



All-Star teams: You can't please everyone

By C.J. RISAK

All-Star teams.

Since the beginning of athletic competition, all sorts of different associations have seen fit to select teams of performers they feel are the best in their sport.

Everyone gets to participate — coaches, the media, even the fans (in professional baseball) get to cast ballots for who they think is best.

Barroom brawls have started over such topics as "Baseball's Greatest Hitter." One says Ty Cobb, another claims Ted Williams, and the argument is on. Chairs and punches don't begin to fly until a third party interjects Joe DiMaggio or Babe Ruth. At that point, the discussion is beyond reason.

Fans from every sport love these All-Star teams, because it gives them some satisfaction to know that, even though their team is losing, they have one star player, someone worth watching.

But so few people understand how arbitrarily these teams are selected. Objectivity is never a concern, and, in fact, is an impossibility in the selection process.

The reason is simple: Few of the voters get a chance to see an athlete perform on a regular basis. The voter may

see some of them, but, without seeing every player at least half of the time during the season, no fair appraisal can be made.

THE SAD fact is, few voters even get a chance to see a given player perform. So quite often, ballots are cast on a word-of-mouth basis, the voter basing his decision on what others have told him about an athlete.

The Observer & Eccentric has such teams — All-Area sports squads, the best, as chosen by the coaches throughout the circulation district.

It hasn't been easy, selecting these teams. The O&E sports staff has tried several different methods to choose the team, but none has been overly successful.

First, we tried coaches' meetings. Every coach in the coverage area was invited to attend for his or her sport and help decide who should make the team.

Problem: The coaches rarely (if ever) agreed on who would be on the team. This type of selection process often brought us back to step one — accusations and fists flying, with a few colorful phrases uttered along the way.

The only thing on which the coaches agreed was their opinion of the O&E staff.

Solution: No more meetings. They're just too dangerous.

Two other modes for selecting the team's have been tried. The first, selection of the team by a coaches' panel, at least allowed the staff to eliminate the more volatile coaches from the meeting, providing us with some health insurance.

BESIDES, THERE'S safety in numbers. And three coaches can't throw as many punches as a whole gang of them. Our last method was the best, as far as alienating the staff from coaches' ire. Ballots were sent out to every coach, and he/she was asked to pick his team. We did the tabulating and wrote the story.

But this just wasn't fair to the players. Without discussions to hear what other players have done during the season, the coaches made some bad choices.

They can't really be blamed, since they had little opportunity to see every player in the area play. A good example was in this year's O&E football team.

North Farmington's Rich Nutter had a fine all-around season for the Raiders. He rushed for 817 yards and 10 touchdowns, despite missing the most part of two games with injuries. He also started on defense.

He was honored with a pick on the first team, but not because of these ac-

complishments, but for his punting. Nutter punted well during the year, averaging 31.9 yards a boot.

But at neighboring Farmington Harrison, Mark Alcantara punted for an average of 10 yards more a kick than Nutter did. That wasn't the only injustice; Harrison finished the season with a 7-2 record, yet only one of its players made the first team.

In contrast, Southfield-Lathrup had three players on the first team, despite finishing the year at 3-6.

THE REASON? Simple — Harrison played three teams from the Oakland county circulation area, while Lathrup played six. In other words, only three of Harrison's opposing coaches could be expected to cast a vote for the Hawks, while six saw the Lathrup players.

It's an injustice, certainly. Too often, players honored by other publications or groups receive a slight from the O&E. No one can really be blamed for this, but you can have one guess as to who does get blamed, despite having no vote in the poll.

The O&E sports staff has received all sorts of threats, with irate parents, coaches and fans calling our bosses to tell them how inept we are. One parent last year refused to have his son as a part of the second team in his sport, saying if he wasn't on the first team, he wouldn't be on it at all.

Ridiculous, isn't it? Far too much time is spent on what is supposed to be a learning experience for prep athletes already, let alone worrying about All-Star teams.

Solution: I guess the fairest way would be to have a coaches' committee select names for a ballot, then send it out to all the coaches and have them vote on it. After that, a meeting would be scheduled to discuss our final decisions.

By the time all that was through, we'd be getting out the football selections at the end of basketball season. The only other answer is going back to the coaches' meetings again, at least

for some of the sports (football and basketball), and let coaches' committees decide the rest.

That, to date, is the trend the O&E sports staff is leaning toward. We'll be coming out of the closet to risk life and limb as the coaches pick, through the process of elimination (don't ask what will be eliminated), the All-Area teams. Just remember, fans, parents and coaches: Whatever happens, we're doing our best. But nobody's perfect.

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