

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Belen athletic director Carlos Barquin is a Herald Lifetime Achievement Award recipient

BY ANDRE FERNANDEZ

JULY 03, 2023 6:00 AM



As a young coach at Belen Jesuit Prep in Miami in the early 1970s, Carlos Barquin's cross-country and track and field athletes didn't have much in the way of facilities or equipment.

But Barquin has never been one to make excuses.

Whether it was pole vaulters vaulting onto the roof of the bathrooms at Crandon Park or running on the streets and sidewalks of Miami, Barquin instilled in his athletes to do a lot with a little.

"I learned that from him as a runner on his teams," said longtime Belen cross-country coach Frankie Ruiz, who ran for Barquin in the late 1990s. "It didn't matter if it was raining or you had something going on, you just didn't make excuses. You ran in all conditions. You came to practice no matter what and I've passed that on to everything I do whether it's high school, club or even lessons I teach my own kids."

Barquin is referred to as a "BE-Legend" by many at Belen.

And hard to argue when you think of the influence he's had over half a century at the prestigious all-boys private school in Miami.

Barquin founded many of the sports in the school's athletic program, which grew from only two sports in 1970 to 48 today if you include middle school and junior-varsity teams, and set the foundation for their ongoing success that includes over 30 state championships over the past three decades.

After 36 years as Belen's athletic director and 53 years coaching overall, Barquin is stepping away from those roles to become a special assistant to the school's president going forward.

For his impactful contributions for over half a century, Barquin is one of this year's Miami Herald Lifetime Achievement Award recipients for Miami-Dade County.

Barquin, a humble person who never shied away from doing even the smallest tasks to help the student-athletes he coached succeed, is quick to deflect praise for his accomplishments.



Belen Jesuit athletic director Carlos Barquin (middle), seen here coaching the Wolverines' cross-country runners during the 1970s, is a Miami Herald's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. *Courtesy of Belen Jesuit School*

"It's something I don't feel like I'm deserving of, but I feel honored," Barquin said. "It's been such a great ride and I've cherished every second. I have been blessed by working with outstanding coaches who also happen to be great role models."

But there's no doubting the influence Barquin has had on taking Belen's athletics from humble beginnings to its current status as one of the state's top athletic programs.

Barquin led the Wolverines' cross-country team to state runner-up finishes in 1978, 1982, 1984 and 1986 before breaking through for the school's first state title in any sport in 1995. He'd lead the program to two more state runner-up finishes before one of his top pupils, Frankie Ruiz, took over in 2002 and has led Belen to 13 of its state-record 14 state championships.

Barquin coached Ruiz and his father, Francisco, before him. Ruiz said he learned the coaching philosophy that's helped his teams become the standard for success in the sport from Barquin.

"If I could I would put Barq's name on every strand of real grass, fake grass, gravel, bleacher, grain clay, cement block, scoreboard, basketball hoop, rubber track particle, just about everything used for athletics at Belen," Ruiz said.

Belen Jesuit has become a force in multiple sports under Barquin's watch.

The Wolverines' swimming and diving program has won seven state titles. Their water polo team has won four. Their soccer team has won three. Their track and field team won its first state title in 2007.

Barquin helped coach the tennis team to its lone state title in 2017.

Belen's football team has yet to win a state title, but its 2009 squad defied the odds, upsetting several state powers on its way to the state championship game.

And this past March, Belen's basketball team completed a similar underdog run to the school's first championship in that sport. It was a perfect going away present for

Barquin, who took part in an emotional celebration postgame on the court in Lakeland.

“Barq is first and foremost an educator of men,” Belen school President Willie Garcia-Tuñón said. “His philosophy that ‘sports is an extension of the classroom’ is the motivation that has fueled his career. The Catholic-Jesuit values of Belen Jesuit have been at the core of what he has done and he has been unwilling to compromise them...ever.”



Belen athletic director Carlos Barquin (right) celebrates with players from the Wolverines' football team that made the school's lone trip to the state finals in 2009. *Courtesy of Belen Jesuit*

Barquin, 76, was born in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba and, at age 13, emigrated to the U.S. through Operation Pedro Pan, the mass exodus that saw over 14,000 unaccompanied minors flee the island after Fidel Castro's communist regime came to power.

Barquin spent a year first living at the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Opa-Locka and later at Camp Matecumbe near the Tamiami Airport until his parents were able to join him in Miami.

Shortly after this, Barquin's father, Cayetano, was diagnosed with cancer, which forced a teenage Barquin to work as well as attend school in order to help support his family.

It was this trying time that instilled the hard-working qualities that Barquin exemplified throughout his coaching career and time as athletic director at Belen.

Barquin's perseverance as a young man growing and succeeding came not long after Belen, a school that was established in Cuba in 1849, went through a similar transformation and growth process following a move to Miami following the regime change on the island.

“I feel like we were always able to do a lot with very little,” Barquin said. “Having had the honor of living through it all is like seeing a son or a child grow up. Athletics really gave me focus because it was tough not knowing if I'd ever see my parents

again. It kept me out of trouble and focused. I always wanted to give back and give to students the way others did for me.”

Barquin had played baseball and basketball as a kid in Cuba, but quickly learned how to play football and took up wrestling in Miami under the tutelage of Hall of Fame coach Jim Husk while attending Archbishop Curley-Notre Dame.

Barquin became a counselor for the younger kids at the Catholic Welfare Bureau which had taken him in and studied Health Physical Education and Recreation. In 1969, Barquin was hired as a P.E. teacher, the only one Belen had at the time.

But Barquin strived for more.



Belen Jesuit's Carlos Barquin (middle) celebrates with the Wolverines' boys' basketball team this past March after they won the school's first state championship in the sport in Lakeland, Fla. Carlos Cristobal *Courtesy of Belen Jesuit*

At a school that offered only baseball and basketball as varsity sports at the time, Barquin started the school's cross-country program the following season. Barquin had never been a runner, but began to study the sport in depth. Barquin also established the school's track team, and in 1971, he helped kick off the football program.

And all of this while Barquin was coaching cross country, track and field, football, wrestling, baseball, and basketball.

“He always has had relentless energy,” said former Belen football coach Rich Stuart, who began coaching at Belen in 1983 when Barquin was hired as athletic director, replacing longtime AD Dave Hewett. “You see him all the time on the tractor if the grass needed to be cut or something needed to be put up or brought down, he was there ready to do it. Whenever we were short a coach, he stepped up and taught himself everything he needed to know. Everything we've accomplished athletically as a school, we owe it to him.”

In 1984, Barquin started an annual summer camp at Belen that still exists today.

Barquin, who had already been running a summer camp at a local YMCA in Miami, wanted to start a camp that employed students, fund the athletic program, and serve the community.

Over 500 campers registered that first year.

Approximately 1,100 campers attend each session these days and over 1,600 campers register every year, with 90 percent staying for all seven weeks.

And it was Barquin's refusal to make excuses that got the camp launched in the first place.



Longtime Belen athletic director Carlos Barquin, seen here interacting with Wolverines students, stepped down from his position after the 2022-23 school year. Barquin is one of the Miami Herald's Lifetime Achievement Award recipients. *Courtesy of Belen Jesuit*

Without a swimming pool, Barquin often drove campers on a bus to Tamiami Pool and often bought the kids meals from Burger King or McDonald's or prepared them meals on location.

"A lot of times kids remembered how he treated them even more than what he taught them. If they worked hard and gave it all they got, you knew they were going to be successful," Stuart said. "I think his generosity is something people don't realize. He'd hire a lot of people to work those camps that needed jobs or just needed the help at the time."

While Barquin won't be overseeing the athletic program starting this fall, don't expect him to be too far away.

Even in his new role, Barquin has been heavily involved in the construction of a new sports complex being built at the school that will house locker rooms for all the teams, weight rooms, and state of the art training equipment for each program.

“To me all of the sports have something special to offer, so a state championship in crew is as big as the one in basketball and every other one,” Barquin said. “Over 74 percent of our school students participate in at least one sport and over 75 percent of our school academic honor roll are student-athletes. When it comes to facilities, and the reason that I enjoyed building something with whatever resources I could get, is because something is much better than nothing.”

▪ Lazaro Fernandez, who has spent the past nine years coaching at Gulliver Prep and the past two as athletic director, will succeed Barquin in that same role at Belen. Andre Torres, who was already working at Gulliver and previously spent seven years at Hollywood Chaminade-Madonna as basketball coach and later as that school’s AD, has been named the new Raiders’ athletic director.

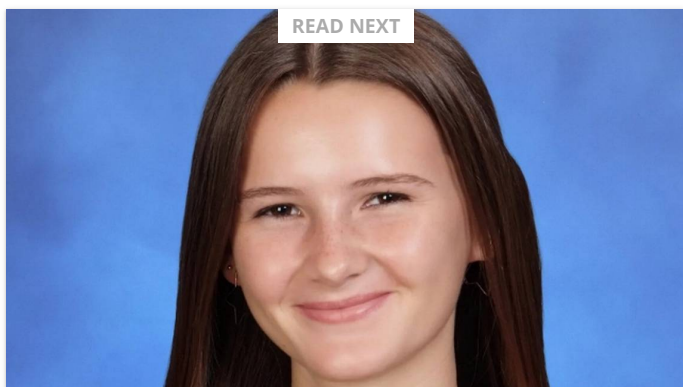


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Andre Fernandez is the Deputy Sports Editor of the Miami Herald and has covered a wide variety of sports during his career including the Miami Marlins, Miami Heat, Miami Dolphins, University of Miami athletics, and high school sports.

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