



Meet the President: Bruce Wilkison, ATCCCA President

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8/16/10 - Bruce Wilkison, a strings teacher and cross country coach at Gilbert Christian School has a heart for smaller schools in Arizona.

He also says he isn't too great with money, so when the president and treasurer positions opened on the Arizona Track and Cross Country Coaches Association—well, you get the picture.

"I don't have all that much experience, but I love the sport and want to see success in Arizona," Wilkison said. "I would really like to see the ATCCCA be able to influence districts, with all of the budget cuts happening right now."

The ATCCCA provides a means for coaches to meet and communicate, organize, administer and promote the two sports in conjunction with the AIA, and disseminates information regarding competitions and their results.

Wilkison graduated from the University of Michigan in 1983 with a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance. He spent one year in the Los Angeles area freelancing professionally, and played with the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra from 1984 to 2002. "Much of my life inside and outside of school revolved around music, but my escape from the pressure that would become my career was found in distance running," Wilkison said. "I wasn't very good but I loved it, and competed in cross country and track for three years."

So when an administrator at Gilbert Christian School offered to start up a cross country team six years ago, Wilkison immediately jumped on board.

"When my younger daughter started running cross country, I started running again too. I had no experience other than my own running, and the first season wasn't very good," Wilkison said. "Fortunately, I got to know a few of the great Arizona coaches and have learned from them and a number of other sources."

As president, Wilkison would like to see the number of students participating in cross country and track and field increase, as well as the performance of Arizona's top athletes to be increasingly recognized nationally.

He would also like to see more coaches from around the state get involved with the ATCCCA so he will know what their needs and the needs of their athletes are.

"I'd like to meet as many coaches and athletes as I possibly can," Wilkison said. "Undoubtedly, I'll discover more goals as the time passes."

Arizona Track also had the opportunity to discuss the AIA's recent overhauling of the format for individual and team state tournaments with Wilkison.

He sees it more of an adjustment than a problem. "Right now the two sports are trying to find out how the recent conference/division shakeup will affect them," Wilkison said. "A problem is the tendency for school and district administrations to treat cross country as a throwaway sport at the first sign of budget trouble, as was experienced very recently by the Tolleson district. In my opinion, track is less affected by this, but certainly not unaffected."

"Frankly, I'm in favor of it. Having seven championships is ridiculous, so four is a good compromise," Wilkison said. "Personally, it won't make much a difference for my team, because we'll probably be in the smallest division for some years. We were already competing in 1A and 2A."

Wilkison's program has been self-funded, which limits what meets the team can travel to. His team had to rely on the regional meet to qualify athletes. "Even if it's a detriment to my particular program, I think it's progress. I have to be a better coach," Wilkison said.

Sandra Day O'Connor High School cross country and track and field head coach Brian Dempsey said that Wilkison was a good choice for the ATCCCA president position because of his general enthusiasm for the sport itself. Dempsey was also the most recent ATCCCA president.



“We actually sought him out because as everyone has probably noticed on the ArizonaTrack.com forums, he’s very interested and talks quite a bit on there. Just meeting him the last couple years, he’s more of a fan than anything,” Dempsey said. “He’s a coach and does well with a small school. He was a little nervous about taking it on, but we’re going to support him and help him out in anyway we can.”



In the midst of conference and division shakeups, budget cuts and the like, Wilkison still holds true one simple philosophy.

“Everything we do as coaches should be directed toward benefiting the student athletes we

coach. Every athlete is important, and every athlete improves,” Wilkison said. “Cross country and track and field are excellent vehicles for instilling strong character and values in the lives of young athletes.”