



Photo by Alex Kozlowski

Wheeling Central football coach Jim Thomas, right, is presented the Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year award by Nick Bedway, Executive Sports Editor of The Intelligencer and Wheeling News-Register. The presentation was made during the OVAC Banquet of Champions.



T-L Photo/MICHAEL HARVILLA

WHEELING Central football coach Jim Thomas, right, is presented the Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year award by Nick Bedway. The presentation was made during Monday night's OVAC Banquet of Champions.

Nominees Listed for OVAC Coach of the Year

Unfortunately, we can have just one winner of the 2002-2003 Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year Award to be presented during Monday night's Banquet of Champions at the Wheeling Civic Center.

I can honestly tell you that the selection committee experienced what may have been our toughest job ever this year. Even narrowing the field from a list of 17 nominees to five finalists provided some spirited debate.

It's not surprising to see the selection process become this difficult. The men and women coaching our kids are simply the best around. Also, the athletes under their charge are turning in some marvelous accomplishments in nearly every sport.

OVAC coaches do an outstanding job of molding this young talent into winners. Most of them also make it a priority to help prepare their athletes for life beyond the high school playing arena.

As you can tell, I'm admirer of the members of the Ohio Valley coaching fraternity. I've been in this business a long time and on very few occasions have I made the mistake of being critical of a coach in print.

This year's list of finalists for the BVH Coach of the Year Award includes four basketball mentors and one football coach. Boys' hoop coaches making the "Fab Five" were Wheeling Central's Dave Wojcik, who led the Maroon Knights to a second consecutive West Virginia Class A championship; Magnolia's Dave Tallman, coach of the Blue Eagles' state Class AA titlists; and Fort Frye's Dan Liedtke, whose Cadets enjoyed an undefeated regular season title.

The girls' basketball nominee for the second straight year is Shadyside's Jim Miller. His Tigers earned back-to-back trips to the Ohio Division IV state tournament, a very exceptional and noteworthy accomplishment.

The lone football coach surviving the first cut was Wheeling Central's Jim Thomas. His Maroon Knights also achieved something that had not been done on the 100-yard field by an Ohio Valley team for quite a while. The Thomas-led squad appeared in the West Virginia Class A final for the third year in row last December and capped things off by winning the state championship for the second time.

Not since the Sistersville powerhouses of the 1980's had this taken place. The Tigers played in the single-A championship game seven straight years from 1980 through 1986 and won the title

Our list of 2003 finalists guarantees that the coach of the year will come from the football or basketball ranks for the first time since 1999. The 2000 winner was wrestling coach Larry Shaw, from Oak Glen High School. Wheeling Central's Terry Edwards, who had back-to-back state title winners in baseball, was the 2001 recipient while last year's choice was Craig Schneid, wrestling coach at Magnolia High School.

Liedtke has quietly done a solid job of building a contending team at Fort Frye the past several years. He nearly took the Beverly-based squad to the state tournament this past season. After a perfect 20-0 regular season, the Cadets knocked off three more opponents before running up against Garaway in the Division IV regional finals.

Back-to-back state championships wasn't an easy accomplishment for Wheeling Central and head coach Dave Wojcik. The Maroon Knights lost three starters from the previous season leaving Wojcik with a rebuilding job.

Tallman's Blue Eagles were dazzling during the state tournament at Charleston's Civic Center Coliseum. Led by all-stater Ted Talkington, one of the West Virginia's top players in any class, Magnolia won with a young cast that had just two seniors in the first seven players.

For Tallman, it was the second time in four years that he brought the Wetzel County School to the big dance and the Blue Eagles waltzed home as state champions both times.

Miller's Shadyside Tigers thrilled their fans with two straight trips to Columbus for the Ohio Division IV state championships. Shadyside made it to the title game in 2002 and reached the state semis last March before being eliminated in heart-breaking fashion.

During the past two seasons, Miller's girls lost a total of just five games while playing against some top-flight competition. Two of those losses were to West Virginia power Mount de Chantal and, of course, two others were in the state tournament.

Wheeling Central twice had to go overtime during the 2003 season to defeat Moorefield, the defending state football champions. The first was by a 35-34 score the second week of the season at Moorefield, with the other win being a 14-7 beauty in the Class A final at Wheeling Island Stadium.

This also earned Thomas a third state championship as a head football coach. During his

Nick's Notebook



By NICK BEDWAY

first tenure at his alma mater. Wheeling Central earned the double-A division crown in 1979.

As we pointed out before, only one of the above finalists will be called up to the podium to accept the BVH Coach of the Year Award. Congratulations also should be extended to every high school coach in our area for a job well done.

In my mind, all of you are coaches of the year.

