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Steve Spurrier First Year Coach Award & Freshman of the Year Finalists Announced

Gainesville, FL – December 29, 2021 – The Football Writers Association of America (FWAA) is pleased to announce the finalists for the Steve Spurrier First Year Coach Award, which goes to the best coach in his first year at a school, and the FWAA Freshman of the Year Award. Both awards are sponsored and presented by Chris Doering Mortgage, with the winners announced in January.

“I’m excited to honor my former coach (Spurrier) with the naming of the First Year Coach Award,” said Chris Doering, former college and NFL player and current football analyst for SEC Network. “It means a lot to me knowing how passionate he is about this award and what it stands for. In most cases as a first year coach, you’re basically being asked to turn around a program with a largely inherited roster. Coach Spurrier took great pride in each of his first year head coaching opportunities with an innate ability to get those around him to buy into the culture and what they’re being asked to do. I think it speaks to the essence of what a good coach is.”

Steve Spurrier First Year Coach Award finalists:

Shane Beamer, South Carolina

Beamer, the son of first-ballot College Football Hall of Famer Frank Beamer, helped the Gamecocks improve from 2-8 to 6-6 in his first season as a head coach. Beamer had to win games with three different quarterbacks — two apiece — one a former FCS quarterback and another a former graduate assistant coach.

Josh Heupel, Tennessee

Heupel led the Vols to a 7-5 record after taking over a program that went 3-7 the year before and was mired in an NCAA investigation left over from the previous staff. Heupel, a national championship quarterback and Heisman Trophy runner-up as a player at Oklahoma, is vying to become the first two-time winner of the Spurrier Award, having won it at Central Florida in 2018.

Gus Malzahn, UCF

Malzahn led the Knights to an 9-4 season including a Gasparilla Bowl victory over Florida, a three-game improvement from the 6-4 mark they ran up last season despite losing several key players, including QB Dillon Gabriel. Malzahn finished the season coaching with a broken tibia after being injured in a sideline collision, working some games from a sideline platform rather than going up into the coach’s box and just finished off the highest recruiting class in school history.

Previous winners of the First Year Coach of the Year Award:

2002 Tyrone Willingham, Notre Dame
2003 Steve Kragthorpe, Tulsa
2004 Mike Price, UTEP
2005 Steve Spurrier, South Carolina
2006 Chris Petersen, Boise State

2007 Jeff Jagodzinski, Boston College
2008 Paul Johnson, Georgia Tech
2009 Chip Kelly, Oregon
2010 Jimbo Fisher, Florida State
2011 Dana Holgorsen, West Virginia
2012 Urban Meyer, Ohio State
2013 Gus Malzahn, Auburn
2014 Bryan Harsin, Boise State
2015 Tom Herman, Houston
2016 Justin Fuente, Virginia Tech; Clay Helton, USC
2017 Lincoln Riley, Oklahoma
2018 Josh Heupel, UCF
2019 Ryan Day, Ohio State
2020 Karl Dorrell, Colorado

“This award is given to the coach in his first year at his school who comes in and exceeds expectations,” said Steve Spurrier. “All three of these coaches got their programs heading in the right direction and they didn’t make any excuses. They took what was there and started running with it and they all had outstanding seasons.”

Chris Doering Mortgage is also honored to present the Freshman Player of the Year award. Doering said this award is of particular interest to him because compared to his days as a player when you would typically get red-shirted and a chance to acclimate, today’s players are expected to come in and immediately contribute.

Freshman of the Year Award finalists:

TE Brock Bowers, Georgia

The SEC Newcomer of the Year and a second-team All-American, Bowers set Georgia all-time tight end records for receiving yards (791) and touchdowns (11), and he enters the College Football Playoff needing three catches to set the receptions record. Bowers had a career-high 10 catches in the SEC Championship Game and recorded his fourth game with more than 100 yards receiving.

DE Collin Oliver, Oklahoma State

The Big 12 Defensive Freshman of the Year tied for seventh in the nation with 11.5 sacks for an Oklahoma State team that led the Big 12 and finished eighth in the nation in scoring defense. Oliver came through with two sacks in the Cowboys’ win over Oklahoma, and two more in the Big 12 Championship Game against Baylor.

QB CJ Stroud, Ohio State

The Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year currently has the best Ohio State single-season mark for passing efficiency (182.2), completion percentage (70.9) and passing yards per game (351.1). The Buckeyes led the nation in total offense and scoring offense with Stroud under center, and Stroud was a finalist for the Davey O’Brien national quarterback of the year award.

Previous winners of the Freshman of the Year Award:

2018 Trevor Lawrence, QB, Clemson
2019 Kenny Gainwell, RB, Memphis
2020 Will Anderson, LB, Alabama

Doering had the following comments on the finalists:

Chris Doering on Brock Bowers – “The tight end position has been a way for offenses to create a mismatch at the NFL level for 10 plus years. It’s now creeping into the college ranks as well and Brock Bowers is an issue for opposing defenses. He can do it all. He can act as an attached TE with his hand on the ground and has the ability to run block and force teams to cover him with linebackers and safeties. He can split out and run routes like a wide receiver while

overpowering an undersized corner. Brock definitely tasks opposing defensive coordinators with figuring out how to defend him.”

Chris Doering on CJ Stroud – “Playing the quarterback position at Ohio State comes with a lot of pressure and expectations. This year the competition heading into the season was stiff. They were not sure who was going to start, let alone how much success that player would have. Stroud took this offense and the opportunity and ran with it. He served as great leader for the Ohio State Buckeyes despite his youth and inexperience.”

Chris Doering on Collin Oliver – “You talk to defensive coordinators and they’re looking for a game wrecker who can impact the opposing offense’s ability to operate by affecting the quarterback. Oliver is that game wrecker and is a large part of Oklahoma State’s defensive transformation in to one of the top defensive units in the country. The guy was basically unblockable.”

This will be the 21st straight season in which the FWAA has named a Freshman of the Year and the 20th consecutive year for the First Year Coach Award, although the first time with a namesake for the award, Steve Spurrier.

Spurrier along with Doering are planning a February dinner to honor the winners. The site of the dinner in the state of Florida will be announced at a future time.

ABOUT FOOTBALL WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Founded in 1941, the **Football Writers Association of America** consists of journalists, broadcasters, publicists, photographers and key executives in all areas of college football. The FWAA works to govern media access and gameday operations while presenting awards and honors, including an annual All-America team. For more information about the FWAA and its programs and initiatives, contact Executive Director Steve Richardson at 214-870-6516 or tiger@fwaa.com.

ABOUT CHRIS DOERING MORTGAGE

Chris Doering Mortgage, based in Gainesville, FL, was established in April 2007 as a residential lending company providing mortgage products including conventional, FHA, USDA and VA loans. The branch is a division of MortgageAdvisors.com – 3940 NW 16th Blvd., Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32605 – NMLS 70168/1937321. FHA Lender ID 2631500094. For more information, visit www.ChrisDoeringMortgage.com.

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