

Furman Magazine

Volume 57
Issue 2 Fall 2014

Article 19

9-1-2014

Perseverance Furthers

Vince Moore
Furman University

Jeremy Fleming
Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Moore, Vince and Fleming, Jeremy (2014) "Perseverance Furthers," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 57 : Iss. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol57/iss2/19>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.



Notes from the
FIELD

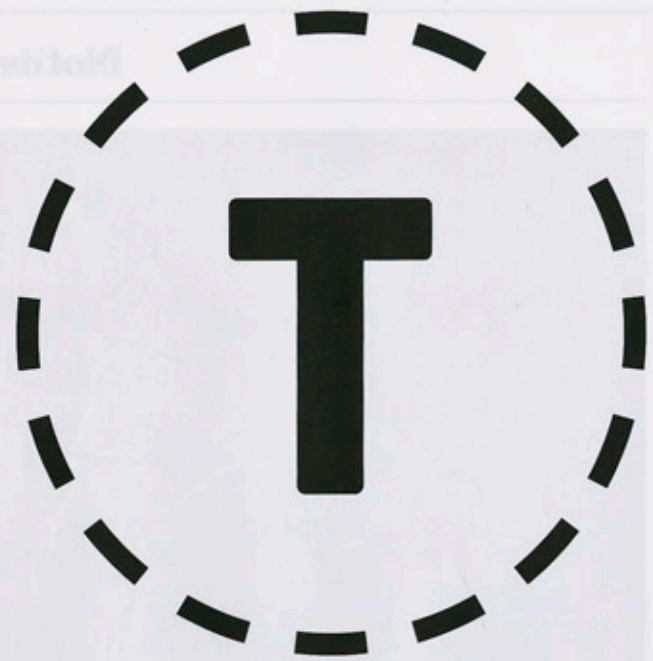
Perseverance Furthers

*In the hype-driven world of college sports, **Bruce Fowler '81** relies on a quieter philosophy to produce attention-getting results.*

BY VINCE MOORE
PHOTOS BY JEREMY FLEMING



Coach Fowler celebrates
in purple style.



There was nothing about the start of the 2013 Furman football season that would have lifted the hopes of anybody but the most optimistic and delusional Paladin fans.

The team started 0-2 with losses to Gardner-Webb and Coastal Carolina, and it would have been 0-3 if the Paladins hadn't blocked a potential game-winning field goal at home against Presbyterian College in the game's waning seconds. Halfway through the season, Furman stood 2-4 with the toughest part of the Southern Conference schedule still to come.

The Paladins had experienced only four losing seasons in the past 33 years, but two of those had occurred since 2010, and there seemed to be a very good chance that another lost season was on the docket.

But then things changed.

The Paladins won five of their next six games—a 48-16 loss to SEC power Louisiana State being the only blemish—which included victories over league rivals Appalachian State, Georgia Southern, and Wofford. Furman would ultimately win the conference championship, its first since 2004, and qualify for the FCS playoffs. The Paladins beat South Carolina State, 30-20, in the first round before falling to eventual national champion North Dakota State, 38-7, one week later.

So, how does a team that was fortunate to beat Presbyterian at home in September go to LSU six weeks later and trail by only four at halftime?

Furman head coach Bruce Fowler would like to tell you that the team's fortunes were reversed by a single season-altering play or an inspiring halftime speech, but there wasn't anything that dramatic. The second half of the season was simply a culmination of everything Fowler

Notes from the Field



PALADIN PRIDE

Post-victory, Coach Fowler motivates all his players to push beyond the limits they (mistakenly) believe they have.

"THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS...YOU WORK HARD EVERY DAY, YOU PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL, AND YOU DO YOUR BEST AT ALL TIMES, BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD. THAT'S THE TRADITION OF FURMAN FOOTBALL." – COACH FOWLER

had been teaching since he took over the program in 2011.

"There are no shortcuts," Fowler says. "You work hard every day, you pay attention to detail, and you do your best at all times in all areas, both on and off the field. That's the tradition of Furman football. It was gratifying to see the players keep working in that direction and stay with the plan."

Of course, that is exactly what Fowler was hired to do. Not to provide a quick fix or merely win a few more football games, but to revive a storied football tradition known for producing champions both on the field and in the classroom. Furman has not only been the conference's most winning football program over the past three decades, it also has an NCAA Division I graduation success rate that routinely

ranks among the top-10 schools in the nation and rivals that of the Ivy League universities.



Fowler says it's important to understand the program doesn't prosper despite the academic rigor of the university, but rather because of it.

Prospective football players and their parents are drawn to Furman's strong

Notes from the Field

academic reputation and the football program's outstanding graduation rate.

"We have a rare combination of athletics and academics that attracts high-achieving student-athletes who want to be challenged to be the very best," says Fowler, who spent nine seasons as defensive coordinator and assistant head coach at Vanderbilt University before returning to Furman. "They know they'll receive a tremendous education, they'll have a solid opportunity to win championships on the field, and they'll have an opportunity to make an impact in the community. They will be prepared for life after graduation, and that is the main objective of their college experience."

Fowler is certainly familiar with the Furman football tradition. A 1981 Furman graduate, he played defensive back on the Paladins' first conference championship team in 1978, and he spent 16 years as an

assistant coach for Furman teams that produced eight league championships, made nine playoff appearances, and won the 1988 Division I-AA national championship. He says there is no reason Furman can't be that dominant again, especially since the last few recruiting classes have been strong and the Paladins' new home, the 44,000-square-foot Pearce-Horton Football Complex, is the "best facility in FCS football."

"It's very up-to-date technologically, and it provides a perfect setup for teaching and coaching. It has had a huge impact on the morale of the coaches and players, and it's given us a boost in recruiting."

For 2014, the team returns a majority of the starters from last year's conference champions, and Fowler fully expects some of the younger players to become valuable contributors. Furman will be one of the favorites to win the Southern Conference, which will

have a new look as Elon, Appalachian State, and Georgia Southern depart the league, and East Tennessee, Mercer, and VMI come onboard.

"I've seen many different teams come and go," Fowler says. "But the league is always one of the toughest in the country."

As for making specific predictions about this season, Fowler will take the head coach's often used oath of silence. What good would it do after all? The experts picked the Paladins to finish fifth in the conference last season, and that was a bit off the mark.

"I am optimistic. I always am coming into the season," Fowler says. "But our success will be based on the kind of work we do on a daily basis leading up to and throughout the season. It will be about more than just what happens on the field on Saturdays. As long as we worry more about process and less about outcome, then we'll be successful."



PREPARED

A tremendous education, a competitive chance to win championships, and an opportunity to make an impact in the community—that is the Paladin athletic experience.