



# ATHLETICS NEWS

Fall 2020

An Update from the AD | XC Goes to Nationals | All Star Park Renovation



# FROM THE A.D.



Josh Pierantoni '22  
Nicholas Skinner '20



Stephanie Day '20



Basketball team in Costa Rica

Despite a COVID-19-shortened 2020 spring, CCU athletes accomplished much both on and off the courts and fields during the 2019-20 athletics seasons.

For the first time in program history, the men's cross country team qualified for the **NCAA National Championships**, held in Sacramento, California. Following the NCAA Regional Championships, the Cougars were ranked No. 23 nationally out of more than 300 men's cross country teams in Division II. Only 34 of those teams, a total of 267 runners, qualified to compete in the national championship race, and halfway into the race the Cougars were running in the 30th position. With much poise and discipline, CCU's men, led by Josh Pierantoni '22 (61st overall), Ryder Searle '20 (80th), Nicholas Skinner '20 (123rd), Trent Cochran '23 (145th), and Jeremy Miller '22 (156th) systematically picked off runner after runner to finish as

a team in 17th place nationally. Coach Jon Poag noted, "The success of this race was a testament to the hard work each runner invested since the beginning of the season. This truly is just the beginning of what our team can accomplish at this level."

Women's softball was on a similar trajectory as they **led the Rocky Mountain Athletics Conference with a 10-2 record** before COVID-19 abruptly ended their spring season. The Cougars were ranked in the top 5 nationally in hitting and were poised to make a run into the NCAA post season. Despite the abbreviated season, **two-time athletic All-American Stephanie Day '20** made history, when she was named the first ever academic All-American for any CCU sport. For her career, Day has a .403 batting average, 231 hits, 40 doubles, 36 home runs, 178 runs batted in, and 393 total bases.

In addition to these outstanding competitive outcomes, four CCU teams invested their time, talents, and financial resources to represent Jesus cross-culturally. In August of 2019, the women's volleyball team traveled to **Puerto Rico** and the women's basketball team traveled to **Costa Rica**, where they each spent time serving in an orphanage, teaching volleyball and basketball clinics, and loving children. In January of 2020, the women's golf team traveled to **Kenya** and the women's soccer team traveled to **Costa Rica** to share Jesus by teaching their respective sports and loving the children they met along the way. These trips created amazing opportunities for players to deepen their personal relationships with Jesus and with each other, while tangibly demonstrating the love of Christ to those they were able to serve. Finally, CCU was voted by players and coaches as the **RMAC Sportsmanship Cup Winner** for the fourth

consecutive year and eighth time overall in the 13-year history of the award.

Preparing for the 2020-21 seasons presented numerous challenges in navigating COVID-19. The NCAA has reduced the competition seasons for all sports by 20%. The RMAC has chosen to push all fall sports to spring, which for CCU includes volleyball and men's and women's soccer. Men's and women's golf will play their fall/spring schedule as normal. Winter and spring sports are still on schedule, pending additional NCAA and RMAC review. Athletic seasons continue to be a moving target as COVID-19 remains fluid, however, CCU Athletics is committed to providing the best experience possible for each of our athletes.



Brian Wall  
Director of Athletics



# COACH SPOTLIGHT



**Philip Nelson looks to grow CCU's women's golf into national powerhouse**

While competing for the Colorado Christian men's golf team from 2007-11, Philip Nelson helped lay the foundation of success for a program that has competed in the NCAA postseason 10 times.

Currently he is in the process of doing the same thing for the University's women's golf program as the team's coach, while also working on fundraising efforts for the entire athletics department as the new athletics advancement coordinator.

"The overall idea of advancement is to raise money, but it is not about the money to me. It is about caring about the donors and sharing the department's vision. I care about where this department is going and I want to care for the people that care about us," said an optimistic Nelson. "This department is at a very clear tipping point where we can shy away from the momentum we are creating or we can lean into that success and have a clear plan for the future so we can have one of the best departments in the conference."

The Ohio native is no stranger to success as a golfer or a fundraiser. He is one of just two Colorado Christian student-athletes to qualify

for the NCAA postseason with their team in all four years of their collegiate career while earning multiple all-conference honors. He also led the charge in raising more than \$100,000 for the women's golf program from 2018-19.

"That money was raised because the right relationships were already in place to raise those funds. It wasn't about the money it was about caring for the donors and communicating the long-term vision of where the women's golf program was going. A lot of the success in raising that money was the character and increasing competitiveness the players showed. Because of that, and the work we did attaching others to our long-term vision, donors were interested in helping the program reach that goal. It was all about relationships and vision."

Continued Nelson, "We are so close to having a nationally competitive department, not just one team. Once we get scholarships at an increased level we can then work on developing the student-athletes with improved facilities. I'm confident we have the right coaches and administrators in place to recruit, develop, and model Christ-like character to Colorado Christian student-athletes."

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*Pictured: Women's golf head coach Philip Nelson talks strategy during tournament play with Hannah Doran '21.*





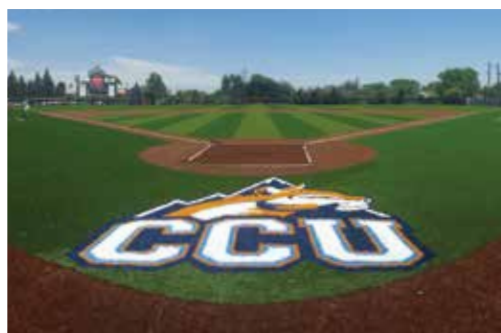
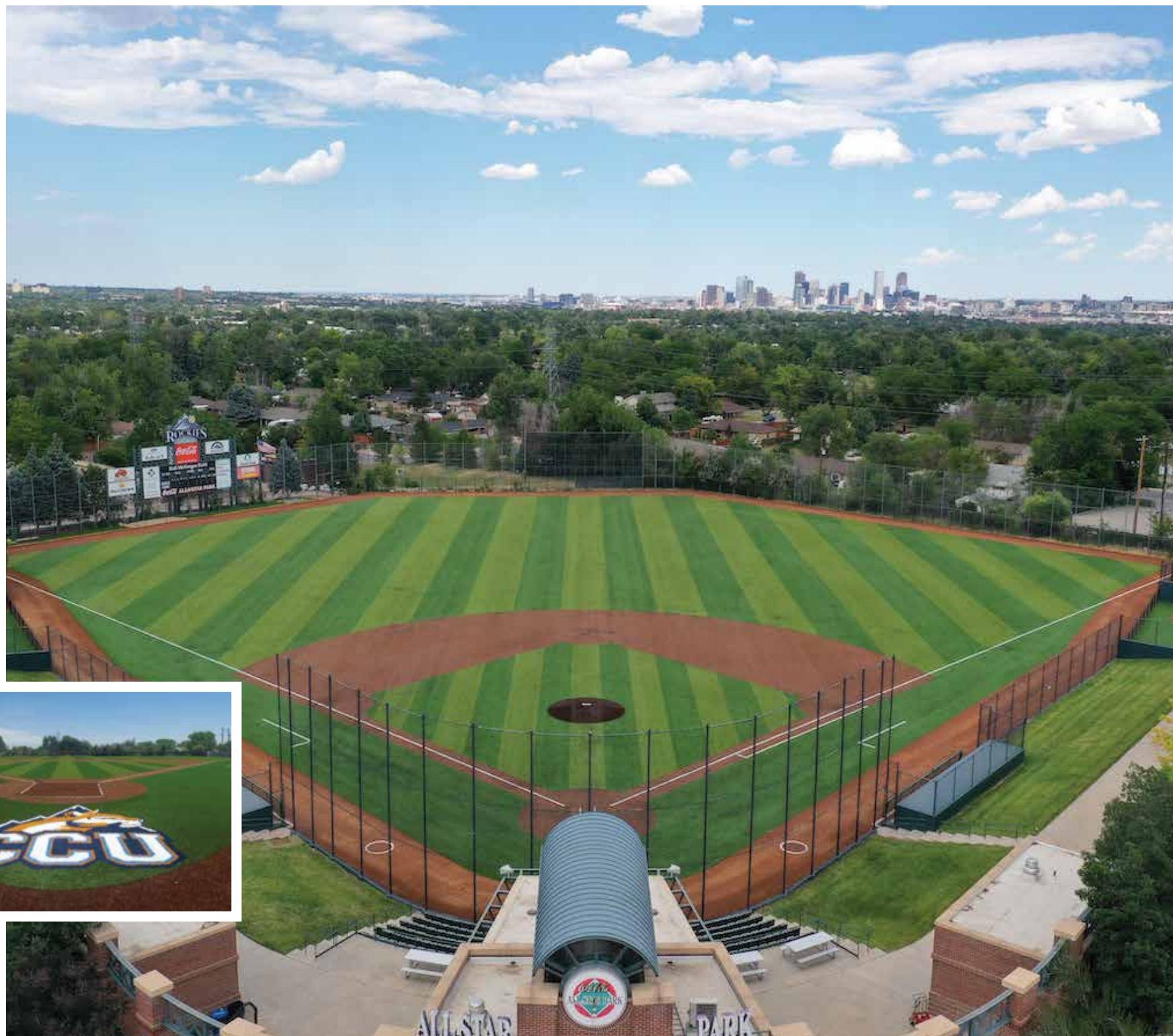
# ALL STAR PARK

## Cougars renovate their new long-term home for baseball and softball

It is with tremendous enthusiasm and thanksgiving that Colorado Christian University Athletics celebrates the completion of the All Star Park Baseball and Softball Complex Renovation. As of July 1, 2020, CCU officially opened a new chapter in school history with the launch of newly renovated All Star Park (ASP). In November 2019, the renovation began with the removal of the old sod, installation of a new drainage system, field base, and ultimately the installation of synthetic turf.

In June of 2019, CCU entered into a long-term lease agreement with the Gold Crown Foundation that provides the University with preferential scheduling of the facility. In order to fully maximize the use of ASP year-round, CCU made the investment to install synthetic turf, along with a portable baseball mound system and removable softball fencing, to allow for the park to be multiuse for both baseball and softball competitions. Beginning in the spring of 2021 both CCU Baseball and Softball teams will play their home games on the new and improved synthetic turf surface, which was modeled after the system installed in the Arizona Diamondbacks Chase Field.

Renovations at ASP were also made to upgrade the bullpens, install new backstop netting (which will be much more fan friendly), and to renovate the batting tunnels. On June 26-27, 2020, CCU's softball and baseball programs successfully hosted their inaugural prospect camps on the new field.





# TEAM SPOTLIGHT

## Men's cross country makes its mark on the national stage

The strategy at the NCAA Division II Men's Cross Country Championship was pretty simple: be patient in the early going and attack in the final miles. It worked out quite well and put a wrap on one of the best seasons by any team in school history.

Despite sitting in the 30th position in the 34-team field at the halfway point of the 10K (6.2 miles) race, the Cougars strategically made their move. By the event's end the team posted a 17th place finish and outperformed their prerace national ranking of 23. It was a culmination of a season that proved the program is a true competitor on the national scene.

"Every emotion comes to mind when reflecting on the NCAA National Championships; it was a thriller from start to finish," head coach Jon Poag said. "Athletic talent is a given at the NCAA National Championships, but poise, restraint, and courage are often what determine a team's ability to race to their potential. Our athletes were the embodiment of all three of those attributes and I could not have been prouder of their efforts."

Two weeks before that historic morning in northern California, the Cougars helped seal their at-large selection in the NCAA Championship race with a memorable event on a dusty course in Canyon, Texas,

at the NCAA South Central Regional Championships. Earning a fifth-place finish that day as a team, the trio of Ryder Searle, Josh Pierantoni, and Nicholas Skinner earned All-Region Honors.

The season's first major milestone took place on a mud-filled course at the Lewis Crossover outside of Chicago in mid-October. Not yet ranked in the national top 25, Colorado Christian toed the line against 11 nationally ranked teams. After beating four of those nationally recognized teams, the Cougars earned their first top 25 ranking in school history. That day was a harbinger of things to come.

"Future success can be a precarious thing, but I am confident that if we continue to embrace the right priorities and stay committed to our process the outcomes will take care of themselves," Poag said. "Competing at the 2019 NCAA National Championships was a milestone for our program, and our experience there serves as motivation for our future goals."



Coach Jon Poag  
Head Cross Country  
and Track Coach

*Pictured: CCU's NCAA Division II National Championship Team: Back row (L-R) Keaton Helm '20, Josh Pierantoni '22, Jeremy Miller '22, Trent Cochran '23; Front row (L-R) Ryder Searle '20, Jacob Vermillion '23, Nicholas Skinner '20*







# ELEVATE ATHLETICS

Over the last two years most of the improvements done around the school's athletic department have been done with little to no fundraising.

During that time the department improved its athletic training facility, entered a long-term lease and renovated All Star Park, and refurbished the Event Center floor, just to name a few advancements. After months of planning the department is rolling out its Elevate Athletics fundraising campaign.

The aim of the campaign is to raise athletic scholarship funds for all 15 of the department's NCAA Division II programs. In addition to the scholarship enhancement, the dollars raised will also help the department build soccer and softball fields and a track and field complex on the corner of Alameda Avenue and Kipling Street.

"My vision for athletics really parallels what is going on at Colorado Christian, and that is to see excellence. I want us to be excellent on the fields and courts and beyond that to have success in the classroom. Most importantly, I want to have student-athletes grow their relationships with Jesus Christ,"

said Athletics Director Brian Wall. "If we can have those things come together in an excellent way, that is success from my vantage point."

## The Altitude Team

All donors are members of the exclusive **Altitude Team**. There are a handful of giving levels available:

- ☐ All-American \$10,000+
- ☐ All-Conference \$5,000-\$9,999
- ☐ Captain \$1000-\$4,999
- ☐ Starter \$25-\$999

## Join the Team

Interested in joining the Altitude Team or have questions? Contact Philip Nelson at [pnelson@ccu.edu](mailto:pnelson@ccu.edu) or **303.963.3392**.



Philip Nelson  
Athletics Advancement  
Coordinator



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