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High-profile performances: Four Paladins who made their marks on the playing fields during 2004-05

John Roberts
Furman University

Vince Moore
Furman University

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Furmanathletics

High-profile performances: Four Paladins who made their marks on the playing



Aguocha a two-sport standout

It didn't take long for Chibuzo Aguocha, a highly recruited volleyball and track athlete, to make an impact in both sports at Furman.

In early September, before the resident of Houston, Texas, had attended her first college class, she had been named Southern Conference volleyball player of the week

for logging 64 kills in four matches at an invitational hosted by East Carolina University.

Flash forward to this spring: Competing in her first home track meet, Aguocha (pronounced ah-goo-cha) won the long jump and set a meet record in the triple jump with a leap of 37 feet, 7½ inches.

A slender 5-9, Aguocha, whose nickname is "Chewy," has the highest vertical leap on the volleyball team. From a standstill jump she can almost touch a basketball rim.

"She's probably the most athletic player to come through the volleyball program," says her coach, Michelle Young. "She is very serious on the court and expects a lot from herself."

If you had told Aguocha 18 months ago that she would attend Furman, you probably would have received a blank stare.

Recruited by Sam Houston State, the University of Mississippi and Stephen F. Austin, she initially figured that she would enroll at a large state school. After Ole Miss opted out of the recruiting process, an assistant coach there mailed video footage of Aguocha to Derek Schroeder, the assistant Furman volleyball coach who had previously coached at Ole Miss.

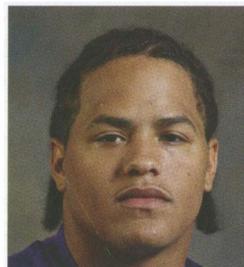
Aguocha agreed to visit Furman, but after traveling to three state schools in Texas, she called Young to cancel. But the Lady Paladin coach talked her into coming anyway.

Once Aguocha arrived, the campus worked its charms. Suddenly Furman didn't seem so small.

"When you come here the first thing you notice is how beautiful it is," she says. "The student body is small, but everything is so spread out so you don't feel you are at a small school."

Furman's strong academics and the knowledge that she could compete in two sports also had an impact on her decision.

"I'm the type of person that always likes to keep moving," says Aguocha, the youngest of five children whose parents immigrated to the United States from Nigeria in the early 1970s. "I enjoy playing two sports. It keeps me busy. I like the team aspect of volleyball, and track allows me to compete as an individual."



Felton a strong presence

Jerome Felton entered his first high school football game as a defensive lineman — a hard-nosed, hard-hitting defender who wore No. 54. When the final whistle blew, he was wearing a different jersey (34) and playing a new position.

After the starting fullback for Sequoyah High in Madisonville, Tenn., suffered leg cramps, the coaches had few options, since the second-string fullback had a broken arm. In desperation, they turned to Felton.

Felton not only changed jerseys, he turned heads. Apparently fated to be a fullback, he led the team in rushing the next four years. During his senior year, Felton rushed for 1,300 yards — and contributed 104 tackles from his linebacker position.

Felton also excelled in the classroom, where he amassed 19 hours of college credit. He chose Furman over such schools as Duke and Tennessee Tech because he was attracted to the program's pro-style offense. He also saw an opportunity to compete early for a starting position, even though most freshmen at Furman are red-shirted their first year.

"I really worked hard last summer in the weight room," says Felton. "I thought coming into practice that I would be able to compete for a spot."

At 6-1 and 250 pounds, Felton made an immediate impression on offensive coordinator Tim Sorrells. "A lot of freshmen don't understand what it's like to be in great shape. They come in and try to physically survive," says Sorrells. "Jerome was in great shape. He was able to come in and learn and compete. And he just kept learning."

As Felton's stock rose, so did his position on the depth chart. By mid-season he was the starting fullback and had emerged as an offensive force. Over the final five games he tallied seven touchdowns, including late-game scores against Georgia Southern and Wofford that helped Furman secure a Southern Conference title. He ended the season with a club-high 10 touchdowns and shared the team's Freshman of the Year honors with Andrew Thacker.

Sorrells says that, aside from kickers, only a few freshmen have started at Furman in recent years. Two who did were Desmond Kitchings '00 and Louis Ivory '02. Kitchings, now the Paladins' tight end coach, spent four years in the National Football League, and Ivory won the 2000 Walter Payton Award as the outstanding offensive player in NCAA Division I-AA.

That's good company.



fields during 2004-05



Fredrickson finds a balance

When Julia Fredrickson enrolled at Furman four years ago, she had the athletic skills to play both volleyball and basketball at the varsity level. But she wanted to leave an adequate amount of time for the academic and social aspects of college life, so she decided to limit herself to just one sport.

"I wanted to be a well-rounded student-athlete," says the 5-10 Fredrickson, who was all-district in both volleyball and basketball at Highland Park High School in Dallas, Texas. "If I had tried to play both sports, athletics would have taken up too much of my time."

Fredrickson chose volleyball as her sport at Furman, and she played it well enough to be named first-team All-Southern Conference last fall. As a middle blocker, she led the Lady Paladins in blocks (84) while finishing second in kills (365) and third in service aces (23). She ranks fourth all-time at Furman in solo blocks (70) and seventh in total blocks (296).

Fredrickson also became the well-rounded student she wanted to be. She was a member of Tri-Delta sorority, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Athletics Service Board. She was named to the Southern Conference Academic Honor Roll all four years and was elected to *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges*.

"I fell in love with Furman the first time I visited, and I would have come here even if I didn't play sports," she says. "But the school recruited me for volleyball, and that made the decision that much easier."

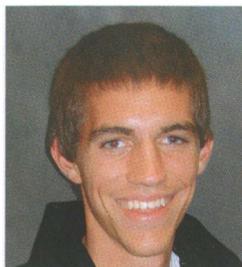
What does the future hold for Fredrickson, who graduated this spring with a degree in history? Law school is definitely a possibility, she says, but not before she takes some time off to contemplate her options.

"I'm hoping to get a job in a nonprofit organization or law firm that does child advocacy work," she says.

The transplanted Texan also wants to stay in the Southeast and is looking at job possibilities in Greenville, Atlanta and Charleston. "I love this area of the country," she says. "I think I'm here to stay."

As for her career at Furman, Fredrickson's only regret is that the Lady Paladins weren't able to win a conference title during her four years.

"That is one goal we didn't accomplish," she says. "But I was blessed to play with a great group of girls, so I can't complain. It was a great experience."



Johnson eyes league title

Gene Mullin, cross country and track coach at Furman, knows a good runner when he sees one, which is why he is so impressed with Tyler Johnson '06.

"He's got the whole package," Mullin said. "He has a lot of ability, and he's committed to everything he does."

"Tyler has all the qualities a runner needs to be successful."

Johnson was an All-Southern Conference performer in both cross country and track as a sophomore, but he significantly raised the stakes in 2004-05. Last fall, he won the Winthrop Invitational with a 6K time of 17:57 and then placed second at the Furman Invitational cross country meet with a season-best 8K time of 25:17 — some 50 seconds faster than his best time in 2003.

He capped his season by finishing second in the 2004 conference cross country championships, where his time of 25:38.89 was just four seconds off the winning pace. He was twice named the conference's runner of the week and was the league's Cross Country Athlete of the Month for October.

"I had a good summer of training, and I felt like I was going to have a good fall," Johnson says. "I was really able to improve my times."

Johnson has been running since his freshman year at Bear-den High School in Knoxville, Tenn., where he was named "Most Intellectual" senior and received the Einstein Award for excellence in the physical sciences. He also played soccer, but gave up the sport his senior year to concentrate on running.

"I knew I wanted to run in college, and the University of Tennessee recruited me," says Johnson, a computing-business major who is a regular on the conference's Academic Honor Roll. "But when I visited Furman, I liked it so much that I applied Early Decision and didn't even apply anywhere else. I knew this was the place for me."

Heading into his senior season, Johnson should be the odds-on favorite to win the conference cross country title, especially if he continues to improve.

"My No. 1 goal will be to win the conference championship," says Johnson, whose sport is in season all year long and who runs about 75 miles a week to stay in shape. "I would also like to make the All-Region team and qualify for the nationals, although I realize that might be a bit of stretch. But that's a good goal to have, and I'll do my best to get there."

