

6-1-2011

## Reed finds gridiron success north of the border

Ron Wagner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

---

### Recommended Citation

Wagner, Ron (2011) "Reed finds gridiron success north of the border," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 54 : Iss. 2 , Article 20.  
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol54/iss2/20>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact [scholarexchange@furman.edu](mailto:scholarexchange@furman.edu).

## Reed finds gridiron success north of the border

**WHEN KAVIS REED** graduated from Furman in 1995, the Canadian Football League didn't seem like a world away — and not because the young Paladin cornerback was exceptionally worldly. Quite the opposite, in fact; he had never even heard of the Canadian Football League.

“An agent phoned and asked if I was interested in pursuing [an opportunity to play there], and I quickly ran to the library and researched it. I did not know about the CFL,” Reed said.

What he discovered was that America's neighbors to the north actually played something that didn't involve skis or skates. More importantly, they wanted to pay him to play it with them. That fact alone prompted Reed to start packing his bags, even though the Georgetown, S.C., native scarcely knew more about the country itself than he did about its football league.

Reed laughs at the memory of seeing Canadian license plates at Myrtle Beach when he was a kid and assuming a fair number of the tourists owned their own igloos. These days, he could probably teach a class on the nation and its football. His five-year CFL playing career laid the groundwork for a coaching climb that recently reached its zenith when he was named head coach of the Edmonton Eskimos, perhaps the proudest franchise in the league.

Reed returned to Edmonton after an 11-year CFL coaching journey that reads like a retired couple's road trip: Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg. But the Eskimos were the team that plucked him from Furman and thrust him deep into the heart of Alberta, due north of Montana and about 2,350 driving miles from home. And they have come to own his heart.

He could have wilted under the weight of the culture shock 16 years ago, but Reed embraced the opportunity to expand his world.

“I wasn't afraid — more curious as to what it had in store for me. But once that plane landed and I started driving into the city, I quickly realized it was no different than an American city, besides the weather,” Reed says.

“I think most Americans would view Canada as a homogenous society when in fact it's made up of many different cultures. But you see how they're woven together and even how the different languages are not seen as negatives but as something that makes the country what it is.”

Reed also adapted nicely to the CFL's larger field and pass-happy attacks, establishing himself as one of Edmonton's best players with 205 tackles and 20 interceptions (returning five for touchdowns) over his five seasons. His play earned him a tryout with the National Football League's Kansas City Chiefs, but at the peak of his game Reed's career ended in terrifying fashion when a hit left him paralyzed and forced him to have two vertebrae surgically fused together.

“As soon as I went down that night I knew I was done,” he says. “It's really a scary deal to not have any control of your limbs, and I had about 30 minutes of not having any. For a month I was very weak and could not stand up for more than a minute. It was not a good experience.”

Nonetheless, Reed never wavered from his desire to stay involved with the sport. Nor has he wavered in his love of Canada. His wife, Darlene, is Canadian, as are their children, Tyra and Tarik, and though the family recently bought a vacation home in Arizona, they live in Edmonton full time.

“We usually enjoy seven months of winter. They are long, grueling and mentally taxing, but



Kavis Reed (right) meets the press with Eskimos' general manager Eric Tillman.

DALE MACMILLAN/EDMONTON ESKIMOS

if you can survive it's a great place to be,” Reed says without a trace of irony.

No matter what the map says, however, Furman is never far from Reed's thoughts. He says he follows Paladin football “religiously,” and one of his few regrets was that he didn't get to see longtime equipment manager Spear Sedgley before Sedgley died last year. Reed is convinced that new coach Bruce Fowler, his position coach in college, can restore the Furman program to prominence.

“Everyone up here teases me because I boast about Furman,” says Reed, who earned his degree in biology. “I had a lot of visits in college and I could have taken a lot of major Division I offers, but when I stepped on that campus I felt like I was at home. The way the people made you feel, the pride in being a student — you carry that with you wherever you go, that pride in saying I'm a Furman graduate. You know you earned that degree.”

Fowler is not surprised by Reed's accomplishments. “I couldn't be happier for him,” Fowler says. “It's great for Furman to know that we have an alumnus out there in a position of tremendous leadership. He's gone on to represent Furman on a large stage.”

— RON WAGNER

*The author, a 1993 graduate, is a freelance writer in Hendersonville, N.C.*