

1-1-2010

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Recommended Citation

Chandler, Stacy Schorr (2010) "Paladin Pride still comes through," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 4 , Article 35.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol52/iss4/35>

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Paladin Pride still comes through

Amid the sea of orange and blue in the stands at Auburn University's football game November 7, there were a few specks of purple.

It was Homecoming for the Southeastern Conference powerhouse, and we, the Paladins, served as the obligatory underdog. Make that the under-under-underdog.

But despite the odds — an SEC team with a behemoth recruiting budget and regular bowl trips versus, well, us — the stadium was dotted with Furman faithful. And we weren't there to be shy.

I was one of those specks of purple, a little out of place deep in Jordan-Hare Stadium's home seating with my father, Bob Schorr, as diehard an Auburn fan as you'll ever meet.

I grew up going to Auburn football games. I know the Auburn fight song by heart. I became fluent in cursing by observing my dad and those around him during losing seasons.

But although it pained me a bit, I had to follow where my heart and my student-loan payments led me. I donned a purple T-shirt emblazoned with the word "Paladins" and headed to Auburn with my dad to watch my team get crushed by his.

Wandering the campus before the game, I encountered several Auburn fans who welcomed me to their turf. A friendly, sportsmanlike gesture, no doubt, but one that often came with an ulterior motive: information.

At least three times, the pleasantries were followed by a question: "Just where is Furman, anyway?"

After answering, I took it upon myself to extract a little information in kind. My informal, highly unscientific poll (I was an English major, after all) found that the percentage of Auburn fans who know what a Paladin is was closely akin to the odds of Furman pulling off an upset that day.

But thanks to my bright purple shirt and the conversations it sparked, a few more people now know that Furman is in Greenville, S.C., and that a Paladin is a knight on a noble steed. And that fans of our football program may be fewer in number, but no less bursting with pride.

Once I entered the stadium and found my seat, I realized I was a lone voice in my particular section, but I wasn't alone among the enemy.

On the way in, I had passed the occasional purple shirt and became increasingly relieved that I would not be the only Furman fan in the crowd. The view from my seat confirmed it: There, across the stadium, was the visitors section. And while it was more of a puddle of purple than an endless sea, it was lively.

I went into the game with two main hopes. One, that we'd put some points on the board. Two, that

our team would escape heinous injury at the hands of an SEC squad not known for playing daintily.

Less than two minutes in, Auburn scored its first touchdown. But then a funny thing happened. Furman answered almost immediately with a field goal.

I started to breathe easier and settled in to watch the game unfold. The quick-paced exchange of points — though by no means an even one — kept things interesting.

In the end, the Paladins finished with a respectable 31 points. Sure, that was up against Auburn's 63. But still, points are points, and avoiding ridicule on the sports networks' evening recaps is always a good thing. And no one was hurt, not even my pride.

I wasn't the only Paladin fan who left the stadium with my head held high. On my way out, I passed a man in Furman gear and gave him a nod and a shrug. He nodded back, but there was no shrug.

Instead, his simple comment offered irrefutable proof that Paladin Pride is forever, as our fight song says, "floating on high:"

"Maybe next time."

— STACY SCHORR CHANDLER

The author, a 1999 graduate, is a copy editor with the Raleigh (N.C.) News & Observer.