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AMER SPORTS

The man from Wilson

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By Cliff Terry
Photos by Wilson

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Chris Considine grew up in a working-class U.S. Midwest town, where his father worked for the same company for 24 years. Considine himself will have worked for the same company for 24 years this June, and will have been sent to high school overboard," he says with a grin. "I even married my wife in the same town."

Since last November, he also has been president of Wilson, a venerable, legendary company established in 1914 and now a \$700 million business with 1,600 employees worldwide.

"This has always been a dream job for me," says Considine, a self-described "gym rat" as he sits in his attractive, airy office in

a high-rise building not far from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. "It's a lot of fun, but it's also a business. When you're developing our market share and our business position, when you're developing our product line, you get turned into what the consumer wants, you fit into the competitive landscape and determine how to add value. And that's my job every day."

Considine looks around his office, a 10-year-old boy's fantasy room, with all kinds of footballs and basketballs and tennis rackets, along with posters of some of the athletes who have been in the Wilson "hall of fame," from Michael Jordan to Ivan Lendl to Roger Federer.

"Our association with top athletes is a very big deal for us," he says. "It could use one word to describe our brand: it would be 'authentic.' And we get that authenticity with the best players in all levels of our products and helping us with product development. Roger Federer is one who stands out for me. He's a seven-time grand slam champion and the #1 ranked tennis player in the world. Roger is the epitome of professionalism and a true ambassador of our brand."



Since November 2005, Chris Considine has been president of Wilson Sporting Goods Co.

Loyal, honest and direct As president, Considine has solid background and expertise: "I started at the lowest levels, and worked my way up to being in charge of the office. I take great pride in my loyalty to our brand and people. My approach to management is to be honest and direct, even when it's uncomfortable. Also, it's important to be honest. We have changed as our business has grown and prospered."

The youngest of five children, Considine grew up in Ohio, where his father worked for Ohio Edison. "I came from a working-class town, and learned that working diligently and being true to your word can take you a long way," he says. He attended Archbishop Hoban High School, where he played basketball, cross country, baseball, track and summer league baseball, and graduated as valedictorian in 1981. He graduated with honors from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, then worked at a marketing major — his was political.

The company was looking for a marketing major — his was political.



"If I could use one word to describe our brand it would be 'Authentic.'"

2005 NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP Winner, The Official Basketball



Wilson is superior to other brands in part because of its proud heritage, having been at the center of many great sports moments in history.

2006 AUSTRALIAN OPEN Champion Roger Federer of Switzerland

science — but agreed to see him anyway. "Two things attracted me to Wilson," remembers Considine, now a trim 40-year-old. "First was my love for sports. I really do have a PASSION. Second, I was drawn by the brand. As a kid, I had Wilson baseball gloves, and even for two years the primary baseball as a tennis sales rep, then moved on to more than 10 other positions, from general manager of the shoe division to president of team sports, before becoming president."

In 1982, he married his school sweetheart, Teresa and Chris now have two daughters and two sons (total, aged 12 to 19). "Sports is definitely a central part of our lives," he says. "Most of my time when I'm home is spent at a baseball or a gym. I've coached girls' softball, boys' baseball and basketball. I was wearing a pitcher's cap when I was a kid. I looked out at the field and thought, 'I'd like to play a lot of fun.' I treasure those moments. Personally, I like to play a lot of basketball, racquetball, tennis, golf." Asked about his wife, he grins. "Teresa was never into sports. But now she doesn't have much of a choice!"

Considine spearheaded the acquisition of specialty but mainly pitching machines, and baseball/softball training equipment. He also is engaged in product innovation, working with his R&D team to develop new products. "The Easy Catch glove, for instance, is based on how kids catch their hands," he explains. "Is it easier thumb to differently than an adult glove. The Wilson GST football is another great example of product development. The face on a football has been the same forever — probably since Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. The face on a football has changed a lot since the 1920s. So we developed AJC (Accurate Control Layer), which is a softer face. It's pebbled, it's easier to grip." Wilson, he emphasizes, is a truly global company. "That's the beauty of being part of Amer Sports. In any major industrialized nation, we have a subsidiary. Our tennis business is actually bigger outside the U.S. Also, we just opened a subsidiary in Mexico, and our business in China is growing rapidly."

The importance of innovation One challenge for Wilson, he observes, is to keep developing the design of its products. "We have a tremendous very strong, but you need to stay contemporary. We're adding to our industrial design, design staff and supporting it with outside resources." Another ongoing challenge, he adds, is innovation in the product line. "I never rest on my laurels. For example, we remembered that bats were made with two-piece bats. The handle is graphite and the barrel is aluminum or graphite. My job is to make sure we keep that edge. Why do people purchase brands? The most important

reasons are aspiration, prestige, image and quality. When walking on to the tennis court you feel proud you're carrying a Wilson Code bat. Or you come to the basketball field with one of our new Wilson bats. It gives you more confidence and a certain self image."

Wilson, he stresses, must always change. "Our customer base is more demanding all the time. So we have to be at the cutting edge, say, distributing products to them. We're proud of that. We have to keep packaging ourselves to become a better service provider. We also need to communicate with consumers through our packaging and the message we give them in the consumer walks into a sporting goods store. We have to make our Web site more user-friendly. Because the world has become so complicated."

Specialist in every sport As for the challenges since becoming president, "One is that there's a lot of brands in the Wilson brand. We're very strong in football, tennis, basketball, soccer, volleyball, golf, all these sports. But we have to be successful in each one of these categories. And from a managerial perspective, one of my key goals is to have a stronger sense of community of the overall Wilson family, because we all get in our little worlds. We're also doing a lot of things from an employee standpoint to involve people from all the different businesses. I can be a great facilitator in that."

Considine pauses. "I could name 20 or 25. I want to be fair to all named the same improvement team of the Year by Golf magazine. From a tennis perspective, our code rackets. We're No. 1 on the tour for both men and women, with players like Roger Federer, Justin Henrichsen, Venus and Serena Williams and Lindsay Davenport — among others." And from the bat perspective, our two-piece bats give you a flex and a bigger sweet spot. We're a ball-hitting hot company."

Considine says that Wilson is superior to other brands in part because of its proud heritage, having been at the center of many great sports moments in history. "There are brands out there that may would just love to have that position. There are brands out there that our brand strength is that there's a real factor from the top athletes or sharing credit with their kid in the backyard. Our brand is solid. There's no failure. That's our real strength: the consistency in our approach. To put it in the baseball vernacular, Wilson is not trying to be home run. Our business is about singles, and moving the runner along."

Cliff Terry is a Chicago-based freelance writer and former writer and editor for the Chicago Tribune.

The man from Wilson

President Chris Considine has been with Wilson for 24 years. “This has always been a dream job for me,” he says.

By Cliff Terry

Chris Considine grew up in a working-class U.S. Midwestern city, where his father worked for the same company for 50 years, Considine himself will have worked for the same company for 24 years this June, and will have been wed to the same woman for 24 years this November. “I even married my high-school sweetheart,” he says with a grin. “I’m really sort of an old-fashioned guy.”

Since last November, he also has been president of Wilson Sporting Goods Company, the venerable, legendary firm established in 1914 and now a \$700 million business with 1,600 employees worldwide.

“This has always been a dream job for me,” says Considine, a self-described “gym rat” as he sits in his attractive, airy office in a high-rise building not far from Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. “But it’s also a BUSINESS. It’s FUN, yeah, but we have challenges. We have numbers to make. But it IS fun in that if you’re developing a new baseball glove, you get tuned into what the consumer wants, you fit into the competitive landscape and determine how to add value. And that’s pretty cool.”

Considine looks around his office, a 10-year-old boy’s fantasy room, with all kinds of footballs and basketballs and tennis rackets, along with posters

of some of the athletes who have been in the Wilson fold, from **Michael Jordan** to Irish golf pro **Padraig Harrington**.

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“Our association with top athletes is a very big deal for us,” he says. “If I could use one word to describe our branding it would be ‘authentic.’ And we get that authenticity with the best people on all levels using our products. Greg Maddux is one who stands out for me. He’s a World Series champion, 40 years old, and a class act. Also, these athletes help us with product development. Greg came up with an idea. When he was throwing curve balls, the way he positioned his index finger, he would ‘tip’ his pitches. So we developed a cover, a finger wrap, that we put around many of our gloves.”

As president, Considine has solid background and expertise: “I started at the lowest levels, and worked my way up to be sitting in this office. I’m not only an old-fashioned guy, but a loyal guy. My approach to management is to be honest and direct with people, even when it’s uncomfortable. Also, it’s important to FACE issues. A lot (of executives) don’t do that.”

The youngest of five children, Considine grew up in Akron, Ohio, where his father worked for Ohio

Edison. “I came from a working-class family, and learned that working diligently and being true to your word can take you a long ways,” he says. He attended Archbishop Hoban High School, where he participated in baseball, basketball and track, and graduated as “Athlete of the Year.” In 1982 he graduated with honors from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, then noticed that Wilson was interviewing for jobs. The company was looking for a marketing major—his was political science—but agreed to see him anyway. “Two things attracted me to Wilson,” remembers Considine, now a trim 46-year-old. “First was my love for sports. I really do have a PASSION. Second, I was drawn by the brand. As a kid, I had a Wilson baseball glove, and even then it hit me what a powerful brand it was.”

For two years he proved himself as a tennis sales rep, then moved on to more than 10 other positions, from general manager of the shoe division to president of team sports, before becoming president.

In 1982, he married that school sweetheart. **Teresa** and Chris now have two daughters and two sons (twins), aged 13 to 19. “Sports is definitely a central part of our lives,” he says. “Most of my time when I’m home is spent at a ball field or in a gym. I’ve coached girls’ softball, boys’ baseball and basketball. I was warming up a pitcher between innings recently, and I looked out at the field and thought, ‘This is really a lot of fun.’ I treasure those moments. Personally, I still play a lot of basketball, racquetball, tennis, golf.” Asked about his wife, he grins. “Teresa was never into sports. But now she doesn’t have much of a choice!”

Considine has spearheaded the acquisition of specialty bat maker DeMarini Sports, and ATEC, the world’s leading manufacturer of pitching machines

and baseball/softball training equipment. He also is engaged in product innovation, working with his R&D and marketing staffs. “The Easy Catch glove, for instance, is based on how kids close their hands,” he explains. “Is it easier thumb to pinky, or some other way? So we designed the glove to close totally differently than an adult glove. The Wilson GST football is another great example of product development. The lace on a football has been the same forever—probably since (legendary Notre Dame coach) **Knute Rockne** worked with Wilson to put a football together back in the 1920s. So we developed ACL (Accurate Control Lacing), which is a softer lace. It’s pebbled, it’s easier to throw.”

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Wilson, he emphasizes, is a truly global company: “That’s the beauty of being part of Amer Sports. In any major industrialized nation, we have a subsidiary. Our tennis business is actually bigger OUTSIDE the U.S. Also, we just opened a subsidiary in Russia, and our business in China is growing rapidly.”

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One challenge for Wilson, he observes, is to keep developing the design of its products. “We have a brand that is very stable, but you want to stay contemporary. We’ve added to our industrial in-house design staff and tapped into outside resources. Here’s a (handsome, sleek) batting helmet. We’ve really changed the way helmets are designed.”

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Another ongoing challenge, he adds, is innovation in the product line. “Never rest on your laurels. For example, we reinvented how bats were made with the two-piece bat. The handle is graphite and the barrel is aluminum or graphite. My job is to make sure we keep that edge. Why do people like

brands? The most important reasons are aspiration, prestige, image. You walk to the tennis court and you feel PROUD you're carrying a Wilson nCode racket. Or you come to the baseball field with one of our new Vexxum bats."

Wilson, he stresses, must always change. "Our customer base is more demanding all the time. So we have to be at the cutting edge in, say, distributing products to them. We're pretty good at that. But we have to keep pushing ourselves to become a better service provider. We also need to communicate with consumers through our packaging and the message we give when the consumer walks into a sporting goods store. We have to make our Web site more user-friendly. Because the world has become so complicated. You just can't walk into a store anymore and see only two baseball bats."

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As for the challenges since becoming president: "One is that there's a lot of BREADTH to the Wilson brand. We're very strong in baseball, tennis, basketball, soccer, volleyball, golf, all these things. But we have to be specialists in each one of our sports. And from a managerial perspective, one of my key goals is to have a stronger sense of community of the overall Wilson family, because we all get in our little worlds. We're also doing a lot of things from an employee standpoint to involve people from all the different businesses. I can be a great facilitator in that."

Pressed to name Wilson's hottest products at the moment, Considine pauses. "I could rattle off 20 or 25. I want to be fair to all the divisions. All right: the Ci6 iron for the golf group. It was just named the Game Improvement Iron of the Year by GOLF magazine. From a tennis perspective, there're our new nCode racquets. We're No. 1 on the tour for both men and women, with players like **Roger Federer**, **Justine Henin-Hardenne** and **Lindsay Davenport** using different versions. And from the bat perspective, our two-piece bats give you a flex and a bigger sweet spot. We're a hot happening bat family."

Considine says that Wilson is superior to other brands in part because of its proud heritage, having been at the center of many great sports moments in history. "There are brands out there that would just DIE to have that position," he says. "Another thing about our brand strength is that there's a trust factor, from the top athletes to the person who just wants to go out and have fun playing tennis or playing catch with their kid in the backyard. Our brand is SOLID. There's no fanfare. That's our real strength: the consistency in our approach. To put it in the baseball vernacular: Wilson is not trying to hit home runs. Our business is about singles, and moving the runner along."

Cliff Terry is a Chicago-based freelance writer and former writer and critic for the Chicago Tribune.