



Photo by Jim Elliott

## Coach of the Year

Steubenville football coach Reno Saccoccia, standing alongside his wife, Patty, was named the Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year at the 21st annual OVAC Banquet of Champions Monday at WesBanco Arena. Saccoccia led Big Red to a perfect 15-0 season and an Ohio Division III championship.

Sunday, May 14

# SPORTS

## OVAC Coach of the Year down to five

By DON CLEGG  
For The Times Leader

The curtain comes down on one of the most successful years in the history of the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference tomorrow night when Wheeling's WesBanco Arena hosts the 21st annual OVAC Banquet of Champions.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. with the proceedings getting under way at 6:30. As always, it promises to be a memorable event.

A total of 37 college scholarships totalling more than \$27,000 will be awarded to some of the conference's top scholar-athletes and more than 60 OVAC championship teams from the 2005-06 school year will be on hand to pick up their championship banners.

Several major awards are also scheduled to be presented, highlighted by the announcement of the Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year.

The award is named in honor of the late Bill

Van Horne, a charter member of the OVAC Hall of Fame who spent more than a half-century chronicling the careers of Ohio Valley coaches and athletes as sports editor at the Times Leader and Wheeling News-Register.

The selection was made by the OVAC Coach of the Year committee, which solicited nominations from media members in the OVAC coverage area.

Listed in alphabetical order, this year's five finalists for the Bill Van Horne/News-Register OVAC Coach of the Year are:

- Bubba Kapral, Bellaire St. John Central (girls' track/basketball)
- Donnie Madzia, Harrison Central (boys' basketball)



- Eric Meek, Weir (football)
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Included among those are people like John Magistro, who led the Bellaire High football team through an undefeated regular season, and Gene Ammirante, who did the same with the Big Reds boys' basketball team.

That was the first time an OVAC school has had unbeaten football and boys' basketball teams in the same year since Bridgeport High turned the trick back in 1965-66.

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Wheeling Central's Mike Young won Virginia Class A football title in his first year at the helm of his alma mater while Knight baseball coach Jim Wodusky and coach Peggy Dailer also received strong praise following their teams' state championship seasons.

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● **OVAC**

Continued from Page B1

**BUBBA KAPRAL (ST. JOHN CENTRAL)**

Kapral's St. John Central girls' track team capped a great run last spring with a runnerup finish in the Ohio Division III state track meet in Columbus.

As head track coach at St. John Central for the past 18 years and head girls' basketball coach for the past dozen seasons, Kapral is no stranger to success.

His girls' track team has won eight OVAC Class A titles, including the last five, and also has five district championships and three regional runnerup finishes to its credit.

St. John is the two-time defending champions in the Shadyside Relays and the Bellaire Invitational and Kapral is a three-time Ohio District Coach of the Year honoree.

On the hardwood, the Lady Irish basketball team presented Kapral with his sixth OVAC Class A title in 12 years this past winter.

Kapral is also a three-time Ohio District Coach of the Year honoree in girls' basketball and was The Associated Press' Ohio Division IV Coach of the Year in 2000.

His 2001 St. John squad won OVAC, sectional and district championships to earn a regional tournament berth and finished with a 23-2 mark.

**DONNIE MADZIA (HARRISON CENTRAL)**

Madzia led a veteran Harrison Central boys' basketball team to unprecedented heights last winter.

In a season of firsts, his 21-3 Huskies set a school record for victories, eclipsing the mark of 15 wins they set the year before.

They beat Indian Creek and East Liverpool to win the school's first Ohio Division II sectional basketball title and then knocked off Tri-Valley to give Harrison Central its first Ohio Division II district basketball crown and regional tournament berth.

Those would be impressive accomplishments for any team but the fact that Madzia and the Huskies struggled through an 0-20 campaign when this year's seniors were freshmen is testimony to Madzia's commitment to his players and his players commitment to their coach.

The following year, Harrison Central improved to 8-13 with four sophomores and a freshman in the starting lineup.

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It didn't come easily. The average height of Madzia's five starters was a shade under 5-11 and several missed significant time during the season due to injuries and illness.

But whatever they may have lacked in size and medical good fortune, they more than made up for in the chemistry and cohesion Madzia had been nurturing in them since taking the Harrison Central reins five years ago.

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**KAPRAL**



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**SACCOCCIA**

Park won the OVAC Class AAAA tournament title, finishing second to Oak Glen in the overall standings, and placed third at the West Virginia state meet.

Nevertheless, this past season was truly a breakout year for the Patriots and their head coach.

They dominated the OVAC tournament from start to finish for the school's sixth overall title and didn't lose a dual meet all year.

Among their dual meet victims were 10-time West Virginia Class A-AA champion Oak Glen -- Park's first win over the Golden Bears in 10 years -- and defending West Virginia Class AAA champion Parkersburg South.

Wheeling Park was ranked No. 1 in the state for most of the year and lived up to that billing in the post-season.

The Patriots posted a comfortable victory over Parkersburg South's defending champs in the Region One tournament. A week later, Monteleone's matmen won the state championship by an even larger margin.

**RENO SACCOCCIA (STUEBENVILLE)**

Reno led Steubenville to the first 15-0 season in Ohio Valley history and finished it off in style with a 28-7 thrashing of Columbus DeSales in the Ohio Division III championship game at a cold and snowy Paul Brown Tiger Stadium in Massillon.

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Saccoccia, who has compiled a dazzling 226-45 (.834) record in his 22 seasons.

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#### ERIC MEEK (WEIR)

Meek made his first season at the Weir High helm a memorable one as his Red Riders won the West Virginia Class AA state football championship with one of the most dominating playoff runs in Super Six history.

Weir's 40-0 blowout of defending state champion Bluefield in the Class AA title game at Wheeling Island Stadium put the finishing touches on a dazzling 13-1 season for Meek's Red Riders.

In four playoff games, Meek's double-A juggernaut outscored its opponents by a whopping 162-15.

Meek has compiled a 70-46 (.603) record in 11 seasons as a head coach at Toronto, Wellsville and Weir.

He coached three state-ranked teams at Wellsville. Last year's Red Riders spent the entire season in the West Virginia state rankings before embarking on their state championship run and won the seventh OVAC football championship in school history.

Meek cut his coaching teeth as a graduate assistant under current Ohio State head man Jim Tressel at Youngstown State from 1990-92 and was on the staff when the Penguins beat Marshall, 25-17, to win the 1991 NCAA Division I-AA national championship.

Meek also spent the 2003 and 2004 seasons as running backs coach at NCAA Division I-AA Robert Morris University under former New York Jets head coach Joe Walton before returning to the valley to take over the Weir High program.

#### GENE MONTELEONE (WHEELING PARK)

Four years ago, Gene Monteleone took over a once-proud Wheeling Park wrestling program that didn't even have enough wrestlers to field a complete team.

Today, his Patriots are masters of the West Virginia and OVAC wrestling world.

Since taking the head coaching reins at Wheeling Park, Monteleone's roster has grown from less than 10 wrestlers to nearly 50 this past year and the quality has kept pace with the quantity.

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- 1973: Lou Nocida, Magnolia (Football/Basketball)
- 1974: Bill Hinegardner, John Marshall (Wrestling); Jay Circocta, Woodfield (Football)
- 1975: Rich Wilinski, Toronto (Football)
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- 1977: Tom Vichich, Shadyside (Track)
- 1978: Terry Leggett, Buckeye Trail (Basketball)
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Big Red also won the 1984 Ohio Division II title and was state runnerup in 1987 and 1988.

Steubenville has won 10 regional championships under Saccoccia and he's coached 24 first-team All-Ohiolans.

Nine of his teams have gone unbeaten in the regular season and Big Red is currently riding a 30-game regular-season winning streak dating back to the end of the 2002 campaign.

Reno is the only one of tonight's nominees to have won this award previously and he's one of only six coaches to win it twice.

He was named OVAC Coach of the Year in 1985 following Big Red's 1984 state championship run and was also the 1989 OVAC Coach of the Year after back-to-back trips to the state championship game.

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**Sad Week for OVAC**

Sadly, a former recipient of the OVAC's most prestigious coaching award won't be with us at WesBanco Arena tomorrow night.

John Marshall football coach Mike Linsky was taken from us much too soon last week when he lost his courageous battle with cancer.

I had the chance to share some memories last week with a number of coaches who matched wits with Mike during the 23 seasons he guided John

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It has been said that the measure of a man lies in the tasks he performs during his time here on earth but the memories he leaves for those he loved and those who loved him.

If that's the case, it was quite some time before it measures up to Mike Linsky.

The prayers and sympathy of the Intelligencer/Newspaper sports department go to his wife Sandy, son Jere and daughters Lori, Mik and Chelsea.

We'll miss him, too. Don Clegg can be reached via e-mail at: [Clegg@newsregister.net](mailto:Clegg@newsregister.net)



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