Role model

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Role model
Quarles compiles extraordinary record as coach at Maryville High

Over the past 30 years, the Furman football program has produced more than 60 coaches who have achieved great success on the field. But you would be hard pressed to find anybody who has been more successful at winning football games than George Quarles.

Quarles, a 1989 graduate who started at wide receiver for Furman’s 1988 national championship team, is entering his eighth season as head coach at Maryville High School in Tennessee. In his first seven seasons, his teams won five 4A state championships and compiled a 93-9 record.

That’s a 91 percent winning percentage.

Tim Sorrells ’81, Furman’s offensive coordinator, can only laugh when he considers such numbers. “I don’t think there has been a football coach anywhere — not Knute Rockne, not Vince Lombardi — who won 90 of his first 100 games,” Sorrells says. “George has done a remarkable job as a head coach, and we certainly hold him up as a poster boy around here.”

But the 93-9 record actually fails to reflect just how successful Quarles has been. Throw out his first season at Maryville in 1999 (10-3) and the first four games of 2000 (0-4), and Quarles has a mind-boggling 83-2 mark, with 30 straight wins over the past two years and three perfect seasons in the last four. Quarles has been voted the region’s top coach six times and, in 2005, was named the Tennessee Titans High School Football Coach of the Year.

So how does a coach produce such success in a sport where the ball is designed to bounce in funny and unpredictable ways — and with teams that, according to observers, don’t always have the most talented players? “If I knew that,” Quarles says with a grin, “I would bottle it and sell it and make a million dollars.”

Quarles may not be talking, but others have ideas. Whether it’s Furman coaches who scout his games or Maryville sportswriters who cover his teams, they say the same thing: Quarles doesn’t have anything resembling an ego, and he is one of the nicest people you are likely to meet.

“He knows how to bring out the best in everybody and doesn’t let ego get in the way, either on the field or off,” says John Brice, sports editor of the Maryville Daily Times. “All the players will tell you they not only leave as better football players, but as better young men.”

Sorrells, who has seen Quarles in action, says, “George is a steady guy, and those guys make the best coaches. He doesn’t get too emotional whether things are going good or bad. The players know they can count on him to act a certain way, and that he will treat them right.”

Quarles also holds a special place in Paladin football lore. During the championship run in 1988, Furman played at Marshall in the second round of the playoffs. Late in the first half of a scoreless tie, Quarles snuck behind the defense and waited patiently — and pretty much alone — in the back of the end zone for a Frankie DeBusk pass. When it arrived — after DeBusk had spent what seemed like hours scrambling to find a receiver — the touchdown helped propel Furman to a 13-9 win.

Quarles remembers the pass as the “fair catch.” “Frankie threw it up there, and I wasn’t sure it was ever going to come down,” Quarles says. “To make a play like that was one of the highlights of my college career.”

Quarles spent a year as a graduate assistant at Furman before serving four years as an assistant at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens, Ga., and at Eastside High in Greenville. He moved to Maryville in 1995 as an assistant and became head coach in 1999. Along the way, he met his wife, Leslie. They now have a 2-year-old son, Jack.

But it was his time at Furman that had the greatest impact on him. “Any success I’ve had in coaching I owe to Furman,” Quarles says. “I learned that X’s and O’s are certainly important, but I remember how well the coaches treated us, how they acted as mentors and good role models. I’ve tried to remember that now that I’m a coach.”

— Vince Moore