

Underrepresented runners moved out of the spotlight

GUILFORD'S TRACK AND FIELD TEAMS LOOKED OVER DESPITE BREAKING RECORDS AND TAKING NAMES

BY MCCAFFREY BLAUNER
STAFF WRITER

A flitting shadow in the trees, glimpsed only for a moment. A shape, too fleet-footed for the eye to follow, tearing down some forested trail. One might speculate that they have caught a glimpse of a species of Appalachian Bigfoot, driven from its mountainous home by global warming. No! It's Guilford's track and field team.

When one thinks of Guilford's sports teams — all members of the highly prestigious Division III conference — generally what is brought to mind are the hordes of maroon tracksuited football players. Or perhaps one thinks of Guilford's lacrosse players, those able men and women who are so rarely seen without their faithful sticks. Far less represented, however, is the Guilford track team.

While most of the attention given to the athletic department seems to focus on teams whose events constitute more traditional spectator sports, runners like sophomore Jasmine O'Neill of Winston-Salem, N.C., have been breaking school

records and taking names while out of the limelight. As one of the cross-country team's strongest runners, O'Neill has recorded the six best 800-meter times in Guilford history, with a personal best time of 2:32.23. O'Neill also set the school's 200-meter record at the Old Dominion Athletic Conference Championships at 29.82 seconds as a rookie on the team.

A standout athlete even in high school, under the tutelage of Parkland High School coaches Erick Fritz and Antwan Hughes, O'Neill was able to letter two years in cross country, and three in track. During her time there, she helped Parkland High School place second at the 2009 3A state championships, as well as assisting in three Piedmont Triad Conference Outdoor Track and Field titles.

As a cross country athlete, O'Neill has set the fifth-fastest time for a Guilford runner in the five kilometer at the Hagan Stone Classic, clocking in at 21:09.99 and finishing 18th out of a veritable swarm of 114 runners, helping Guilford place eighth out of 13 teams.

Speaking to what some might perceive as an underrepresentation of Guilford's track team in disproportion to their achievements, O'Neill conceded that the school does seem to place less value on the team.

"My friends and family tell me they want to come to one of my 'home' meets all of the time so they can watch me run," said O'Neill. "And it hurts to tell them they can't

because we don't have a track or (now) a course to compete on."

Will Guilford's administration continue to neglect its

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Jasmine O'Neill, track and field athlete

hard-working runners, or will the achievements of athletes like O'Neill finally draw the attention they really deserve? Only time will tell.

Teams that did not make the cut

BY JOSH BALLARD
STAFF WRITER

Of the 12 total collegiate sports offered by the athletics department, only half are offered to both men and women.

Other traditional collegiate sports, like men's swimming and volleyball and women's golf and wrestling aren't offered at all.

"I feel like if we have a men's golf team we should have a women's golf team, simple as that," said junior and sports fan Andrew Shearer in an email interview. "We compete every year for championships in men's, yet we can't even have a women's team?"

A number of factors contribute to these sports not being offered.

Dave Walters, sports information director and assistant director of athletics, cites the main factor as a lack of interest. If there were substantial interest in adding a certain sport, the athletics department would have probably already added them.

"A group of students would need to demonstrate a sustained interest in forming a new team and communicate its desire for varsity status to the athletics director," Walters said in an email interview.

However, Director of the Friends Center and Campus Ministry Coordinator Max Carter feels

there are other factors that lie outside a simple lack of interest.

"Follow the money; it's all about the budget," Carter said in an email interview.

A Nov. 2011 letter entitled "Budget Process for Fiscal Year 2012-2013" released by the college mirrors Carter's statement.

"The primary challenge for Guilford College is to raise sufficient revenues for funding ... high quality student services and athletic programs," the letter said.

One might assume that the school's Quaker values would be a factor in choosing which sports to offer. However, that is not the case.

"If one looks back into Guilford's history, when its faculty, trustees, and students were overwhelmingly Quaker, one will see that sports such as football and baseball — which in earlier times was considered a rough sport — were offered and were popular," said Carter.

Yet, for the sports previously mentioned, it all boils down to the Old Dominion Athletic Conference itself. According to the ODAC website, a combined total of 15 sports are offered, which branch off into either men's or women's sports.

Of the sports mentioned above — men's volleyball and swimming, women's golf and collegiate wrestling — only women's golf is offered as part of the conference. The rest aren't available for student participation, at least not at a varsity, conference-sponsored level.

This is not to say that some of these sports were never offered at Guilford. Walters said that in the '60s, the school did have a wrestling team, and there was even a field hockey team for a short stint in the '70s.

There is also a chance that they could once again be introduced. It is all a matter of student interest as well as budgetary and conference availability.

In the last decade alone, softball, women's swimming, cross-country, and track and field have been added.

"I don't think it's so much a matter of what sports are played — with the exception of ones that do, in fact, glorify violence — as what the goal of the competition is and how well they build student character," said Carter.

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Andrew Shearer, junior and sports fan

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