

Charlie Shaffer Jr. '64

Charlie Shaffer seems to gravitate to situations that demand what his friend Billy Payne calls an “incredible combination” of quick wits, determination, and, above everything, an assuredness that no matter what the odds, the best possible outcome is never out of reach.

He needed it to overcome a devastating injury that threatened his great promise as an athlete. He needed it when he played for Dean Smith’s first three teams. He needed it when his adopted city of Atlanta began near the bottom of the list in its bid for the Olympic games.

Back when Atlanta was wrestling with seven or eight other U.S. cities just to win the right to compete with the rest of the world for the Olympics, Charlie was among a small group which took Southern hospitality on the road to impress prominent sports officials. The group was funded by their own checkbooks, and they had a rotating system of paying for meals. We don’t know how lavish all these events were, but we do know of course that Atlanta sufficiently impressed the world. So when you ask what Charlie did to bring the Olympics to Atlanta, his friends will remind you that the New York leg of that trip included a \$4,000 lunch at the Waldorf . . . and it was Mister Positive Attitude’s day to pay.

Charlie brought that attitude with him to Carolina, and there is no question where he got it. As director of development for the University, his father worked an 8-to-10 job you have to love. Charlie says, “I was right there on the front row to watch him give back for 25 years.”

He grew up two blocks from the varsity tennis courts, three blocks from Woollen Gym. Classmates recall that he already was a legend when he arrived. He was the state’s best junior tennis player and had just turned down a UNC quarterback’s scholarship to take a Morehead. He had an old family car painted blue and white and tooled around town in “one of the great ’52 Plymouths you’ve ever seen.” He planned to play all three of his favorite games as a freshman and then pick one, but the football injury made his decision for him: He picked two, and he starred in basketball and tennis.

Sport has continued to be an important focus of Charlie’s life. But the essence of Carolina for him was, as he called it, “the vast importance of what was going on in the classroom.” He still reels off a sizable list of professors who taught him to “analyze, question, search, conclude and then keep searching.” He spotted an overlap in the English literature teaching of Hugh Holman and the religion lectures of Sam Hill and Bernard Boyd. Today Charlie’s favorite hobby is teaching an eight-week course in literature and theology in his church.

He was one of the original nine organizers of the Atlanta Olympics. In the middle of this all-consuming effort, he found time to join the steering committee for Carolina’s bicentennial, and he headed the bicentennial campaign for our 6,700 alumni in the Atlanta area. They established the Atlanta Professorship in Southern Culture at Carolina.

Today he is back in sports and back at UNC. When another city appeared to have the year 2000 Super Bowl locked up, Charlie led the delegation that landed it in Atlanta. He now is national chair of UNC’s National Development Council, and his work there was described this way: He is somebody who sees it as an important part of his life to give back to this University. He’s wonderful with words and ideas that capture your attention—sometimes in an unusual way that you won’t forget. Charlie has the capacity to verbalize what others feel in a way that draws them in.

Charlie and his sister, Winborne Chandler ’67, set up a scholarship fund to honor their parents a decade ago. His two daughters are in the fifth generation of Shaffers to graduate from UNC.

Besides his football injury, he now has a bent spine from all the medals which have been hung around his neck. While at Carolina he earned the Frank Porter Graham Award for outstanding seniors, and he was elected to the Order of the Golden Fleece, the Order of the Grail, the Order of the Old Well, and as Permanent Class President of the class of ’64. He received the William Richardson Davie Award from UNC in 1996 and the UNC law school’s Distinguished Alumni Award the following year.

Ten years ago Charlie wrote to the editors of the Yackety Yack to say, “UNC offered an education that sank to the depth of my being, in the richest possible environment.”

In 1996 he got to choose where in all the country he wanted to carry the Olympic torch. There was only one place on Earth he wanted to run. He handed the torch off to fellow Olympian and classmate A.D. Frazier ’65 at the Old Well, with his parents, his sister, and his wife and their children proudly watching.

Today Charlie says that other than family, he doesn’t know of an institution for which you can have more affection than your alma mater. He has loved her well, and their relationship has enriched us all.