IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR SCHOOLS TO HIRE ONE OF their own graduates to coach an athletic team, so the fact that Joe Folek ’88 is entering his 13th season as the head coach of the Wilkes baseball team is not really newsworthy. However, Folek’s entire five-man coaching staff comprises alumni.

Last season, Folek, along with assistant coaches Jerry Bavitz ’75, Bob Klinetob ’95, Nate Lipton ’00, and Mike Toomey ’06, led the Wilkes baseball team to an overall record of 24-12 and the Freedom Conference championship. The conference title was the first for the Colonels since 1994, and garnered the squad its first NCAA Division III playoff appearance since 1978.

Folek, Freedom Conference Coach of the Year in 2007, has been affiliated with the program for 23 years. He played for Wilkes from 1985-88 and then became an assistant coach for the Colonels for six seasons. As the head coach, he has amassed an overall record of 241 wins, 196 losses and four ties.

“I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to coach at Wilkes,” says Folek, who teaches in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. “Many of

By John Seitzinger
ARSITY M E N’ S AND wo m en’ s crosscountry teams return to Wilkes beginning with the 2008 season. Nick Wadas will serve as head coach for both programs.

Wilkes last sponsored the sport in fall 1994. A lack of numbers on both men’s and women’s teams forced an end to the varsity program. Both teams will compete as members of the Middle Atlantic Conference.

“Bringing back both men’s and women’s cross country is the latest step to expand sport offerings at Wilkes,” says University athletics director Addy Malatesta. “This will be the first expansion since the addition of women’s lacrosse in 2003.”

Wadas graduated from College Misericordia with a bachelor’s degree in health sciences and a master’s degree in occupational therapy. He also holds certification in addictions counseling.

Wilkes brings back cross country for the first time since 1994. This photo is from 1990. PHOTO FROM WILKES ARCHIVES

He’s not opposed to bringing in an outsider, Folek explains. “We’ve been fortunate that we’ve never had to due to the fact that there has always been someone from the Colonel ‘baseball family’ to take over when one of the staff moves on.”

He notes that Wilkes has always been home to old-fashioned, hard-nosed baseball. “We’ll continue to keep it simple: Be dedicated, practice hard, play harder. And we’re not afraid to admit that winning matters.”

The things that we do today in the program are things that were done in the past by Coach (Gene) Domzalski, Coach (Bob) Duliba and Coach Bavitz. I have added some of my own wrinkles, but everything goes back to the roots of the program. The fact that we are graduates of the school and the baseball program helps because we never have to break anyone in. Each of us knows how things work, and we are able to maintain a consistency because of it.”

Bavitz, athletic director at Nanticoke Area High School, is the elder statesman of the staff. He enters his 36th year at Wilkes, including four years as a player, four as head coach and 28 years as assistant coach. Bavitz served on the coaching staff under Domzalski when, from 1976-78, the Colonels made three straight NCAA appearances.

“Coaching with fellow Wilkes alumni has been exciting,” Bavitz says. “The fact that we are all Wilkes graduates helps us relate better to the players, as well. We know the faculty and staff and understand what is expected of a Wilkes student.”

Klinetob is back for his 13th season as a coach. A player for three seasons for the Colonels, he was starting catcher on the 1994 Middle Atlantic Conference championship team.

Lipton, who works for the Pennsylvania Auditor General’s office, returns for his fourth season as an assistant coach. Toomey, graduate assistant for the baseball program, returns for his second season of coaching. Both played four seasons.

“The teachers, coaches and administrators at Wilkes have definitely helped shape who I am,” says Klinetob, brewmaster at Lion Brewery. “Being a member of the coaching staff affords us the opportunity to have that type of impact on today’s student-athletes.”

Folek notes that the team has had 13 different former players coach at one point or another since 1990. “From the annual trip to Florida to open the season, to 6 a.m. workouts, to who has to pick up meal money/vans on game day, to meeting with recruits, to the pitcher’s home run hitting contest, to who throws batting practice before the game and ‘floor touchers’ during pre-season conditioning, these are all just a small part of being a Colonel.”