

The spotlight is shining

—on **Birmingham-Southern** and on Division III athletics

BY JOHN WATTS '86

Twenty-one years after graduating and only one short year away from my daughter attending Birmingham-Southern, I can only be excited about all of the changes that are under way on the Hilltop.

I reflect back today on my freshman year of 1982 and remember the anticipation of attending classes, meeting new people, getting to know my professors, fraternity rush, and getting into the daily regimen of tennis practice under Coach Ann Dielen. I was very fortunate to have excelled in the sport of tennis and to have been offered an athletic scholarship for four years. BSC was the perfect place for me since I had an interest, at that time, in pre-med. I will never forget trying to balance all of the activities that came with being a freshman with the demands of the curriculum.

What I did not come to realize until later was the dynamic that existed with regard to academics and athletics during my years at 'Southern. It became very clear to me that the emphasis would be academics first and athletics second. I remember having difficulty early on with my studies and Coach Dielen granting me the flexibility of attending lab during practice on occasion. I finally became acclimated to life on the Hilltop as a scholar-athlete, but only as a result of Coach D's belief that we were really there to get an education. I am truly thankful that Coach Dielen personally communicated this to all players under her care. And her beliefs were consistent with the true mission of the College. Please do not misunderstand me—we definitely put in the hours practicing very hard while we were under her direction in preparation for regional competition. And we wanted to compete as hard as we could, and we wanted to win with a passion.

I now think about what is taking place with the re-introduction of a football program, the introduction of new areas of study for students to pursue, the construction of much-needed green space on campus, and the many other changes that will grow our college for the future. It is no wonder that Birmingham-Southern has record enrollment for the incoming freshman class. Having spent a fair amount of time myself over the last five years coming to understand the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead for BSC, I can easily say that I have never been more proud to be an alum.

Now that clear progress is being made in recruiting for many of the teams under Division III, one can conclude that the decision to leave NCAA Division I athletics was the right call for the long-term health of the institution. The alumni who have invested a little time in learning why BSC went to Division III have come to realize this as well. Taking a step back to view what has taken place over the last three decades, first under the leadership of Dr. Neal Berte and now under the leadership of Dr. David Pollick, BSC is once again exhibiting strength in delivering a superior liberal arts educational experience to students and scholar-athletes. The financial resources that have been freed up to reinvest in tangible ways are having an immediate and meaningful impact—one that can be clearly felt by everyone who steps foot on campus.

I can think of no better place for my daughter to learn and grow as a person than at Birmingham-Southern. She will have the benefit of so many things when she arrives next year. A new Urban Environmental Studies major will be in place, the Admission Welcome Center will be opening its arms to our future students and visitors, and

the Urban Environmental Park will be providing an outdoor classroom and leisure area for the students. And, a full season of football will be complete under Coach Joey Jones (his competitive spirit is evident) and the new football stadium will be ready to be filled with enthusiastic BSC students. We've all watched an intense in-state football rivalry over the years. Now it's exciting to wonder who our football rival will be in the coming years. No one knows the answer, but won't it be fun to sit back and watch this unfold before our very eyes?

It really is comforting to know that so many young men have chosen to play football at Birmingham-Southern and for a man of such high character. Coach Jones is a man with strong faith who will teach these young men what it means to excel in all aspects of life. But more importantly than playing football at BSC or playing for a man of such high character, they will be getting one of the best liberal arts educations in the nation.

It seems that the spotlight is shining on Birmingham-Southern—and on our football program and the other Division III sports. And it is such a deserving spotlight. Much of what is being accomplished and what will be accomplished in the future requires that we as alumni continue to support Birmingham-Southern in any way possible, whether that's helping recruit prospective students, attending sporting events, making sure you send that important annual gift in, or simply telling others about the good story that is Birmingham-Southern. Let's do what we can to keep the spotlight on our college for many years to come.



Watts

Editor's Note: *John Watts of Huntsville is a 1986 Birmingham-Southern graduate, a member of the college's Board of Trustees, and vice president of athletics for the BSC Alumni Association's Board of Directors. He is founder and resident manager of Evans, Watts, and Schrimsher Wealth Management Group of Wachovia Securities.*



Back in the day,

Birmingham-Southern students had their own ideas about celebrating a big day on the gridiron—say, the Nov. 22, 1930, match-up with the Panthers’ archrival Howard Bulldogs. This page from the 1931 annual *La Revue* sets the scene: coeds in football finery, a brass band parade through the heart of town, and a happy-go-lucky jalopy driving home the message of the day: Beat Howard!

Now that football is back at BSC, today’s Hilltoppers will find new ways of enjoying the game (tailgating, anyone?). And here’s some exciting news: beginning in 2008, the annual BSC Alumni Reunion will take place in the fall, and each year’s festivities will feature Homecoming football fun.

Meanwhile, mark your calendars for this year’s exciting Homecoming game, which pits the Panthers against DePauw University Oct. 6 at 1:30 p.m. at Regions Park in Hoover. Call your friends now to make sure they’ll be sitting with you in the bleachers as we begin a grand new Homecoming tradition at BSC.

BSC

Birmingham-Southern College

900 Arkadelphia Road
 Box 549003
 Birmingham, Alabama 35254

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