Sayer '66, Thad Talley '62, Tommy Thompson '64, Dave Tyler '64, Copley Vickers '64 and Ed West '65. Ken Garrett '60 (shot put), Bill Keel '63 (pole vault) and Ed Moore '64 (shot put) won multiple field events.

Rohe was indeed a master recruiter who went far and wide to attract athletes to Furman. Talley and Loustalot were from Mississippi, Martin and Moore from Texas, Vickers from Tennessee, and Keel from Illinois. Armstrong grew up in Florida and was set to attend either the University of Miami or the University of Florida when he was contacted by Rohe.



“I got a call at home out of the blue,” says Armstrong, who today lives in Seneca, S.C., and is retired from IBM Corporation. “I had never heard of Furman and wasn’t planning on leaving the state to go to college. But by the time I got off the phone with Coach Rohe, I had decided I would be going to Furman.”

Furman may have had the athletes

to become a dominant team, but Rohe was the driving force behind the program’s success. To this day, some 50 years later, both Segal and Armstrong refer to him as “Coach.” They describe him as a dynamic mentor who brought out the best in his athletes, and whose positive influence went far beyond the field of competition.

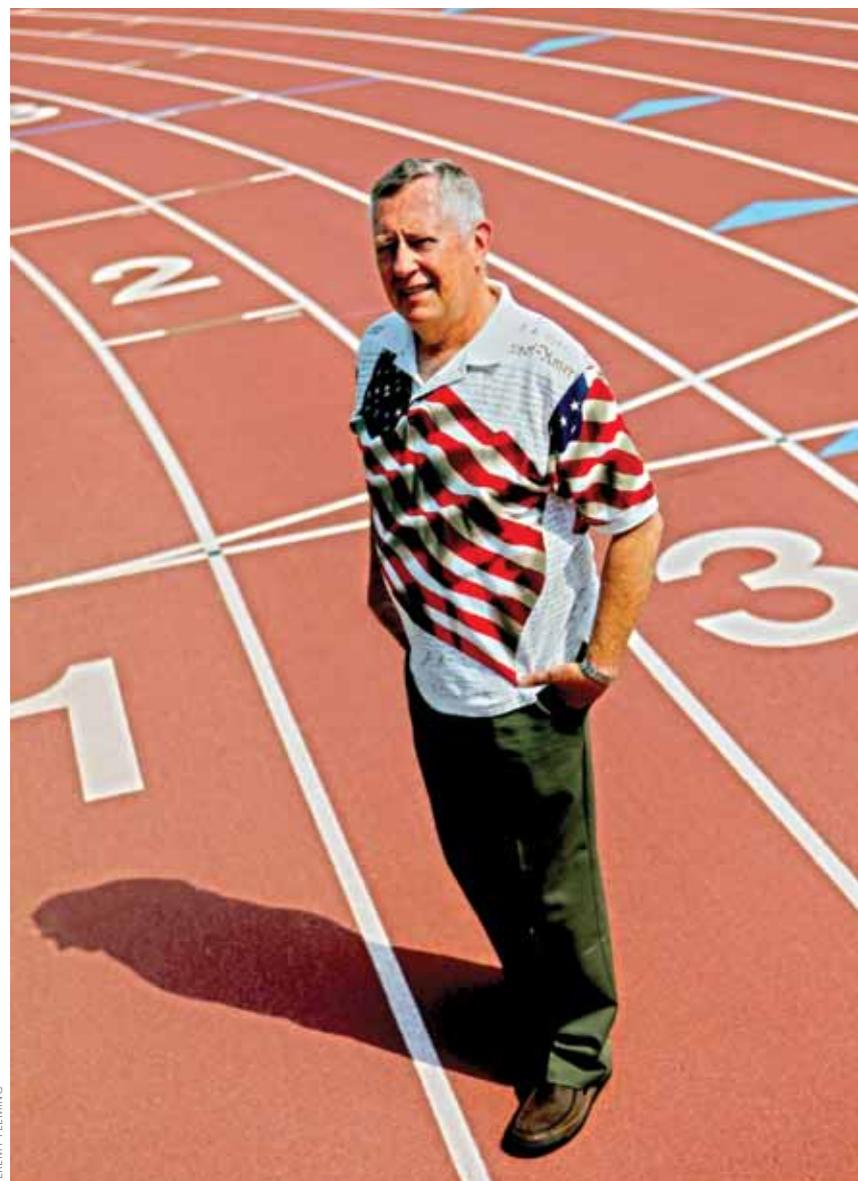
“He got more out of a group of guys than you can ever imagine,” Armstrong says. “He was very demanding, but also very reasonable. There are certain leaders you will follow anywhere, and Coach Rohe was one of those people.”

But what exactly was Rohe going to teach a British Olympian who had competed at the highest level all over the world? Segal admits that one of the reasons he chose Furman was to be a “big fish in a small pond” — and, in fact, his times improved while he was at Furman. His best time of 9.5 in the 100-yard dash, run on a dirt track in Johnson City, Tenn., in the pouring rain, was just two-tenths of a second off the existing world record.

Segal points out, though, that he was afflicted, as many runners are, by the selfishness that is inherent in such a solitary sport.

“Coach Rohe changed my life,” he says. “I was self-centered when I came to Furman. I was a runner, and running is a very lonely thing. But he taught me how to move beyond that selfishness and be part of a team, and that changed everything for me.”

He also discovered the joys of being a good teammate. Although Segal says that sprinting a quarter-mile was, and still is, the stuff of his nightmares, he ran the distance anyway as a member of the mile relay team.



JEREMY FLEMING

One of Furman’s top runners during the golden years was Don Armstrong, a team captain in 1962 and 1963. He provided the photos on page 8 and opposite (standing with Chuck Rohe) and the newspaper clippings that illustrate this article.



“Coach wanted me to run it, so I did,” he says. “It killed me every time, but with three other people depending on me I would do the best I could.”

While wildly successful, Rohe’s term at Furman was relatively short. He turned down an offer to coach at Clemson University, but when the University of Tennessee came calling in 1962, he decided it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

“It wasn’t an easy decision at all,” Rohe says. “Furman definitely had a better program than Tennessee at that time.”

He left the Furman program in the hands of a young assistant coach named Jimmy Carnes, who, after two years at the helm, would go on to enjoy a Hall of Fame career at the University of Florida and be named head coach of the 1980 U.S. Olympic track and field team. But even though Carnes led the Paladins to indoor and outdoor conference titles in 1963, things were never quite the same after Rohe left.

“When he moved to Tennessee, it felt like my heart had been cut out,” Segal says.

The wave of success that Rohe created peaked in the early 1960s and crested by the latter part of the decade. Furman would sweep the cross country and indoor and outdoor track titles in 1965, but there would be only one more team championship over the next 46 years — cross country in 1976.

It should come as no surprise that Rohe continued to enjoy success. He coached Tennessee to 21 consecutive SEC cross country and track and field championships, earned NCAA National Coach of the Year honors in 1967, served on the U.S. Olympic Committee, and spent 20 years as executive director of the Florida Citrus Bowl. Now 80 and semi-retired, Rohe lives in the Orlando, Fla., area, just a few streets away from Tiger Woods in the community of Isleworth.



Rohe and the accomplishments of the Furman teams will be back in the spotlight this fall when the university celebrates the 50th anniversary of its first conference championship. The members of the 1961-65 cross country and track and field teams have been invited to gather on campus October 7-9 to celebrate their feats. The same weekend, Rohe will be inducted into the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame — an honor that Segal, who was enshrined in 2008, says is long overdue.

The record books and ensuing 50 years testify to the greatness of that period in Furman athletics. After all, the two coaches who oversaw the program — Rohe and Carnes, who died in March of this year — went on to become two of the most prolific figures in U.S. track and field history.

But when Segal and Armstrong remember those days a half century ago, they don’t say much about the records or the championships. They talk mainly about what it was like for a group of athletes to band together and achieve things they didn’t believe were possible.

For his part, Segal is less interested in discussing his running career than he is in describing how he, a natural-born loner, joined a fraternity and edited the school newspaper while at Furman. And that may be the program’s greatest legacy — that it made many young men better than they expected to be. Even a world-class runner.

“My whole life has been molded around my experiences at Furman,” says Segal, who went on to a successful business career in the United States and now lives in Houston. “I was always amazed at the high caliber of individuals who were at Furman — not just my teammates, but everybody associated with the university.

“Furman seemed to attract people of superior character, and I knew I needed to raise my game if I was going to be superior as well.” [F]

The author is director of news and media relations at Furman.



Breakthrough Victory

The 1961 Southern Conference indoor track and field meet in Lexington, Va., came down to the final event.

Upstart Furman and Virginia Military Institute, the three-time defending champion, battled for the championship throughout the late February weekend, even with the FU Roadrunners, as the student newspaper, *The Hornet*, called them, suffering through various misfortunes. Injuries hampered the performance of one of the team's top scorers, the Furman runners in the 440 were thrown off rhythm by two false starts and wound up back in the pack, and other stalwarts of the squad were off form.

Still, their teammates picked up the slack, and as the meet wound down Furman was in solid position to win. VMI led by one point with two events remaining. But up next was the mile relay, in which Furman had an excellent foursome. A victory would ensure the title, and Furman had a 15-yard lead entering the last leg — until more bad luck, in the form of a dropped baton, snuffed the opportunity.

"When I saw that baton fall on the ground, for a moment it looked like everything had gone out the window," Coach Chuck Rohe said after the meet.

The miscue meant that everything would be decided in the pole vault. Furman's hopes rested with Bill Keel '63, who needed to tie or win if the team was to take the championship.

The March 4 issue of *The Hornet* provided this breathless account of what happened from the perspective of a team member, who wrote anonymously:

"Dramatically, a hush settled over the field house. Keel nervously rubbed his hands as he stood in the center of the pole-vault run-up with the pole resting on his right shoulder. He came smartly

to attention, tested the flexibility of the pole, and began his run.

"The patter of spikes in the cinders echoed throughout the field house as rain would on an iron roof. Suddenly the rain stopped and Keel sailed majestically through the air and over the bar to bring Furman its first Conference Championship ever.

"A cloud of grey sweat-suits descended on Keel as back-slapping Furman track men went wild with joy."

By clearing 13 feet, 10 inches — a conference indoor record — Keel had given Furman the win by 1.5 points.

His title-clinching performance earned him a spot on the all-conference team with

Dave Segal '63, who won the 60-yard run and 70-yard low hurdles; versatile Thad Talley '62, 800-yard champ; and Tony Etnyre '62, high jump winner and second-place finisher in the broad jump and hop, step and jump.

Since that night 50 years ago, Furman has added 175 regular-season and tournament championships in all sports, the most of any school in the league. Furman teams have participated in 93 NCAA or AIAW (Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women) tournaments. Two teams, women's golf in 1976 and football in 1988, have captured national championships.

But as Rohe says today, "The first championship is always the best. What an exciting event that was, when our guys battled through a lot of adversity to win the first conference championship in any sport for Furman. All the hard work and dedication by those athletes finally paid off, and today they can be justifiably proud of the program they established."

And of the tradition they started.

— JULIE PRINCE PARÉ

The author, a 1996 graduate, is a sports information assistant at Furman.

Chuck Rohe maintains an active lifestyle at his Florida home. Called by some "the father of track and field in the South," he will be inducted into the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame October 8. Photo by Andrew Hunter.