

Highlighted by a fourth-consecutive Big South Championship for the men's team, plus a NCAA national runner-up in Sam Chelanga, the 2008 Liberty cross country program continued its legacy of being a major force on the collegiate cross country circuit.

Liberty hosted its first home meets in 10 years with the Big South Preview on Sept. 20, as well as the Big South Cross Country Championships on Nov. 1, and each time the men took first place while the women's team finished a close second behind Coastal Carolina.



2008 Big South Men's Cross Country Champions

**Men's Team**

The men's squad was led by Chelanga, who was named the 2008 Big South Runner of the Year, earned a spot on the All-Big South team, took five first-place finishes and was named the Big South Runner of the Week three times. The national runner-up (with a time of 29:08 in the 10K, cutting 14 seconds off the Liberty and Big South records) was also honored with the USTFCCA Southeast Region Men's Cross Country Athlete of the Year award during his first year with the Flames.

Jordan McDougal and Josh Edmonds also contributed to the team's success. McDougal, an all-Big South team member, won the Big South Preview on Sept. 20 while setting a new course record, and was named the Big South Runner of the Week on Sept. 24. Edmonds, also an all-conference honoree, was named the 2008 Big South Men's Cross Country Scholar-Athlete of the Year and was a member of the Big South All-Academic Team. He finished second behind McDougal at the Big South Preview with a time of 26:16. The season kicked off at the Virginia Tech Relay in Blacksburg, Va., where Chelanga and Mark Hopely teamed up to take the victory with a winning time of 48:57. Edmonds and Jake Reed finished fourth with a time of 50:30.

At the Big South Preview on Sept. 20, McDougal and Edmonds were joined in the top 10 by Powers, who finished seventh with a time of 26:43.

Chelanga, who sat out the Big South Preview, returned on Oct. 3 to set a new course record in the 8K at the Brooks Paul Short Run in Bethlehem, Pa., with a 23:05 time to take first place. The new time smashed the old record by 34 seconds. McDougal followed, finishing in the 10th slot

with a time of 24:05. The next-best Flame finisher was Edmonds, who crossed the line in 30th place with a time of 24:27.

Chelanga continued his record-setting run at the Pre-Nationals in Terre Haute, Ind., on Oct. 18, winning the 8K event with a 22:51 time. He broke the course record, meet record, Liberty record and Big South record, all of which had formerly been held by Josh McDougal. Chelanga won the race by 44 seconds.

Three of the top five finishers at the Big South Cross Country Championship on Nov. 1 were Liberty runners, as Chelanga took first (24:32, a new course record), McDougal finished second (24:55) and Edmonds took fourth (25:20).

Chelanga stayed hot at the NCAA Southeast Regional, winning the 10K event, while Jordan McDougal placed 12th and Edmonds finished 18th. All three were all-region honorees, and the team matched its best-ever finish (fifth).

Chelanga wrapped up the season at the NCAA National Championship with a runner-up finish (29:08) behind Oregon star Galen Rupp (29:03). Chelanga led practically the entire race, before Rupp was able to take the victory in the final 100 meters. McDougal also made his first ever NCAA national meet appearance.

**Women's Team**

The Lady Flames enjoyed considerable success of their own in 2008, and finished second to Coastal Carolina by only one point in the final Big South standings.

Senior Rebekah Ricksecker took home almost all of Liberty's accolades, as she was named the Big South Women's Cross Country

Scholar-Athlete of the Year, in addition to being named to the All-Big South team (along with classmate Ashley Osborne) and the Big South All-Academic team. Ricksecker also brought home the lone first-place finish when she won the Virginia Tech Relays on Sept. 5, teaming up with Osborne. She was also named the Big South Runner of the Week on three different occasions (Sept. 10, Oct. 8 and Oct. 22).

At the Virginia Tech Relays where Ricksecker and Osborne took the victory, the duo of Dacia Bushman and Melissa Martens finished third with a time of 46:32. The other Lady Flames team finishing in the top ten was the coupling of

Jaime Watson and Rod'Esther Castor, who placed ninth with a time of 49:40. As a team, the Lady Flames finished second behind host Virginia Tech.

At the Liberty-hosted Big South Preview, Ricksecker and Osborne both finished in the top five, as Osborne took second place with a time of 19:17, and Ricksecker finished third with a time of 19:28. Bushman also ended up in the top 10, as her 19:42 time was good for seventh place.

At the Brooks Paul Short Run in Bethlehem, Pa., on Oct. 3, Ricksecker was the highest Lady Flame finisher, coming in 69th with a 21:50 time in the 6K event. Osborne was the only other Lady Flame to finish in the top 100, coming in 92nd with a time of 22:03. Ricksecker had another 69th-place finish on Oct. 18 at the Pre-Nationals, ending the 6K with a personal-best time of 21:34. She was the only Lady Flame to finish that race in the top 100. Osborne was 198th with a time of 22:50 while Bushman finished 200th (22:52).

The Lady Flames saw greater success back in Lynchburg on Nov. 1, when five Liberty runners finished in the top 20 at the Big South Cross Country Championship. Ricksecker finished second (18:39), followed by Osborne (19:10, 10th), Bushman (19:13, 11th), and freshmen Hannah Hunt (19:25, 15th) and Denise Troyer (19:37, 17th).

At the NCAA Regional on Nov. 15, Ricksecker again led the Lady Flames with the lone top-20 finish. She placed 11th with another personal-best time of 21:24 in the 6K, and the Lady Flames finished 15th out of 33 teams. Ricksecker was an all-region honoree, becoming the fourth Lady Flame to earn all-region honors at the Division I level.



**Brant TOLSMAS**  
 Head Coach  
 24th Year at Liberty  
 Newark Coll. of Engineering, '71  
*12-Time Big South  
 Cross Country  
 Coach of the Year*



(L-R): Nancy, Tami and Brant Tolsma

Entering his 24th year at Liberty, Brant Tolsma is the head coach of the men's and women's cross country and track and field teams. He was brought to Liberty in 1986 by former Liberty track and field coach, Jake Matthes, to serve as the head men's track and field coach. By 1991, Tolsma had assumed each of the coaching positions he still holds today.

Under Tolsma's guidance, the Liberty program has enjoyed considerable success. The cross country and track and field teams have won 75 conference titles since his arrival on campus, including three Big South championships during the 2008-09 academic year.

Tolsma has won 40 Big South Coach of the Year honors and twice was named the NCAA District Coach of the Year. His athletes have earned 37 All-America honors since the program moved to the NCAA Division I level in 1989.

Two of his student-athletes have captured individual national titles. Heather (Sagan) Zealand won the mile at the 2002 NCAA Division I Indoor Track & Field Championships, while Josh McDougal crossed the line first at the 2007 NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships.

Tolsma's student-athletes have also excelled in the classroom during his tenure at Liberty. Last season, senior Daniel Newell was a third-team ESPN the Magazine Academic All-American. The honor marked the second straight year one of Tolsma's athletes received the award, as Clendon Henderson became the sixth Liberty cross country or track and field athlete to earn Academic All-America status under Tolsma's direction in 2007.

Tolsma's coaching career began at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C. He served as the head cross country and track and field coach there for seven years. During his time as a collegiate head coach, 20 of his athletes have represented the USA in international competitions.

Tolsma completed his undergraduate work with summa cum laude distinction in 1971 at Newark College of Engineering, since renamed New Jersey Institute of Technology. He went on to earn a master's degree in hydraulic engineering from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. in the biomechanics of sport from Indiana University. Tolsma's doctoral dissertation was entitled Leg Dynamics of Maximum Speed Sprinting.

Tolsma has published several articles about track and field training and released a book, *The Surrendered Christian Athlete*, which expounds the role of the Christian faith in athletics. He has also designed several athletic training devices.

When he can find time, Tolsma still actively trains and competes in track and field. He won his age group in the Masters National Decathlon Championship in 1993 and in 2003. He placed second at the World Veterans Games decathlon in 1995 and at the 2002 World Double-Decathlon Championship in Finland.

Tolsma twice held the world record for men over 50 in the double decathlon, a two-day, 20-event competition which includes all of the track and field disciplines. In October 2007, Tolsma broke his age group's world record for the one-day double decathlon, at the Matthes-Hopkins Track Complex.

Currently serving as president of the International Association of Ultra Multi-events, Tolsma has raced nearly every competitive distance from 50 meters to 50 miles. The latter he did to celebrate reaching age 50.

Tolsma enjoys a number of sports and fitness activities, especially water-skiing and springboard diving. Nancy, his wife of 34 years, is the mother of his six children, Michelle, who is married to former Liberty tennis player Matthew Schley, Rachel, Brenda, who is married to current assistant track and field coach Clendon Henderson, Regina, Joey and Tami, a sophomore on the Liberty women's track and field team. Tolsma has two grandsons, Jacob and Bradon, as well as a granddaughter, Eliana.

### ***Tolsma By The Numbers***

2

Number of NCAA Division I national champions he has coached.

6

Number of children he and his wife of 34 years, Nancy, have raised.

40

Number of Big South Coach of the Year awards he has won, including cross country and track & field.

75

Number of conference titles his Liberty teams have won.



**Heather  
ZEALAND**  
Assistant Coach  
8th Year at Liberty  
Liberty, '02

Heather Zealand is in her eighth year on Liberty's cross country and track and field coaching staff. The native of Warrenton, Va., joined the staff after becoming the most prolific women's cross country and track and field athlete in program history.

Since Zealand has been on staff, the Liberty men's and women's cross country squads have combined to win six Big South titles.

2002 was Zealand's finest year as a runner. She became Liberty's first NCAA Division I national champion, capturing the national title in the mile at the indoor track and field championship meet. Her time of 4:38.52 set Liberty and Big South Conference records. Zealand was also the first Liberty athlete to win an ECAC title, winning the mile at the event.

In the track and field season of the same year, Zealand was undefeated in the 800 meters, the 1500 meters and the mile until finishing as the national runner-up in the 1,500 at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships. Along the way, Zealand became the first collegiate winner of the Penn Relays Olympic Development mile since Vicki Huber in 1987.

The year brought numerous accolades, including Big South Women's Athlete of the Year, Big South Track and Field Athlete of the Year and First-Team Verizon Academic All-American. Zealand was selected the 2001-02 Rock Royer/Mack Rivera Award honoree, garnering Liberty's highest athletic honor. She was honored by the United States Track Coaches Association as the 2002 Division I Track and Field Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Zealand also represented Virginia for the 2002 Woman of the Year Award.

After graduating from Liberty with a bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language in 2002, Zealand began to compete professionally for Adidas. She traveled to the 2003 World Cross Country Championships, where she was the second American to finish. She placed fourth behind Regina Jacobs' world record in the indoor 1,500 meters and ran a 4:29 road mile in Austin, Texas.

In 2004, Zealand made the finals of the U.S. Olympic Trials in the 1,500 meters. She ran a 4:10.37 in the prelims at the event.

Zealand is married to former Flames runner Josh Zealand and the couple has a daughter, Alyssa (3) and a son, William (1).



**Josh  
MCDUGAL**  
Graduate Assistant  
1st Year at Liberty  
Liberty, '08

Josh McDougal, the 2007 NCAA National Cross Country Champion and a 14-time All-American, has joined the Liberty cross country coaching staff as a graduate assistant.

McDougal, who will help coach the distance runners at his alma mater, earned four All-America honors in cross country, seven in indoor track & field and three in outdoor track & field. When he graduated, he owned Liberty's 8K and 10K cross country records, as well as every indoor and outdoor track & field school record from 1,500 meters through 10,000 meters. His outdoor 5,000-meter personal best (13:20.43) makes him the sixth-fastest collegiate performer of all-time.

The pinnacle achievement of the Peru, N.Y., native's college career came on Nov. 19, 2007, when he outkicked Oregon's Galen Rupp to capture the NCAA Division I National Cross Country title by one second. McDougal became the first men's athlete in Lib-

erty and Big South history to capture a NCAA Division I national championship and recorded his 23rd victory in 27 collegiate cross country races.

McDougal also won numerous Big South Conference honors during his career, including a trio of Big South Howard Bagwell Male Athlete of the Year distinctions and four Big South Male Track & Field Athlete of the Year awards. A 17-time Big South individual champion, McDougal helped the Flames win 10 Big South team championships during his four years with the Flames.

McDougal enjoyed success at the IC4A meet as well, capturing seven individual event titles. At the 2007 IC4A Outdoor Track & Field Championships, McDougal swept the men's 1,500, 5K and 10K championships for the first time in the meet's 132-year history. His efforts enabled the Flames to capture the IC4A team championship for the first time since 1996.

McDougal, who now competes professionally for Nike, lives and trains in the Lynchburg area. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology in May 2008 and is currently pursuing a master's degree in human services at Liberty.