

6-1-2011

A legend steps down

Jim Stewart
Furman University

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

Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim (2011) "A legend steps down," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 54 : Iss. 2 , Article 31.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol54/iss2/31>

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.

THE LAST WORD

A legend steps down

It's hard to imagine Furman without Paul Scarpa.

As Ron Wagner wrote in *Furman* magazine five years ago in a feature commemorating Scarpa's 40th year as men's tennis coach, "When you've been around Furman University longer than just about anything but the oaks that line Furman Mall, you're bound to leave a legacy."

Scarpa has done so — of championship tennis, of outstanding student-athletes, of contributions to the game, of sustained excellence, and of loyalty to Furman.

Now, after 45 years, he has decided to retire.

In making the announcement July 26, the 72-year-old Scarpa said the decision was "tough and somewhat sad, but one I needed to make in order to spend more time with my wife [Sandy] and extended family. I am so proud of what our program has been able to accomplish with the resources we have had. We have been able to establish a nationally recognized program through our recruitment of quality individuals."

Hired in 1967 from the U.S. Naval Academy by President Gordon Blackwell, Scarpa retires with more wins — 853 — than any men's tennis coach in NCAA Division I. All but 36 of those wins came at Furman, where his teams captured 17 regular-season Southern Conference titles and 14 league tournament championships. He is a member of the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame, the United States Tennis Association Southern Hall of Fame, and the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame. The stadium court at Furman's Mickel Tennis Center is named in his honor.

"Honestly, I never chased records," Scarpa told Greg Garber of ESPN.com in 2009 after a win over Yale gave him his record-setting 820th victory. "If I had waited around 46 years just trying to break the record, I believe I would have given up. There are a lot of great coaches that I admire. Maybe they retired along the way. I just kept going."

Scarpa's impact extended to other areas. His popular summer camps have for years helped young players learn the fundamentals of the game. He invented and patented Tenex tape, which is used to mark clay courts throughout the world. And in 1993 the NCAA began using a dual match scoring system that Scarpa devised. It specifies that all matches begin with doubles play, featuring eight-game pro sets, and that all three doubles teams play for one doubles point. The "Scarpa System" brought more of a team aspect to the sport and shortened the length of a typical dual match, thus increasing overall intensity and fan interest.

Scarpa also recruited true student-athletes. Sixteen of his players have been admitted to medical school.

His greatest contribution, though, was as a mentor and role model. Dudley Reynolds '75, an Alabama businessman and past member of the Furman board



of trustees, said in 2006, "I think you'll find, almost to a player — anybody that's played for Paul Scarpa — some of that optimism and enthusiasm and just passion about what he does rubs off on you. You don't realize it at the time always, but you certainly reflect on it later in life. That's certainly been my case."

David Holly '74, director of tennis at Greenville Country Club, echoed Reynolds' comments. "Pretty much everything I know about tennis, how to teach tennis, how to deal with people, I've learned from Paul. He cares probably more for you after you graduate than when you were there. He's always proud."

Scarpa will remain a presence on campus. He has been named a special assistant to President Rod Smolla and a Furman "ambassador at large" — giving him an official title for the role he has filled unofficially for 45 years.

As he said in announcing his retirement, "My dedication to Furman has come from my commitment to those who have expressed confidence in me and their desire for a special tennis program: President Blackwell, [former] athletics director Lyles Alley, Presidents John Johns and David Shi, and now President Smolla and our board of trustees, which over the years has included many Furman tennis alumni, including David Ellison ['72], Ed Good ['67] and Dudley Reynolds. I also want to thank my players for all they have meant in showcasing our program and making it so special for our alums."

— JIM STEWART

Much of the information in this article provided by Furman sports information. For more on Scarpa, visit www.furmanpaladins.com.