

OVAC Banquet set for tonight

• Scholarships valuing more than \$27K to be presented

By **SETH STASKEY**
Times Leader Sports Editor

After more than nearly eight months of blood, sweat and tears, it's time for the athletes and scholars of the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference to be recognized for their accomplishments.

The 27th annual OVAC Banquet of Champions will be held this evening at WesBanco Arena in downtown Wheeling.

The event will feature the presentation of the 76 championship banners and scholarships valued at more than \$27,000.

One of the longest running and highest paying scholarships is the Douglas Pilney Memorial Golf Scholarship.

The award is named after Buckeye Local and Kent State University product Doug Pilney, who died tragically as a result of an automobile accident.

"When we were meeting with the funeral director (after Doug's passing), he recommended that we start a fund and list it in the obituary," Doug's father, Milan, recalled during a phone interview from his winter home in Florida. "We received so many flowers that we couldn't fit them all in the room, so Bill Wallace, who was at Belmont National Bank at the time encouraged us to get it started."

Milan then approached then OVAC Executive Secretary Sam Mumley about the idea of starting a golf scholarship.

"There was no golf scholarship at the time," Pilney said.

The first Pilney Memorial Scholarship was presented in 1994 and was valued at \$500. On Monday, Meadowbrook High's Matt Miller will receive the Pilney Scholarship, which is now valued at \$2,500.

To raise funds for the scholarship, Milan Pilney held a golf outing at Belmont Hills Country Club. He brought in 36 golf professionals from clubs across the tri-state area and placed them on teams. There was a winner's share for the professionals and the amateur teams.



"We did that for about 10 years and really raised a lot of money," Milan said. "A lot of the pros who came were Doug's friends. Actually, once we stopped holding the event at Belmont Hills, one of Doug's friends, Jeff Willis, moved the tournament to Willandale, which is near Sugarcreek and held the event for three years."

Noble Local Schools Superintendent and OVAC Executive Board Member Dan Doyle, who was principal at Buckeye Local when Doug Pilney attended school, will present the scholarship.

"Tom (Rataiczak) and Dan have done a great job of handling the scholarship for us," Milan said.

A committee of three has been chosen by Milan to help select the winner of the scholarship each year, which is open to only prep golfers. It requires a certain grade point average and also takes into consideration an individual's need.

"Usually, we get anywhere from 15 to 40 applications for the scholarship," Milan said.

Milan indicated that the account for the scholarship will allow it to continue at \$2,500 for many, many years to come.

"There should be enough (in the account) to make it a perpetual thing," Milan said.

The entire list of scholarships to be presented Monday include: Pepsi-Cola (2), Henry Lasasz Basketball (2), Richard Potts Basketball (2), OVAC Softball, Stephen E. Hannig Memorial, DeLuca Realty Volleyball, OVAC Cheerleader (2), Samuel A. Mumley, Wrestling (4), WesBanco, OVAC Baseball, OVAC Boosters (4), OVAC Track (2), Bordas &

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Bordas, OVAC Basketball Coaches Clinic, Clare Kapral Track, Bette & Ray Ponzio (4), Kinetic Networking (2) and Marti Wood Stephen Memorial.

Additionally, several special awards will be presented.

Included is the OVAC Coach of the Year. The finalists, which were announced on Sunday, are Mike Blackburn (Steubenville), Kim Clifford (St. Clairsville), Paul Jackson (South), Dan Liedtke (Fort Frye) and Mike Young (Wheeling Central).

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CONGRATULATIONS

2012 OVAC SCHOLARSHIP

WINNERS



AT LEFT: Harrison Central's Garritt Sproull is presented the Bordas & Bordas Scholarship by Scott Blass at last Monday's OVAC Banquet of Champions.

ABOVE: Harrison Central's Chelsea Brown (right) was one of four to receive the OVAC Boosters Scholarship. She's pictured with presenter Rick DeLuca (center) and Brooke's Alec Salakovich.

AT RIGHT: St. John Central's Lacey Dobrovich received the WesBanco Scholarship during the OVAC Banquet of Champions. She was presented her award by Tanner Russell.



DeLuca Realty honors Craft

STEUBENVILLE -- DeLuca Realty and the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference has announced that Dominique Danielle Craft of Paden City High School has been selected to receive the ninth annual DeLuca Realty/OVAC Volleyball Scholarship Award.

Initiated in 2004 through the contributions of DeLuca Realty located at 560 Canton Road in Wintersville, the Scholarship Award was established to provide one senior student/athlete from a member school of the 50-school Ohio Valley Athletic Conference with financial assistance at the university, college or school of higher education of their choice.

Dominique, a senior at Paden City High School was very active in four sports and as well being a four-year member of the Wildcat cheering squad. In addition she has been active in numerous clubs and activities as well as being selected as an officer of the school's National Honor Society and has served as a class officer and student council officer. She was a four-year letter-winner in volleyball, softball and basketball and participated in track for two years. She is the daughter of Ken and Bev Craft of Paden City. Dominique is the school's first recipient of the OVAC/DeLuca Realty Volleyball Scholarship.

"Every year, it is so gratifying to know that so many of our young people right here in the Ohio Valley possess such a great work ethic and that their success in school and beyond shows the results of that hard work and enthusiasm," Rick DeLuca, broker/owner of DeLuca Realty said.

"Just knowing that Dominique has been the kind of individual that works long and hard with hopes of improving herself and becoming a vital part of the community just shows that she possesses not only a strong mind, but a huge heart to go with it. It is indeed an honor to present this year's award to such a fine student-athlete," DeLuca added.

This award, as well as, numerous other OVAC Scholarship awards are presented annually at the OVAC Banquet of Champions at the WesBanco Arena in Wheeling.

Our Opinion

Saluting Champions

THE OHIO Valley Athletic Conference is honoring its best tonight.

The nation's largest functioning athletic conference drops the curtain on its 69th 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 displayed in their respective schools. More than 60 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 final five includes wrestling coaches Paul Jackson (Parkersburg South) and Mike Blackburn (Steubenville), basketball coaches Kim Clifford (St. Clairsville) and Dan Liedtke (Fort Frye) as well as Wheeling Central football coach Mike Young.

The winner will be announced as one of tonight's highlights, an award of major significance as the confer-

ence boasts more than 600 head coaches.

But the OVAC Banquet of Champions is more than just athletic recognition. Far from it.

More than \$30,000 in scholarships, encompassing some three dozen 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 well stocked with champions.