

WHEELING CENTRAL head football coach Mike Young (left) poses with OVAC Executive Secretary Tom Rataiczak after being named the 2012 Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year. Young guided his Maroon Knights to their fifth state title in seven seasons.

Photo/RICK THORP



Central's Young pockets top OVAC coaching recognition

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

WHEELING — Humbled, honored and grateful were just some of the many adjectives Wheeling Central head football coach Mike Young used Monday evening.

Those sorts of words tend to come to mind quickly when you're named the top coach in a conference which boasts 50 schools and more than 600 coaches.

Young was recognized as the Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year during the 27th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions held at WesBanco Arena.

'To receive this award is just hard for me to fathom.'

—Mike Young

The Maroon Knights' mentor, who guided his team to its fifth West Virginia Class A state title in seven years had been a finalist for arguably the conference's most prestigious award three times previously.

"I love what I do and (awards) like this cause you to

even appreciate it more," Young said. "To be recognized by the OVAC, which I have great respect for, and the media is just a great feeling."

The other four finalists included Kim Clifford (St. Clairsville basketball), Mike Blackburn (Steubenville wrestling), Paul Jackson (Parkersburg South wrestling) and Dan Liedtke (Fort Frye boys and girls basketball).

Young admitted he would have been happy had any of the nominees won because they were "all very deserving."

"I am extremely surprised because there are so many great people in that group," Young

See, **YOUNG**, Page B2

ES LEADER - Tuesday, May 15, 2012 - B2

● Young

Continued from Page B1

admitted. "Coach Clifford and Coach Liedtke are legends and to be up against the coach from South's record makes it even more remarkable for me. It just speaks volumes for the people I work with and the kids I am around."

Young becomes the 37th different winner of the award, which has been given the past 44 years.

"I've been fortunate to coach a lot of great kids over the years and I've worked with a lot of great parents," Young said. "I've been very, very blessed and I'm very, very appreciative of this. It's a remarkable recognition."

The Knights were hit hard in graduation in 2011 and many expected Central to possibly take a step backward when you also throw in the fact of a few transfers. However, the Knights' factory just kept producing.

"It was an unbelievable season," Young said. "We had kids, who were no-names, step up and come out of the woodwork that were question marks, but I felt in August they had earned their stripes. They were a band of brothers who played hard together and wanted their moment in the sun. When they got their turn, they shined greatly."

Central reeled off nine straight wins before falling to Linsly in its regular-season finale.

"We got our tails beat by a great team (in Linsly), but we recovered and still made the noise we made in the postseason," Young said. "The kids work hard, they

buy into what we're doing and this is their award, too."

It served as a wake-up call because Central proceeded to reel off four straight victories to win yet another football title.

"This isn't something you search for, but it's something you love being recognized for," Young said. "To be put into this group (of honorees) is just great. To be recognized in this manner is just tremendous."

During his acceptance speech, Young gave much-deserved credit to each member of his coaching staff, which has been together, primarily, since Young was hired.

"To receive this award is just hard for me to fathom," Young said. "This is the greatest award you can be recognized with by the OVAC, the valley and the media, so that just says volumes for everything we've worked hard to get."

Along with the coach of the year, more than \$30,000 in scholarships were presented to student-athletes from all over the Ohio Valley. Local students recognized with scholarships were Harrison Central's Garritt Sproull (Bordas & Bordas Scholarship) and St. John Central's Lacey Dobrovich (WesBanco Scholarship).

Former St. John Central track coach Robert "Bubba" Kapral received the Cal Giffin Track and Field Service Award. During his years at the Irish helm, Kapral led the Green to two OHSAA Division III state titles and two state runner-up finishes along with 13 OVAC titles.

The Subway Cup winners were also presented. The award recognizes the overall sports champions for the past school year. Those were: Wheeling Park (5A), St. Clairsville (4A), Martins Ferry (3A), Linsly (2A) and Madonna (1A).

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Central's Young Named Coach of the Year



Photo by Rick Thorp

Former Intelligencer sports editor Doug Huff, left, presents Wheeling Central football coach Mike Young with the News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year plaque during Monday's OVAC Banquet of Champions.

Knights' football boss earns award for 1st time

By RICK THORP
Staff Writer

WHEELING — When Mike Young assumed the reins of the Wheeling Central football program in 2005 he fancied himself as, not only a coach, but the caretaker of a legacy of success.

In his seven seasons at the helm, Young has guided the Maroon Knights to five West Virginia Class A championships, the latest coming against last December at Wheeling Island Stadium.

The 35-21 triumph against Williamstown capped what might have been Young's best coaching job to date.

Despite the loss of 12 seniors and having a new quarterback, new tailback, and a revamped offensive line, the Maroon Knights never lost a step.

And for that, Young was named the winner of the 44th annual News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year Award for the first time Monday

night at the 27th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions at WesBanco Arena.

"For me to be in this elite group is remarkable, so humbling, yet so gratifying for the number of years I've put in and gratifying for the number of great kids I've coached," said Young, who was visibly stunned to have been named the winner.

"I'm very blessed and very, very appreciative of this.

"This is the greatest award you can be recognized with by the OVAC and the (media) and that says volumes.

"I worked with Bill (Van Horne) on the sidelines at track meets and everything and I admired the gentleman. Then, to receive an award named after him is kind of hard to fathom."

Young was part of a stellar group of finalists for the honor that also included St. Clairsville boys' basketball coach Kim Clifford, Steubenville wrestling

coach Mike Blackburn, Parkersburg South wrestling coach Paul Jackson and Fort Frye boys' and girls' basketball coach Dan Liedtke.

"To be included in this group, again, I'm blessed," Young said. "It's rewarding to be recognized in this manner."

Young is the sixth Wheeling Central coach to be honored joining Terry Edwards (baseball-2001), Mel Stephens (boys' basketball-2009), the late Skip Prosser (boys' basketball-1983) and the late Jim Thomas (football-1980 and 2003).

Young, also Wheeling Central's athletics director, took over the Central program following Thomas' death in early 2005.

"JT set the tone and I was blessed to be able to pick up and continue what he started," Young said.

Please See YOUNG, Page 16

YOUNG

(Continued from Page 15)

Young also was a protégé of another Coach of the Year winner — George Strager, the legendary St. Clairsville coach who won top honors in 1979 and 1987.

"I love what I do and things like this cause you to appreciate it more," Young said. "It's also great to be recognized by the OVAC, which is a conference I have great respect for."

"I appreciate what is done for the kids and the programs throughout the valley, the coaches I coach against and the kids I coach against."

"This is just a remarkable recognition."

There were plenty of

questions surrounding the 2011 Maroon Knights when the season began. Their starting quarterback transferred, their top runner graduated, as did the entire offensive line.

"But I had kids step up that were no-names and I had kids step up that were question marks," Young recalled.

"But they earned their stripes. They were a band of brothers that played hard together and they were a band of brothers that wanted to have their turn in the sun."

"They were united, showed great leadership and worked hard every day."

The Maroon Knights won their first nine games of the season before being thumped by Linsly in the regular-season finale.

"We got our tails beat by a great team, but we rebounded and recovered and were able to make some noise in the playoffs," Young said.

"This is just icing on the cake. It's their award, too, not just mine."

Young was referring to everyone associated with Wheeling Central football, especially his assistant coaches.

"They challenged the kids every day," he said. "All of my coaches believed in each other and believed in what we were doing."

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Five Named Finalists for OVAC Coach of Year

Award given Monday at WesBanco Arena

By SETH STASKEY
For the News-Register

There are more than 600 head coaches in the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference, many of whom have enjoyed most memorable seasons in the 19 sports that the OVAC recognizes each school year.

Thus, narrowing the list to five, and then down to one, as the Wheeling News-Register Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the



Blackburn



Clifford



Jackson



Liedtke



Young

Year can be a daunting task.

After receiving nominations from Ohio Valley media members, a 12-person committee met recently to attempt to widdle

down the names and arrive at the 44th annual recipient of an award that has been given to 45 coaches — 36 different winners as there's six two-time recipients and

Stevensville Big Red football coach Reno Saccoccia has won the award three times.

The award, which will be presented during Monday's 27th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions by retired Wheeling Intelligence sports editor Doug Huff, includes coaches from the spring of 2011 and the fall and winter of this school year.

The OVAC Coach of the Year Committee consists of Tom Rataiczak, Bob Koch, Ron Mauck, Don Zinni, Shawn Rine, Rob Metzger, Bubba Kapral, Jeff Harrison, Seth Staskey and Huff.

See, OVAC, Page B2

OVAC

Continued from page B1

Here's a look at the five finalists in alphabetical order:

MIKE BLACKBURN, Stevensville Wrestling — This Big Red head coach has been at the helm of one of the area's most up-and-coming

wrestling programs for seven years. It's safe to say his Big Red squad officially turned the corner this season when it sent eight wrestlers to the Ohio Division II State Tournament.

En route to getting what

was tied for the largest delegation to Columbus, Big Red won the OVAC 4A dual and tournament title while finishing second to Parkersburg South for the overall banner in the Ron Mauck OVAC Tournament.

Stevensville cruised to the dual title in the OVAC's new format, posting a 14-1 record in duals. It's only loss came to South in the championship match of the Park Duals in December.

Blackburn's Big Red squad also won the Division II sectional title at Buckeye Local and then held off perennial district power Claymont to win the Division II East/Central District title.

At the state tournament, Stevensville finished fifth with 67 points and produced five all-Ohioans, including state runner-up Charlie Keenan.

This is Blackburn's first time as an OVAC Coach of the Year finalist.

KIM CLIFFORD, St. Clairsville Basketball — This Red Devil coach just completed his 21st season at the helm of the Belmont County program.

He and his Red Devils enjoyed their most memorable season in school history this past winter. Clifford guided his all-underclassmen team to an outstanding 23-3 record, which included a 22-game winning streak.

The Red Devils pocketed their first OVAC boys' basketball championship in February when they downed East Liverpool, 79-64, in the 4A title game. It carried the momentum directly into the OHSAA Division II postseason.

St. Clairsville advanced to the district championship game for the sixth time under Clifford's

watch and got another monkey off its back with a 70-53 victory against the Potters.

At the regional tournament in Athens, St. Clairsville dispatched Chillicothe and New Philadelphia to reach the Division II state tournament where it fell to eventual state runnerup Elida.

Clifford owns a career record of 372-229 overall, which includes a tenure at Cadiz High School. His St. C. record is 283-181.

This is the first time Clifford has been a finalist.

PAUL JACKSON, Parkersburg South Wrestling — When you talk about building a juggernaut in the sport of wrestling, there's no better place to start the conversation than with Jackson.

The South graduate put the finishing touches on his brilliant coaching career with another robust campaign with a West Virginia Class AAA championship for the fourth straight season. He captured the overall and 5A championship at the Mauck OVAC Tournament. It was South's third straight title in the conference meet.

Jackson's squad finished with just one loss in duals and it snapped a 115-match winning streak.

All told, Jackson won nine big-school Mountain State titles and produced 26 state champions. Last month, Jackson was named West Virginia High School Coach of the

Year. This is the third consecutive year that Jackson has been a finalist for this award.

DAN LIEDTKE, Fort Frye Boys and Girls Basketball — This coach might have been one of the conference's busiest and most successful.

For the third consecutive season, Liedtke served as the head coach of both the boys' and girls' basketball teams in Beverly. It was his 27th season overall as boys' coach.

Liedtke brought his teams to Ohio University Eastern on back-to-back weekends for the OVAC Tournament and left with the top prize both times. His boys upended Magnolia in Class 3A, while the girls beat Monroe Central.

All told, the girls, who were also PVC champions, finished 22-3, were ranked sixth in the final Associated Press poll and won a Division III District title. They fell to eventual state champion Columbus Africentric Early College in the regional semifinal.

The Cadet boys finished 17-5 and advanced to the Division III district tournament along with winning another PVC title.

Liedtke was named Eastern District Division III Coach of the Year for boys and girls and was named Ohio Division III Coach of the Year for girls.

This is Liedtke's second time as a finalist. He was also one in 2003.

MIKE YOUNG, Wheeling Central Football — This veteran head coach leads one of the most consistent programs in the state of West Virginia.

And this past season was definitely no different. Despite a trying off-season, the loss of 12 seniors from a state title team in 2010 and being counted as an underdog by many, the Maroon Knights won their first nine games of the season before running into a Linsly buzzsaw in Week 10.

However, Young and company rallied their troops for the Class A postseason and were never challenged en route to winning their fifth state title under his watch.

In the opening round, the Knights thumped Parkersburg Catholic, 39-14. That was followed by a 34-16 victory against Moorefield and a 37-14 victory against East Hardy in the state semifinals.

In the title game, the Knights used the brilliant running of Gino Bianconi en route to a 35-21 victory against Williamstown.

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SPORTS

Sunday,
May 13, 2012

OVAC coach of the year finalists set

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

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See, **OVAC**, Page C2



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PAUL JACKSON
Park. South



DAN LIEDTKE
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THE TIMES LEADER - Sunday, May 13, 2012 - C2

● **OVAC**

Continued from Page C1

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