

Ron Higgins becomes FWAA's 65th president

Ron Higgins of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* became the FWAA's 65th president during the association's annual meeting on Jan. 7, 2008, in New Orleans.

He is the second straight FWAA president from Tennessee, succeeding Mike Griffith of the *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

Higgins, 51, actually will be the latest in a long line of distinguished sports writers from the state of Tennessee who have served as FWAA president. The others are Griffith; Raymond Johnson (*Nashville Tennessean* in 1948), Tom Siler (*Knoxville News Sentinel* in 1954), Fred Russell (*Nashville Banner* in 1965) and Edgar Allen (*Nashville Banner* in 1978). But Ron is the first FWAA presi-

dent from *The Commercial Appeal*.

Higgins got a jump start on his presidency when he attended a board meeting of NCAA Football this past December in New York City. And his first column appears on Page 2 of this *Fifth Down*, where the new officers and board are also listed.

The son of a former LSU sports information director Ace Higgins, Higgins got his start as a sports writer at age 8 when he wrote stories for the hometown *Baton Rouge Advocate*. Ron played basketball at Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas, as a freshman. After averaging 20 points and 12 rebounds as a power forward-center, Higgins suffered a knee injury and transferred back to his home state.

(Continued on page 8)

FWAA board approves dues increase

The FWAA Board, citing increased benefits for membership in recent years, voted to move the dues to \$50.00 annually at its meeting on Jan. 5 in New Orleans. With benefits provided by Marriott, Hertz, Rivals and complimentary Phil Steele Magazines, not to mention the FWAA Directory, membership can amount to several hundred dollars savings in any one year.

The dues' increase will go into effect

for the 2008 season. A letter will accompany the renewal notices, which will go out in the spring.

The Board also voted to provide lapel pins for all members in lieu of stand alone membership cards. But each FWAA member will have a certificate of membership, which will be the same as a card, included in the 2008-09 FWAA Directory.



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Inside this issue:

President's column	2
Freshman All-America team announced	3
Georgia SID Claude Felton honored with Bert McGrane Award	4
Kansas' Mark Mangino named FWAA Coach of the Year	5
LSU wins Grantland Rice Trophy as FWAA national champion	6
Nate Kerkhoff named Volney Meece Scholarship winner.	6
Navy's Zerbin Singleton wins FWAA Courage Award	7

President's column

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Memphis Commercial Appeal

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Raleigh News & Observer

Carter Strickland
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Lenn Robbins
New York Post

Tom Kensler
Denver Post

Phil Steele
Phil Steele Magazine

Maureen Fulton
Toledo Blade

Joseph Duarte
Houston Chronicle

Malcolm Moran
Knight Foundation

Antonya English
St. Petersburg Times

Paul Strelow
The State (S.C.)

Kyle Hightower
Orlando Sentinel

Bob Asmussen
Champaign News-Gazette

Ex-Officio
Charles Bloom
Southeastern Conference
Joe Hornstein
University of Central Florida
Mike Finn
Atlantic Coast Conference



RON
HIGGINS

It is an honor and a privilege serving as your president for the next year.

But I plan to do more than shake hands at public functions. I want to shake up the way our profession is being treated by the coaching establishment.

That's why in the next 12 months, starting with a meeting I had with the NCAA Football Committee in December, I made it crystal clear that things have to change.

The committee seemed to be stunned by our increased lack of access to players and coaches. They were surprised to hear how media guides have morphed into recruiting guides. In some of these guides, there may be 10 pages on a weight room and more than 100 pictures of a head coach, but year-by-year results have been omitted.

I'm tired of being told "You can't." You can't talk to assistant coaches, you can't talk to freshmen, you can't watch the scrimmage, and you can't watch practice (unless you're part of an ESPN all-access crew that coaches love for recruiting exposure).

And because we have been told "you can't," the level of frustration between reporters and coaches is at an all-time high.

The post-game situation with Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy this past football season is just an example of what could happen on every campus. When I related that to the NCAA Football Committee, it certainly became very concerned.

Both Grant Teaff of the American Football Coaches Association and Wright Waters of the Sun Belt Conference approached me about their concerns after the meeting. And the National

Football Foundation's CEO, Steve Hatchell, and others are arranging a College Football Forum in May in Dallas where discussion can continue.

Also, the roundtable at the BCS National Championship Game in New Orleans, arranged by Charles Bloom of the Southeastern Conference, was another boost to get the ball rolling. Members of the FWAA, writers and sports information directors met for an hour and a half to discuss the current relationship between the media and coaches.

A middle ground must be found. I understand coaches are paranoid about the immediacy of the Internet. But they also must realize that if they want accurate reporting, our eyes must see something, like a scrimmage, and not be merely handed stats on what happened in a scrimmage.

Also, I plan to be at the BCS commissioners' meetings at the end of April in Miami, Fla. It is our belief that conferences need to establish some standard media policies, and all conferences are hiding behind the rationale that media policies are "an institutional decision."

If the NFL and NBA have media policies that work, why can't college football? Why aren't there set interview times during the week? Why aren't all players and coaches available? Why are locker rooms closed after games?

The answer is simple. Coaches now make millions and they don't care about us. If they don't respect the professional advice of their own sports information directors – and some of them don't – then they certainly don't respect how we handle our jobs.

Any coach who says, "I respect you guys (the media) and the job you do" is a flat-out liar.

If one coach says, "I'm closing scrimmages, you can't talk to my assistants and my freshmen are off-limits" and that coach has a winning season, then other coaches think that controlling media must have been a key to maintaining focus.

That's why conferences have to step

(Continued on page 8)

FWAA names seventh annual Freshman All-America Team

NEW ORLEANS, La. – The Football Writers Association of America and AON Insurance announced their seventh annual Freshman All-America Team during the association's annual awards breakfast.

The team features teammates from Arizona State, Florida State and Texas Tech and was chosen from 104 players nominated. The Big East leads all conferences with five players on the squad, while the ACC, Big 12 and Pac-10 each boast four members. Fourteen of the

28 freshman All-America selections are true freshman.

In addition, Boston College coach Jeff Jagodzinski was named the top first-year coach at his school.

The team and coach are selected by a group of writers led by FWAA 2007 president Mike Griffith of the *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Both true freshmen and red-shirt freshmen were considered for the team and so noted.



FWAA Freshman All-America team

OFFENSE		
Pos.	Player, School	Hometown
QB	Sam Bradford, Oklahoma	Oklahoma City
RB	Knowshon Moreno, Georgia	Belford, N.J.
RB	• LeSean McCoy, Pittsburgh	Harrisburg, Pa.
RB	Harvey Unga, BYU	Provo, Utah
WR	Michael Crabtree, Texas Tech	Dallas, Texas
WR	Jeremy Maclin, Missouri	Kirkwood, Mo.
TE	James Casey, Rice	Azle, Texas
OL	• Anthony Castonzo, Boston College	Hawthorn Woods,
OL	• Anthony Davis, Rutgers	Piscataway, N.J.
OL	• Rodney Hudson, Florida State	Mobile, Ala.
OL	• Matt Murphy, UNLV	Lake Forest, Calif.
C	Ryan McMahon, Florida State	Rome, Ga.

DEFENSE		
Pos.	Player, School	Hometown
DL	• Everson Griffen, USC	Avondale, Ariz.
DL	Greg Romeus, Pittsburgh	Coral Springs, Fla.
DL	• Ian Williams, Notre Dame	Altamonte Springs, Fla.
DL	• Colby Whitlock, Texas Tech	Noble, Okla.
LB	• Greg Jones, Michigan State	Cincinnati, Ohio
LB	Scott Lutrus, Connecticut	Brookfield, Conn.
LB	• Rolando McClain, Alabama	Decatur, Ala.
DB	• Eric Berry, Tennessee	Fairburn, Ga.
DB	• Omar Bolden, Arizona State	Ontario, Calif.
DB	Alex Kube, Northern Illinois	Cary, Ill.
DB	Tavious Polo, Florida Atlantic	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
DB	Deunta Williams, North Carolina	Jacksonville, N.C.

SPECIALISTS		
Pos.	Player, School	Hometown
P	Keenyn Crier, Arizona	Spring, Texas
K	Thomas Weber, Arizona State	Downey, Calif.
KR	• Max Suter, Syracuse	Ruffs Dale, Pa.
ATH	• Antonio Brown, Central Michigan	Miami, Fla.
• Indicates true freshman		

FIRST-YEAR COACH OF THE YEAR	
Jeff Jagodzinski	Boston College

Georgia SID Claude Felton named winner of Bert McGrane Award

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Claude Felton, long-time sports information director at the University of Georgia, has been named the 2008 recipient of the Football Writers Association of America's Bert McGrane Award.

The McGrane Award, symbolic of the Association's Hall of Fame, is presented to an FWAA member who has performed great service to the organization or the writing profession. It is named after McGrane, a Des Moines, Iowa, writer who was the executive secretary of the FWAA from the early 1940s until 1973.

"Claude Felton for years has run one of the best press operations in college football and has been of great help to other FWAA members and the media in general," said 2007 FWAA president Mike Griffith. "He has always been responsive to writers' needs and has gone out of his way to help. He is very deserving of this honor."

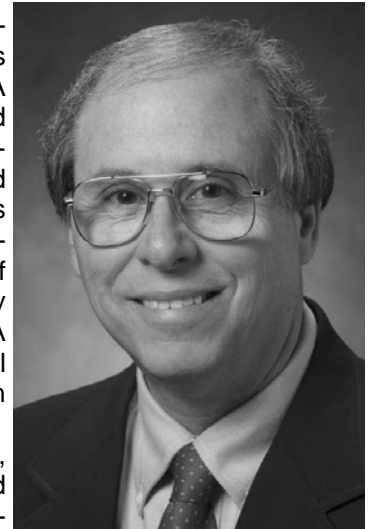
During his career, Felton has served as media coordinator for 17 NCAA championship events and was the host sports information director for the 1977 NCAA Final Four basketball tournament in Atlanta. He served on the press liaison staff for the U.S. Olympic Committee at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and was the press chief for the soccer venue at the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games.

Felton also served as chairman of the Ethics Committee of the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) from 1985-91 and chairman of the CoSIDA

Olympic Liaison Committee (1992-1995). He was inducted into the CoSIDA Hall of Fame in 2001 and is a recipient of the organization's Arch Ward Award in 2004. Felton, who was inducted into the Savannah (Ga.) Athletic Hall of Fame in 2005, is currently a member of the NCAA men's basketball Final Four media coordination committee.

A native of Savannah, Ga., Felton has received two degrees from the University of Georgia. He is married to the former Cathy Turner of Athens, Ga., and they have three children: Robyn, a 2000 graduate of Samford University; Christopher, a 2001 graduate of Georgia; and Patrick, a sophomore at Georgia.

Felton will be honored this summer during the National Football Foundation's Hall of Fame induction weekend July 17-19 in South Bend, Ind., and his name will be placed in the College Football Hall of Fame's rotunda.



Claude Felton

BERT McGRANE AWARD WINNERS

1974	Charley Johnson, <i>Minneapolis Star</i>	1992	Volney Meece, <i>The Daily Oklahoman/FWAA</i>
1975	Wilfrid Smith, <i>Chicago Tribune</i>	1993	Bob Hentzen, <i>Topeka Capital-Journal</i>
1976	Paul Zimmerman, <i>Los Angeles Times</i>	1994	Edgar Allen, <i>Nashville Banner</i>
1977	Dick Cullum, <i>Minneapolis Tribune</i>	1995	Dick Herbert, <i>Raleigh News & Observer/AFCA</i>
1978	Wilbur Evans, <i>Cotton Bowl Athletic Association</i>	1996	Bob Hammel, <i>Bloomington Herald-Times</i>
1979	Tom Siler, <i>Knoxville News-Sentinel</i>	1997	Bill Lumpkin, <i>Birmingham Post-Herald</i>
1980	Maury White, <i>Des Moines Register</i>	1998	Don Bryant, <i>University of Nebraska</i>
1981	Fred Russell, <i>Nashville Banner</i>	1999	Field Scovell, <i>Cotton Bowl Athletic Association</i>
1982	Furman Bisher, <i>Atlanta Journal</i>	2000	Jimmie McDowell, <i>All-American Football Foundation</i>
1983	John Mooney, <i>Salt Lake City Tribune</i>	2001	Edwin Pope, <i>Miami Herald</i>
1984	Si Burick, <i>Dayton News</i>	2002	Orville Henry, <i>Morning News of Northwest Arkansas</i>
1985	Blackie Sherrod, <i>The Dallas Morning News</i>	2003	Dan Foster, <i>Greenville News</i>
1986	Raymond Johnson, <i>Nashville Tennessean</i>	2004	Pat Harmon, <i>Cincinnati Post</i>
1987	Tim Cohane, <i>Look Magazine</i>	2005	Steve Richardson, <i>FWAA/Dallas Morning News</i>
1988	Dave Campbell, <i>Waco Tribune-Herald</i>	2006	John Junker, <i>Fiesta Bowl</i>
1989	Jim Brock, <i>Cotton Bowl Athletic Association</i>	2007	Mark Blaudschun, <i>Boston Globe</i>
1990	Jack Hairston, <i>Gainesville Sun</i>	2008	Claude Felton, <i>University of Georgia</i>
1991	Murray Olderman, <i>Newspaper Enterprise Association</i>		

Mangino is coach of the year

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Kansas coach Mark Mangino was named the winner of the 2007 FWAA/Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year Award in January.

The Eddie Robinson Award is sponsored by the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl and was presented in conjunction with the BCS Championship Game, which was played on Jan. 7 at the Louisiana Superdome. The entire FWAA membership votes on the coach of the year award, which was narrowed to eight finalists in early December.

"I appreciate the award and hope to live up to the high standards of the award for Coach Eddie Robinson," Mangino said. "I will never win as many games as he did. I will run out of time."

Mangino acknowledged the number of games Coach Robinson won but added: "I wonder if people knew what a great person he is. What we want to do is make a difference in young men's lives. And Coach Robinson made a difference."

Kansas finished the 2007 regular season with an 11-1 record, losing only to Missouri, 36-28, in the final game of the regular season. Then, Kansas knocked off Virginia Tech in the FedEx Orange Bowl, 24-21. The Jayhawks won more games (12) than in any season in school history. KU's Orange Bowl appearance was the third bowl berth earned under Mangino in his six seasons at KU.

Mangino, a 1987 graduate of Youngstown State, served as an assistant on the staffs at Kansas State and Oklahoma before arriving in Lawrence. He inherited a KU program that had not gone to a bowl game since the beginning of Big 12 play in 1996. But he took the Jayhawks to the Tangerine Bowl in 2003 during his second season. After winning the Orange Bowl, Mangino's six-year record at KU now stands at 37-36.

"The Fiesta Bowl is proud to continue its partnership with the Football Writers Association of America in hon-



Kansas' Mark Mangino receives the FWAA/Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year Award from 2007 FWAA president Mike Griffith.

oring the career and life of the great Eddie Robinson," Fiesta Bowl Chairman Dick Stemple said. "We are extremely proud to honor Kansas head coach Mark Mangino with the most prestigious coach of the year award in college football."

The FWAA coaching award is named after Robinson, a coaching legend at Grambling State University for 55 years. "Coach Rob" won more Division I games (408) than any other coach. Robinson passed away on April 4, 2007. Robinson coached his entire career at Grambling and produced numerous professional players and coaches as well as players who graduated and distinguished themselves in other professional endeavors.

EDDIE ROBINSON COACH OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS

1957	Woody Hayes, Ohio State	1974	Grant Teaff, Baylor	1991	Don James, Washington
1958	Paul Dietzel, LSU	1975	Woody Hayes, Ohio State	1992	Gene Stallings, Alabama
1959	Ben Schwartzwalder, Syracuse	1976	Johnny Majors, Pittsburgh	1993	Terry Bowden, Auburn
1960	Murray Warmath, Minnesota	1977	Lou Holtz, Arkansas	1994	Rich Brooks, Oregon
1961	Darrell Royal, Texas	1978	Joe Paterno, Penn State	1995	Gary Barnett, Northwestern
1962	John McKay, USC	1979	Earle Bruce, Ohio State	1996	Bruce Snyder, Arizona State
1963	Darrell Royal, Texas	1980	Vince Dooley, Georgia	1997	Mike Price, Washington State
1964	Ara Parseghian, Notre Dame	1981	Danny Ford, Clemson	1998	Phillip Fulmer, Tennessee
1965	Duffy Daugherty, Michigan St.	1982	Joe Paterno, Penn State	1999	Frank Beamer, Virginia Tech
1966	Tom Cahill, Army	1983	Howard Schnellenberger, Miami	2000	Bob Stoops, Oklahoma
1967	John Pont, Indiana	1984	LaVell Edwards, BYU	2001	Ralph Friedgen, Maryland
1968	Woody Hayes, Ohio State	1985	Fisher DeBerry, Air Force	2002	Jim Tressel, Ohio State
1969	Bo Schembechler, Michigan	1986	Joe Paterno, Penn State	2003	Nick Saban, LSU
1970	Alex Agase, Northwestern	1987	Dick MacPherson, Syracuse	2004	Urban Meyer, Utah
1971	Bob Devaney, Nebraska	1988	Lou Holtz, Notre Dame	2005	Charlie Weis, Notre Dame
1972	John McKay, USC	1989	Bill McCartney, Colorado	2006	Greg Schiano, Rutgers
1973	Johnny Majors, Pittsburgh	1990	Bobby Ross, Georgia Tech	2007	Mark Mangino, Kansas

LSU wins Grantland Rice Trophy

Southeastern Conference champion LSU won the 54th annual Grantland Rice Trophy, which is presented by the Football Writers Association of America to the best team in college football.

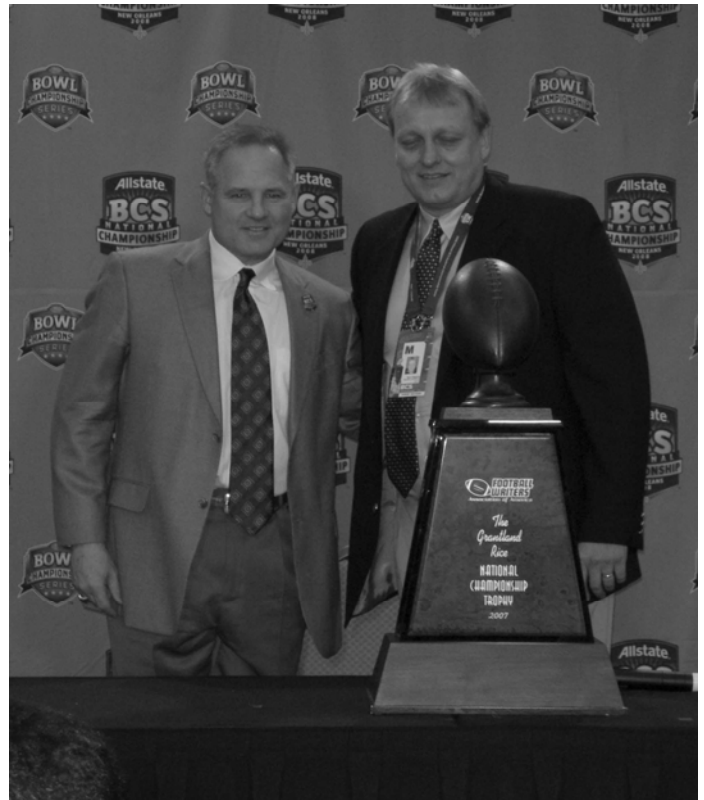
LSU defeated Ohio State, 38-24, in the Bowl Championship Series title game on Jan. 7 at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans. A panel of member writers selected the Tigers as the FWAAs champion after the game.

LSU, which suffered two losses during the regular season, became the second straight SEC team to win the Grantland Rice Trophy. Florida won in 2006. LSU had never been named the FWAAs national champion until this season.

FWAA president Ron Higgins made the presentation of the Grantland Rice Trophy twice to LSU Coach Les Miles. He first handed the trophy off to Miles at a news conference on Jan. 8 in New Orleans. He made a second presentation to Miles on Jan. 19 at Tiger Stadium before a crowd of about 25,000 people when the school held its national championship rally.

The FWAAs will conduct a preseason poll during this summer when the entire FWAAs membership will vote. The poll will be released in late August before the beginning of the 2008 season.

The Grantland Rice Trophy has been presented to college football's national champion each year since 1954. It was the first national championship trophy to be presented after the post-season. The trophy is named after the legendary sports writer Grantland Rice, who passed away before the 1954 season.



2008 FWAAs President Ron Higgins presents the Grantland Rice Trophy to LSU coach Les Miles.

Nate Kerkhoff wins Volney Meece scholarship

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Nate Kerkhoff, a senior at Blue Valley High School in Overland Park, Kan., is the 11th winner of the Volney Meece Scholarship.

The scholarship is awarded annually by the Football Writers Association of America and named for the late Volney Meece. Meece served as the FWAAs executive director for 22 years and was the organization's president in 1971. The scholarship is a \$1,000 annual grant for four years. It is given to a deserving son or daughter of an FWAAs member.

The 18-year-old Kerkhoff is the son of long-time FWAAs member Blair Kerkhoff of the Kansas City Star. Kerkhoff was FWAAs president in 1997.

Nate's impressive academic record at Blue Valley High School includes selection to the National Honor Society with a 3.7 GPA, while being named an Advanced Placement Scholar. An all-state and all-conference selection during a record-setting baseball

career, he was also an all-conference selection in football and helped his team to a state championship. Those successes resulted in his selection to the Eastern Kansas League Scholar-Athlete team in both sports.

In addition to his academic and athletic achievements, Nate has been involved in numerous extracurricular activities at his high school. Some of those achievements include the annual Christmas toy drive, serving as a Tiger Ambassador and doing volunteer work with younger students in the Tiger Mentor program.

"Nate's work ethic is inspirational to those around him, and makes him a great role model for the younger students in our school," said Blue Valley football coach Steve Rampy. "It is a credit to his diligence and perseverance that he has maintained such high academic marks while being involved in so many activities."

Scheduled to graduate in May 2008, Nate plans to attend a university in the Big 12 Conference.

Navy's Zerbin Singleton named winner of FWAA Courage Award

DALLAS — Navy's Zerbin Singleton is the winner of the FedEx Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award.

Singleton, a senior slotback, overcame a troubled background to win an appointment to the Naval Academy, and is on track to reach his ultimate goal of becoming an astronaut. Last month, he was named Brigade Commander for the second semester.

Singleton received the award at the FedEx Orange Bowl on Jan. 3. He also was recognized at the Orange Bowl coaches' luncheon on Jan. 2.

"I am honored and humbled to be selected for this award," Singleton said. "All the credit goes to God and my family."

Singleton didn't know his father until he was a senior in high school; a year later, his father committed suicide. Singleton had been living with cousins in Decatur, Ga., since he was 11, when he left his home in Alaska because his mother went to jail for a parole violation.

Wanting to pursue military aviation and his dream of becoming an astronaut, Singleton was accepted by the Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy, and chose the Navy because of the potential to "land on a carrier, in pitch black, while it's tilting left and right," he told *SI.com*.

But Singleton's dream was deferred when he was hit by a drunk driver one week before he was to graduate from high school (as valedictorian). A broken collarbone meant he couldn't go through Navy's plebe summer, and couldn't enroll. But after a year at Georgia Tech, Singleton transferred to Navy. He has been a two-year starter. He carries a 3.14 GPA in aerospace engineering.

Last month, Singleton received orders to begin training as a Marine pilot after the football season. As Brigade Commander, Singleton will be responsible for guiding and directing the daily activities of the Brigade of Midshipmen and act as the liaison between the Brigade and the senior leadership at the Academy.

Navy lost to Utah, 35-32, in the San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl on Dec. 20. Singleton's senior class finished one victory shy of tying the Class of 1909 for the most wins in school history.

Singleton rushed for 484 yards on 67 carries (a 7.2-yard average), with nine touchdowns. He had 12 catches for 263 yards, averaged 21.3 yards on kickoff returns and had 15 special-teams tackles. In his last four regular-season games, he rushed for more than 100 yards twice and scored eight touchdowns.

"Zerb is a great example of being able to do anything you want through hard work. His work ethic is something that I admire," senior slotback Reggie Campbell said



Zerbin Singleton overcame a troubled background to earn an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy.

earlier this year. "The guy has his phone number posted in the locker room, and anybody on the team can call him at any time if they need anything thing. He will go the extra mile for anybody. He has a big heart and he is a genuine person."

The Courage Award was created by *ESPN The Magazine's* senior writer Gene Wojciechowski, also an FWAA member. A select group of writers from the FWAA vote on the winner each year. The requirements for nomination include displaying courage on or off the field, including overcoming an injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through hardship.

Previous winners of the FWAA's Courage Award are Clemson's Ray Ray McElrathbey (2006), the Tulane football team (2005), Memphis' Haracio Colen (2004), San Jose State's Neil Parry (2003) and Toledo's William Bratton (2002).

President's column (continued)

(Continued from page 2)

in to stop this poison from spreading.

Conferences have to formulate a policy. And if schools don't follow the policy, you fine them, just like the SEC fines for fans rushing football fields and basketball courts in post-game celebrations.

As far as the media guide issue, hopefully CoSIDA will step forward and do something about making the media guide usable again. Leaders from that organization have asked the FWAA for input and a list of "must have" items in every media guide.

SIDs have bowed to the pressure of head coaches, who somehow believe a 17-year-old high school recruit is going to choose a school because of the 20 pages of pictures on facilities.

I've yet to see a kid quoted on signing day saying, "I chose (your school here) because the media guide had a picture in the training room of a treadmill that was underwater and used for rehab. Wow! Where do I sign?"

The 2008 football season will mark my 30th year in the business. With each passing year, particularly in the last 10, schools have made it more difficult for us to do our jobs.

We've got to draw a line in the sand. There has to be

some give by the coaches and sports information directors. SIDs are trying to figure out how to handle the advent of on-line media and the solution of the coaches to shut off access.

I'm tired of it, and my clock as president is ticking.

New president (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

He graduated from LSU in 1979 and began a writing career. Ron has worked for the *Tiger Rag Magazine*, *Shreveport Times*, *Shreveport Journal*, *The Advocate*, *Mobile Register* and *The Commercial Appeal*.

Higgins has spent most of the past 25 years in Memphis, where he has written about everything from college football to the Olympics and the NBA. He has won more than 100 state, regional and national writing awards, including being named the Tennessee Sports Writers Association Writer of the Year five times.

Higgins has been married to his wife, Paige, for 30 years and has raised two sons, Carl, 25, who played football and graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University, and Jack, 13.



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