



OVAC Banquet slated for May 16

The 20th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions will be held on Monday, May 16 at WesBanco Arena at 6:30 p.m.

Some 32 scholarships will be awarded, totaling more than \$20,000. Also, championship pennants will be presented to OVAC championship-winning teams.

One of the highlights of the evening will be the presentation of the News Register Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of The Year Award. The Dave Bierkortte Award will also be handed out that evening.

Cost is \$15 per ticket. No tickets will be sold at the door. Individuals wishing to purchase a ticket need to call Banquet Chairman Ron White at 304-277-3599.

The following scholarships will be presented during the banquet: Kroger, Pepsi-Cola (2), Bodkin Wilson & Kozicki Co, Soccer, Douglas Pilney Memorial Gold, OVAC Softball, Ohio Valley Football Officials, Samuel A. Mumley, WesBanco (2), OVAC Boosters (8), Henry Lazasz Basketball (2), Richard Potts Basketball (2); Stephen Hanning Memorial, DeLuca Realty Volleyball, OVAC Cheerleader (2), Wrestling (5) and OVAC Baseball.

The major banquet sponsors include WesBanco, OVAC, Wendy's and Kroger.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. at pre-dinner music by the Buckeye Local Chamber Choir.

20th Banquet Of Champions Set for May 16

More than \$20,000 in scholarships will be presented as one of the many highlights when the 20th annual Ohio Valley Athletic Conference Banquet of Champions unfolds Monday night, May 16, at WesBanco Arena in Wheeling.

Major sponsors along with the OVAC of the dinner are WesBanco, Wendy's Restaurants and the Kroger Company.

Overall, 32 scholarship winners are to be announced during the evening, which is an increase of 10 from last year, according to dinner chairman Ron White.

The OVAC Boosters, a newly organized group, will provide eight of the scholarships. Five wrestling awards will be presented along with two scholarships by Pepsi-Cola, WesBanco, OVAC Cheerleaders; Richard Potts Boys' Basketball and Henry Lazasz Girls' Basketball.

Rounding out the list of scholarships are Kroger's, Bodkin, Wilson & Kozicki (Soccer); Douglas Pilney Memorial (Golf), OVAC Softball; Ohio Valley Football Officials, Samuel A. Mumley, Stephen E. Hanning Memorial, DeLuca Realty (Volleyball) and OVAC Baseball.

Another featured highlight of the evening is the presentation of the News-Register/Bill Van Horne OVAC Coach of the Year Award. Also, the Dave Bierkortte Award, presented by the Wheeling Central Catholic High School Boosters, will be given to the most valuable wrestler in the OVAC Tournament held in January.

Banners will be presented to the schools winning conference team championships during the 2004-05 season.

The doors to WesBanco arena open at 5:30 p.m., with dinner to be served at 6:30 p.m. No tickets will be sold at the door the night of the dinner. Anyone wishing to purchase banquet tickets, which are priced at \$15 each, should call Ron White at (304) 277-3599.

Pilney Scholarship



RECEIVING THE Doug Pilney Memorial Scholarship was Indian Creek's Nick Kirsch during last Monday's OVAC Banquet of Champions. Pictured, from left, are Judge Mark Costine, who presented the award; Kirsch, and Frankle Pilney and Milan Pilney -- Doug's parents. Doug was a standout golfer at Buckeye South and collegiately before dying in an automobile accident.

Photo courtesy/BRIGGS PHOTOGRAPHY

OVAC to Recognize Its Best at Annual

Once again, the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference will wind down a wonderful sports year Monday night by holding its annual Banquet of Champions at WesBanco Arena in Wheeling.

The doors open at 5:30 p.m. with dinner to be served at 6:30 p.m.

In attendance will be several hundred members of teams that were fortunate enough to play or perform on conference championship squads during the 2004-05 school year. Their proud coaches will also be on hand as will numerous scholarship award recipients, their presenters and equally-thrilled parents.

For one area coach, the night will provide some lasting memories and much-deserved recognition as the recipient of the OVAC/News-Register Bill Van Horne Coach of the Year award.

The award was renamed in 1996 to honor the memory of Bill Van Horne.

This legendary journalist spent 53 years informing us through his impeccable writings about the achievements of Ohio Valley sports greats.

He served as sports editor of the Times-Leader for 25 years and the Wheeling Hall of Famer spent the last 28 years of his life as sports editor of the News-Register.

The OVAC has been honoring its coach of the year since 1969 when one of our favorite mentors and Bill's, Frank Baxter, was named following an outstanding season turned in by his Bridgeport High School boys' basketball team.

Frank's 1969 Bulldogs enjoyed a brilliant 25-2 record season and advanced to the Ohio Class A state high school tournament where they knocked off Fort Recovery, 69-68, in the semifinals. In the state championship game, the "Blue" fell to powerful Arcanum, 84-59.

In the years following, a "Who's Who" list of other Ohio Valley coaching greats took their turn in the spotlight. Highly-recognizable names such as Henry Lazasz, Chuck Watt, Lou Nocida, Bill Hinegardner, Jay Circosta, Sam Andy, Jim Thomas, Skip Prosser, Reno Saccoccia, Paul Billiard, George Strager, Gene Ford, John Magistro, Larry

coach at Wheeling Central Catholic, Bob Kramer, football coach at Weirton Madonna High School and Fred Heatherington, baseball coach at Steubenville Big Red.

Heatherington (1994) and Shaw (2000) are former coach of the year honorees.

Shaw's powerhouse teams continued to dominate the world of West Virginia Class AA-A wrestling last season. In February, the Golden Bears extended their streak of state championships to nine in a row.

The Oak Glen matmen also accomplished another outstanding feat by winning the overall OVAC crown for the second straight year.

Because the OVAC sports year ends prior to the conclusion of state championships in tennis, track, baseball and softball, coach of the year candidates in those sports are considered for their accomplishments the previous spring.

Heatherington's Big Red baseball team advanced to the state championship game in Division IV a year ago. It was Steubenville's second straight appearance in the state tournament.

Two years ago, Big Red lost in the state semifinals.

Stephens played a significant role in four straight West Virginia Class A boys' basketball crowns captured by the Maroon Knights. In 2002 and 2003, the mailman/coach was an assistant as Dave Wojcik led Central to back-to-back titles.

When Wojcik left to return to the college coaching ranks, Stephens was promoted to head coach and the Maroon Knights' championship reign continued in 2004 and 2005.

Kramer joined the list of finalists after a dream season with the Madonna High School football team.

Kramer masterminded a major rebuilding program which paid off this past season when the Blue Dons carried a 13-0 record into the single-A state title game against Wheeling Central at Wheeling Island Stadium.

Although Madonna ended up

Martins Ferry High School. Bruney's Purple Riders went undefeated until reaching the Ohio Division IV semifinals before bowing out against eventual state champion Youngstown Cardinal Mooney.

Last spring, Bob Rosnick led a young Weir High squad to the Mountain State's Class AA baseball championship, while Brad Wilson coached Barnesville to a state baseball tournament berth in Ohio.

Ted Brown's Monroe Central girls' softball team went 32-0 on the way to Division III Ohio crown with daughter Leekycia Brown pitching every inning.

Eric Fries coached the Brooke boys' soccer team to its first-ever regional championship and state tournament

berth, while Darrell Davis directed the Barnesville girls to a runnerup finish in the Ohio state track and field meet.

Others under consideration were Dave Linn, whose Buckeye Trail basketeers lost to Bellaire in double overtime in the district final and Wheeling Central track coach Wayne Rutter, who led his boys and girls team to runner-up finishes in the 2004 state track meet while the girls' team won the OVAC cross-country championship last fall.

Jim Thomas, a previous two-time honoree as coach of the year, died in March as the result of a heart attack. His final season at Wheeling Central saw the Maroon Knights win their third state football crown in five years.

Thomas recently was honored posthumously as the West Virginia High School Coach of the Year.

We could go on and on mentioning outstanding performances by the coaches and the boys and girls athletes who represent this conference so very well during each and every sports season.

While we will applaud the winner of the Van Horne Coach of the Year Award tomorrow night, our hats also should be tipped to all of the coaches in the bi-state league.

also include the presentation of over \$20,000 in scholarship moneys.

To make this program possible, members of the business community should be lauded for stepping forward to provide college opportunities for deserving Ohio Valley athletes.

Pre-dinner music will be provided by the Buckeye Local High School Chamber Choir.

Championship pennants will be presented to 62 OVAC division champions in 18 sports.

We would also like to say thank you to dinner chairman Ron White and his wife Eleanor for their tireless efforts every year to assure that the OVAC has successful, snappily-run banquet.



Our best wishes are extended to Warren Hood on his retirement as athletic director at Martins Ferry High School. Hood will be succeeded by Dave Bruney, who will continue as the school's head football coach.

Warren has been a class act during his entire teaching and coaching career, as well. Honored in 2003 as Ohio's Eastern District Athletic Director of the Year, Hood will be admitted this fall into Ohio's Athletic Director Hall of Fame in Columbus.

Also a former basketball official and baseball umpire, Warren has served the OVAC as the Class AAA Division's representative on the executive board for the last eight years.

He also previously coached eighth grade football, served on the West Virginia Super Six State Football Championships Committee and has taught in the Martins Ferry School District for 30 years.

Enjoy your retirement, Warren. You served the kids in your school district and the OVAC very well during your career.

Bruney will have Dirk Fitch and Joe Kosar serve as assistants in the AD job, while Carol Burda was appointed to take over as ticket manager.



Nick's Notebook



By NICK BEDWAY

Bill Van Horne.

This legendary journalist spent 53 years informing us through his impeccable writings about the achievements of Ohio Valley sports greats.

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We could go on and name each and every winner of this prestigious award because they were equally as qualified and deserving to be on this list.

Over the past 36 years only one female coach has been so honored, however.

Dee Davis - one of Wheeling Park High School's all-time greatest girls' basketball performers if not the best ever - was named the coach of the year in 1998.

She led the voting for the award after the 1997-98 season in which Davis coached the Patriot girls to the first of their back-to-back West Virginia Class AAA hoop championships.

Among the five finalists for the 2005 Coach of the Year Award is another female mentor, Nikki Hardman of Magnolia High School in New Martinsville. Hardman coached the Blue Eagles to the West Virginia Class AA girls' basketball championship last March.

Joining Hardman on this year's list of finalists are Larry Shaw, wrestling coach at Oak Glen High School; Mel Stephens, boys' basketball

championships in tennis, track, baseball and softball, coach of the year candidates in those sports are considered for their accomplishments the previous spring.

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Although Madonna ended up being spanked 34-7 by the late Coach Jim Thomas's Maroon Knights, Kramer's success in getting his team into the state final for the first time since 1987 certainly earned him a spot in our final five.

Hardman has been coach of the Blue Eagle girls' team since 1996 and she has compiled an impressive career won-loss record of 131-82.

She previously brought the 2000 and 2002 Magnolia girls to the state tournament.

Last March, Magnolia won it all despite having played the last half of the season without its starting point guard who sustained a knee injury.

As usual, the coach of the year committee had a difficult task. Even just cutting the list to the final five resulted in several long debates.

It's been another year of remarkable achievements by coaches up and down the Ohio Valley.

As many as 14 mentors were nominated for the finalists spots and the committee could have gone beyond that number for sure.

Consider the fact that absent from the list of finalists is Dave Bruney, the football coach at

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berth, while Darrell Davis directed the Barnesville girls to a runnerup finish in the Ohio state track and field meet.

Others under consideration were Dave Linn, whose Buckeye Trail basketballers lost to Bellaire in double overtime in the district final and Wheeling Central track coach Wayne Rutter, who led his boys and girls team to runner-up finishes in the 2004 state track meet while the girls' team won the OVAC cross-country championship last fall.

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While we will applaud the winner of the Van Horne Coach of the Year Award tomorrow night, our hats also should be tipped to all of the coaches in the bi-state league.

Whether they had perfect season or their charges didn't win a game, all of the OVAC coaches are No. 1 in my book.

They deserve to be commended for the job they do in teaching the particular sport they coach and also for the help they give in preparing their athletes for the more important game of life which lies ahead.

People who don't understand or choose to ignore the qualities of men and women who coach their kids really need to take a closer look at themselves.

Monday night's program will

the school's head football coach.

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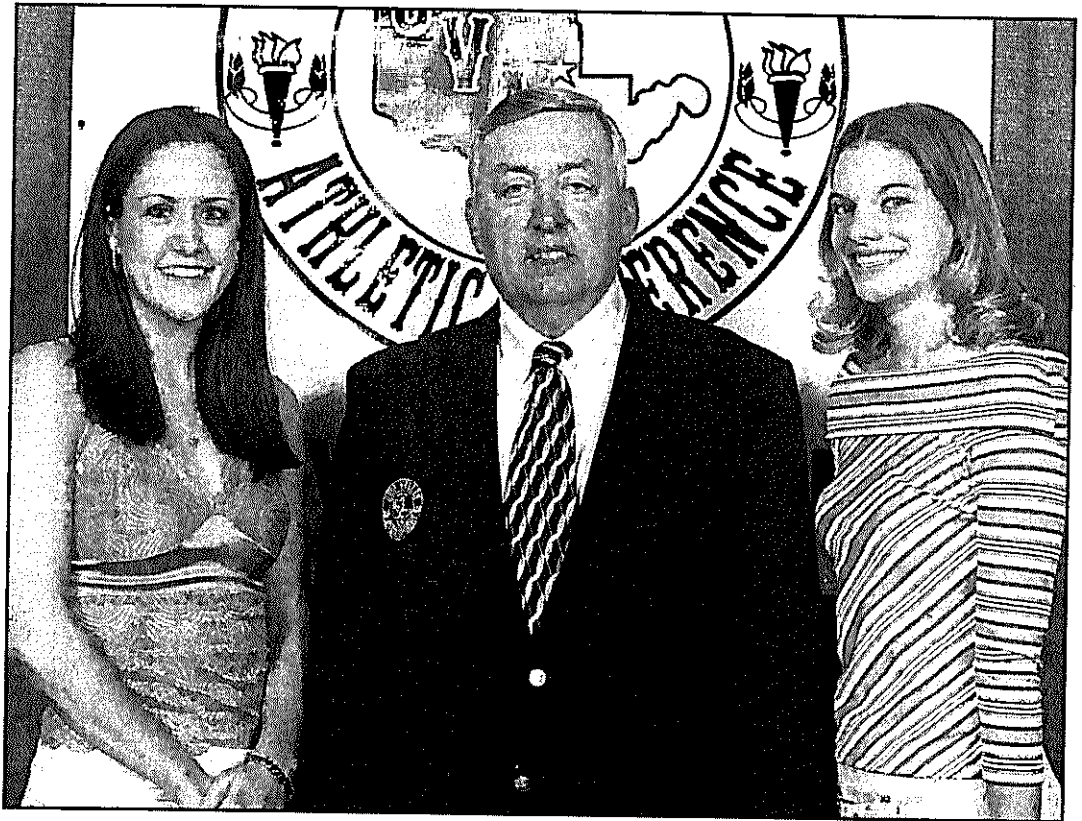


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OVAC Banquet



RECEIVING the OVAC All-Star Basketball Scholarship at the recent OVAC Banquet of Champions are Magnolia's Katie Blatt and St. John Central's Annie Wiater. Presenting the awards is OVAC Executive Board member Tom Bechtel.

Photo courtesy/BRIGGS PHOTOGRAPHY



Highlights from 20th OVAC Banquet of Champions



Jeff Harrison/The Daily Jeffersonian

More than \$26,000 in scholarship money was presented at the 20th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions on Monday at WesBanco Arena in Wheeling. Among the recipients were these four local students (l-r): Jacob Zerkle and Tracy Roe of Shenandoah (OVAC Boosters Scholarships); Stefanie Lapp of Meadowbrook (OVAC Track Scholarship); and Ryan Kafury of Cambridge (OVAC Baseball Scholarship).



Jeff Harrison/The Daily Jeffersonian

Four local teams picked up their banners for winning Ohio Valley Athletic Conference championships during the past year. The coaches of those four are, l to r, Dave Linn of Buckeye Trail (Class 2-A boys' basketball); Jeff Beros of Buckeye Trail (Class 2-A volleyball); Tracy Fox of Cambridge (Division III girls' soccer); and Luke Johnson of Barnesville (Class 2-A wrestling).