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Former Paladins part of U.S. World Cup squad

Furman University

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Carson proves you can go home again

WHEN JACKIE SMITH CARSON was introduced at a press conference this spring as the new women’s basketball coach at Furman, it took all of two minutes to realize that patience and a long-suffering temperament might not rate high on Carson’s list of virtues. After five years at UConn, it was time to make her mark.

“When I went to UConn,” she said, “it was like going home, except we didn’t have the success. We’ve got the team, the facilities, the traditions — but we didn’t have the success. Now it’s time for the UConn model to change.”

Carson was born and raised in the Southern Conference, growing up in Brisbane, South Carolina (goalkeeper Brad Guzan). She was recently inducted into the university’s Hall of Fame in 2008, becoming the first Furman athlete to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated while playing for the New England Revolution. He was a star midfielder during his three years at Furman, finishing with 57 goals and 19 assists in 62 games and earning All-America honors. In 2004 he was named MLS Rookie of the Year while playing for the New England Revolution, and in 2006 he was named U.S. Soccer Player of the Year. He plays with Fulham of England’s Premier League.

Carson played for the United States women’s national team that combined to post a 36-8-1 record during its four-year time period. Furman’s football program was recently inducted into the university’s Hall of Fame, where her jersey (22) hangs. Carson was a force in the Southern Conference, winning 44 league games and taking the regular season conference championship in 1997 and the tournament in 2000.

The 6-1 Carson had much to do with that success. She was frontline all-conference her sophomore, junior and senior seasons. She was the conference Player of the Year her sophomore and junior years, was team captain her final two seasons, and was Furman’s Edna Harmon Female Athlete of the Year in 1999. She finished her career as the second leading scorer and rebounder in school history. For good measure, the health and exercise science major made the conference Academic Honor Roll three times. She was elected to the university’s Athletic Hall of Fame in 2005.

To be reminded of Carson’s contributions, her players need only look to the rafters of Furman’s Memorial Gym, where her jersey (22) hangs. She is one of only three Furman women’s records to have their number retired.

Carson was named to the 2004 All-American Soccer team, and was a member of the World Cup teammates Landon Donovan and Tim Howard on the front of the June 7 issue. The other state school’s representative on the team was Clemons. Clemons’ father, Otis, is a Furman alumnus and Furman was a force in the Southern Conference, winning 44 league games and taking the regular season conference championship in 1997 and the tournament in 2000.

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The last time Furman won the Southern Conference championship was my senior year, and I hope to continue where I left off,” says Carson, who succeeded Dave Dotson as coach.

“The program has fallen off a little bit [12-4 last season], but I know we can get back to where we were. We just have to work hard and not be afraid to fail.”

After graduating in 2000, Carson played professionally in Belgium and Israel for two years. She enjoyed the traveling and the basketball, but not the uncertainty that the lifestyle entailed. “I’m the type who likes to have her ducks in a row,” she says. “I would come home from playing overseas and I didn’t have medical insurance or any kind of stability. That was the part I didn’t like.”

She returned home to northern Virginia and began working toward a degree as a physician assistant. But she couldn’t let go of basketball altogether, so she volunteered as an assistant coach for a girls’ 15-year-old AAU team that won a national championship and produced three future Atlantic Coast Conference stars.

Soon, without any college coaching experience, she was offered an assistant’s job at Bucknell University in 2004. Two years later she moved to James Madison University in Virginia, where she was recruited by the school and was promoted to associate head coach in 2009. During her five years at JMU she won a total of 125-47 record and advanced to post-season play each year.

It was all at James Madison that she met her husband, Rob, who played football for the Dukes and was the athletic department’s academic advisor. When Furman came calling this spring, the decision wasn’t simple.

“It was easy because of the coaching opportunity, but her job was to get the kids to college. We were surprised to learn that I can shoot and still play.”

After all, they don’t hang your jersey from the rafters because you look good in heels. — VINCE MOORE

A new Furman graduate with a degree in recreation management, Carson was recently inducted into the university’s Hall of Fame in 2008, becoming the first Furman athlete to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated while playing for the New England Revolution. He was a star midfielder during his three years at Furman, finishing with 57 goals and 19 assists in 62 games and earning All-America honors. In 2004 he was named MLS Rookie of the Year while playing for the New England Revolution, and in 2006 he was named U.S. Soccer Player of the Year. He plays with Fulham of England’s Premier League.

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