

1-1-2003

Scholar-athlete

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Vince (2003) "Scholar-athlete," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 4 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol45/iss4/27>

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Scholar-athlete

Stallsmith sets the standard for the well-rounded student

If Furman's Admissions Office were to create a prototype of the perfect student — one that would take full advantage of the educational and cultural opportunities that the university has to offer — it might still fall a bit short of Jon Stallsmith.

The Furman senior is double majoring in Spanish and history, has a grade-point average of about 3.95, and was a Rhodes Scholar candidate in the fall. His academic achievements have earned him the J. Furman Bisher Academic/Athletic Scholarship and the Mickel Presidential Scholarship, a feat akin to winning a gold medal in two different events at the Olympics.

But there's more. He has been a member of the Paladin baseball team for four years and is team captain this season. He spent a fall term studying Spanish language and culture at a university in Madrid and a summer writing for a human rights magazine in Costa Rica. He even helped start a tutoring program for Hispanic children at a local elementary school, a program that

now involves nearly 30 Furman students each week.

And if that isn't enough, Stallsmith is 6-3 and could easily do some modeling if nothing else works out for him.

"No matter how many good things you say about him, you still can't express what an incredible person he is," says Furman baseball coach Ron Smith. "He is bright, inquisitive, motivated, totally unselfish, a real leader. I've been coaching for 23 years and I haven't come across another one like him."

And contrary to every law of probability, Smith might have added the word "humble" to his description of Stallsmith. Because if the young man holds even a moderately high opinion of himself, you'd never know it.

Stallsmith was a National Merit Scholar while attending high school in Milwaukee, Wis., so there was no shortage of good colleges he could have attended. But he loved baseball and was tired of cold weather, so he limited himself to looking at the best Southern liberal arts colleges. Furman won hands down.

Baseball has been an important part of Stallsmith's college experience. He has been primarily a pitcher for the Paladins — he started and gave up only two runs in a win over South Carolina his sophomore year — but he has also played first and third base and anywhere else Smith has assigned him. Like most baseball folks, he speaks reverently of the game.

But the playing field hasn't provided all of his memorable experiences. While studying in Spain in the fall of 2001, Stallsmith befriended a 45-year-old Iranian man who was struggling in their Spanish language class. Stallsmith volunteered to tutor him — with both his Spanish and English — and they met each day after class.

"On September 12, he came to me, offered his hand and said, 'I would like to express my sincere condolences for what happened in your country.' He meant to say 'condolences,' but it didn't matter.

I knew what he meant. Everybody is talking about what kind of culture produces these terrorists, and this is my experience with a person from Iran. He was just a normal guy with three kids trying to learn Spanish."

While spending last summer in Costa Rica writing for *Mesoamérica*, a human rights magazine, Stallsmith learned to surf and spent several weekends hiking in the rain forest. He also discovered that his Spanish, while fluent, was still subject to mistakes when he and a friend inadvertently ordered boiled cow intestines from a menu.

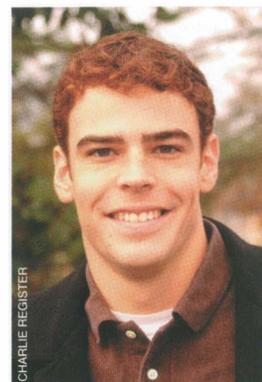
Another of his great joys comes from the Hispanic children he and other Furman Spanish majors tutor at Greenville's Parker Academy. The children, who speak little English, are often dropped into the school midway through the year because their parents have just immigrated to the United States.

"They're being asked to do verb conjugations and they don't even know the verbs yet," Stallsmith says. "It's good that we can help them with the basics, that they can speak to us in Spanish."

Stallsmith is not sure what he will do after he graduates. He wants to be a writer, so he plans to spend a year following that pursuit and then perhaps apply to journalism school at Northwestern. Right now, he just wants to enjoy the rest of his senior year and his final season of baseball, still his greatest love.

"The funny thing is, the closer you get to the major leagues, the more you realize just how far you are from it," Stallsmith says. "Division I baseball is a pretty high level. We play against the best teams in the country and I see the best players at this level. I'm good, but I know I don't have that kind of gift. I just love playing the game."

Spoken like a man who has learned a lot in four years.



CHARLIE REGISTER



PATRICK COLLARD

Jon Stallsmith has seen action as both a spot starter and a reliever during his Furman career.

— Vince Moore