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Field of Dreams

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FIELD OF DREAMS



ONCE UPON A TIME, A LONG, LONG TIME AGO, FURMAN WAS A FOOTBALL POWER THAT COMPETED CONSISTENTLY AGAINST CLEMSON, SOUTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIA. AND MANLY FIELD WAS ITS HOME.

FOR 17 YEARS, from the first home game of the 1919 season until the last hurrah — a victory over The Citadel on October 10, 1936 — “one of the most splendid athletic fields in the South” was home to many of Furman’s finest football hours.

Located at the northeast corner of the downtown campus, about where Greenville’s Family Court building is today, Manly Field was a modest structure. But since it offered seating, an amenity unavailable at “the athletic grounds on Augusta Road beyond Prentiss Avenue” that had served the team since football was reinstated as a varsity sport in 1913, it was enthusiastically welcomed.

In 1916, the board of trustees, notoriously tight with money, agreed that the alumni-run Athletic Association could raise funds to construct a football field to be named for Furman’s second president, Charles M. Manly. The boosters went right to work, receiving \$30,000 in pledges from “alumni, friends, and interested people” within a year and a half, but first the war in Europe and then Spanish influenza slowed construction. Early in 1919, though, Gallivan Construction Co. promised to complete the job in time for the fall football season.

It did so, and a record-breaking crowd of

1,600 saw Furman play Oglethorpe College there on October 4, 1919. Every seat in the home-team grandstand on the west side of the newly graded field was filled. (No other seats were provided.)

A sportswriter, impressed that “the full field is seen at a glance from the concrete stands imbedded in soil in amphitheatre style,” described the facility as “a marvel of beauty where no expense has been spared.”

The grandstand lacked a roof, although trees surrounding the field may have offered some shade. At the 4 p.m. kickoff the temperature was 88 degrees, but neither heat nor broiling sun affected the Furman players, as they defeated Oglethorpe 13-0 and started a 17-year tradition.

The statistics speak loudly: eight state championships, a record of 124 wins, 42 losses and 7 ties, and no losing season. (A 5-5 record in 1924 was redeemed by consecutive end-of-the-year home victories over Clemson, South Carolina and the University of Mississippi.)

The first eight years under W.L. (Billy) Laval represented a golden age. Laval compiled a 69-19-3 record, beat Clemson and Carolina six times each, and coached the 1927 squad to a 10-1 record, including a 38-7 victory over Miami in the predecessor to the Orange Bowl.

BY JUDITH T. BAINBRIDGE



L AVAL'S SUCCESS launched the university into big-time college football. While Furman continued to play state teams, other Southern Baptist colleges (Richmond, Wake Forest, Mercer), and Presbyterian rival Davidson, under Laval it also scheduled (and lost to) Alabama, Georgetown, West Virginia, Army and Bucknell, and defeated Virginia, Florida and even (once) Georgia. That win was really the big time, since the Bulldogs consistently stomped on the Hurricane.

In his history of Greenville County, A.V. Huff, former dean and professor of history at Furman, tells the story of alumnus Norwood Cleveland, who swore that if his team finally beat Georgia, he would walk the 101 miles from Athens to Greenville. When Furman accomplished that seemingly impossible feat in 1926, Cleveland began hoofing his way north. Four days later, he entered Manly Field to the applause of the entire student body — and several hundred Greenvillians. (See accompanying story.)

Perhaps coincidentally, the university as a whole improved dramatically during the golden Laval years. It became one of the four collegiate beneficiaries of The Duke Endowment, ensuring its future; it was accredited for the first time; President Joseph McGlothlin built five new buildings, doubling campus facilities; and enrollment tripled from about 250 to more than 750.

Although its size and reputation were growing, Furman was still a small school with a small team. The 1927 squad, for example, had no man weighing more than 195 pounds. Most were under 160, and one player was described (not ironically) as a “towering 6-foot-two-incher.”

Sports administration was equally spare. A non-paid “graduate athletic manager,” Alester G. Furman, Jr., was, in effect, athletic director. Laval coached football, basketball and baseball without an assistant.

Even when the University of South Carolina lured Laval away after the 1927 season, the Hurricane (also called the Purple Dervishes, Purple Paladins, Purple People and, later, the House of Magic) continued their winning ways under first T.B. Amis (1928-1931) and then A.P. “Dizzy” McLeod.

Manly Field served them well. Seating was inexpensively expanded with wooden bleachers, and a press box with broadcasting facilities was installed above the grandstand. In 1929, 5,000 fans watched Furman beat Erskine 19-6 in South Carolina's first night football game, lighted by 1,000-watt bulbs mounted on 14 posts.

Night lights burned in Old Main offices in the years of the Great Depression, as administrators tried to balance books and pay faculty salaries. Enrollment fell and Furman's debt increased. Without funds from The Duke



WALK OF FAME

Norwood Cleveland's Victory March

As a young man, Norwood Cleveland was a devoted Furman football fan — so devoted that, in October of 1926, he made a bold promise. At a Furman practice, Cleveland, a member of the Class of 1913, vowed that should the Hurricane upset Georgia in Athens — a rare accomplishment for the teams of that day — he would walk the 101 miles back to Greenville.

You guessed it. On October 16, W.L. Laval's squad stunned Georgia 14–7. *The Greenville News* reported that “men close to the team believe [Cleveland's] promise substantially aided Furman's morale in the conflict.”

And Cleveland was ready to make good on his commitment.

Years later, in a 1972 interview with the *News*, the 81-year-old Cleveland described the situation. “There was no getting out of it,” he said. The paper had reported on his promise, “and everybody knew about it.”

So he cheerfully began the journey from the goalpost at Georgia's Sanford Field. A friend who had joined him at the game agreed to accompany him on the first leg, and they made it to Royston. The next day, Cleveland crossed the state line and marched into Anderson.

Initially, Cleveland recalled, he had planned to do the walk in three days, but arrangements could not be made for a Tuesday celebration. So “they sent a couple of reporters from the *News* down to get me to put it off for a day.”

There was just one problem. An acquaintance had made a \$10 wager that “Naughty” could make it home in three days, and Cleveland didn't want him to lose the bet. An agreement was reached, however, and Cleveland remained in Anderson the extra night, where, he said, he spent most of his time “in a hot tub of water resting my feet.”

Virtually the entire student body and several hundred townfolk turned out to greet his arrival at Manly Field October 20 — recorded at 4:12 p.m. He was met with cheers of “Naughty, you're the best sport in Greenville,” treated to a parade down Main Street, crowned “king of sports,” and presented a football autographed by the Furman team. “They even had me in the movie newsreels downtown,” he recalled. For his part, Cleveland had told the paper that he felt “joy in every step.”

He went on to serve as postmaster of Marietta, S.C., for 39 years and remained a staunch Furman supporter throughout his life. When he died in 1987, his obituary listed his greatest claim to fame as his walk from Athens to Greenville.

— JIM STEWART



Endowment, the university would not have survived. But football fever still burned.

Influential trustees and alumni soon grew unhappy with Manly Field. There wasn't enough seating, they complained. Because the field had never been sodded, injuries could be harsh. And federal funds were available.

Although Furman president Bennette E. Geer was opposed, in 1934 the trustees voted to seek funds to build a new, bigger stadium. They mortgaged property and borrowed \$20,000 from the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. to buy the land. On Halloween Day in 1936, Furman christened Surrine Stadium with a victory over Davidson.

Manly Field was not abandoned. It hosted Sally League baseball games, served as Furman's football practice field, and became the university's ROTC drill ground. But never again would it echo with cheers of celebration or witness such golden victories. |F|

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