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Furman University

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Gioia caps standout career with Athlete of Year award

Women's tennis standout Laura Gioia '09, who advanced to the round of 16 in this year's NCAA tournament to earn All-America status, was named the 2009 Southern Conference Female Athlete of the Year. She is the sixth Paladin to be named the league's Female Athlete of the Year and the fourth Furman women's tennis player to win the award.

The honor capped a remarkable four-year run by Gioia, who was named the league's Player of the Year for the second time. During her Furman career she won 33 of her 36 conference matches, went undefeated her sophomore and senior years, and was first-team all-conference all four years. She led Furman to four regular-season league titles, three tournament crowns and three NCAA tournament appearances.

With 145 victories in singles and doubles, Gioia is the winningest player in Furman women's tennis history.

In addition, she received the conference's Dorothy Hicks Graduate Scholarship. A health and exercise science major and native of Tampa, Fla., she has enrolled in dental school at the University of Florida.

Gioia was also named Furman's Female Athlete of the Year for 2008-09. William Middleton, an All-America cornerback on the football team who was selected in the fifth round of the National Football League draft by the Atlanta Falcons, was named the Male Athlete of the Year after a season in which he had 95 tackles, five sacks and four interceptions.

While Gioia earned the league's top honor in tennis, the women's golf team also had the league's player of the year in Stefanie Kenoyer '11. Fourth-year coach Jen Hanna '98 was named coach of the year after leading Furman to the league championship.

Kenoyer posted a three-round score of 7-over-

par 223 to claim her second straight Southern Conference tournament title. The league crown was Furman's 13th, and the team made its 17th straight appearance in the NCAA regionals. She averaged 74.77 strokes for her 27 competitive rounds in 2009 and went on to qualify to play in the U.S. Women's Open.

Hanna's teams have won two straight Southern Conference titles and made four straight appearances in NCAA regional play.

Former football coach Bobby Johnson, now head coach at Vanderbilt University, was among three Furman greats inducted into the university's Athletic Hall of Fame July 25. He was joined by former wide receiver Desmond Kitchings '00 and soccer star Emily Turgeon '04.

Johnson, who served on the Furman staff for 24 years, was head coach from 1994-01. While compiling a 60-36 record during that time, he won two league titles and led the Paladins to the 2001 Division I-AA national championship game. He was defensive coordinator for the 1988 I-AA national championship team. He is entering his eighth season at Vanderbilt.

Kitchings was a four-year letterman and three-year starter who is Furman's second all-time leading receiver, with 112 receptions. He was also a standout kick returner and an all-league performer. He played briefly in the National Football League and was for a time an assistant coach at Furman. He is now running backs and special teams coach at Vanderbilt.

Turgeon is the top scorer in Furman women's soccer history, with 57 goals and 148 points. She was the Southern Conference Freshman of the Year in 2000 and the Player of the Year in 2000 and 2002. She is a social studies teacher at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, N.C., where she also coaches junior varsity girls'



basketball and soccer. She is training for the Marine Corps Marathon this fall, where she is running to support the Wounded Warrior Project.

Bill Pierce, chair of the health and exercise science department and Furman's NCAA faculty athletics representative since 2003, has been named president of the Southern Conference. He will serve a two-year term.

A graduate of Davidson College, where he was a member of the basketball team, he earned a master's degree from West Virginia University and an Ed.D. from Virginia Tech. He was head basketball coach at Bluefield College in Virginia for one year before coming to Furman in 1983.

Pierce is a member of the faculty of the Furman Institute for Running and Scientific Training (FIRST), which promotes running as a healthy physical activity and provides training information based on scientific principles. FIRST has been featured in *Runner's World*, *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. Pierce, who has completed more than 30 marathons, is co-author of the book *Run Less, Run Faster*.