



**AN FCA
BIOGRAPHY AND
TRIBUTE TO
WENDELL
CONOVER**

**FELLOWSHIP OF
CHRISTIAN
ATHLETES**

BIOGRAPHY

Excerpts From “Influence – A History of the Nebraska Fellowship of Christian Athletes” by Arthur Lindsay

In August 1970 Wendell and Marie Conover traveled from Sargent, NE to Estes Park, CO for the 15th annual national conference for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. They returned to Nebraska with a burning desire to make church a more significant part of their lives, and they were determined to help promote the FCA any way they could.

Max Stratton was the Regional Director for FCA over Nebraska and in 1977 Max helped Nebraska organize the first FCA state board. Dr. Bob Smith of Norfolk was elected Coordinator, Wendell was chosen to serve as Assistant Coordinator and Harvey Gilbert of Omaha served as Secretary. They each made a commitment to the task of initiating the work of the FCA in Nebraska, including starting a search for the first State Director.

On April 29, 1978 the board unanimously confirmed Wendell Conover as the Nebraska State Director starting June 1st. He was given a salary of \$15,500 along with an expense allowance and eventually a donated car from Lee Sapp Ford in Ashland. Wendell was easy to spot criss-crossing the state in a black Ford Fairmont with an orange top!

Since he is by nature a rather quiet, private person, most people never knew what it was that drove him to cover the whole state of Nebraska with both his presence and his prayers on behalf of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He however had given thoughtful consideration to what his role should be. In writing his own life’s mission statement Wendell was highly motivated first of all by 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

“I want to use my gift of encouragement for God,” he wrote, “because as a Christian all I ever wanted to be was a Barnabas. It’s not how I started that matters. It’s how I finish. I want to finish strong.” Wendell saw his responsibility as State Director to be one who challenged and encouraged others in reaching out to coaches and athletes with the good news about Jesus.

TRIBUTE

The following are notes of tribute from staff, board members and others who have been impacted by Wendell and his years serving the Lord through the FCA.

Chris Bubak
FCA-Nebraska State Director

Each of us has people that God placed in our lives as vessels of His grace to accomplish His purposes. Most likely there are many, but one can usually name a handful that had significant impact. For me, Wendell Conover is on the shortlist.

I cannot recall when I first met Wendell but am guessing it was the summer of 1980 at the FCA National Conference in Estes Park, CO. The FCA huddle at Chase County high school got its start as a result of the students that attended camp that summer. This was my first exposure to FCA and God used this to redirect my life. FCA was God's means of grace for me, because through FCA I was connected to most of the people on my short list, including Wendell Conover.

After being involved in the huddle at the University of NE, Wendell called to ask if I would serve as a huddle leader at the 1984 Estes Park camp that summer. I thought of a thousand reasons why I couldn't go, but among Wendell's great gifts were persistence and encouragement. I met two more people on my short list at that camp; Ned Pauley and Stan Parker-more vessels of God's grace. My wife Natalie and I met through FCA (she's number one on my short list!) and eventually attended Denver Seminary knowing we were going to serve Jesus through missions somehow, somewhere.

In September of 1993, again Wendell called asking if I would be willing to apply for the Lincoln Area Representative position. I thought of a thousand reasons why I couldn't, but Wendell's persistence and encouragement won out again. As we recall, we interviewed in October and Wendell offered me the position soon after. Looking back, I was in no way ready but will forever be grateful for Wendell's persistence and encouragement. He was always for me! I know there are quite literally several hundred other men and women in Nebraska that would say the same.

Wendell, I know that you are in the presence of Jesus right now and I just want to thank you once again for living your life for Him. I am a life that was saved because you served Him well!

TRIBUTE

Coach Ron Brown

Former FCA-Nebraska State Director, Founder Kingdom Sports

After being fired as an Assistant Football Coach for the University of Nebraska in 2004 I was led to take on the role of FCA-Nebraska State Director. Wendell Conover, Nebraska's first and only State Director had just retired after 26 years. In some ways because of Wendell my new role was going to be difficult. Following Wendell would be like anyone following Tom Osborne as Nebraska's Head Coach. Those shoes were awfully large to fill! The difficult part for me was consistently maintaining the numerous relationships that Wendell had established through his years of faithful travels and networks through Weekend of Champions, camps, marriage retreats, banquets, bible studies, staff meetings, personal visits, and more. Dude was Hustling!!!

However, in other ways, also because of Wendell, this new role for me was much easier to transition to. God had used Wendell powerfully to possess much spiritual and geographical land in sports ministry all over Nebraska - in just about every nook and cranny with over 200 FCA Huddles! Wendell knew the heartbeat of a rural state. He left out no one it seemed! His hard worked paved the way for a much welcomed FCA transition for me. In addition, Wendell was so organized and efficient financially that the ministry was strong. God's financial provision for FCA's fueling was of His favor, I believe, because Wendell and Marie were very faithful and gifted with banker-like detail: dotting i's and crossing t's. I clearly stepped into a well stewarded ministry because of their Christlike diligence. FCA-Nebraska's consistency is reflected in the rare longevity of its staff-many still on board since 2004 when I joined. This along with staff growth is a tribute to both Wendell and present-day State Director Chris Bubak.

God really grew the FCA story in Nebraska with Wendell and his diligent wife Marie. It's an inspiring story that will last for eternity. I had the privilege of visiting Wendell shortly before he went to be with our Lord. His dry humor and capacity to listen intently-which I always thought were outstanding attributes of his - were still strong on that last visit. Inspiring! I'm sure many will miss him-tons! The numbers of folks in Nebraska who have come to know and grow in Jesus through Wendell and FCA is staggering when you listen to testimonies. But I'm sure Wendell could never be talked into coming back to earth to visit the many who miss him-even if it were possible. Yes I know when it comes to both football and FCA, there is no place like Nebraska. But both pale in comparison to where Wendell lives today-the very presence of the One and Only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!!!

TRIBUTE

I Remember Wendell Conover
by Arthur Lindsay

I first met Wendell Conover on a cold, snowy night in October 1972. I was traveling all over the country, raising support funds for the missionary ministry God had called my family and me to in Italy. A friend had arranged for me to travel way out into the Sandhills to speak at the Methodist Church in Sargent, Nebraska. I had traveled all day to get there and would have to leave immediately afterward to get to St. Joe, Missouri.

After dinner with Bob Frescoln, pastor of the church, and his wife, we went to the church for the meeting. We were joined by four women and one man: Wendell Conover, who was both teacher and coach at the high school. I made my presentation of why God had called us to go to Italy and what we planned to do there. The seven people thanked me for coming as I left. As I drove away in the blowing snow I thought to myself, "At least I will never have to come all the way out here again."

But, I had not taken in account Wendell Conover. Somehow he was totally turned on. For the next 26 years he and Marie did not miss a month of sending in their financial support. Not only that, through Wendell's persistence, the Methodist Church in Sargent became a regular supporter and I made the trip out there several times more.

When God brought me to live in Lincoln in May of 1988, Wendell was the State Director and had moved to Milford. When I contacted him, he invited me to join him the next Friday morning for the FCA Men's Breakfast in Lincoln. (He drove in every week for that 7 o'clock meeting.) I was immediately impressed with what he was accomplishing with coaches and athletes. I was even more enthused in July of 1989 when Wendell asked me to drive a bus across the state, picking up high school students along the way to take them to the National Boys Conference at Estes Park, Colorado. On the first night, when a couple of hundred boys responded to the invitation to come forward to receive Christ as Savior, I was turned on to FCA for good.

I was blessed for thirty years to watch Wendell deftly involve others in the pleasure of uplifting Christ in the sports world. I remember clearly his great excitement of bringing Chris Bubak on staff a quarter-of-a-century ago. For Wendell, the ministry of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes was always about involving others. He was content to give support from the shadows.

TRIBUTE

Dr. Jud Martin

Former National Board of Trustee/State Board Member

In the late 1980's a Mr. Wendell Conover knocked on my door asking if I would be interested in volunteering time and resources for FCA. Wendell soon became known to us as 'the president' since our five-year-old daughter thought he looked like President George Bush. Through our eyes 'the president', along with his invaluable companion Marie, has served his Savior with unwavering commitment. Job well done good and faithful servant!

Coach Tom Osborne

FCA Hall of Champions/Lifetime FCA Board Member

Wendell Conover was the first full-time FCA employee in Nebraska. Prior to Wendell's being hired as State Director in 1978 Nebraska was served by a regional coordinator, Max Stratton, who lived in Salina, Kansas, traveled several states and visited Nebraska a few times a year. Wendell served for 26 years and oversaw tremendous expansion of FCA throughout the state. Prior to accepting the position with FCA Wendell coached multiple sports in Sargent, Nebraska for 10 years. His coaching experience served him well in relating to athletes and coaches and understanding the issues they face.

Wendell was a very quiet, humble person and I never heard him speak a negative word about anyone. Money was tight in the early years and Marie was a great asset to Wendell and FCA. Both of them worked tirelessly to advance the FCA mission.

All of us are greatly indebted to Wendell for his leadership in establishing and growing FCA in Nebraska.

TRIBUTE

Stan Parker
Former FCA staff, Team Lead MyBridge Radio

The first adjective that always comes to mind when I think about Wendell is... an over-achiever! And I mean this in all the best ways! In fact, that is what I aspire to be said of me... that because of Jesus, the impact of my life was disproportionate to my apparent capacity.

Wendell was a simple man... a humble man... a faithful man. A simple man in that he was singly focused on establishing the ministry of FCA in Nebraska... and that he did! A humble man in that he never, out of insecurity, shied away from hiring high caliber staff! He hired the best God would supply to advance the cause! A faithful man in that once his sights were set, he stayed on point for decades, giving FCA the time needed to begin to blossom. Wendell was my first and longest boss, who gave me an opportunity when I had zero experience, allowing me to get the experience that helped unlock my gifts and calling.

I, and those Jesus impacted through my ministry over the last three decades are eternally grateful!

Tim Johnson
FCA VP of Field Ministry – Midwest Region

When I was called to serve with FCA in 1993 as the Illinois FCA State Director, I was told to reach out to the Nebraska FCA state office if I had questions, because Wendell Conover was a veteran FCA leader. It was great advice, as I discovered in Wendell, a willing advisor, with deep godly wisdom, who was passionate about reaching his state for Christ through FCA.

Together the team of Wendell and Marie Conover inspired other FCA husband and wife teams like Lisa and me throughout the ministry. Their lives and leadership were committed to seeing the gospel advanced through FCA, resulting in thousands of Nebraska coaches' and athletes' lives being changed forever by the power of Jesus Christ. Wendell's legacy lives on in a strong and growing Nebraska FCA staff with that same pursuit,...the gospel to be front and center in sports throughout the state. Wendell's was a life well lived, bearing much fruit for the Kingdom.

TRIBUTE

Gordon Thiessen

Former FCA staff, Founder Cross Training Publishing and Kingdom Sports

I will never forget the first time Wendell visited our University of Nebraska FCA football Bible study with George Andrews, Craig Bohl and me in the late 1970s. He had just become the first state director for FCA in Nebraska. When we told him we were the NU FCA Huddle on campus, he bluntly stated, "No, you are not." He launched into a lecture on how we needed a signed charter, elections, and sponsor. He never wavered from doing things the right way. In fact, anyone around him at a Weekend of Champions heard more than once, "We will leave this place better than how we found it." For the next few years, Wendell drove the three of us throughout the state to share our faith with students and help him start new huddles. He also helped our small group become one of the largest and most influential Christian groups on campus.

Wendell was a master of connecting with people, with a quick quip and a gift for remembering names. He spent hours writing notes to coaches, athletes, and volunteers nearly every day. The Lord clearly called Wendell Conover to accomplish something in Nebraska that almost seemed impossible. I watched the number of high school huddles increase from just a handful to more than a hundred in just a few short years. Many of the key volunteers across the state he met within those first few years have remained loyal to FCA for decades. Somehow, the Lord helped him find leaders in every part of Nebraska.

The most valuable lessons I learned about conducting ministry came directly from Wendell. I'm forever thankful he recruited me to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes team, where I served 28 years. His legacy for Christ will continue through the thousands of athletes and coaches he served. By now, I'm sure he has heard, "Well done good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of the Lord."

Todd Brown

Former FCA Board Member, Founder/CEO Brown Church Development Group

Few men have impacted my Christian life like Wendell. As a new Christian, Wendell challenged me to be bold in my faith and to unashamedly proclaim the gospel. The great thing about Wendell was he not only challenged me, but he gave me the opportunity to share the gospel across the state of Nebraska. Seeing people raised to new life through the power of the gospel is the blessing I experienced with Wendell.

TRIBUTE

Dr. Bob Smith
First FCA-Nebraska Board Coordinator

Prior to 1977 Nebraska did not have a State Director. The Regional Director, Max Stratton, had a meeting with all the FCA member leaders in the state to convene in Minden with the task of developing a Board. The group elected me as Coordinator, Wendell as the Assistant Coordinator and Harvey Gilbert as Secretary. This was my first time meeting Wendell—a teacher, coach and huddle leader at Sargent High School. The 3 of us along with Max became the selection committee to find a fulltime State Director. Max had indicated that our \$22,000 budget would need to be raised by our board prior to hiring anybody. We didn't have to look far for candidates as both Wendell and Harvey expressed a desire to be considered. After a night to think about it, Harvey withdrew his name. Wendell conferred with Marie and said he would take the position. Max asked Wendell what he needed for a salary. Wendell said if you match my current salary I will take the job. Thus began the Wendell and Marie FCA era!

The Omaha adult chapter had started a Weekend of Champions held at Midland College 2 years prior to Wendell's hiring. We had about 30 high school boys, and under Wendell's leadership that quickly went to 50 then 100 to over 200. The Norfolk adult chapter had started a girls Weekend of Champions in 1976 which Wendell took over in 1978 and combined it with the boys at Midland College and it blossomed.

As most of you know Wendell was rather quiet but had an infectious smile and a dogged personality. He tirelessly traveled the entire state encouraging coaches and volunteers to share the Gospel with their athletes. When he would come to Norfolk he would stay with Jeanne and me. We would have great conversations and as a result he had a strong influence in my spiritual growth. He also encouraged me to be the Weekend of Champions Camp Dean which I did for a number of years. He and Marie were definitely devoted missionaries for Christ. Thank you Wendell and Marie for giving to the Lord, you have changed my life and countless others. Your legacy lives on.

TRIBUTE

Sondra (Obermeier) - Herold
First FCA-Nebraska Field Associate

Wendell Conover was a man of integrity, strong faith, a loyal friend and boss. He was the BEST Barnabas encourager by letter (I still have them all). He was a tireless worker for the Gospel kingdom and his impact, influence and visions are still felt throughout Nebraska FCA today.

In 1977, through the vehicle of FCA, God convicted me of my 'religious Faith' and a need for a Savior. Wendell then helped several of us UNL athletes start the first Univ. of Nebraska FCA Huddle in 1978 (or '79?) and in 1982, as FCA State Director, Wendell and Marie took a giant leap of faith and hired a young 23-yr-old as Nebraska's first Field Associate for the Greater Omaha Area. It was some of the most impactful and influential years of my life. I'm so thankful God allowed me to come along side Wendell and Marie in the FCA journey.

It was an Incredible ride thank you Wendell for having an eternal Impact on my life!