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Three new coaches eager to start at Grace Christian Academy

Knoxville, Tennessee—Two new varsity sports have been added to the athletic program at Grace Christian Academy, cross country and girls' soccer. High school principal Randy Down will coach cross country and Daniel Byrd has been named as the girls' soccer coach. Paul Pridemore has been named as the girls' basketball coach.

An active and competitive runner since the age of fifteen, Randy Down has enjoyed coaching runners of all ages. In his first coaching experience in Houston, Texas, he coached twin sisters to first and second place finishes in the state cross country championships. In California, he coached boys and girls cross country teams, winning one boys' and two girls' conference championships.

Down has built cross country teams at Charlotte Christian School in North Carolina and Westminster Catawba Christian in Rock Hill, South Carolina. He also grew a girls' track team at Charlotte Christian, producing four conference titles, state champions in individual and relay events, one state runner-up and two state titles.

Coach Down has helped thirty-eight runners earn scholarships to NCAA schools in running, basketball, and even two in rowing. "The two who won crew scholarships were runners and basketball players, but were not strong enough for the college game. However, they were athletic and able to row well enough to compete for schools like UC-Irvine and Clemson," said Down.

He is excited about the new crop of almost thirty who came out for spring conditioning runs. "We have a wonderful campus on which to run, with plenty of hills, and we have had a lot of fun introducing the nuances of cross country to these first-time runners," said Down. A few students have running experience that Down sees as a bonus for a first-year program. "These experienced runners are like assistant coaches. Coach Down stated, "They already know the dedication and perseverance it takes for a sport like cross country, and the younger runners already look up to them."

Daniel Byrd shares Down's enthusiasm as he prepares to bring girls' soccer to GCA. Byrd helped this year at Grace with the middle school boys' team who won the division championship. The girls have played with the guys on a co-ed team but this will be a first to have their own team. "Co-ed doesn't work for the girls," said Byrd.

Byrd draws from years of coaching and playing experience including working to develop professional players with Brad Friedel's Premier Soccer Academics in Lorain, Ohio. He has coached several varsity high school soccer teams (boys and girls) in Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

Byrd grew up playing soccer in Africa where his parents served as missionaries. He played ODP for Kentucky and college soccer at Johnson Bible College, finishing his career on the semi-professional level with the Cleveland City Stars of the USL II.

Byrd says this is a building year at Grace and he is ready to offer a “quality soccer experience.” He is excited about the opportunity to integrate faith into soccer. His vision is to see the lady Rams (soccer team) become top contenders in the next few years.

Girls’ basketball will head in a new direction as Paul Pridemore takes over as the varsity coach. “The program is ready to take a huge step forward in the development of not only the player but as a program in general,” said Pridemore. Coach Pridemore has coached basketball for 24 years at both the college and high school level. Prior to moving to Tennessee, he was the varsity boys’ coach at Trinity Christian Academy, an AAA school in Jacksonville, Florida. Pridemore took his team to two district championships and was runner-up for two years. He was voted coach of year on two occasions. Most recently, Pridemore served three years as the assistant boys’ coach at Grace Christian Academy.

Down who is also the interim athletic director is excited about the changes taking place in the athletic program. “We have an eager and coachable group who want to be a part of building a legacy here at Grace,” said Down.

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