

# Who Will Be OVAC's

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Balloting in the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference "coach of the year" poll has been completed but the identity of the winner will not be revealed until the OVAC's annual spring dinner meeting on Thursday night at Oglebay Park's Gleesner Auditorium.

There is a choice field of candidates for the coveted honor this year and it is possible that we may see some sort of break-through as a result of the vote of media representatives.

Never has there been a repeater since the "coach of the year" poll was inaugurated in 1969. But it is logical to believe that there could be this time. Some of the most prominent and most deserving possibilities are men who have won the award in the past, including last year's winner, Sam Andy, then of Wheeling High.

Andy received the News-Register trophy after directing the Wheeling High Wildcats to a West Virginia state triple-A basketball championship in the Cats' final season on the hardwood.

Now coaching at the consolidated Wheeling Park High, Sam enjoyed another remarkable campaign, though its conclusion was not as satisfying as in 1976. This winter his Park High Patriots were not only OVAC four-A champs but were ranked No. 1 in the state of West Virginia in both press association polls and received the UPI Cup as the state's regular-season champs. The Patriots won a total of 23 straight before bowing to Clarksburg Washington Irving in the first round of the state tournament.

Other past winners of the "coach of the year" honor who again rate serious consideration are Jay Circosta, the Woodsfield High football strategist whose team was unbeaten and untied last fall and rated No. 1 in Ohio "A" ranks by the Associated Press; Henry "Herk" Lazasz, whose Buckeye South High basketball team won 22 straight before bowing in regional play; and Bill Hinegardner, John Marshall High wrestling mentor whose team was OVAC titlist and undefeated in dual meet action, in addition to finishing second in the West Virginia state tournament. Lazasz's cagers were OVAC three-A kingpins and Circosta's gridders were conference single-A titlists.

Lazasz was the "coach of the year" back in 1970 when his team at Warren Consolidated High won 22 in a row for the best season in the history of the school and made the regional plateau. In 1974, Hinegardner piloted John Marshall to a third straight state wrestling title and then tied with Circosta for the OVAC coaching

award. Circosta had given Woodsfield its first perfect grid record in the fall of '73.

To date, Hinegardner is the only coach picked for his success in any other sport except football or basketball. But that's a situation which might also change this season as there are worthy nominees from track, wrestling, swimming, and baseball.

The OVAC poll was inaugurated in 1969 and the first recipient of the award was Frank Baxter, the veteran Bridgeport High basketball boss whose club was 25-2 that year and reached the Ohio state Class A tournament finals at Columbus. Two more teachers of the shoot-and-dribble game, Lazasz and Steubenville Big Red's Chuck Watt, carried off the laurels the next two years. Watt's Big Red machine won 21 of 22 before failing to champion Walnut Ridge by two points in overtime in regional action.

Along about then, I was wondering if basketball coaches were going to make the award their exclusive property. But in the spring of 1972, the choice was Tom Korab, now the athletic director and head football coach at Wheeling Park High School but then at Steubenville Catholic Central, where his '71 combine posted an unblemished record, first in the history of the school, and was recognized in the wire service polls as state champion in double-A.

Up until '73, there had not been a selection from the West Virginia side of the river but then Lou Nocida came through. He was recognized for his outstanding efforts in two sports at Magnolia High at New Martinsville. His 1972 footballers had been the OVAC double-A kingpins and advanced to the finals of the West Virginia state playoffs. His '73 basketballers reached the state playoff finals. Lou, of course, is now head football coach at Lewis County High School after two years at Oak Glen.

In '74, we had the Hinegardner-Circosta tie, with duplicate awards being presented. There had been prior occasions when a single vote had settled the issue but this was the only flat out dead heat.

The choice was a decisive one in '75, with Rich Wilinski, who had posted a perfect grid slate at Toronto in the fall of '74, finishing well ahead of the pack. Rich won an OVAC title with an 8-2 team this past fall and now moves on to Steubenville Central.

If the pick is to be a football coach this time, Circosta would seem to have the edge, though there could be support for Jim Thomas, who has won two OVAC grid titles in the past three years at Wheeling Central and

coached the victorious West Virginia all-stars in last summer's inter-state charity game. Down river, the vote might go to Buddy James, football coach at Parkersburg whose team won the West Virginia state playoff, although it suffered regular-season losses to Marietta and Brooke. Of course, some media members might feel that Ron Pobolish, with a two-year record of 18-1-1 at Cadiz, or Rich Saccoccia, who succeeded the living legend, Bob Kettlewell, at Wintersville and won the OVAC four-A division crown in his first season at the Warrior helm, might be an appropriate choice.

In addition to Lazasz and Andy, basketball coaches who may pick up votes are Bobby Dawson, who has had a phenomenal record at Wellsville and won an OVAC double-A crown this season though he did not return a regular from his state journey club of the previous season; Ray Barnhart, who has been 41-8 over the past two years at Sistersville and guided his team to the state semi-finals this winter; or Terry Snively, who ac-

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# Coach of Year?

accomplished a remarkable turnaround in his first season at Shadyside as he took the Tigers to the Class A regional at Athens and posted a 20-3 record. Or how about Jim Brinkman, whose Wheeling Park girls' team won 17 in a row before losing in the semifinals of the state tournament?

Swimming is not a sport in which many OVAC schools participate but no one can argue with the total dominance of Linsly Institute under Paul Blair, who has continued in the tradition established by Warren Eugh. The Cadets have won the conference crown so many times that no one seems to know for certain how long they have reigned but the span is at least 30 years.

Not to be overlooked is Dave Cisar, the fiery Magnolia High football and baseball coach whose diamond squad won more games than any other team in West Virginia last spring, with three all-staters on the roster.

I am aware of sentiment for Eric Carder, Wheeling Park wrestling coach who did a bang-up job in the school's baptismal year. His team

carried John Marshall down to the wire in the OVAC tourney and subsequently won regional and state triple-A championships. Eric had a state double-A champ at Warwood the previous year so he has accomplished the unusual feat of two state titles in two years at different schools. He was named "coach of the year" in triple-A wrestling in the Mountain state.

Another coach who had a state champion team at Warwood last year was Ron White, in track.

Track coaches have received short shrift in the balloting in the past because they are in the midst of their season when the poll is taken and their accomplishments of the previous spring are not quite as prominent in the minds of the voters as they would have been months earlier.

But serious consideration should be given to White and at least two other track coaches, Tom Vichich of Shadyside and Gordon Downie of Martins Ferry. Last spring Downie piloted the Purple Riders through their most successful track season in 25 years and had the valley's all-time

two-mile record-holder in Bruce Smith. His team won a bundle of titles last year. And he has also done outstanding work in cross-country.

As for Vichich, his accomplishment was without precedent. He is the first coach to direct an OVAC school to an Ohio track and field title. His Tigers won the Ohio "A" championship at Columbus last spring after triumphs in the OVAC "A" meet, the Ohio Valley Track League, and the Eastern-Southeastern Ohio district meet. Tom is also athletic director at Shadyside and heads up the Shadyside Relays. He is extremely popular among his peers and with the press. So he may have a shot, despite the reluctance of the selectors to recognize the worthy work of track coaches in the past.

Truth is that the vote is likely to be widely split.

That increases speculation about the final choice. Regardless, the winner is certainly going to be a worthy of joining the ranks of the men who have been tapped for the coveted prize in years past.

# TOM VICHICH HONORED

## Shadyside Track Boss Is OVAC Coach of Year

By BRIAN BONENBERGER  
The Intelligencer Staff

A sure sign of the changing of the guard took place at the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference's annual spring dinner and awards night Thursday night at Oglebay Park's Glessner Auditorium.

For the first time in the nine-year history of the OVAC-Wheeling News-Register coach of the year award, the honors went to a coach of a "non-major" spring sport—Tom Vichich, coach of Shadyside High School's 1976 Ohio Class A track champions.

Only once in the history of the award had it gone to someone rather than a football or basketball coach, and that was in 1974 when Bill Hinegardner, who had just led John Marshall to its third straight state wrestling championship, had to share the honors with Woodsfield football mentor Jay Circosta.

But this year, the hard work put in by Vichich, and all track and baseball coaches in general, was recognized when he was announced as the winner of the conference coach of the year honors.

And because the vote was clearly in favor of Vichich, it was a victory not only for the third-year Tiger head coach, but for all spring sports coaches as it marked the acceptance of spring athletics as major sports.

It appears that the dominance of football and basketball coaches in OVAC awards is over. The efforts of those such as Warwood High's retired track coach Don Minder and ex-Shadyside track mentor Jack Berger have, in a way, been recognized by the media's voting of Tom Vichich as OVAC coach of the year.

Vichich's honor shared the highlight of the dinner with a moving speech by former Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur, now working in public relations with General Motors.

Miss Van Derbur spoke on motivation, and the effect failing had on a young student-athlete. She stressed the point that though a person might have failed once, that person is not a failure.

The main speaker pointed to times that such noted persons as Abraham Lincoln, Robert Kennedy, Winston Churchill, and yes, even Babe Ruth, failed to achieve something on their first try but continued to strive until they did indeed achieve it.

Miss Van Derbur has a glowing reputation as a speaker on

motivation, and her speech last night was motivating and inspirational, to say the least.

Four student-athletes were honored with scholarship awards. Bridgeport three-sport star Ed Ducker received the annual Picoma Industries Scholarship Award, while Bishop Donahue All-State basketball player Pat Popicg was accorded the Morris Plan Bank Scholarship.

Mark Schneider, St. Clairsville football standout, was the recipient of the Pepsi-Cola Award, and Dave Foltz, a guard-linebacker for Oak Glen, won the first Ohio Valley Board of Approved Football Officials scholarship.

OVAC Sportsmanship Awards went to Parkersburg in Class AAAA, River in Class AAA, Linsly in double A and Skyvue in Class A. They were presented by the OV Board of Approved Basketball Officials.

Previously announced awards went to former Wheeling High, Warwood High and West Liberty State College coach Bob Roe, winner of the Calvin J.J. Giffin Memorial Award, Jefferson Union wrestler Rich Davis, the Dave Bierkorte Memorial Award as the OVAC tournament's most outstanding wrestler, and to the late Charles "Bob" Mumley, veteran Ohio Valley official, Dr. Harold Meyer, retiring commissioner of the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and out-going OVAC president Father John Lester of Bishop Donahue, each of whom received a special award from the OVAC.

In addition, toastmaster Jerry Schultz, who humored the crowd all evening with his witty anecdotes and introductions, received a plaque from the conference.

OVAC championship trophies and pennants were presented to John Marshall, Jefferson Union, Barnesville and Weirton Madonna for dual wrestling championships; Wheeling Park, Buckeye South, Wellsville and Madonna for boys basketball, Steubenville Catholic Central and Madonna for winter girls' basketball; Martins Ferry for gymnastics and Linsly for swimming.