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Cedarville Coach Pivotal in Training of Paralympic Gold Medalist

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Jeff Bolender, affectionately known as "Coach Bo," has coached dozens of track and cross country athletes at Cedarville University in the last several decades. His impact on his athletes, even after they graduate, is evident as Grace Norman '20 continues to win Paralympic medals.

And Coach Bo is hoping his current work with the two-time Paralympic medalist will continue as Norman competes in the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.

Bolender's focused training for Norman's Paralympic success speaks to his caliber of skill. Norman saw great success running under Coach Bolender and decided to bring him on as a permanent member of her coaching team to consult with for her run training for the triathlon.

Norman views Bolender as an integral part of her coaching team.

Bolender and Norman are in regular communication as he monitors her run training and develops workouts. He keeps the sessions concise and targeted to best complement her cycling and swimming.

"She's a very talented person and a very gifted runner," Bolender said of Norman. "I'm helping her stay in a good place, where she's healthy and fit and can compete to the best of her ability."

There have been many other Cedarville student-athletes who have made it into the U.S. Olympic trials, as well as winning championships at the national level. Daniel Michalski, a 2018 graduate, came within a half-second of making the U.S. Olympic team for steeplechase in 2021. Carsyn Koch-Johnson '18, MSN '20, was a four-time NCAA Division II 800 meters national champion, and Tommy Ansiel '21 won the pole vault at the 2019 NCAA Division II Men's Outdoor Track & Field Championship.

While athletes are often discussed and lauded for their abilities, coaches don't always get the recognition they deserve. Athletes couldn't be their best without them.

When you ask Norman, she credits much of her running success to her college coach, who has remained a trusted part of her coaching team.

"I've been working with Coach Bolender for the past seven years of my career, and his training methods and workouts work very well for me," Norman said. "Last year, we improved my run times significantly for the 5k portion of the triathlon. We are prepping for a strong season this year with the goal of qualifying for my third Paralympic Team, looking to the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games!"

Bolender's coaching responsibilities are many. He develops individualized workout routines and writes training programs for his athletes. Coach Bo also has a lot on his plate with the travel logistics of scheduling bus and van transportation for his teams.

"It's a lot of work, but I absolutely love it," he said.

As he spends time with students, Bolender gets to impact them and shape their lives for the better, through their college years and beyond.

“The goal is to mentor our student-athletes in a positive way for Christ,” said Bolender. “And athletics is a microcosm for life. Pursuing a sport teaches you how to handle success and failure and how to get back up when you get knocked down. We are preparing students for excellence and driving them to work hard, push through and overcome. That’s the focus in the midst of helping them improve their individual sport.”

Bolender’s dedication is clear in the way he talks about his athletes and cheers them on.

“I enjoy working with all our student-athletes. Grace is a pleasure to work with. She’s a tremendous young lady, and I’m really happy for her and for the success she’s had.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 5,082 [undergraduate](#), [graduate](#), and [dual-enrolled](#) high school students in more than 175 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [Bachelor of Science in exercise science](#), high graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and the #4 national ranking by the Wall Street Journal for student engagement. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Sarah Mummert

Photo Cutlines:

Caption (A): The outdoor track at Cedarville University (photo credit: Scott Huck)

Caption (B): Jeff Bolender, head coach of the women’s cross country team and of the men’s and women’s track and field teams at Cedarville University (photo credit: Scott Huck)

Caption (C): Grace Norman, 2020 Cedarville graduate and two-time Paralympic medalist (photo credit: Scott Huck)