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Sports Briefs

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SPORTS BRIEFS

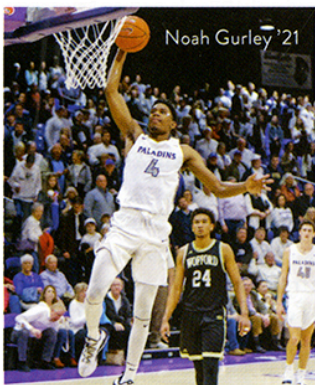
BY VINCE MOORE

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR

Before the 2018-19 basketball season got underway in November, nobody knew what to expect from the Furman men's team. The Paladins had lost four important players to graduation, and they were picked to finish fourth in the Southern Conference by both the league's head coaches and the media.

But the season would prove to be anything but ordinary. And while the Paladins did not realize their ultimate goal of qualifying for the NCAA tournament, that was just about the only thing all year that didn't go Furman's way.

Furman won its first 12 games and became the first team in the 106-year history of the men's program to be ranked in the Associated Press Top 25 poll. The Paladins rose to No. 23 before finally losing on the road to Louisiana State, which would go on to become the SEC regular-season champion.



Noah Gurley '21



Matt Rafferty '19

The perfect start included road victories over defending national champion Villanova (76-68) and fellow 2018 Final Four participant Loyola Chicago (60-58). Junior Jordan Lyons also tied the NCAA Division I record for three-point baskets in a game, hitting 15 shots beyond the arc and scoring 54 points in a 107-67 victory over North Greenville.

Furman finished third in what was an especially strong year for the conference before losing to No. 2 UNC-Greensboro in the semifinals of the league tournament in Asheville, North Carolina, which might have been the loss that kept the Paladins out of the NCAA tournament. But Furman received a bid to the National Invitation Tournament for the first time since 1991, hosting a good Wichita State team as a No. 3 seed. The season ended with a 76-70 loss to the Shockers.

Overall, the team set a school record for regular-season wins (24) as well as total victories (25) and surely drew more attention from the national sports media than any team in Furman history. Matt Rafferty, a first-team all-conference selection, and fellow seniors Andrew Brown, Jalen Williams and Brady Schuck were also part of the winningest class in program history.



A BANNER SEASON FOR THE WOMEN

The women's basketball team finished second in the Southern Conference regular season and advanced to the finals of the league tournament, where Furman lost to regular-season champion Mercer, 66-63, to just miss an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. The Paladins were awarded a berth in the Women's National Invitation Tournament and fell to Virginia Tech in the first round, 92-65.

The team finished with a 19-14 record, with the 19 victories matching a season high under ninth-year head coach Jackie Carson '00. The Paladins were led by a pair of all-conference performers – junior guard Le'Zae Davidson and sophomore center Celena Taborn – and guard Milica Manojlovic, who was named to the league's All-Freshman Team. Senior forward Kaitlyn Duncan earned a spot on the five-player SoCon All-Defensive Team.