

## **SPECIAL DEDICATION Coach Major Bill Curry, GMA**

### **Dear FSU Gymnasts, Gymkana, Tallahassee Tumbling Tots & friends:**

Once in a while a story surfaces about the life of a very special person. Most of you are educators and coaches and you know and have felt the life long effect you have made on students under your charge. I sent this exploratory email to three of our group. I have since received a wealth of information about this living legend. Some of the information is pure data but the most far reaching words are of the man as described in these personal responses. I have some talent in writing and have made some money at doing so. Nonetheless, it would be absurd to pretend to improve on the following responses to my query from these, our retired teammates.

Colonel U.S. Air Force, Benny Wallace  
Lt. Colonel U.S. Army, Charlie Christian  
All-American & Iowa Gymnastics Coach Sam Bailie

Jack Miles  
50-58

Email sent to Benny Wallace, Robert Christian, & Sam Bailie

Hi: I saw some pictures where in the recent past GMA dedicated a gym for weight lifting (and gymnastics I believe) I saw on a plaque in one of the pictures a head shot of Coach Bill Curry as I would have known him then - and as he is now. It came to me that you guys should send me some info on this coach of boys. Especially since you three notable athletes came from his program. He must have done something very right. I was unbelievably lucky in that my and Jack Sharp's High School Coach was Dr. Leopold Zwarg a very old man as a teacher and a pioneer in the sport. He was very German, strick, and stern but he really knew his stuff.

He gave me the best prerequisites for the sport and drove all the way to the nationals held at Penn State when I won the Nationa

l All-Around. He was even older, almost ancient, then. It made me so proud that he came all that way in his very advanced age...Let me know what you know about Coach Bill. Jack.

**{I opened the gate and a flood of wonderful stories/testimonials flowed forthread on..jmm}**

Benny & Carolyn Wallace  
51-55

Reply to above Re. Bill Curry

I first met Major Curry at the GA State Weightlifting Championships in Atlanta in 1948 at age 17. I had been training myself in Savannah, GA, using books mostly, and apparently it was a bit of a surprise when I won the novice division in my weight class. As a result, Major Curry invited me to GMA to participate in his annual show, similar to Gymkana but without the girls! The school paid for my train ticket and I stayed in the dormitory. I was paired in a head to head match with a Curry-trained GMA weightlifter, who was better than me, and I lost but came very close and the GMA cadets and locals were generous with their applause. While there, Major Curry and Eleanor had me to dinner and treated me very well. Their two small children, Billy and Linda, were there and I got a look at an ideal family.

Back in Savannah I graduated from high school and took a dead end job in the local paper mill where my father worked. On his annual recruiting trip around the state in the summer of 1950 Major Curry, to my amazement and delight, persuaded my parents to send me to GMA for my first year of college. At GMA the routine was very demanding but taught me discipline in my studies and athletics. We had only two hours per day for workouts and wasted no time, as you might imagine. We went to several lifting and gymnastic meets in northern GA and southern Tennessee and I did well. Early on I began to think of a military career and almost got it sooner than expected; I was drafted! I took the physical, passed and even

had orders to report, but Major Curry got school officials to send a letter to the draft board on my behalf which apparently impressed them enough that I was granted a deferment to finish school and pursue a commission. I rate that occurrence and Major Curry's talk with my parents as the most important turning points in my life.

During my year at the school Major Curry arranged to have some of the FSU guys and Dr. Price come to the school for an exhibition. I was introduced to Dr. Price, which led to arrangements for me to attend FSU with out-of-state tuition waived. At FSU I made the team, Carolyn and I married and our son was born while we were students. I received my commission (as promised to the draft board!), got through pilot training and was a fighter pilot for 20 years, flying 102 combat missions over North Vietnam and fully retired in Tucson, AZ in 1975 where I earned a second college degree at the University of Arizona, majoring in Spanish.

One day I read in the paper that Billy Curry, the kid that often went with us to the meets held at Georgia Tech had become head football coach at the school! I had been out of the country for several years in Canada, Japan and Thailand and had lost contact with my old coach but young Bill gave me his number. Before I could call him, he called me. That was in the early 1980's and we have talked on the phone almost weekly ever since. Carolyn and I have flown to visit him and Eleanor at their home of many years in Opelika, AL and I attended a couple of events in his honor at Woodward Academy (formerly GMA). At 88 and still married to Eleanor after 65 years; he is their oldest living teacher and much respected by all. Recently they moved into an assisted living facility but, typically, took along a set of dumbbells and an exercise bike! I am in contact with young Bill, who followed Bear Bryant as coach at Alabama and is now a football commentator for ESPN. We call his parents often and remember them with gifts on their anniversary and at Christmas; small payment for steering me to a life of financial security, world travel and adventure that I never thought possible. This is a summary of the more than 50 years that I have known this most excellent man. All that I am, I owe to his inspiration and guidance. Quite simply, he saved my life..Benny Wallace

**Charlie Christian**  
55-57

**Reply to above Re. Bill Curry**

In 1949 I lived 4 blocks from GMA, Georgia Military Academy, in College Park, AG. And one day Major Bill Curry knocked on the door recruiting students. At the time I was the original 4'9" skinny 97 pound youngster. He convinced my family and me he could do wonders for me physically so we decided I should attend. Within a year, due to the physical fitness/weight-lifting and gymnastics programs I was 125 lb. and had to lose 2 lbs. to reach the 123 lb. for my weight-lifting class. Well, surprisingly I won the State contest as a novice. The next two years were more of the same wonderful guidance for an outstanding coach. Bill was the coach for weight-lifting and gymnastics as well as boxing and produced champions in each sport. Bill not only taught us fitness but also established goals for our lives most of us never forgot and he molded our lives to set examples for others to follow rather than following the crowd for so-called peer acceptability. Some of us went on to different fields such as a distinguished Air Force Pilot to a member of the International Gymnastics Hall of fame. Thanks to Major Bill Curry, upon graduation from GMA in '53, I was offered a tuition free scholarship to coach weight-lifting and gymnastics at Gordon Military Jr. College in Barnesville, GA. Subsequent to that in '55 I was also offered a tuition free scholarship to FSU for gymnastics. In '57 I made a decision to attend Dental School at Emory University and left FSU and discontinued my active pursuit of gymnastics for a Dental career. However since that time the standards Bill Curry instilled in me followed wherever I went. He was a large influence to my character and well as the thousands of others with whom he came in contact. Interestingly, my son followed in my footsteps of fitness and was a member of the weight-lifting staff for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. In 2004 we dedicated the newly constructed Weight-Room facility at Woodward Academy, formally GMA, to Major Bill Curry through generous donations from those he coached while at GMA from 1941 to 1951. A fitting and long overdue tribute to a wonderful coach, father and role model. The friendship and camaraderie of teammates is never ending and I am so very proud to have been a small part of the experience..Charlie Christian

**Sam & Tosi Bailie**  
54+ (Iowa)  
Reply to above Re. Bill Curry

I think its great that you are doing an article on Maj. Bill Curry who did so much for so many. Im sure I could write a book on what Bill Curry did for me as my coach over a 4 year period during my 6 years at GMA.. Bill Curry was my first coach and like so many kids at age 12 & 13 I was small, skinny and lets say the original 98 lb. weakling. Coach Curry started all of us in weight training & body building to give us the tools to move into the areas we wished to pursue. For me this was gymnastics, weight lifting & swimming. The main thing that Coach Curry instilled in so many of us was how to train and the dedication it took to win. Coach always pushed us to better ourselves whether it was how many sit ups in 60 sec., hand walk for distance, chin ups, rope climb etc. Coach set up school records in all these areas and, as I remember there were 15 categories, and this became a big deal for all school athletes. Under Coach Curry I became a state & regional champion in both weight lifting & gymnastics as well a better swimmer due to the strength training, receiving Prep School All American honors for swimming in my senior year at GMA. I was recruited for swimming by the University of Georgia and by FSU & Iowa for gymnastics. I picked Iowa as Coach Currys replacement was a former Iowa gymnast. At Iowa I became a three time All American. As I tell everyone, gymnastics has been my life. In my 8 years as a college coach I were very successful (winning 5 conference titles at Arizona and 2 Big 10 titles in my 2 years at Iowa) using what I learned at GMA under Coach Curry. I could go on & on about Coach Curry. I try to pass on to my children as well as others what I learned in my early years at GMA from my coach & good friend Coach Bill Curry..Sam Bailie

**Charlie Christian**  
55-57  
Reply to above Re. Bill Curry

Jack, I just had a call from Ray Woodall who was Bill's champion boxer on GMA's boxing team. I had asked Ray to send you some info. from that aspect if you would care to use it but Ray is in the process and moving and said it would probably within the week before he could get something to you, if that isn't too late. Please let me know your cut off date if it hasn't already passed.

You probably know Bill's son Bill Jr. went on to be the Coach at Kentucky then at Alabama and with the Baltimore Colts where he was an all-Pro center.

It's interesting, when he first was interviewed by Vince Lombardi, Vince told him he was too small to play football but that didn't slow Bill Jr.down a bit. He was too much of his Dad to be a quitter and give up! He made Vince eat his words. Charlie

After 50+ years no one had thought of a dedication to our wonderful coach so I asked myself why not? It never dawned on anyone he had not been sufficiently honored as he so rightly deserved. I had not visited since I graduated in '53. When I found a new facility had been built I simply asked the Academy if it would be possible for it to be named for him and they said, "If you can come up with \$15,000 in donations". I suggested the idea to Benny and Sam and they were the first to pledge \$1000 and told me to "go for it". Bill coached Gymnastics, Weight-lifting as well as Boxing and had champions in each. The dedication was for the new weight facility as Gymnastics and Boxing were dropped years ago. My best, Charlie

**Dear readers: We should all be proud that living among us is a coach, educator, motivator who is so wonderfully appreciated that even those who were not under his charge have learned of and felt the benefits of his dedication and influential teaching to his students - our friends. Bless him and his wife to many more happy years. Jack Miles**



Major Bill Curry accepting dedication plaque



L-R: Sam Bailie, Charlie Christian, Bill Curry, Jerry Kahn, Ray Woodall



L-Sam Bailie, R-Charlie Christian



Standing L-R  
Jack Gilmore, Jerry Kahn, Benny Wallace  
Seated L-R  
Bill Curry, his wife Eleanor, Sam Bailie, Raymond DeClue



Charlie Christian and Dick Whelan working on a Master Gardener demonstration garden project. (not related to Bill Curry)



Benny Wallace