

Nov. 9, 2011, Bill Stout - Address at Hall of Champions / Coaching Legends banquet

Sir Isaac Newton once said, “If I have seen further than others, it’s because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” While I don’t claim the status of a “world changer” like Newton, the sentiment still rings true. No one realizes great things without the support of others’ strong shoulders.

When I look back on over 25 years in education, I just have to marvel at what I’ve been blessed with!

I have been blessed with a rock solid foundation that my parents provided. Despite growing up in conditions that our society today would call “below the poverty line,” my parents rooted their five sons deeply in the convictions of our Christian faith, the value of hard work, and the abiding belief that our wealth didn’t depend on material things.

Sports were always a passion of mine as I grew up, and I was blessed with a number of coaches along the way who challenged, taught, & inspired me.

I was blessed to get a teaching job right out of college, at Calvin Christian. Because it was a small school, there were immediately opportunities to coach. I had never participated in cross country in my life—I had always played sports in which running was a *punishment*—but my XC coaching career began that first year as an assistant when a buddy of mine asked me to give him a hand. The following year he moved to another sport, so I became the head coach.

Some of you may know that XC is a sport that sort of flies under the radar. I had tremendous support from the school administration and my athletic director, mostly in the form that they let me do what I wanted. And I think that support had a lot to do with the fact that what I wanted didn’t cost a lot of money. Coaching colleagues such as Doug Van Solkema gave me a lot of encouragement, and other coaching greats from the larger public schools set high standards with their programs—I wanted my program to be just as good as theirs! If I had questions, they were gracious and would give me advice for how to improve our program.

Along the way, I was blessed to meet my wife & partner, Elsa Wilgenburg. An athlete of some acclaim at both HS & college levels herself; she was always so supportive of my coaching. She even helped out with the girls’ team in the early years of our marriage.

And, of course as coaches, all of us know that we would get nowhere without the kids. I had such great kids for so many years. They came for all sorts of reasons—to get in shape for another sport, because of the girls (or the boys), because their parents made them, they had nothing better to do . . . There were talented kids, average kids, and slow kids—but we had lots of kids and all of them were buying into the program, making sacrifices, working hard. And I had such supportive parents. And when you have those ingredients, some special things can happen. And they did happen!

Precious memories, how they linger . . . It is an inevitable part of the human experience that we are never as grateful for something during the actual experience as we are later when looking back. I believe that is one of the reasons that grandchildren are so precious—because we get a second chance to appreciate the blessing of children the way we realize we probably should have when our own kids were that age.

Thank you for this honor and the opportunity to share this celebration with friends and family.  
Soli Deo Gloria!