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# Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award

▣ **Marc Balcer, Graeme Wilson and Kate Wilson**

*Founders of The Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award*

We are honored to introduce The Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award. The award will provide two \$1,000 grants each year to young orienteers. We have created this award to foster the spirit Iain brought to the sport of Orienteering for two decades.

## *Remembering Iain*

As a child, Iain lived to compete and to win. His father remembers young Iain would burst into tears when his beloved Alabama lost a football game. He was introduced to orienteering by his father, and as a teenager was an active member of the Vulcan Orienteering Club in Birmingham, Alabama, both as a participant and an organizer of events. Through the encouragement of friends there he progressed from local orienteering events to national events and eventually international competition.

Orienteering led Iain to many countries. He represented the USA in the World Cup in Norway and Denmark, in the Swiss Alps for the World Student Champs, and in the Scottish 6 Days. In 2000, he was the US Night Orienteering champion.

Like many young orienteers, he wanted to experience the sport in its birthplace, so he moved to Sweden where he trained with the very successful Gothenburg Orienteering Club. Later he moved to Finland and participated in national and international events.

Iain found creative ways of combining several interests by earning a PhD in neuroscience, where he studied the brain structures underlying navigational ability. Whether he was more interested in advancing our understanding of the brain or just trying to improve his orienteering skills remains a valid question!

Either way, through this serious work, he learned that the structures used to remember environmental location were also among the first to decline in Alzheimer's disease. This remained the focus of his research when he moved to Edinburgh, Scotland. There he worked and orienteered, and with his wife, pursued many outdoor activities until his life was cut short by a bicycle accident in 2008.

Iain's friends from his time on the cross country and track teams at Haverford College describe him as one of those people who would give you the shirt off his back. They joke that

this might explain the ratty light blue shirt he wore on runs for all four years at college. Those same friends remember him as the first to arrive at practice and the last to leave the locker room.

Iain was also seldom the first to leave any social interaction. Always focused on those around him, a great listener, and very much "in the moment," he built deep friendships by sharing his enthusiasm. And so at Haverford, he earned the A.W. "Pop" Haddleton Award for perseverance, dedication and outstanding contributions to an athletic team. It is Iain's spirit of collegiality, shared endeavor, and international friendship that we seek to foster with this orienteering award.

Although he deeply valued personal friendships, he had an intense drive to succeed. He exuded intensity in competitive situations, but intuitively knew when someone needed a kind word or a listening ear. He inspired people with his intense inner drive.

He once ran the London Marathon and the very next day took the train to Scotland to walk in the hills. His father, Graeme, recalls that he did casually admit to feeling a little footsore.

"But he could be mischievous with his enthusiasm in a way that might leave the listener unsure of whether he was joking," explained Graeme. "On a multiday trip in the Scottish mountains we backpacked for several days ascending a peak or two on the way. One evening, when the rest of us were lying around the tents trying to recover strength, Iain showed up in his running shoes and said he was going for a training run – he politely invited us to join him if we were interested." Iain took great pleasure from mixing his humor and his passions.

## *The Award*

The Iain Wilson Award will be presented to two young people each year who have displayed outstanding character in orienteering. The award is intended to assist with the cost of education, training and travel to local, regional and international orienteering events.

Awardees will be selected for their commitment to growth and improvement rather than recent performances or rankings. The awardees



might not be the fastest or the best with a map. They will show competitive spirit, friendship, and qualities that leave others feeling good about the world. It is the indefinable support that some individuals provide that the committee hopes to encourage. Awardees will be role models and mentors for future generations of orienteers. They will remind us of who Iain was and for what he stood.

Orienteers aged 20 and under who are interested in the Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award can visit <http://orienteeringusa.org/wilsonaward> to submit an application electronically or by mail. Applications will be accepted for the 2014 IWA until December 31, 2013.

Applicants will be asked to write a brief essay describing themselves, what their goals in sport and life are and how this award will help them accomplish these goals. A home orienteering club should be named so that club members can be contacted. Winners will be those who embody in life the virtues cultivated in training and competition – thus honoring Iain's memory.

Initial funding for the award has been generously provided by Iain's friends and family, but in order to sustain it many years into the future, your financial support would be greatly appreciated. In fact, we currently have a \$5,500 challenge matching grant from a donor which will allow your gift to have twice the impact! You can learn more about how you can support the award at <http://orienteeringusa.org/wilsonaward> or email [marc.balcer@gmail.com](mailto:marc.balcer@gmail.com).

The committee will announce the first Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award winners in February 2014.

Please visit <http://orienteeringusa.org/wilsonaward> for more information.