

CIAA SPECIAL REPORT

The Best Of The Best In The CIAA

Picking a coach and player of the year from a league like the CIAA that's so blessed with talent and personalities is a tough thing to do. That's a given.

But we at Black College Sports Review are going to endeavor to do it anyway. At the end of the tournament, the CIAA's men's and women's coaches will select a coach and player of the year for women and men. But to be honest with you - here's a little behind the scene insight - many coaches have felt these votes were very political.

BCSR interviewed many of the conference's coaches to try to determine who had the best years and why.

In choosing coaches of the year, we looked at the available talent pool, what the coach had done with it and whether or not the coach was expected to do well. If he or she was nationally ranked and picked to win the league, like say Dave Robbins with Virginia Union's men, then to be chosen as coach of the year, he or she better well have won the league.

If a coach was not supposed to have much, we looked at how they did, and whether they surprised us.

For player of the year, we looked at value to the team. If you took the player away, what would've happened? Obviously we looked at statistics and took in consideration such things as national reputation and big-game performances. It's one thing to average 35 points a game against Podunk High. It's another to put up the big number in the games that matter, say against your conference arch rival.

So, here we go.

Women's Coach Of The Year

There are many candidates. Norfolk State's James Sweat has built a year-in, year-out powerhouse and you've got to be good in a lot of areas to do that. You've got to consistently bring girls in to your program and you've got to be a good coach of the talent you bring in. St. Augustine's Beverly Downing has done much of the same.

They were two of the three primary candidates and names mentioned when talking to coaches.

But the award this year goes to the candidate behind curtain No. 3: Johnson C. Smith's Cynthia Evans-Liebert, BCSR's CIAA Women's Coach of the Year.

Liebert, who won her 100th game on Feb. 6 against Winston-Salem State, completely turned her team around in midseason. Smith began the year by losing seven straight games.

"We were waiting for our team to jell, to come together," Liebert said.

"We had a bunch of new players."

But led by Liebert's infectious enthusiasm and a little 5-2 point guard named Shani Baraka, Smith won 13 of their next 14 games to improve to 13-8 as of Feb. 7. More important, perhaps, the Bulls won eight straight CIAA Southern Division games, including a win over preseason favorite St. Augustine's on the road. And in her past five games, Baraka, daughter of noted African-American poet Amiri Baraka - has averaged 19 points and 10 assists and has posted triple-doubles in three of those games.

Men's Coach Of The Year

There was really little doubt in this category. Who expected N.C. Central



Greg Jackson

to start the season 17-0 and move up to as high as No. 5 in the national rankings? We didn't. The CIAA coaches, who picked Central to finish fourth in their league, didn't.

Greg Jackson, the Eagles coach, was only in his second year. He had a short team of jump shooters. How could they compete?

They have, somehow, done so. Joining together after the death of teammate Stephen Bichette due to an asthma attack in preseason, Central and Jackson have put together a season that has Eagles fans again dreaming on a national title. Central won it all in '89. So, for all of that, Greg Jackson is BCSR's CIAA Coach of the Year.

Women's Player Of The Year

Carolyn Brown, who was featured in last month's BCSR, is really without peer in the CIAA. She's led St. Augustine's to a 17-3 record and despite missing a few games with a knee strain, Brown is still among the nation's leading scorers and is easily



Carolyn Brown

No. 1 in her league at 28.9 points, nearly 10 points ahead of her closest competitor, Norfolk's Hicynthia Spells. Brown also leads the league in steals (7.0), shoots 47% from the field and is second in three-point field goals and is second in three-point field goal percentage (40%). Oh, and she's No. 1 at the line, making a league-leading 81% of her free throws.

Is there any doubt? Didn't think so.

Men's Player Of The Year

Among coaches interviewed this category sparked the most debate. But remember we're choosing the most valuable player to his team, not necessarily the best player in the league. And based on that, the award goes to Johnson C. Smith's inimitable shooting guard Chris "Green Light" Parker.

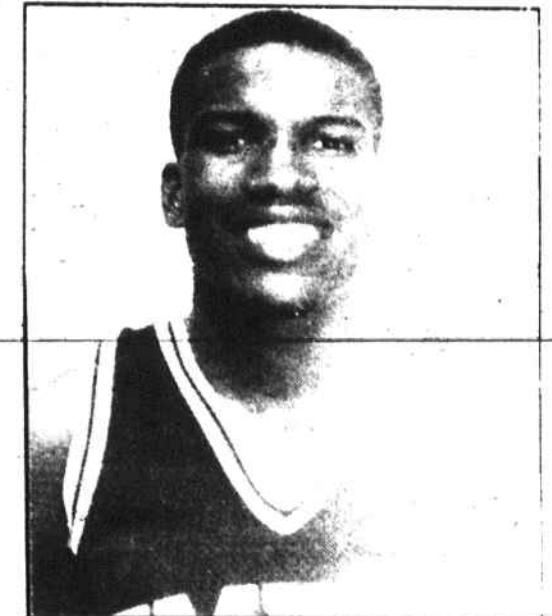
Parker is a two-time Division II All-America who averaged 23.3 points (No. 2 in the league), five assists, five rebounds and five steals per game. He is among his team's top 3 in every statistical category. And he's at his best in the big games.

"I'll always remember him as a

guy who never quit," said Smith coach Steve Joyner.

And Joyner has used Parker to help build Smith into an annual 20-game winner.

This season, Smith was most dependent on its Green Light. When the Lights went out - usually due to double - or triple - team defenses used on a 6-1 guard - Smith (16-5) just lost. The Bulls were a young team. The



Chris Parker

only starter other than Parker who returned this season was Ron Boyd, a point guard who averaged about 1 point last season. Boyd, in fact, no longer starts. The rest of the Bulls were wide-eyed freshmen and sophomores who needed, desperately needed, a leader. Parker was that leader. And without him, Smith wouldn't be a favorite to win the CIAA title or be thinking about an NCAA bid.

"Without Parker," Joyner said, "We'd be in trouble."

Without Parker, Smith might be less than .500. So based on that, he is BCSR's player of the year.

— Langston Wertz, Jr.



Cynthia Evans-Liebert

"We were waiting for our team to jell...to come together. We had a bunch of new players."

— Coach Liebert