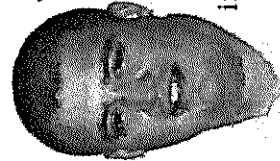


OVAC calendar year coming to an end quickly



SETH STASKEY
Editor of the
Press Box:

The past two weekends have been some of the busiest for the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference.

Championships in tennis, softball, track and field and baseball have all been crowned. That puts the finishing touches

on a year when the conference crowned champions in 13 sports, held all-star games, passed out awards and broke new ground in basketball with the first-ever Wheeling Hospital OVAC

Basketball Championships in February.

Along with the on-field or on-court work, the OVAC is preparing to induct another class into its prestigious hall of fame and the museum continues to grow at WesBanco Arena, so all in all most would say it's been another highly-successful year within the inter-workings of the OVAC.

Along with that, there's still work to do before the conference puts its 64th year officially in the history book.

It's actually hard to believe that the year is coming to an end. Where has the time gone? Seems like just yesterday, everyone was gearing up for the OVAC Golf Championship, which is the first

one of the school year.

Don't think for a minute that Tom Rataiczak and his trusted colleagues with the OVAC are going to kick back and relax because something tells me work for the 2008-09 season are well under way and just think, there are only a little more than two months until the new year kicks off with the annual Rudy Mumley OVAC All-Star Charity Football Classic at Wheeling Island Stadium.

BANQUET OF CHAMPIONS

The annual OVAC Banquet of Champions has become one of the staples of the OVAC calendar. It's a chance to truly honor the teams who have poured out the blood, sweat and tears to earn the right to be called a champion.

The annual event — which is spearheaded by Ron White — is slated for Monday, May 12 at WesBanco Arena, starting at 6:30 p.m. All of the senior members and captains of the respective teams along with their coaches are invited as championship banners are passed out at this time.

Along with the recognizing of the champions, some 35 scholarships, totaling more than \$27,000 in financial rewards will be presented at this time.

The list of scholarships include: Kroger (2), Pepsi-Cola (2), Bodkin Wilson & Kozicki Co. Soccer, Douglas Pilney Memorial Golf, OVAC Softball, Ohio Valley Football Officials, Samuel A. Mumley, WesBanco (2), OVAC

Boosters (8), Scholastic Sports Marketing, Clare Kapral Track, Henry Lazasz Basketball (2), Richard Potts Basketball (2), Stephen E. Hanning Memorial, DeLuca Realy Volleyball, OVAC Cheerleader (2), Wrestling (5), OVAC Baseball and OVAC Basketball Coaches Clinic.

Along with the rewards for the students, the official presentation of the Dave Bierkorette Award, which is presented to the Most Outstanding Wrestler from the giant Ron Matuck OVAC Wrestling Tournament held this past January.

Also, the highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the News-Register Bill Van Horne

See, **OVAC**, Page C2

OVAC Coach of the Year Award, which recognizes coaches from the spring of 2007 along with the fall and winter sports of the current school year. Five finalists will be recognized and then the winner will be announced by retired Wheeling Intelligencer Sports Editor Doug Huff.

The event is open to the public at a cost of \$18 and the deadline to purchase tickets is Wednesday and no tickets will be sold at the door. Anyone wishing to purchase tickets should contact White at 304-277-3599.

CONGRATS TO THE CHAMPS

As always, The Times Leader would like to extend sincere congratulations to all of the OVAC Champions that were crowned this year. Along our journeys from golf courses to football fields to gymnasiums to diamonds, it's been another year we won't soon forget.

A couple of teams that jump out to me from this past school year include: the Bridgeport boys basketball team for one. The Bulldogs of Coach Donnie Cash qualified with the second seed in the OVAC Tournament and went into the event after suffering a pair of regular season losses to Weirton Madonna, the top seed.

However, the Bulldogs were relentless as they chased their first OVAC title since the 1982-83 season. Bridgeport had been through a rough pre-season that a lot of teams might have folded, but the Bulldogs seemed to feed off of the adversity. Senior leaders Chaz Lindsey and Mike Bachie came up big time-and-time again for the Bulldogs. Lindsey was especially big in the title game.

Another team that sticks out is the Barnesville girls' basketball team. The Lady Shamrocks came into the season knowing they had some talent back from the year previous, but they had undergone a coaching change with Jamie Carpenter stepping in just before the season.

And early on in the campaign, it looked as if the Lady Shamrocks were headed for a year of mediocrity. Then came a Megan Kemp buzzer beater against Shadyside, which propelled the Lady Shamrocks into the top four.

All they did from that point was knock off eventual Class A West Virginia state champion Wheeling Central on their home floor and then took down top-seeded and red-hot Martins Ferry at OUE for the title. Throw in a big win over OVAC Class 1-A champion St. John and the Lady Shamrocks went from mediocre to one of the area's premier outfits.

The third team that really sticks out is one, which just won its title this past weekend. The St. John Central girls track team just continues to dominate. While this was expected, it's still worth talking about. The Lady Irish are the consummate track team. Whether it's field, sprints, distance or jumps, the Lady Irish have it all. They scored well over 200 points for the third consecutive year at the OVAC Class 1-A track meet this past weekend and won titles in all but four events en route to the crown.

OVAC YOUTH GRID CAMP

The plans for the second annual OVAC "Tackle Life Head on" Football Camp are

The camp is being put on by the OVAC and the Sports World Ministries program.

The cost of the camp is \$85 if registered by May 19 and after that date the cost is \$100. The camp runs daily from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. and is open to boys and girls from ages 6-13. Space is limited, so registering early is encouraged.

Several former National Football League players - including Michael Cobb (Chicago Bears); Steve Grant (Indianapolis Colts); Devon McDonald (Indianapolis Colts); Lee Rouson (New York Giants); Don McNeal (Miami Dolphins), Ray McElroy (Indianapolis Colts) - are all scheduled to take part. Along with the former pros, Ohio Valley area coaches and athletes will also be taking part.

A new addition to this year's camp is an emphasis to be placed on punting and kicking with Herman "Thunderfoot" Weaver who played 11 years in the NFL and was the 1975 NFC Punter of the Year.

Each camper will receive lunch daily and a camp t-shirt and no special equipment is required.

Other sponsors for the event include: Consol Energy, DeFelice Brothers Pizza, America's Best Value Inn, Bauknecht-Altmeier Funeral Homes, Ohio-West Virginia Excavating and Belmont Savings and Loan.

Registration forms may be found and downloaded at either ovac.org or sports-world.org on the Internet. For more information contact either the OVAC at 671-3269 or Sports World Ministries at 671-3967.

OVAC SOCCER

The annual OVAC All-Star Soccer Match is slated for today at Steubenville's Harding Stadium with several local booters set to take part in the boys' match which begins at 3:30 and the girls encounter which is slated for 6 p.m.

Three area boys players will take part, including St. Clairsville's Seth Wenger and Gordon Washinsky as well as Monroe Central's Josh Billman.

On the girls' side, the Lady Red Devils have three representatives, including Alexis Cain, Sarah Ball and Heather Hochstrasser. St. Clairsville's Joe Kubik is also serving as one of the assistant coaches for Team Ohio.

SETH'S SCOOPS

TODAY is sectional drawing day for baseball and softball tournaments around the Buckeye State. Paths to Columbus for baseball and Akron for softball will be formed and the actual tournament opens around the state Saturday.

FORMER Martins Ferry standout David Frey added another hole-in-one to his resume recently. He pulled out a driver and sank a tee shot on a 340-yard par 4 at Beechwood Hills Golf Course on April 30. The ace was witnessed by John Becca, Eric Coe and Gary Schrickel.

FORMER Bellaire High all-stater Nate Davis shined brightly in the Ball State Spring Game a few weeks ago. He completed 15-of-21 passes for 251 yards and three touchdowns. Davis established several Ball State records last week in his first full season as the starting quarterback for the Cardinals.

Banquet On the Horizon

OVAC's annual event slated for May 12

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Our Opinion

OVAC Champions

THE OHIO Valley Athletic Conference is putting on the ritz tonight.

The nation's largest functioning athletic conference drops the curtain on its 65th year of operation when it stages the annual OVAC Banquet of Champions at Wheeling's WesBanco Arena. Tonight's affair is the Cadillac of prep fetes.

Teams claiming conference titles this past academic year will be recognized, receiving championship pennants to be hung in their respective schools.

Some 62 teams in all will be honored tonight for capturing coveted conference crowns.

Along those athletic lines, five coaches have been singled out as finalists for the prestigious Bill Van Horne/Wheeling News-Register Coach of The Year Award. The winner will be announced as one of tonight's highlights, an award of major significance as the conference boasts some 500 head coaches.

But the OVAC Banquet of

Champions is more than just athletic recognition. Far from it.

More than \$28,000 in scholarships, encompassing some 35 awards, will be handed out tonight.

That is a most noteworthy and generous statement from individuals and companies who believe in the conference. It's a refreshing investment in the future of our student-athletes.

While tonight's banquet plays out seamlessly in a few hours, it is a happening which takes countless amounts of time to put together. That is the thankless task of Ron White, one that he does with great expertise.

Athletes and coaches will gain much of tonight's limelight, but what should not be overlooked is the selfless actions of scholarship donors, OVAC Executive Secretary-Treasurer Tom Rataiczak, the conference's executive board and White. It all adds up to a championship night for a conference filled with champions.