A BRIEF HISTORY OF FURMAN ATHLETICS
By Hunter Reid, Sports Information Director

Furman athletics traces its genus to Dec. 14, 1889, when the school played Wofford in the first football game in South Carolina history. Over the last 125 years the university's athletics program — much like the school itself — has experienced periods of growth and contraction but overall has been a major part of the school's experience through the participation of thousands of student-athletes. Today Furman athletics is comprised of 20 sports involving over 400 student-athletes, representing approximately 16 percent of the university student body.

Baseball (1891) was the second sport to begin competition at Furman, followed by basketball, which beat South Carolina, 21-19, on Oct. 30, 1908, in the first hoops game in state history.

Furman's first athletic affiliation was with the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (SIAA), which in the 1900s and 1910s also included most of the South's largest universities, many of whom went on to form the Southern Conference (1921), the Southeastern Conference (1932), and finally the Atlantic Coast Conference (1954).

The 1920s saw the school's first notable athletic success with the emergence of a powerhouse football program, first under W.L. Laval and later under T.B. Amis and A.P. "Dizzy" McLeod. From 1919-36 the Hurricane, as the gridiron teams were then known, posted a 124-42-9 (.734) record, captured nine state championships, and regularly posted wins over foes such as South Carolina (10-5-1), Clemson (10-5-2), Wake Forest (9-1), N.C. State, Duke, Florida, and Ole Miss, among many others.

Furman joined the Southern Conference (SoCon) in 1936, beginning an association that is now in its 79th year, thus tying The Citadel for the longest active membership in league history.

Furman's first All-SoCon performer was Bob King (1936), a standout end on the football squad who as a senior helped deliver a 7-2 record for the Hurricane that included season-ending wins over both South Carolina (23-6) and Clemson (12-0).

World War II led to a three-year lull (1943-45) in intercollegiate athletic competition at Furman and most other colleges and universities.

The resumption of athletics at Furman in 1946 saw the football program struggle to regain its pre-war competitiveness against mostly better-funded, bigger competition as evidenced by a stretch of six consecutive losing seasons from 1946-51. In 1952 the Hurricane turned it around by going 6-3-1 under head coach Bill Young, beating a high powered West Virginia team, 22-14, along the way.

The early 1950s witnessed the rise of Furman basketball under the tutelage of head coach Lyles Alley and play of All-Americans Frank Selvy and Darrell Floyd, who combined to give Furman its first...
real national sports presence.

Selvy, a 6-foot-4 guard from Corbin, Ky., arrived in Greenville in 1951 and proceeded to author his own version of the school and NCAA record books. As a sophomore he averaged 24.6 ppg, helping Furman improve from three wins the year before to an 18-6 campaign in 1951-52. His junior year he tallied 29.5 ppg in a 21-6 season, and as a senior he poured in an NCAA record 41.7 ppg — a mark that stood until LSU great Pete Maravich topped it in the late 1960s — en route to consensus All-America and NCAA Player of the Year honors. Selvy’s career, spiced with victories over the likes of South Carolina, Clemson, Georgia Tech, Duke, Georgia, Virginia Tech, and Manhattan, among many others, also featured an NCAA Division I record 100-point performance against Newberry on Feb. 13, 1954, in Greenville’s Textile Hall. He went on to play nine seasons in the NBA, most notably with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Floyd, who put up impressive numbers (24.3 ppg) while playing alongside Selvy during the 1953-54 season, gave Furman a four-year lock on the NCAA Division I scoring crown by averaging 35.9 ppg and 33.8 ppg, respectively, during the 1954-55 and 1955-56 seasons. He scored a career high 67 points against Morehead State and registered 62 and 56-point performances, respectively, in wins over The Citadel and Clemson.

The third sport to establish a stretch of greatness at Furman was track & field, which in 1961 claimed the school’s first SoCon team championship with an indoor championship under Chuck Rohe — a feat that would pave the way to eight SoCon titles in cross country, indoor track & field, and outdoor track & field from 1961-65. Dave Segal, a two-time Olympian and bronze medalist for his native England in the 1960 Games in Rome, headlined the surge by capturing nine SoCon individual championships in sprints and hurdles during his brilliant career.

By vote of the student body, on Sept. 15, 1961, the university uniformly adopted the nickname “Paladins” for all its athletic teams — a moniker first given to the school’s basketball program in the 1930s by a Greenville News sportswriter. The action retired the use of “Hurricane” for the football team and “Hornets,” which the baseball team had been known for many years.

Baseball, which in 1956 led the transition to the university’s new campus off Poinsett Highway, became the second sport to secure a SoCon championship when it won the 1965 title and made the school’s first NCAA Tournament appearance.

Furman’s experiment with non-scholarship football beginning in the mid-1960s led to diminished competitiveness on the gridiron and an embarrassing 77-14 rout at the hands of long-time foe Davidson in 1969. Soon thereafter scholarship support was restored and an 8-3 season in 1970 breathed life back into the school’s oldest sport, thereby paving the way for a 35-year stretch that would bear witness to some of the greatest moments in school athletic history.

The 1970s ushered in a new era of broad-based athletic success and expanded opportunities for the school’s female students with the passage federal legislation commonly known as Title IX, in 1972.
The first sport to grab the winning mantle in the 1970s was men’s basketball under head coach Joe Williams, the former Jacksonville assistant who took over the program’s reins in 1970 and proceeded to put Furman hoops back on the national stage. The program registered its first title and NCAA Tournament appearance in 1971, and before the decade was over the Paladins racked up five regular season championships, six league tournament crowns, and six NCAA Tournament invitations.

Paced by All-America forward and Greenville native Clyde Mayes, the Paladins posted a 22-9 mark during the 1973-74 campaign and beat coach Frank McGuire’s vaunted South Carolina squad, 75-67, in Philadelphia, Pa., in NCAA Tournament play. The next year Mayes and Furman went 22-7 and ran the table with a 12-0 SoCon mark, capped by a 66-65 tournament championship game victory over William & Mary in Greenville’s Memorial Auditorium.

All told Furman’s most dominant decade of hoops featured victories over Clemson, South Carolina, Texas A&M, West Virginia, Texas, Minnesota, Florida, Houston, Illinois, Georgia, and, most impressively, back-to-back wins over North Carolina (89-83) and N.C. State (68-67) in the 1978 North-South Doubleheader in Charlotte, N.C.

Men’s tennis began its rise to prominence in the late 1960s under head coach Paul Scarpa, the Charleston, S.C., native and former Florida State All-American who assumed the reins of the program in 1967. By 1969 Scarpa had guided Furman to its first of 23 SoCon regular season and tournament championships in a coaching career that would span 45 seasons — the longest tenure of any head coach (in any sport) in SoCon history. In addition to his stellar on-the-court record, which would include an NCAA Division I record 853 overall victories, 43 consecutive winning seasons, and an 87 percent winning percentage against SoCon opposition, Scarpa revolutionized the collegiate game with a new modified “3-6” scoring system adopted by the NCAA in 1993 and oversaw the construction of the Mickel Tennis Center in 1996.

Inducted into Furman, Southern Tennis, South Carolina Tennis, Intercollegiate Tennis Association, South Carolina, and Southern Conference Halls of Fame, Scarpa coached four All-Americans, led All-American Clyde Mayes was a central figure in Furman’s highly successful stretch on the hardwood in the 1970s.

Paul Scarpa, a member of six halls of fame, won an NCAA record 853 matches in a distinguished 45-year head coaching tenure.
by Don Barton (1982) and Ned Caswell (1986 & ’87).

Women’s golf, Furman’s most outstanding sport on a national level for many years, marked its ascent in the 1970s under health and exercise science department chair Dr. Ruth Reid, and later coach Gary “Doc” Meredith. Competing under the banner of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (AIAW), the national organizing body forerunner of NCAA women’s sports (1982), Furman claimed its first of two national sports championships in 1976 at East Lansing, Mich., with a squad featuring Betsy King, two-time U.S. Amateur champion Beth Daniel, and Sherri Turner, among others.

The national crown helped launch an era of unprecedented success and achievement for women’s golf that, all told, has seen Furman register a combined total of 32 regional and national tournament appearances — the most of any university sport — and produce 11 All-Americans, among whom are Turner (’79), Cindy Davis (1983), and Dottie Pepper (1986 & ‘87), who led the Paladins to a national runner-up finish at the 1987 NCAA championship in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Two-time All-American Caroline Peek (1933 & ’95) punctuated her outstanding career with three NCAA Long Drive championships.

To this day probably no college or university in America can rival the professional worksheet compiled by Furman graduates who went on star on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour — a record that includes 94 victories (including 10 major championships), seven Rolex Players of the Year (including five in a six-year stretch from 1989-94), eight Tour annual money leaders, and an outstanding register of achievement in the Solheim Cup, the women’s golf international competition equivalent of the Ryder Cup.

Two Paladins, King and Daniel, are LPGA Hall of Fame inductees, and Pepper, who claimed 17 LPGA Tournament titles, is currently one of the most recognized and respected golf television analysts in the world today.

Since its beginning at Furman in the 1930s, men’s golf has brought great distinction to the university. It gave the school its first SoCon individual title in any sport when Heyward Sullivan won medalist honors at the 1959 SoCon Championship at Mid Pines Golf Club in Southern Pines, N.C., and in the 1970s the Paladins reeled off the first five of now 13 SoCon Tournament championships.

The most heralded men’s golfer in school history, Brad Faxon, twice earned first team All-America honors during his outstanding career (1980-83), which featured 11 individual tournament championships and the 1983 Fred Haskins Award, given annually to the
top college player in the country. Faxon went on to claim seven victories on the PGA Tour and compete in two Ryder Cup competitions, and is now a member of the PGA Legends Tour.

Furman football entered a new era in the 1970s with the arrival of Art Baker, who took over the head coaching reins in 1973 with a staff that included future head mentors Dick Sheridan and Jimmy Satterfield. Baker’s five-year stint, which featured the play of future Green Bay Packers quarterback David Whitehurst, gave Paladin football much stability and paved the way for the Sheridan to take it to new heights, which he did in 1978 with an 8-3 record and Furman’s first SoCon football crown in his inaugural season as head coach.

Furman’s run of championships continued into the 1980s with consecutive titles from 1980-83 and a 1985 season that netted the Paladins a sixth league championship, NCAA I-AA (FCS) national runner-up finish, and 12-2 record—the program’s best season since 1927.

In addition to establishing itself as the SoCon’s dominant gridiron power during Sheridan’s tenure, Furman football opened 16,000-seat Paladin Stadium on campus in 1981, closing a 45-year stretch at Greenville’s Sirrine Stadium.

Behind the stellar play of three-time SoCon Player of the Year running back and future nine-year NFL veteran Stanford Jennings, in 1982 the Paladins knocked off South Carolina (28-23) in what would mark the first of four straight wins over I-A (FBS) opponents that included Georgia Tech (17-14, 1983) and N.C. State (34-30, 1984; 42-20, 1985).

Sheridan’s departure to N.C. State following the 1985 season ushered in the Jimmy Satterfield era and another stretch of football excellence beginning with the 1988 season that saw Furman, an unheralded preseason fourth place pick in the SoCon, catch fire at mid-season en route to a 13-2 campaign that delivered to the school its second national sports championship. Boasting the top defense (9.7 ppg) in I-AA (FCS) led by consensus All-America linebacker Jeff Blankenship, Furman claimed a share of the SoCon regular season crown and proceeded to take down Delaware, Marshall, and Idaho in playoff action before finishing off its stellar run with a 17-12 triumph over Georgia Southern on Dec. 17, 1988, in Pocatello, Idaho.
Furman followed up its 1988 national championship season with a 12-2 record and SoCon crown in 1989 to finish the decade with a 95-25-4 mark (.780).

A part of Furman athletics since the late 1960s, men’s soccer, aided by scholarship and facility support from the Stone family, emerged in the early 1980s to command notable recognition on the regional level, and over the last two decades on both the national and world stages.

Furman captured its first SoCon men’s soccer regular season championship in 1983 and currently counts 19 titles — the most of any Furman men’s sport. Paladin soccer’s 31 combined regular season and tournament crowns rank second among the university’s programs and have led to seven NCAA Tournament appearances, including a 1999 season that saw Furman post a 21-2-1 record and victories over both North Carolina (2-1) and Wake Forest (4-0) in NCAA Tournament play, as well as No. 5/No. 3 rankings in the National Soccer Coaches Association and Soccer America final polls, respectively.

In 2002 the Paladins went 19-3-1 and advanced to the NCAA quarterfinals with wins over Loyola of Maryland (2-0) and VCU before falling to Stanford (2-1).

Paladin soccer has produced 16 All-Americans since 1986, including former teammates Clint Dempsey and Ricardo Clark, who firmly established themselves in Major League Soccer (MLS) before taking their talents abroad.

Dempsey, who starred with the MLS New England Revolution, went on to fashion an outstanding career in the English Premier League (EPL), playing for both Fulham and Tottenham, before returning to the United States in 2013 to play for the MLS Seattle Sounders. Clark, a veteran of the MLS MetroStars, San Jose Earthquakes, and Houston Dynamo, played several seasons overseas for Bundesliga club Eintracht Frankfurt before returning to Houston. Both players sport notable U.S. National Team experience, with Dempsey leading the United States on the 2006, 2010 and 2014 World Cup Teams. Twice named Honda U.S. Soccer Player of the Year, Dempsey served as captain of the United States 2014 World Cup squad, scored the fastest goal in U.S. World Cup history in a 2-1 win over Ghana, and ranks as the U.S.’s second all-time leading scorer in national team history.

The ascent of Furman’s women’s tennis began in the 1980s under head coach Debbie Southern, and the sport has had...
few peers in terms of success, winning at a 91 percent clip in league play during Southern’s tenure. Since 1986, Furman women’s tennis has combined to claimed 35 SoCon regular season and tournament championships — the most by any university sport — and has made nine NCAA Tournament appearances. During a 12-year stretch from 1998-2010 the Paladins reeled off an incredible 100 consecutive league regular season victories — the longest run of success by any sport in SoCon history.

Megan Dunigan, the only four-time player of the year selection in the annals of SoCon sport, was a charter inductee into the SoCon Athletic Hall of Fame in 2009, and that same year Furman women’s tennis produced its first All-American in Laura Goia.

Men’s and women’s swimming, which for many years competed successfully as an NCAA Division II sport at Furman, were dropped as intercollegiate sports in 1991 due to high costs and lack of conference sponsored competition, but the exploits of world class swimmer Angel Myers must be included in any history of Furman athletics.

A nine-time All-American, Myers won four national championships and earned Division II Swimmer of the Year honors as a freshman in 1986 after leading Furman to a fourth place national team finish. The next year, with Paladins competing in Division I, she earned a pair of All-America accolades, and in 1989 captured three All-America scrolls, including a national championship in the 200 individual medley. Myers won four gold medals in the 1986 Goodwill Games in Moscow and went on to claim gold and bronze medals in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. She capped her Olympic career by claiming four medals (two gold, two bronze) at the 1996 Games in Atlanta.

The termination of men’s and women’s swimming, as well as wrestling, led to a Title IX investigation by the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and expansion in scholarship support, staff, and operating budgets, as well as facility improvements for Furman’s women’s athletics program in the early 1990s. That action, combined with the adoption of women’s sports championships under the SoCon’s banner during the period, helped fuel a run of female sports domination never before seen in league history as Furman captured the Germann Cup, given annually by the SoCon to its top women’s sports program, a record 12 consecutive years from 1993-04.

On the hardwood Furman women’s basketball, which traces its humble, pre-Title IX origins to 1969, captured its first of four SoCon regular season championships in 1990 while volleyball won its first league crown in 1993. That same
year cross country reeled off its first of four league titles, and softball, spurred by All-American Cathy Fronheiser, claimed the SoCon’s inaugural softball championship in 1994. Women’s golf, meanwhile, a long-established national pow-
er, benefitted from the construction of the REK Center for Intercollegiate Golf in 1995 and feasted on its new SoCon competition, winning the first nine league championships in impressive fashion.

The introduction of women’s soccer in 1994 was followed by the construction of Stone Soccer Stadium in 1995, which keyd a dominating stretch by the women kickers, who won six SoCon regular season championships from 1995-03 and earned six NCAA Tournament appearances in the program’s first 13 seasons of existence. All-Americans Kay Brownlee (1999) and Emily Turgeon (2000) were pioneers in the impressive rise in Paladin women’s soccer, keying the Paladins to back-to-back 20-3, NCAA Tournament appearance seasons in 1999 & 2000, respectively.

The decision in 1996 by Greenville County Council to close Memorial Auditorium, the long-time home of Furman basketball, forced the university to bring the sport to campus — first to Lay Physical Activities Center for two years during construction of Timmons Arena, which opened in 1998.

Furman football enjoyed a resurgence in the late 1990s under head coach Bobby Johnson, capturing the league championship in a 1999 season that also saw the Paladins beat North Carolina, 28-3, and earn the first of three straight NCAA I-AA (FCS) playoff appearances. The next year junior All-America running back Louis Ivory ran for a nation leading 2,079 yards, including a then SoCon record 301 yards in a 45-10 rout of Georgia Southern, en route to capturing the Walter Payton Award, the Heisman equivalent for the top player in I-AA (FCS) football.

Behind the strong play of six All-Americans, including Ivory and linebacker Will Bouton, in 2001 the Paladins posted a 12-3 record, captured a share of the SoCon title, and handed Georgia Southern its first home playoff loss (24-17) in 39 games en route to a national runner-up finish.

Heralded quarterback Ingle Martin helped Furman claim its 12th SoCon football championship in 2004, and a year later the Paladins went 11-3 and advanced to semifinal round of the I-AA playoffs.

The past decade also witnessed surges by Furman baseball, as pitcher Tom Mastny led the nation in earned run average (1.09) in 2003 and became the first All-American in program history on the
way to a five-year major league career that included a win over Boston in Game 2 of the 2007 American League Championship Series as a member of the Cleveland Indians.

The opening of Pepsi Softball Stadium in 2001 represented a major commitment to the sport, which won the 2007 SoCon Tournament title and earned its first NCAA Tournament appearance.

Volleyball also charted steady improvement in the first decade of the new century, spurred by a switch of home venues from Timmons Arena to Alley Gymnasium, where the Paladins enjoy one of the most intimidating home court advantages of any university sport. In 2008 Furman claimed the league tournament title and earned the program its first NCAA Tournament appearance, which it followed up with a regular season league crown in 2009.

While Furman’s overall athletic competitiveness experienced a lull following the 2008-09 school year, it returned in impressive fashion during the 2013-14 school year, highlighted by SoCon championships in football, women’s soccer, men’s and women’s cross country, and women’s tennis. The return to championship form netted the 2014 Germann Cup for Paladin women’s sports and a solid third place finish in the Commissioner’s Cup for Furman’s men’s programs.

A major factor in Furman’s broad athletics resurgence has been facility construction and improvements, evidenced in a number of projects, including the golf practice complex (2012), softball press box (2012), new 11,000-square foot baseball complex (2013), and construction of the Pearce-Horton Complex (2013), the new 44,000-square foot operational home for Paladin football. In addition, a new Shaw Sports Turf playing surface was installed in Paladin Stadium in 2013 to serve as the home field for both football and the university’s two newest sports, men’s and women’s lacrosse.

The latest construction project incorporating a new soccer field house at Stone Stadium is now underway.

Since its beginning in 1889, Furman athletics has brought great distinction to the university with student-athletes who have embodied the school’s highest ideals. Through the years Paladin men and women have combined to win two national championships and send 97 teams into NCAA Tournament competition. The school is home to 85 SoCon regular season titles and 101 league tournament crows, and ranks among the nation’s elite in NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR).

In terms of individual accomplishment, Furman athletics has produced 114 NCAA Division I All-Americans, two Rhodes Scholars, a SoCon best 35 CoSIDA Academic All-Americans, 16 NCAA Post-Graduate Scholars, 109 SoCon Players of the Year, 16 SoCon Athletes of the Year, 52 SoCon Tournament MVPs, and 102 SoCon Coaches of the Year.

Initiated in 1981, the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame, with over 200 inductees, honors the outstanding men and women who have combined to create, maintain, and extend the university’s outstanding athletic heritage.