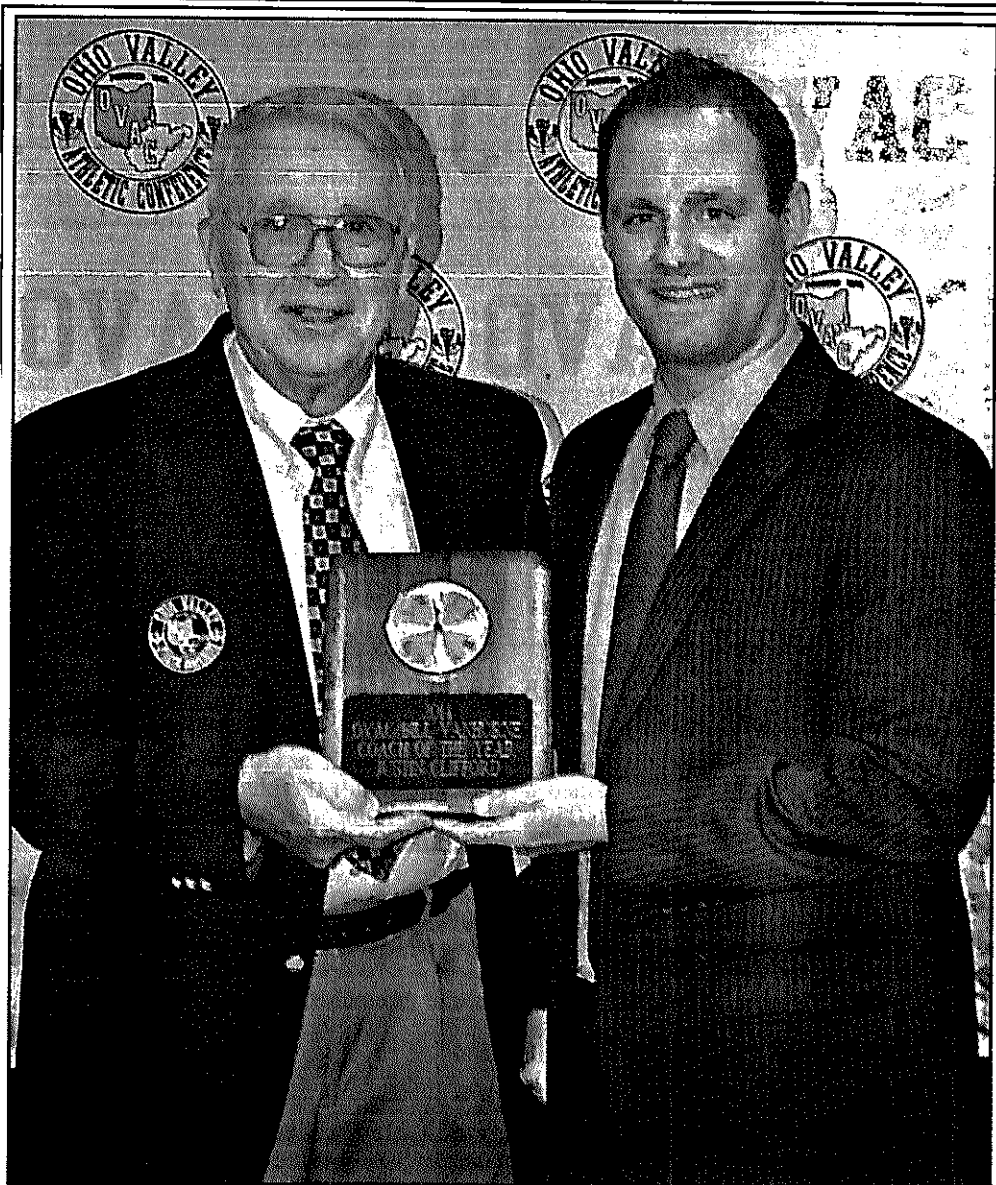


The Times Leader

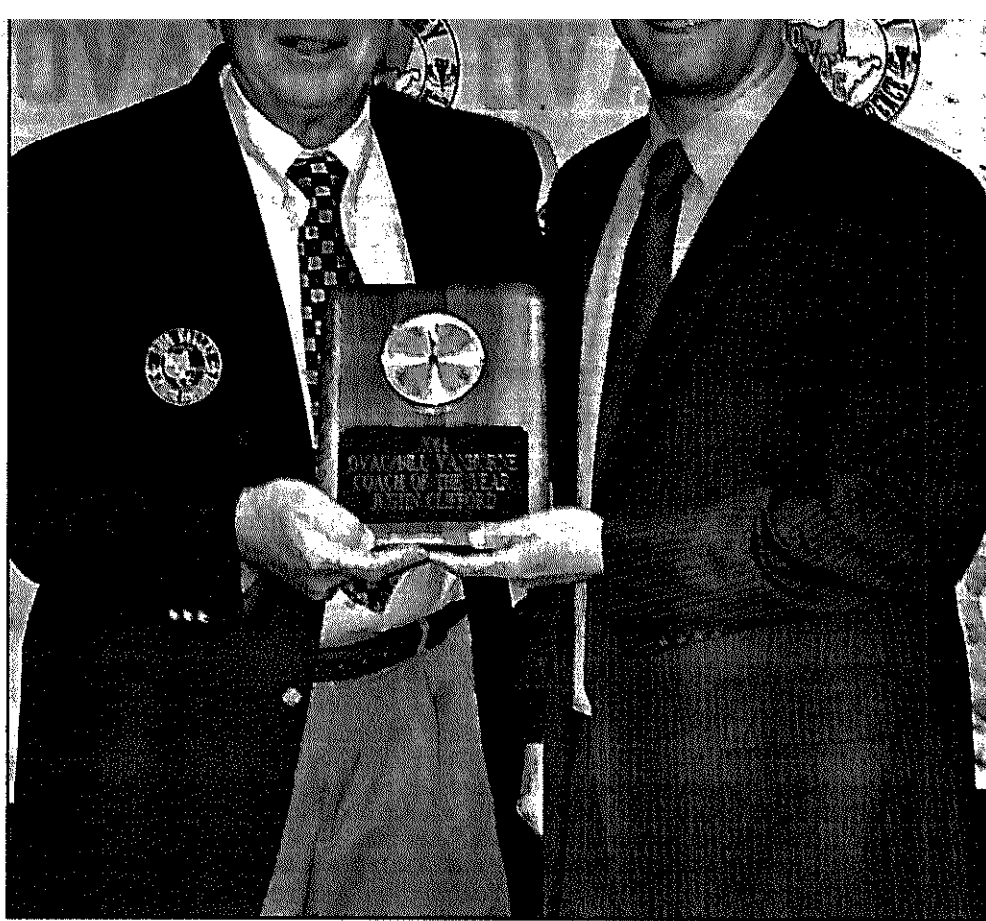
SPORTS



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T-L Photo/SETH STASKEY

Clifford wins OVAC Coach of the Year



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Clifford wins OVAC Coach of the Year

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

WHEELING – Justin Clifford was honored to be listed among the finalists for the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference's top coaching award.

He was simply stunned when he heard his name announced as the 2014 recipient of the OVAC Bill Van Horne Coach of the Year winner during Monday's 29th annual Banquet of Champions at WesBanco Arena.

Clifford won the award after guiding the Huskies to the 2013 OHSAA Division II State Baseball Tournament for the first time in school history. Actually, it was the school's first regional trip, too.

"I had no clue (I was going to win)," Clifford said shortly after delivering his acceptance speech. "To be in the same breath (as the other finalists and winners) is just an honor."

The other finalists for the award included: Wheeling Central's Mel Stephens, Madonna's Doug Taylor, Wheeling Park's Don Headley and Cambridge's Mike Denniston.

"Those guys have all done it a long time,

"THE RUN (in the tournament) is something you'll never forget."

*- Justin Clifford
Harrison Central Head Coach*

so I feel extremely fortunate," Clifford continued.

The Huskies went on a tournament run that featured everything you'd expect. You know things like a 15-inning game in the sectional, a six-run rally in the regional and then a balk to send home the winning run in the regional championship game.

"That run (in the tournament) is something you'll never forget," Clifford said. "For those who have experienced a state title or a state tournament run, words can't describe the feeling that it is. Until you're there and experience, words can't describe it."

Harrison Central took down Vincent Warren and Waverly in the regional at Zanesville last spring before falling to Plain City Jonathan Alder in the state semifinals.

The Huskies were led by then senior duo

See, **CLIFFORD**, Page B2

● Clifford

Continued from Page B1

of Rashaen Mitchell and Nick Pelegreen, but those guys had plenty of help along the way.

"You don't realize the accomplishment while you're there," Clifford, who played in a state baseball tournament at St. Clairsville, said. "Several years down the road, they'll remember it even more and the stories will get better as the years go on."

During the course of the run, there was hardly enough time for Clifford, his coaching staff or players to even enjoy it because of the preparations that go into each game.

"We were just worried about throwing a strike and winning an inning," Clifford noted. "I was worried about whether the bus would show up and get us to the field on time. We almost lost twice during the sectional (against Carrollton) and were down six runs in regional final, but we just kept finding a way and that's a credit to those kids and our coaches."

If the baseball aspect wasn't enough for Clifford, his wife, Heidi, was nine-months pregnant with the couple's third child and first daughter, Jenna, during the run.

"My parents (Kim and Penny) were there, which eased my mind a little bit on worrying as much about Heidi," Clifford said. "In that regional final game, I thought I was going to have the baby with how that thing went, so I can't imagine how she felt."

Clifford spent two seasons as the Huskies' head baseball coach and is still the head basketball coach. He stepped down from the baseball post last summer after accepting a new job at Harrison Central.

"Harrison Central has been so great to me," Clifford said. "I have nothing but great things to say about Harrison Central and the opportunities it has presented me."

Clifford's father, Kim, was a finalist for the OVAC Coach of the Year Award in 2012. When his Red Devils' basketball team faces Justin's Huskies in the winter, each wants to win as badly as the other. However, during the Huskies' baseball run, Harrison Central and Justin didn't have a bigger fan than Kim.

"If I could trade this plaque for the (entire) career my dad has put together, I certainly would," Justin said. "I can't say enough about what my dad has done for me, not only as a father, but as a coach. I owe it all to him."

Staskey can be reached at staskey@timesleaderonline.com

Want More?

Visit The Times Leader website:
timesleaderonline.com for video of
Justin Clifford's OVAC Coach of
the Year acceptance speech

OVAC Coach of the Year Narrowed Down to Five

By **SETH STASKEY**
For the News-Register
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That makes the task of choosing an overall coach of the year quite difficult.

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Each of the five finalists will receive a plaque.

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Clifford guided the Huskies' baseball team to a 23-8 record, which ended in the Division II state semifinals at Huntington Park in Columbus. Harrison Central also won the OVAC Class 4A title along the way, which saw them win their first district title in baseball.

To get to the state tournament, Harrison Central defeated Vincent Warren in the regional semifinal

and then it rallied past Waverly, winning on a balk to get to the state tournament.

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For the fourth straight season, Headley coached the individual state champion, too. Cole Hand repeated as AAA individual medalist in 2013.

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Doug Taylor



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Don Headley



Justin Clifford



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Clifford Named 2014 OVAC Coach of Year



Former Wheeling Intelligencer Sports Editor Doug Huff, left, presents the 2014 News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year plaque to former Harrison Central baseball coach Justin Clifford. Photo by Tony Viola

29th Annual Banquet of Champions held at arena

By TONY VIOLA
Staff Writer

WHEELING — Father knows best.

Before former Harrison Central baseball coach Justin Clifford attended the 29th Annual OVAC Banquet of Champions held at WesBanco Arena, the Coach of the Year candidate took some advice from his dad.

Write a speech.

Nearly two hours after the ceremonies began, Clifford was glad he did.

"I had no clue (I would win)," Clifford said after he as he was announced the 2014 News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year.

He was sure to thank his father, Kim, the veteran St.

Clairsville boys' basketball coach, for the words of wisdom during his seven-minute acceptance speech.

Clifford, in his second and final season at the helm, guided Harrison Central to their first district title as well as an appearance in the Ohio Divi-

(Please see **COACH**,
Page 12)

COACH

(Continued from Page 11)

sion II state semifinals. The Huskies posted a 23-8 record last spring and also won the OVAC Class 4A title.

Clifford beat out Madonna football coach Doug Taylor, Wheeling Central boys' basketball coach Mel Stephens, Wheeling Park golf coach Don Headley, and the late Cambridge tennis coach, Michael Denniston, to lay claim to the award.

"It's just an honor to be in the same breath as those guys," Clifford said. "Those guys have done it a long time. I'm fortunate."

Harrison Central defeated Vincent Warren in the regional semifinal and rallied past Waverly — winning on a balk — before falling to state runner-up Plain City Jonathan Alder in the state semifinal.

"It's been an unbelievable year," Clifford said. "I had a baby — well, I didn't, my wife did."

"Just the run, it's something you'll never forget. For those who have experienced a state title or tournament run, words can't describe that feeling. Until you're there and you experience it, words can't describe it."

Following the end of Harrison Central's season, Clifford, also the Huskies boys' basketball coach, accepted a job as dean of students at the high school.

Thinking he had too much on his plate, the Harrison Hills School district made him choose one sport to coach.

He picked basketball.

"It's all been for the good," Clifford

said. "Harrison has given me so many steps and has been so great to me. I have nothing but great things to say about them."

During the Huskies' historic run, Clifford says he never really stopped to think about the big picture.

"You're just worried about throwing a strike and winning that inning," he said. "You're not thinking about playing in Huntington Park or anything like that, you're worried about, 'Is the bus going to get there on time?'"

"I told the kids this when we were there because I had the chance to play — well, be on the team I should say — and won. You don't realize it when you're there. You really don't. You take it for granted. Ten years down the road, they'll remember it. When it happens you don't think about it much."

"It was an unbelievable run."

The Coach of the Year award was just one of several honors given out at the banquet celebrating the nation's largest high school athletic conference.

More than \$30,000 in scholarships were awarded to nearly 40 graduating seniors. In addition, the OVAC overall winners for each class were announced.

Madonna won the Class 1A title for a fifth straight time, Wheeling Central took the 2A crown for back-to-back years, Linsly earned its fourth straight 3A championship and St. Clairsville captured Class 4A for a record sixth consecutive time. Wheeling Park edged out Morgantown by a single point to earn its fifth Class 5A title.

SPORTS

Sunday,
May 18, 2014

OVAC Coach of the year finalists set

• Bill Van Horne Award to be presented at Monday's Banquet of Champions

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

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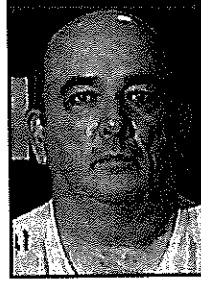
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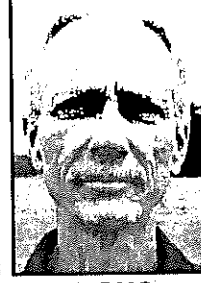
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See, OVAC, Page C2

● OVAC

Continued from Page C1

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Staskey can be reached at sstaskey@timesleaderonline.com

Denniston among OVAC Coach of the Year finalists

SETH STASKEY
FOR THE JEFFERSONIAN

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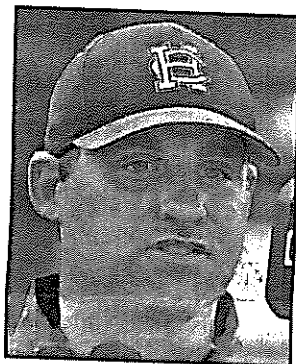
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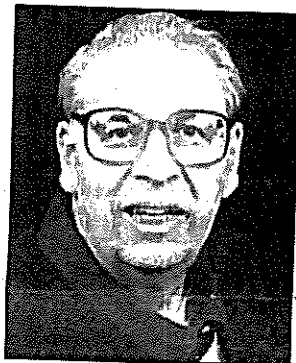
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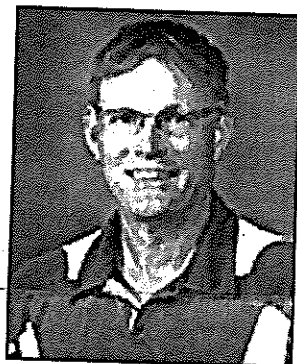
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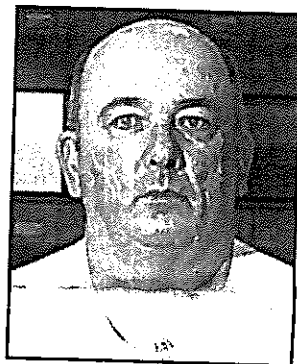
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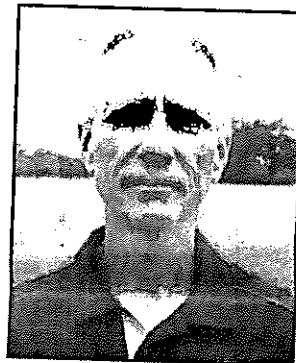
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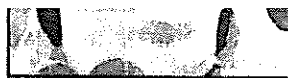
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to Wheeling Island Stadium and completed the mission with this third-year head coach leading the way.

Taylor and the Blue Dons not only hoisted the sport's top trophy, they did so in perfect fashion, completing the 14-0 season.

Along the way, the Blue Dons captured the school's 10th and second consecutive OVAC Class 1A championship.

Taylor was named The Intelligencer Football Coach of the Year as voted on by his Ohio Valley coaching peers.

