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Work ethic

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WORKethic

Tenacious Smith earns place among Furman's basketball greats.

Even though her college basketball career has come and gone, Jackie Smith is still not sure she was big enough to play the forward position. The Furman media guide lists her as 6-1, but she says she is six feet at best. And with a physical bearing just as suited for runway modeling as posting up in the paint, she says she was entirely too "skinny" to be battling bigger, stronger players for rebounds.

So how did Smith finish her career as the second leading scorer and rebounder in Lady Paladin history and become one of the program's greatest players ever? Largely because of an unwavering sense of determination, a quality she developed many years before she came to Furman — and one that has little to do with height and weight.

"I had three older brothers who played basketball," Smith says, "and they never took it easy on me. They just abused me when it came to sports and they always said, 'It's good for you. It will make you tougher.' And I guess they were right.

"I'm not the biggest thing in the world. I'm kind of skinny and I was never the tallest player on the court. But I learned how to work for every little thing and never complain when I got knocked down. My brothers taught me that, so they had a lot of influence on the way I play."

If you ever saw Smith maneuver her way into position for a rebound or work free for a six-foot jumper along the baseline, then you know what she's talking about. She seemed to be a resolute blur of knees and elbows as she established offensive position near the basket, and it was not unusual to see several bodies, including those of her teammates, go flying in various directions when she won the battle for a rebound.

Of course, Smith possessed much more than a single-minded determination. She was as athletic as anybody on the floor, and defenders could hardly ignore her outside shooting touch (she made 28 three-point shots her last two seasons, including three in one game). She was also quick (and savvy) enough to grab an inordinate number of offensive rebounds that she put back in the basket for points.

It all added up to a Furman career that won't be forgotten anytime soon. In addition to ranking as the university's

second leading scorer (1,920 points) and rebounder (1,054), she notched a school-record 52 "double-doubles," which was the number of times she scored and rebounded in double figures in a single game. She ranks ninth on the career assists list (256), is fourth in blocks (99) and made a record 724 free throws (shooting 76.2 percent from the line), almost doubling the previous Lady Paladin record of 389.

"Jackie had an incredible work ethic and a sincere love of the game," says Furman coach Sherry Carter when asked about the secret to Smith's success. "She did anything you asked of her, no matter what it was. She was willing to work as hard as she needed to take her game to the next level."

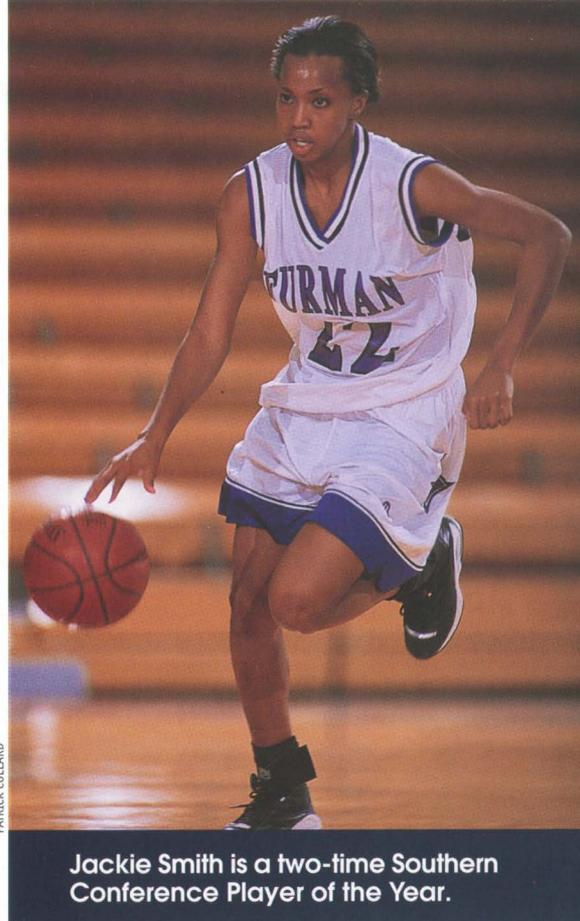
Smith came from a basketball family, and she started playing at such a young age that she can't remember not playing. (She can remember, however, her mother placing a little hoop in the front yard for her when her brothers steadfastly refused to let her play with them.) Her father was in the military, and she and her brothers moved seven times before finally settling in Woodbridge, Va., when Smith was in the eighth grade.

She was named first-team all-district, region and state at C.D. Hylton High School and made the *USA Today* All-America team, which led to overtures from such schools as the University of Washington and Clemson. Because she ranked in the top 5 percent of her class and was a member of the National Honor Society, it was no surprise that Brown, Yale and William & Mary also came calling. But Smith chose Furman.

"It was a perfect distance from home — not too close and not too far away," she says. "I felt like Furman was committed to having a quality program and that it could compete successfully in the Southern Conference. Of course, I also liked the academic reputation."

The deciding factor may have been when her father added his "two cents" to the selection process. After all, he grew up in Barnwell, S.C., and had plenty of family living near Furman.

It seems that Smith chose wisely. She established herself as the dominant player in the league, receiving Southern Conference Player of the Year honors both



Jackie Smith is a two-time Southern Conference Player of the Year.

her sophomore and junior seasons and leading the conference in scoring and rebounding her senior season.

The team was successful as well. The Lady Paladins posted a record of 68-46 during Smith's four years, with the highlight coming this past season when they finished 20-11, won the league tournament and qualified for the NCAA championships. Although the Lady Paladins had to face the Mideast Regional's top seed, Tennessee, in the first round and lost 90-38, it did nothing to dampen Smith's spirit.

"Tennessee had the fastest girls I have ever seen," she says with typical good humor. "They were quick and they were everywhere. We felt that we should have gotten a better seeding in the tournament, but we had no control over that. We did everything we could in the game, so we can't be too upset with what happened."

Smith, who graduated this spring with a degree in health and exercise science, is not sure what the future holds. She's been to a Women's National Basketball Association tryout camp, but if that doesn't work out there's the possibility of pro basketball in Europe. And if she ends up going to graduate school, then that's fine, too.

"I'll be happy no matter what I do," Smith says.

— Vince Moore