



Paper Pride

BY JAMIE SIMPKINS

Every game day, Bridgeforth Stadium is a hub of excitement as students, alumni and community members flock to the stands to support our team. The atmosphere becomes even more electric when the Dukes score a touchdown, prompting fans to release thousands of purple and gold streamers in the air.

The streamers have become a trademark of JMU football games, but what most fans don't know is that the beloved tradition is actually rooted in basketball.

During the 1980s, students would blanket the basketball court in a sea of toilet paper upon the JMU team scoring its first points. However, due to concern for the safety of the players and the disruption of play, the NCAA began calling technical fouls on the team, and the custom came to an abrupt end.

In 2004, JMU alumnus Phil Cockrell ('85) revived the tradition—this time with streamers—to bring more excitement to football games. Although safety was an initial concern, the university agreed to allow the streamers, with some stipulations. Prior to the game, the cellophane wrappers needed to be removed to reduce litter and the streamers had to be picked up to prevent people from tripping.

At the first game of the season, Cockrell enlisted the help of students and alumni to unwrap 1,000 streamers and hand them out

to attendees. The streamers were a hit, not only with students, but with fans of all ages.

"The cool thing was, it didn't matter if it was a 5-year-old kid or a 70-year-old fan, everybody loved getting those streamers," Cockrell says.

'It's just all about the spectacular purple and gold.'

— PHIL COCKRELL ('85)



Fourteen years later, many students name the streamers as one of their favorite things about JMU. Thousands of streamers continue to be thrown at football games and commencement, as well as in university promotions.

"It's just all about the spectacular purple and gold," Cockrell said. "People at JMU really embrace JMU more than a lot of other colleges. It's something special."

To Cockrell, the streamers are more than just crepe ribbons—they are a tangible symbol of his love for JMU Athletics.

"It's a special thing. I'm kind of a sentimental person in that I will tell you at the start of each season, when the team runs on the field for the first time, my eyes water a little bit. I just love seeing the team and what it's grown to at JMU."

(Above): Dukes fans throw purple and gold streamers after a touchdown at the 2017 Family Weekend football game in Bridgeforth Stadium. (Left): A sea of toilet paper covering the court reveals the excitement of the Electric Zoo during a 1983 men's basketball game in the Convocation Center.