



October 2008

Vol. 46, No. 4

Explaining the FWAA awards process

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From time to time I get calls and e-mails from FWAA members and also those outside the association about our awards process. So, here is an explanation.

The FWAA's structure was set in motion decades ago and seems to have stood the test of time. No process is perfect, but this one tends to be solid, with good representation and good transparency.

Q: Why does the FWAA not have semifinalists for awards?

A: We do not do position awards (quarterback, running back, defensive back). Those kinds of awards lend themselves better to watch lists as well as a semifinalist list because they are comparing apples with apples. Our two individual player awards, the Nagurski (Best Defensive Player) and Outland (Best Interior Lineman), cover several positions. The five finalists for the Nagurski and three for the Outland also come from our 25-man All-America team. In effect, once each side of the ball is chosen in November in two separate calls separated by a week, those people (the 11 on defense for the Nagurski) and the (five to eight linemen on offense and defense for the Outland) could be considered semifinalists in the end, but cannot be pre-announced say in early November, because we have not voted on the team

Q: The FWAA selects just one team. Why?

A: We have two conference calls. And it is difficult enough to get busy writers to take time out of their schedules to select one team effectively let alone two. That is one reason. The other reason is schools cannot say or imply a player was a first-team FWAA All-America when he, in reality, was second team. If we select just one team, then a player is either an FWAA All-America or he is not. There is no ambiguity.

Q: How is the All-America team chosen?

A: Every FWAA member will get two ballots, one for offense and one for defense in November. They are e-mailed to the FWAA members separately. At that point, each member is encouraged to fill out the ballots for the 11 best defenders by position, the three best special team players (included with the offensive ballot) and the 11 best offensive players. FWAA members are encouraged to e-mail the ballot (s) to the person on the FWAA All-America Committee from their conference or national representative by certain staggered dates. All 11 leagues and the independents have a representative on the committee. The ballots are only one instrument committee members use in casting their votes by position. They observe games, look at statistics, talk to players and coaches and other football support personnel as well as receive information from the schools.

Q: Do SIDS need FWAA mailing lists?

A: The FWAA encourages SIDs to send information to the committee members. Sending big mail outs to all the members may or may not be effective. Choosing the smaller group may be more cost effective. The FWAA encourages SIDs to know the person on the committee who is their representative. In this way, the SID is actually communicating with the person who has the most influence in choosing the team. Casting a big net, may not catch more fish, so to speak.

Q: What happens as the team is selected? When are finalists and the winners chosen for the individual awards?

A: We will announce the five finalists for the Bronko Nagurski in mid November. They will come from the 11-man defensive side of the ball. The committee will then select a winner by secret ballot as the month progresses. The three Outland Trophy finalists are selected about week later and then announced. The winner of

(Continued on page 4)

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First Vice President
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Eugene Register-Guard

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Tim Griffin
ESPN.com

Chip Brown
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Bob Clark
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Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

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Toledo Blade

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Tampa Tribune

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Raleigh News & Observer

Lenn Robbins
New York Post

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Denver Post

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Phil Steele Magazine

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Toledo Blade

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Houston Chronicle

Malcolm Moran
Knight Foundation

Antonya English
St. Petersburg Times

Paul Strelow
The State (S.C.)

Bob Asmussen
Champaign News-Gazette

Ex-Officio
Charles Bloom
Southeastern Conference

Joe Hornstein
University of Central Florida

Mike Finn
Atlantic Coast Conference

President's column



RON
HIGGINS

I don't need to watch a slasher movie or go to a haunted house to get a good scare on Halloween. All I have to do is go to SportsJournalists.com and read about the number of jobs being cut at newspapers. It's a shame that many papers don't care about the quality of work by an experienced writer. They can hire someone considerably younger at much less salary, and in many cases simply use freelancers because they don't have to pay benefits such as health insurance and a retirement plan.

Many older guys like me (anybody 50 or over qualifies as old guy in my book) have had to adapt to how the business has changed, such as using the Internet to break stories and using your print product for mostly features.

Realizing we are now in a business where people want their news as soon as it happens, the responsibility of reporting this news through either Internet stories or blogs is at the heart of some of our problems with access.

One of the reasons professional relationships between coaches and reporters have been reduced to a Cold War status is that coaches don't trust reporters, even during casual conversation.

There is such a competition among reporters to stick anything on blogs to draw Internet hits that there are too many examples of a lack of journalistic judgment.

Reporters should hold their blogs to the same reporting standards they use on their stories. When reporters carelessly throw something out in a blog to see if it sticks, we lose credibility, especially with coaches.

This is one reason why coaches don't trust us, besides the fact they are

naturally paranoid. This is partially why they've shut down our access next to nothing.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't break stories or pursue the news. All I'm saying is let's do it as professionally as possible, even in blogs, an outlet where it's easy to get lazy and throw anything in there, because we're required to write blogs.

On the other side of the ledger, there are still too many tunnel-vision coaches whose narrow minded thinking just blows me away.

This month's winner of the Nick Saban "I Respect the Media But You Can't Talk To Anyone But Me" Award is Boise State coach Chris Petersen.

Earlier this season when FWAAs first vice-president George Schroeder of the *Eugene Register-Guard* called Boise State's sports information department to set up interviews when Oregon was about to play the Broncos on Sept. 20, he was informed of what might be the most ignorant media policy I've ever heard.

Schroeder was told of a Petersen edict that barred media from the opposing team from interviewing Boise players before games.

If this policy wasn't so pathetic, wasn't so Mayberry, I'd still be laughing.

Neither Boise State nor the Western Athletic Conference was overly apologetic to Schroeder about this Neanderthal line of thinking, not caring to budge an inch on the policy.

That's fine, because you if you don't give, you don't get. Boise State and the WAC shouldn't expect many favors from writers with that kind of attitude.

We all need to be vigilant in our fight for access. If you've got a problem, let someone know. Don't be quiet. We've been quiet for too long.

Meanwhile, with the season coming down the stretch, keep an eye out for Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year candidates, as well as Bronko Nagurski and Outland Trophy nominees. Awards season will be here soon.

FWAA News and Notes

Personnel Moves

Tony Barnhart, who has worked full-time at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* for nearly a quarter of a century, took a buyout and left his full-time position with the AJC at the end of September. He will continue to write his very popular AJC blog, Mr. College Football, as well as freelance for other entities, including CBS. "A number of you have written very kind notes about the upcoming change in my working relationship with the AJC," wrote Barnhart in his blog in September. "That change will still take place in late September. But I want you to know that we've come to an agreement to continue the Mr. College Football blog through the 2008 season. That's a tribute to you. Together we have built this blog into something that is really fun and (hopefully) very readable. I'm excited about this new development and appreciative for the opportunity to continue Mr. CFB for one more season. Thanks again for all your support."

ESPN.com has beefed up its blogging staff with the recent hires of several writers from major papers: **Tim Griffin**, FWAA's 2008 second vice-president, has moved from the *San Antonio Express-News*; **Ted Miller** (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*) has relocated to Scottsdale, Ariz., and joined ESPN; **Heather Dinich** (*Baltimore Sun*) and **Graham Watson** (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) have moved from those papers to the Disney giant.

Wendell Barnhouse, long-time writer for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, has left the paper and is now a freelancer. One of his gigs is blogging and television for the Big 12 Conference. ... **Chip Brown**, who had covered Texas for *The Dallas Morning News* for several years, is now working for Yahoo!/Rivals, but still living in Austin, reporting on the Longhorns and also doing radio and television. ... FWAA member **Brian Davis**, a former college writer for *The Dallas Morning News*, is now covering the Dallas Cowboys. Former FWAA member **Chip Scoggins**, who works for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, has moved from the University of Minnesota beat to the Vikings. ... **Tom Dienhart** has switched jobs, moving from *The Sporting News*, to Yahoo!/Rivals. But Dienhart still lives in the St. Louis area. ... **Robyn Norwood** has left the *Los Angeles Times* and is freelancer based in the same area. ... **Howard Richman** has left the *Kansas City Star* and has left the field. Ditto for **Randy Holtz** (formerly of the *Rocky Mountain News*), who is still in the Denver area. ... **Leigh Torbin** has left Connecticut for Central Florida. ... **John Sudsbury** has left his SID role as California and is the new media director at the Allstate Sugar Bowl. ... SID **Brian Fremund** has left Western Kentucky for similar job at South Alabama. ... **Gregg Ellis** has taken a new SID job at Mississippi State. ... **Jeff Miller** (formerly of *The Dallas Morning News*) is now a Dallas-based freelancer. ... **Jim**

Merriott has moved from the state of Kansas to the state of Texas.

Retiring: **Rod Commons** (Washington State), **John Pruett** (*Huntsville Times*, Ala.), **Earl Gault** (*The Herald*, S.C) and **Dave Campbell** (*Waco Tribune Herald*),

FWAA Award Winners

Claude Felton received the Bert McGrane Award during the National Football Foundation's Enshrinement Banquet on July 19 in South Bend, Ind. Immediate past FWAA president **Mike Griffith** made the presentation to the University of Georgia sports information director, who is a long-time FWAA member and one of the tops in his profession. Felton's name is added to the Bert McGrane plaque (listing all the winners since the award's inception in 1974) in the rotunda of the College Football Hall of Fame. In the press box display at the College Football Hall of Fame, Felton's bio and picture have been featured. The Bert McGrane Award's annual winner, announced in early January at the FWAA's Awards Breakfast, will be featured in the Press Box display annually.

Three more FWAA members have joined the 50-plus club of membership: **Bill Brill**, **Ted Nance**, **Brad Pye**. In order to qualify for the award, a person must have been an FWAA member for 50 years. They will all three receive 50-year pins.

Illinois linebacker **J Leman**, who was a 2007 FWAA All-American, was recognized as one of the Big Ten Conference's 22 Outstanding Sportsmanship Award winners for the 2007-08 academic year. ... FWAA member **Rick Gosselin** of *The Dallas Morning News* has claimed the Fred Russell Award as presented by the American Football Foundation. The late Russell, a former FWAA president (1965) and Bert McGrane Award winner (1981), was one of the giants of the profession at the *Nashville Banner*. ... **Edwin Pope** of the *Miami Herald*, the 2001 Bert McGrane winner, has been named the inaugural winner of the Vanguard Media Award, which was created by the Orange Bowl Committee to honor a member of the media who has made an impact on the Orange Bowl or the South Florida community. The award has also been re-named in his honor. ... Northern Illinois has renamed its football press box in honor of the late **Bud Nangle**, a former SID and newspaper man, and his wife Joyce. Nangle was an FWAA member from 1959 until his death in 2006 at the age of 87. He is generally credited with greatly helping NIU make the move to major-college football when he worked there.

Mary Garber, an FWAA member since 1965, has been inducted into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association Hall of Fame. Garber, 92, was a pioneer for women in sports writing for the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

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(Continued from page 1)

the Outland Trophy is then selected by secret ballot of the committee. The winner of the Bronko Nagurski will be announced at a banquet on Dec. 7 in Charlotte, N.C. Four days later, the winner of the Outland Trophy will be announced in Orlando.

Q: Why does the FWAA team sometimes look different? Maybe one year there are three wide receivers, for example, and only one running back. Sometimes there may not be a tight end.

A: The committee has the authority to put the best 11 players in the country on the team on one side of the ball. The FWAA believes the team should be able to play on the field. But with the proliferation of spread offenses and one-back sets, some years the team will look different if teams with the top individual players run those kind of offenses or, for instance, it is a particularly poor year for tight ends or running backs.

Q: The Outland Trophy considers interior linemen. Explain which positions are eligible.

A: Tight ends or defensive ends are not eligible. On offense, tackles, guards and centers are considered. On defense, tackles and guards (nose guards) are considered for the award. If a player switches from one position, say from end to tackle on defense or vice-versa during the season, then a determination would have to

be made about his eligibility. If a player played tackle as a junior and then moved to end as a senior, he would not be eligible for the Outland Trophy his senior season. The Outland Trophy is based on only the performance of the current season.

Q: What is the FWAA's position on putting freshmen on the team? Some awards groups shy away from giving awards to freshmen.

A: The FWAA has and will continue to consider and place true freshmen or redshirt freshmen on the All-America team as well as consider them for individual awards. The 2007 FWAA All-America team was one of the youngest in history. Picking a team based on academic class is dangerous because a player might have a great freshman year and then get hurt and never play again. That player should not be penalized.

Q: How important are pre-season Watch Lists?

A: Players play their way on to the FWAA All-America team and ultimate consideration for the FWAA's individual awards. Appearing on a pre-season Watch List has no bearing on the committee's consideration. Those players who are capable will rise to the top. SIDs, if they are in contact with members of the committee, should be able to effectively state the case of a player regardless whether he is on a Watch List.



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