



CONVERSATION:

laura wilkinson

God first, medals second

Laura Wilkinson is one of the most decorated American divers in the history of international competition. Since joining the U.S. National Team in 1995, she has set a high standard by becoming the only female diver to win 10-meter platform gold at the world championships (2005), World Cup (2004), Olympic Games (2000) and Goodwill Games (1998).

After briefly contemplating retirement after the 2004 Olympics, Wilkinson has decided to make one last run at Olympic glory. But her reasons have little to do with personal gain and everything to do with redirecting the spotlight towards her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

TPE caught up with Wilkinson to learn more about her past and catch a glimpse into her future.

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tpe: How did you get involved in diving?

WILKINSON: I was 7 years old when I got into gymnastics. I got to a point where I realized that I wasn't going to be the next Mary Lou Retton and I needed to find something that I could be great at because I just felt like I was supposed to be good at something. At the end of my freshman year in high

school I discovered diving. My previous experience in gymnastics helped me make a quick transition.

tpe: What do you remember most about growing up in Spring, Texas?

WILKINSON: I became a Christian at a very young age. I was 8 years old, and it just made sense. I was like, "Why wouldn't people do this?" I totally got it, and I was really excited about God. Then I entered my freshman year of high school, and I switched churches. I started going to a youth group with one of my friends, and I started to see that

living for God, and I was trying to take things into my own control.

My sophomore year in college, I realized my being in control of my life just made a mess of things. I knew I needed God back. I totally recommitted my life, and it's just been different ever since.

tpe: You've listed your parents as some of the most influential people in your life. How have they inspired you?

WILKINSON: My parents are great examples of integrity. They're just awesome. They

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some of the kids would be one way at church and then we'd go out after church and they would be totally different.

I felt really uncomfortable and I didn't know how to handle it, so I just stopped going, which is the complete opposite of what I should have done. At that point, I got confused and so I walked away from it, but then I ended up becoming just like them. I wasn't

don't swear. They don't drink. They're just so concerned about the people around them. They're very loving. They're still together. They're just really good living examples. They just live it out. They don't have to tell you what to do. They just do it, and that's taught me that the best example that you can be is to just be it. Instead of telling somebody, you should just live it out.

tpe: Your journey to the 2000 Summer Olympics was pretty rocky. Can you describe the circumstances that made getting to Sydney (and then winning the gold medal) so special?

WILKINSON: I came home from school that year and left my scholarship behind. I was training full-on for the Olympics. I knew it might be my one and only chance. I was going to give it all I had. And then I broke my foot three months before trials.

It was this big letdown for about a week, and then I realized how badly I wanted to be back in the water. Before that, my dream was getting fuzzy and out of focus, but the injury helped refocus me towards accomplishing my goals. From then on, I just made up my mind that I was going for it and I wasn't going to look back. I just knew that God had given me this dream, so I had to do it.

So for the next few weeks, I would hop up the ladder to the 10-meter platform and sit on the edge in my street clothes visualizing my dives and doing the arm motions. I watched tons of videotape with my coach and just focused on the mental side of diving.

I'm not sure what was more special — winning the Olympic trials or winning the Olympics. Both of those were so monumental, because when I won trials I had only been back in the water for three weeks. That's unreal, not to mention the fact that I won the trials by 40 points.

tpe: How did you deal with the disappointment of finishing fifth at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens?

WILKINSON: It was definitely disappointing because I

had won before, but I was a little behind going into it because I'd had a foot surgery earlier that year and I was finishing school. I really didn't know my dives as well as I should have.

It was disappointing, but at the same time my mission going in was to glorify God first and win a medal second. I didn't win a medal, but I did glorify God. I thanked Him in an interview. I don't think it ever aired, but that was the first thing out of my mouth. My whole attitude about it isn't what people expect. They always expect me to be all ticked off, but it was great. I loved Greece. It was a fantastic Olympics.

tpe: What was your inspiration for taking a shot at your third Olympic Games this summer in Beijing?

WILKINSON: Not medaling in Athens actually turned into fuel for a new passion for the sport. I had to go through wrist surgery after that, and I thought maybe I'd just do one more year. I ended up winning the world championships for the first time, and I started learning new dives. I mean, you don't start learning new dives when you're about to

retire. I could just tell that I really wanted to keep doing this. Sometimes it's tough because most of my friends are settling down and having kids. I don't always know if I want to be doing this, but then God will just remind me, "Oh no, this is what you're meant to do. This is what you love. I have you here because this is what I made you for." **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

Laura Wilkinson waves to her fans after she received her award for winning the women's 10-meter platform at the 2008 U.S. Olympic trials in Indianapolis.