



T-L Photo/SETH STASKEY

SHADYSIDE FOOTBALL coach Mark Holenka (center) was named the Bill VanHorne OVAC Coach of the Year winner Monday evening at the conference's annual Banquet of Champions at WesBanco Arena. Flanking Holenka is coach of the year presenter Doug Huff and OVAC Executive Secretary Tom Rataiczak.

Shadyside's Holenka receives OVAC's top coaching honor

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

It's been quite a year for Mark Holenka.

The second-year Shadyside football coach gave away his oldest daughter, Ashley, for marriage last summer, guided his Tigers to an OVAC title and an eventual berth in the Division VI state championship game in the fall and then watched his youngest daughter Hayley play a key role for the Lady Tigers' trip to the Division IV state tournament.

If that wasn't enough, Holenka learned he and his wife Lana are expecting grandparents as Ashley and her husband, John Farrier, are expecting their first child.

"We've been blessed," Holenka said. "You get to play for the state title, your daughter's team goes to the state and then more good news with finding out we're going to be grandparents around Thanksgiving. It's been like a story-book type 2010-11 for us."

'This award is about the team, the coaching staff and the community. This is their award, and I just happen to be the figurehead.'

— Mark Holenka

And then, on Monday, as he was celebrating his 58th birthday, Holenka was announced the recipient of the prestigious Bill VanHorne OVAC/Wheeling News Register Coach of the Year honor as voted on by a panel of media and OVAC brass, putting the ultimate finishing touches on a year to remember.

"This award is about the team, the coaching staff and the community," Holenka said. "This is their award, and I just happen to be the figurehead."

Holenka edged out the other finalists, Mark Batton (Magnolia, football), Tina Yates (Shadyside, girls basketball), Paul Jackson (Parkersburg South, wrestling) and George Vargo (Madonna, boys' basketball).

"I had no idea I would win, but I knew whatever way it went, I was just honored to be a finalist," Holenka said. "Being that it manifested into what it did is a tribute. I guess, to the state of Ohio because of how much weight it carries. It's got some clout in some people's mind and thought of so religiously. Whatever way the cookie crumbled was okay with me."

In his second season at the helm, Holenka guided the Tigers to a 9-1 regular season the OVAC 2-A title. He then led the Tigers to the Division VI state final against Delphos St. John

BAD NEWS FOR TRIBE

Cleveland Indians outfielder Grady Sizemore is headed back to the DL/17

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Holenka Named OVAC Coach of the Year

Shadyside football coach Mark Holenka, flanked by former Intelligencer Sports Editor Doug Huff and OVAC Executive Secretary Tom Rataiczak, was named the News-Register/Bill Van Horne Coach of the Year.

Photo by
Rick Thorp



Shadyside football boss earns award after remarkable year

By RICK THORP
Staff Writer

WHEELING — The 2010-11 athletic year was a storybook one for Shadyside's Mark Holenka.

First, Holenka guided the Tigers football team to an OVAC Class AA crown and an appearance in the Ohio Division VI championship game.

Next, Holenka got to watch his daughter, Hayley, help lead the Shadyside girls' basketball team to the school's first undefeated regular season and a trip to the Ohio Division IV Final Four.

Then, Holenka and his wife, Lana, learned their daughter, Ashley Farrier, and son-in-law, John, are expecting their first

child in the fall.

And finally, Monday night at WesBanco Arena, Holenka was named the winner of the 43rd annual News-Register Bill Van Horne Coach of the Year Award at the OVAC's annual Banquet of Champions.

On his birthday, no less.

"This is a testament to these young men," Holenka, a 1971 Shadyside graduate, said of the honor.

"It's their award and it's also the assistant coaches' award.

"I never think of them as my coaches, they're *our* coaches. We all coach and we all do this together. This is their award and I'm very honored to pick it up for them."

It's Holenka's third coaching award of the season. He also earned Coach of the Year honors from The Intelligencer and Times Leader.

Holenka was part of a stellar group of finalists for the honor that also include

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HOLENKA

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Magnolia football coach Mark Batton, Parkersburg South wrestling coach Paul Jackson, Weirton Madonna boys' basketball coach George Vargo, and Shadyside girls' basketball coach Tina Yates.

"I kidded my daughter that if (I) didn't win this you helped me lose it," Holenka said laughing.

Holenka is the second Shadyside coach to win the OVAC honor. Tigers track and field coach Tom Vichich was the 1977 winner.

A season after guiding the Tigers to a 5-5 mark and a playoff spot in his first season as head coach, Holenka brought back a team that had many question marks surrounding it.

It became evident, however, this group of Tigers would be one to reckon with.

Shadyside finished 9-1 in the regular season, with a 21-14 loss at undefeated Bridgeport the only blemish.

Undaunted, the Tigers came back the next week with big victory at home against Wheeling Central

and then steamrolled in the playoffs. Among the post-season victories was a 28-0 thumping of Bridgeport in the Region 23 title game in St. Clairsville.

While losing to Bridgeport ended hopes of an undefeated regular season it, in many ways, strengthened the team, Holenka recalled.

"We lost that game, but I knew in my heart we competed very well," he said.

"I think it gave us an attitude that if we ended up with a second shot at them things would work out.

"After losing that game we had to come back against a very good Wheeling Central team in Week 10. And to regroup like we did after that loss made us realize we had a lot of resiliency."

Despite losing in the state finals to highly touted Delphos St. John, Holenka said the memories created last fall will last a lifetime, and awards, such as the one he received Monday will be reminders of those moments.

"After years we will reflect on all this team accomplished," Holenka said. "It was a great feeling."

● Holenka

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after they knocked off then unbeaten Bridgeport and Mogadore in the regional final and state semifinal, respectively.

The Tigers were dealt a lopsided defeat in the state final by the juggernaut Blue Jays, but by the time the team arrived back to Belmont County, most of the players and coaches had realized their accomplishments.

"Obviously, we had a bad taste in our mouth," Holenka said. "We went with high expectations, but when we sat down and looked at all of the things we'd accomplished, it was a great feeling."

The Tigers accomplished all of those things coming off a 6-6 season in which they qualified for the playoffs and won a road game at Columbiana before falling. They returned a solid core, but some of the players were rather green when it came to having to

log quality varsity action.

"How we went about the season is a testament to our coaches on how they developed this team," Holenka said. "The kids really took to the teaching and as the season went along we were a much better team by games eight, nine, 10 and so on."

Holenka's coaching staff was one of the best around with Mark Bonar, Gregg Bonar, Mike Kernik, John Grinch and Jason Merryman.

"I never want to say and think about the coaches as 'my' coaches," Holenka said. "We also coach and do this together and this award is theirs as well as it is mine, but I am very flattered and proud to pick it up for them."

Holenka becomes the second winner from Shadyside. He joined Tom Vichich, who won in 1977 after he led the Tigers to the Class A state track championship in 1976.

This marks the first time since 2008 that there were two finalists from the same school. Holenka and his daughter talked about the award recently.

"I would have been fine either way if Tina (Yates) had won," Holenka said. "I was kidding my daughter, saying 'that if we don't win, she helped us lose it.'"

Staskey can be reached at ssstaskey@timesleaderonline.com

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Five Are Finalists For Coach Of the Year

Winner of OVAC honor will be revealed Monday

By **SETH STASKEY**
For The Intelligencer

WHEELING — Choosing a coach of the year for any sport is often times a very difficult task.

Trying to make the determination between more than 500 coaches in a wide variety of sports makes the chore even more challenging.

That's the the chore faced by a committee, comprised of media members and OVAC officials, who met recently and narrowed a list of nominees down to the top five and then voted for the eventual winner.

The winner of the Wheeling News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year will be announced during Monday's OVAC Banquet of Champions, presented by StratusWave at Wes-Banco Arena.

Today, the finalists for the award are being announced. The top five, who will receive special awards Monday, include, in alphabetical order: Mark Batton (Magnolia, football); Mark Holenka (Shady-side, football); Paul Jackson (Parkersburg South, wrestling); George Vargo (Madonna, boys' basketball) and Tina Yates (Shadyside, girls' basketball).

Here's a capsule look at the five finalists:

MARK BATTON, Magnolia — This Blue Eagles' coach came into the 2010 season with a sour taste in his mouth after his team was ousted in 2009 in the state semifinals by eventual champion Bluefield.

However, the thoughts of 2010 went away quickly as the Blue Eagles steamrolled their way to an undefeated regular season and the school's 11th OVAC title, the third under Batton's watch.

With the perfect season in hand, plenty of work remained for the Blue Eagles, who were the second seed in the Class AA playoff field.

Magnolia cruised to the Super Six on Wheeling Island, posting victories by scores of 62-0, 56-14 and 41-7 to set up a date with top-seeded Ravenswood.

On the Island, Magnolia and Justin Fox were just too much for the Red Devils and Magnolia won its first state title since 1964.

Batton, a 1977 graduate of Magnolia, owns a career record of 95-44 in his 12 seasons and has made eight playoff appearances. His Blue Eagles were state runnerup in 2009 and he was a member of a pair of state runnerup coaching staffs when he served under Dave Cisar.

MARK HOLENKA, Shadyside — In just his second season, this Tigers coach led his alma mater to the school's second Division VI state championship game.

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COACH

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Holenka and the Tigers finished the regular season with a strong 9-1 record, losing only to Bridgeport in a Week Nine showdown.

However, the Tigers — based on their strength of schedule — still won the OVAC 2-A title and earned the top seed in Region 23.

Shadyside steamrolled through its round-one opponent, Glouster Trimble, and then took out Malvern in the second round before avenging its loss to Bridgeport, 28-0, to win the regional title.

In the state semifinals, Shadyside met its second consecutive undefeated opposition in Mogadore, and advanced by virtue of a 28-13 victory.

The Tigers' dream run came to a crashing halt in the title game when they met defending state champion Delphos St. John's.

Holenka, who owns a 19-8 record as a head coach, was named Times Leader Coach of the Year and The Intelligencer Coach of the Year after the season.

Prior to becoming the head coach, Holenka served as defensive coordinator under Ty Fleming at Shadyside and under Terry Snively at River.

PAUL JACKSON, Parkersburg South — In just their second full year as a member of the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference, the Patriots' wrestling program has continued to toy with the competition of the upper Ohio Valley.

Jackson guided his Patriots to their second straight OVAC overall championship at the Ron Mauck OVAC Wrestling Tournament last January, scoring a record 283 points. All told, South produced five champions.

The Patriots continued their ownership of AAA Wrestling in West Vir-

ginia, winning their third straight state title, producing 10 state placers, including two state champions. South finished with 184.5 points.

The Wood County squad finished undefeated in duals for the second straight season, which earned them their second straight dual-meet OVAC title.

This was Jackson's fifth season of his second tenure as the head coach. All told, it's his 12th season.

Jackson was a finalist for this award last year as well.

GEORGE VARGO, Madonna — The veteran coach led his Blue Dons to a season no one will soon forget.

The Blue Dons entered the season with high expectations with several experienced players back in the fold who'd experienced a great deal of success in seemingly every sport they played.

However, in a game in December, the Blue Dons were humbled by Morgantown Trinity, 80-57.

That seemingly got the Blue Dons' attention. Madonna finished the pre-OVAC cutoff portion of its schedule with a 15-2 record and earned a home game in the Class A tournament.

It took care of business and earned an opportunity to meet Trinity again with the OVAC title on the line. Madonna rallied on several occasions and eventually pulled out a 86-81 victory in double overtime.

Then came the West Virginia Class A postseason where Madonna found itself with its back to the wall. The Blue Dons were knocked off in the sectional final, 84-71, by Wheeling Central, but due to West Virginia's tournament system, the Blue Dons remained in the tournament.

It was an opportunity Vargo and company didn't let slide by. They

won their regional final on the road and then won two games in Charleston to reach the Class A state final for a rubbermatch with Trinity.

In one of the premier games of the season on the West Virginia side of the river, the Blue Dons pulled out a 44-42 victory for the school's first boys' basketball title.

All told, the Blue Dons finished with a 24-3 record.

TINA YATES, Shadyside — The Tigers came into the season with a feeling that they had a chance to make some serious noise in March. It just so happened the Lady Tigers made noise in every month it played.

With a talented cast of six varsity contributors, the Lady Tigers posted the school's first-ever perfect regular season in girls' hoops, capturing the OVAC 2-A title along the way with a convincing victory against Fort Frye, which upended the Lady Tigers in the title game in 2010.

In the tournament, Shadyside cruised through the sectional and then had two nailbiters in the district, taking out perennial power Hiland and then knocking off Rosecrans for the third time to advance to the regional tournament.

At the regional, the LTs had their way with then undefeated Lowellville and then took out Dalton to earn the Tigers a trip to the Ohio Division IV Final Four in Columbus for the third time in school history.

The season came to a crashing halt at the hands of Fort Loramie, which handed the Shadyside girls a decisive setback, which was the most lopsided girls' basketball defeat in state tournament history. Yates was named Eastern District and Ohio Division IV State Coach of the Year for finishing 26-1.

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Sunday,
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OVAC Coach of the Year finalists set

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

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