

# Awarding the feats of the college season

**EVERYBODY'S GOT** a list, and at this time of year everybody wants to call their list best.

It's the awards season. Oscars are presented for best movies, Grammys for best music, trophies to best athletes. Everyone has their favorites, and everyone wants everyone else to know what they are.

I refuse to be excluded.

The O&E already honors the top high school athletes in various sports with All-Area teams, so I'll exclude prep stars from my list of bests. The athletes mentioned below are all in college, and all are deserving of the award bestowed upon them.

The winter sports seasons are over. Awards presentations are as rampant as a flu epidemic. I don't want to be last and least, so here are my personal award presentations — whatever they're worth.

**BEST ATHLETE:** Might as well start at the top. If this were being applied to a high school athlete, I might very well opt for a three- or four-sport standout.

But college success requires specialization. That translates into the athlete who performed best in his or her specialty. And that makes the selection process fairly simple: my choice is Kara McGrath, a Birmingham native currently swimming for Texas.

At the NCAA championships last weekend, McGrath splashed to a second-place finish in the 200-yard butterfly, was seventh in the 400 individual medley, placed eighth in the 100 fly and swam a leg on the Longhorns second-place 800 free relay.

Texas became the first women's team to win consecutive swim titles. McGrath, whose specialty is the 200 fly, bested everyone but Mary T. Meagher, the Olympic gold medalist in the event.

**BEST FRESHMAN:** Contribution is the key here. Few freshmen get an opportunity to play. Their contribution can be attributed to two factors: talent that's too exemplary to be left sitting on the bench, and necessity, with injury or the team's lack of talent forcing the coach to use them.

Two basketball players come to mind: Erich Hartnett, a Plymouth Salem grad at Orchard Lake St. Mary's, and Scott Blittinger, at Oakland University. Both started for mediocre teams, and Blittinger was named to the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) All-Defensive team.

But I'm going to go with Hartnett because by season's end, he was relied on to be the Eagles' outside scoring threat. He also ignited a couple of OLSM rallies — against Saginaw Valley and Michigan Christian — with rebounding alley-oop dunks. Hartnett finished the season with a better than 10-points-per-game scoring average.

**BEST DRESSER:** Hands down, this award goes to Michigan State basketball reserve Ralph Walker, a Southfield graduate. Walker's unique style of dress in MSU's game against Northwestern has become Spartan legend.

Walker was inserted into the game midway through the first half with his shorts on backwards. Maybe that ruined the Wildcats' concentration — who can tell? — but Walker went on to score 8 points in the half, his best Big Ten output of the season, and helped the Spartans pull away to an easy win.

**COMEBACK PERFORMER:** I'll be a coward on this one and present male and female. For the male, Mike Wantuck, a Bloomfield Hills Andover grad now diving at Ohio State. For the female, Mary Rozman, a Livonia Stevenson alumnae now swimming at Michigan State.

Wantuck transferred to Ohio State, making All-American at Texas as a freshman. It was a difficult switch, and Wantuck was forced to sit out until January, but he still qualified for this weekend's NCAA championships by finishing second on the 3-meter and fourth on the 1-meter board in the Big Ten.

Rozman battled back after suffering a knee injury as a freshman to win the 50-yard freestyle title at the Big Ten championships. She was the Spartans only conference champ and the team's only NCAA qualifier.

**BEST CAREER:** Of the current crop of seniors, I can think of none as qualified for this award as Brenda McLean, basketball star at Oakland University.

McLean's success was not limited to the court, although she certainly excelled there with four straight years as an All-GLIAC selection. What impressed me was McLean's recognition of what a student-athlete is, and her taking advantage of it. She made the most of her scholarship and was also named to the GLIAC All-Academic basketball team.

**WORST LUCK:** If this were a team award, I could think of about a dozen candidates. For an individual, I think Manny Murus, a Redford Temple Christian grad currently playing soccer for Schoolcraft College, is deserving.

No one wanted to contribute more, so one was being counted on more. But Murus injured a knee early in the season. He tried several comebacks, but the mobility that made him such a threat a year before was lacking. He was limited to 3 goals and his Schoolcraft career ended with his never returning to top form.

**BEST FUTURE:** Again, a lot of names could be submitted, but the two I narrowed it down to are Michigan football star Brad Cochran and Minnesota basketball standout John Shasky, both from Birmingham Brother Rice.

I eliminated several candidates for a simple

reason: money. My choice was based on who I thought had the best chance to make a lot of money in his or her sport. Both Cochran and Shasky have reasonable shots at playing in the pros.

I'll select Shasky, who stands 7-foot and was among the Big Ten leaders in scoring and rebounding. The reason I'm picking Shasky, though, is pro basketball pays better than pro football.

**MOST CLASS:** Carlos Briggs is the choice. Briggs also deserves notice as Best Transfer. He went from Schoolcraft, where he led the NJCAA in scoring in 1983-84, to Baylor, where he was the team's top scorer with better than 20 points a game.



C.J. Risak

Briggs deserves the Most Class award for what he said after Baylor coach Jim Haller was dunned for giving a player money to make a car payment. The player who turned in Haller — the same one who received the money for the car payment — was threatened by unknown sources afterward.

The Baylor players all signed a petition supporting both the firing of Haller and the player who turned him in. All the players except Briggs, who said his coach had been through enough. He lost his job, what more do you want, Briggs said.

**BEST COACH:** Nothing easy about this. At OU, there's Gary Parsons (men's soccer), Greg Kampe (men's basketball) and Pete Howard (men's swimming); at Michigan Christian, there's Garth Pleasant (men's basketball); at Orchard Lake St. Mary's, there's Tim Domke (men's basketball); at Schoolcraft, there's Van Dimlition (men's soccer) and Ed Kavanagh (women's basketball).

At Schoolcraft, there's also Ed Dudek, this year's pick. Dudek took a women's soccer team in its first varsity season to the NJCAA finals.

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## In like Flint?

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Declining enrollment, the lack seventh and eighth grade programs and low coaching salaries have contributed to the demise of basketball in this area.

**FRID THOMANN**, who directed the last public school league team from Oberverland (Salem) into the state semifinals, found the situation intolerable and resigned his position as boys basketball coach last year.

Thomann, like many area coaches, grew tired of battling the obstacles.

Until school district superintendents own up to these problems, you'll continue to see regional basketball scores in the paper like this: Detroit Mackenzie 78, Livonia Stevenson 43.

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