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F R O M T H E

Sidelines

The Official Publication of the New York State High School Football Coaches Association

INSIDE:

**NYSHSFC
Announces
Award Winners**

**At Long Last,
'Chick' Gets
His Due**

PLUS:



**Baker Wins
Prestigious
12th Man**

ALSO:

**NY State Briefs
President's Message
Extra Point**



Building a Temple

Matt Rhule Leads Owls to New Heights

FROM THE Sidelines

The Official Publication of the New York State High School Football Coaches Association

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NYSHSFC

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Clinic, Sponsors and Combine News



We recently concluded our 16th NYSHSFCA Clinic at Turning Stone with approximately 550 coaches in attendance.

Temple coach Matt Rhule was our keynote speaker and gave the coaches a nice blueprint in how to build a winning football program.

I would like to congratulate all the award winners who received awards at our annual banquet. This is always a special event where we get to honor some of the best players and coaches in the State as well as contributors to the game of football.

I would also like to thank all of the individuals involved who help make this clinic a huge success. Our 2017 NYSHSFCA Clinic will be held February 2nd to February 4th, again at the Turning Stone Resort.

I recently attended the AFCA Convention where many speakers talked about the fact that the game of football is under attack.

The general feeling was that the game has never been safer. Rules changes, equipment improvements, and practice and game rules have made high school football a great option for young people to play.

As coaches we also need to continue to promote the game of football and educate our communities regarding the benefits derived from participating and playing football.

As an Association we will be working with the State Athletic Association to put together a package that all coaches can utilize within their communities to help overcome the negative publicity and further promote the game.

The Coaches Association is also working on sponsoring a 7-on-7 championship tournament where every section (including the City-Catholic League) would be represented.

There will be a large-school and small-school division, with two teams from each section representing each division. You will be receiving information from members of the executive committee within their receptive sections in the near future.

Please remember, the Underclassman Combines are coming soon. The dates and locations are listed below.

Thank you for all you do for New York State Football

Sincerely,
Lyle Dixon
President, NYSHSFCA

2017 NYS Underclassmen Combines

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Director: Nick Fitzgerald (518) 260-1231
nfitzgerald@cairodurham.org

Location: Watervliet HS

When: Sunday, May 15th @ 9:30am

Section 3

Director: Kevin DeParde (315) 254-5592
kdeparde@esmschools.org

Location: East Syracuse Minoa HS

When: Sunday, May 15th @ 9:00am

Section 4

Director: Steve Virkler 607-727-7199
virklers@oacsd.org

Location: Union Endicott HS

When: Sunday, May 15th @ 11:00am

Sections 5 & 6

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dsantini1@rochester.rr.com

Lyle Dixon (585) 330-6125
ldixon@midlakes.org

Location: Fairport HS

When: Sunday, May 1st @ 8:15am

Section 11

Director: Dave Falco (631) 793-5207
dfalco@sachem.edu

Location: Sachem HS North

When: Sunday, May 1st @ 9:00am

Thank You to our Clinic Vendors!



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Students Benefit from 'Fuel Up to Play 60'



American Dairy Association Dairy Council ADADC's Kristina Deecher and NYS High School Football Coaches Association President, Lyle Dixon, urge coaches to get involved in Fuel Up to Play 60 during a three-day clinic in February at Turning Stone Resort in Verona, New York.



Coaches attending February's New York State High School Football Coaches Association Clinic at Turning Stone Resort in Verona, NY, got the lowdown on Fuel Up to Play 60 – an in-school fitness and nutrition program. The Fuel Up to Play 60 program encourages physical activity and healthy eating. During the three-day clinic, which began February 4, 2016, coaches were shown how nutrition education among athletes is essential for maximizing performance. The Fuel Up to Play 60 program is a fun and easy way to make sure athletes are putting their health and wellness at the forefront, fueling their bodies with proper nutrition. In addition to benefitting a school's football team, Fuel Up to Play 60 also benefits the school's student body, as student athletes are role models to other students. It's a win-win for coaches to get involved in Fuel Up to Play 60 and encourage their athletes to participate, too.

American Dairy Association and Dairy Council (ADADC) sponsored the Awards Banquet, on February 5, which honored players and coaches for distinguishing themselves as serious competitors, academicians, and role models. Guest speaker at the banquet, ADADC CEO Rick Naczi, talked about the Fuel Up to Play 60 program and dairy farmers' partnership with high school athletic programs, including Chocolate Milk as the Official Beverage of New York State Public High School Athletic Association Championships.

Building A Temple

By Mark Adair

Temple Head Coach Matt Rhule was the keynote speaker at the recent NYSHSFCAs Coaches Clinic.

Rhule has completed three seasons as the Owls' Head Coach and has achieved a remarkable turnaround with a program that, for decades, had been an after-thought in Division I-A football.

Rhule had spent six seasons on the Temple campus as one of Al Golden's top assistants before joining the New York Giants as the assistant offensive line coach in 2012. After just one season in the NFL, he returned to Temple as the Owl's head coach.

Rhule had no misgivings about leaving professional football to return to the college ranks.

"I loved coaching at both levels," he said. "Leaving the NFL was just about getting the opportunity to be a head coach. I was very excited about the opportunity and I still am."

Rhule's excitement shows in his coaching style, his quotes with reporters, and his talks with high school coaches.

"I'm a pretty high-energy person on most days," he said. "I love what I do and I go as fast and as hard as I can."

When he was hired as Temple's head coach in December of 2012, Rhule said that his squad would produce an exciting brand of football and that they would improve as the season progressed.

"We started 0-6," Rhule said, "We got off to a rocky start and then finished 2-10. That was as difficult a time as it could be."

However, the following season, the Owls produced

nearly 400 yards of offense per game, the second-best total in school history. During the second half of the season, Temple never trailed at the start of the fourth quarter.

Clearly, the program was improving.

"We were just trying to teach the kids what it took to win," he said, "and they were great about that."

Rhule said that many times when a program has been unsuccessful, learning how to win is the most difficult part of building the program.

"You just have to teach your players to control what you can," he said. "You play hard and do your job. If you just play hard and do your own job, you can play football."

Rhule said that the same formula holds true for all football programs, from the Middle School level up to the NFL.

"That's really all football is," he said. "Play hard and do your job. Just do that and you have a chance to be a good player and, more importantly, be a good team."

That 2014 season, Temple began to break through. The Owls allowed only 23 points in

4th quarters all season and finished with a record of 6-6.

In June of 2015, Rhule was rewarded with a contract that will keep him at Temple until the 2021 season.

Temple Athletic Director Dr. Patrick Kraft said at the time, "Matt Rhule is one of the best young coaches in college football and we are excited that he will be at the helm of Temple Football through at least 2021."

Kraft's praise was not misplaced and Rhule's efforts began to show results on the field.



Photo by Temple University

Matt Rhule led Temple to a 10-4 record in 2015. It was Temple's first 10-win season since 1979. The Owls won the American Athletic Conference East Division championship.

See Clawson on page 9

Rhule

continued from page 8

Last fall, Temple took major strides forward as the Owls finished 10-4 and won the American Athletic Conference East Division championship. It was the first 10-win season for Temple since 1979.

For the first time in 73 years, the Owls beat Penn State.

"That was a big moment for those kids," Rhule said. "Our kids knew how significant of a thing that was. But we had to move on quickly because we had Cincinnati the next week. You have to stay in the present and focus on what's next."

Temple had the best start in program history as the Owls won their first seven games. Temple was also ranked in the Top 25 for the first time in 36 seasons.

"It was all very nice," Rhule said, "but during the season, you really don't have time to think about all that stuff. You always have to focus on what's next."

Ten of his players earned all-conference honors and senior linebacker Tyler Matakevich won the Bednarik and Nagurski Awards, while also being named a finalist for the Lott IMPACT and Senior CLASS Awards.

Unfortunately, the season ended on a sour note as the Owls lost to Toledo 32-17 in the Boca Raton Bowl.

"We didn't take them as seriously as we should have," Rhule said during his talk to the NYS coaches. "We had won 10 games and our players thought we were pretty good. But Toledo is a very good football program and you can't beat them by just showing up."

In speaking with NYS coaches, Rhule was reacquainting himself with football in the Empire State. He spent his childhood in New York City and played two seasons of high school football at Fieldston in the Bronx. Before his junior season, his family moved to State College, Pa. and he played two seasons at State College High School.

He then "stayed home" and played four seasons at Penn State under the legendary Joe Paterno.

"I wasn't highly recruited," Rhule said. "I walked on at Penn State and it was a great opportunity."

Rhule was a three-time Penn State Scholar-Athlete

and an Academic All-Big Ten honoree in 1997.

Rhule was saddened by the scandal that exploded at Penn State in 2011. The Jerry Sandusky scandal would lead to Paterno being fired and dying shortly afterwards.

"The saddest thing was when Coach Paterno passed

away," Rhule said. "It was sad the way his career ended but his legacy lives in the players that he coached and the way they live their lives."

Following the end of his playing career, Rhule was hired as the linebackers coach for Albright College.

From 1999 to 2000, Rhule served as an assistant coach at Mid-American Conference member Buffalo, directing the Bulls defensive line in 2000 and working as assistant defensive line coach in 1999.

"At first I was a grad assistant under Craig Cirbus," Rhule said. "Then I was hired full-time. I got my Master's Degree at SUNY Buffalo and I loved working for Coach Cirbus."

In 2000, the team's sack total increased from 12 to 27 utilizing a 3-4 alignment. Buffalo also earned its first two Division I-A victories that season.

Rhule also had stops at UCLA and Western Carolina before being hired at Temple as a defensive line coach in



Photo by Temple University

Matt Rhule led Temple to the Owls first win over Penn State in 73 years.

2006. Rhule would switch to quarterbacks coach in 2007 before being named Temple's offensive coordinator in 2008.

In 2011, the Owls went 9-4 and played in the fourth bowl game in school history, the Gildan New Mexico Bowl, where they crushed Wyoming, 37-15. It was Temple's first postseason victory since the 1979 Garden State Bowl.

Rhule says that he knew from a very young age that he wanted to be a football coach.

"I knew my whole life that I wanted to be a coach," he said. "My dad was a high school coach. My uncle was a coach. That was all I ever wanted to do was coach football."

Rhule and his wife Julie have a son, Bryant (11), and two daughters, Vivienne (3) and Leona (newborn).

Players of the Year



Class AA

Jake Zembiec - Aquinas (5)

Class A

Tyree Brown - South Park (6)

Class A

Jack Coan - Sayville (11)

Class B

Jake Shaffner - Cazenovia (3)

Class C

Tony Silvanic - Chenango Folks HS (4)

Class D

Jesse Manuel - Tioga (4)



Coan



Shaffner



Silvanic



Manuel

Coaches of the Year

Class AA

Chris Battaglia - Aquinas (5)

Class A

Tim Delaney - South Park (6)

Class B

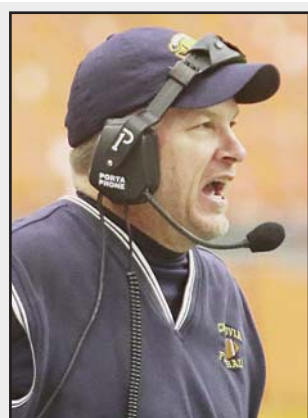
Jay Steinhorst - Cazenovia (3)

Class C

Dave Hogan - Chenango Folks HS (4)

Class D

Nick Aiello - Tioga (4)



Battaglia



Hogan



Aiello

2015 Scholar Athletes

Class AA
Chris Bacotti
Massapequa (8)



Wyatt Mosher - Bainbridge-Guilford

Michael Rothberg - MacArthur

Addison Pitcher - Batavia

Brad Baldinger - Massapequa

Noah Dobbartin - Batavia

Chris Bacotti - Massapequa

Kevin Ladd - Brighton

Justin Patterson - Newark

Austin Pesce - Burke Catholic

Jake Shephard - Niskayuna

Cameron Bellino - Canastota

Frank Castiglione - North Shore

Kevin Frega - Cazenovia

Nick Pizzarelli - Oceanside

Tony Silvanic - Chenango Forks

Andrew Koonz - Rondout Valley

Zackary DeAngelis - Clyde-Savannah

Stephen Lauro - Suffern

Kyle Zingler - Corning Painted Post

Ryan Trudeau - Ticonderoga

Vitor Mourao - Corning Painted Post

Brett Jennings - Valley Central

Brenden O'Flaherty - Cornwall

Donovan Murphy - Valley Central

A.J. Perlino - East Aurora

Kenny Gray - Valley Central

Charles Tomassetti - Farmingdale

Davis Brief - Warwick Valley

Gaetano Famiglietti - Glen Cove

Patrick Vandermark - Webster Thomas

Devon Clark - Gowanda

Brad Bostwick - West Canada

Jordan Caviness - Liverpool

Joseph Brogan - West Genesee

Spencer Matthaei - Locust Valley

Jim Kernan - Westhill

Zachary Lo Cicero - Lynbrook

Will Swartwood - Westhill

Jared Wolfe - MacArthur

Class A
Brenden O'Flaherty
Cornwall (9)



Class B
Kevin Frega
Cazenovia (3)



Class C
Cameron Bellino
Canastota (3)



Class D
Ryan Trudeau
Ticonderoga (7)



Skip Paridon Service Award
Don Santini, LeRoy, Fairport, NYSHSFC

Hunter Low Media Award
Marisa Jacques - Time Warner, Albany



'Chick' Gets His Due

By Mark Adair

Chenango Forks assistant Dave Chickanosky was named the first recipient of the NYS Assistant Coach of the Year Award at the recent NYSHSFCF banquet.

"No matter how much recognition we could give him, we could never give him enough," Forks' head coach Dave Hogan said. "We have been blessed to have him all this time."

To say that Chickanosky is a veteran would be an understatement. He started coaching as an assistant at Walton High School in 1966, 50 years ago.

Two years later, "Chick" joined the staff at Chenango Forks and has been there for the last 48 years.

To put this in perspective, consider that assistant coach Kelsey Greene, graduated from Chenango Forks in 1969, served as head coach for several years, returned as an assistant coach and is now nearing retirement age himself.

"I coached him for one year," Chickanosky said. "We've been together for a long time. I think he started coaching with us in the early 1990s."

Chickanosky also coached against his head coach when Hogan was a QB at nearby Windsor High School.

"My son was also a quarterback," Chickanosky said. "He played against Dave in 1984."

Chickanosky was an assistant coach at Forks from 1968 until 1976 when he decided to step away from the program.

"A football coach could work 12 hours a day if they let us," he said. "With the amount of time we put in, your family is the one that gets cheated."



Photo Submitted

Chenango Forks line coach Dave Chickanosky was named the NYS Assistant Coach of the Year at the recent NYSHSFCF Awards Banquet.

said, "and our community is a nice family atmosphere. It's an enjoyable place to coach."

Along the way, he got to coach his three sons with the Blue Devils.

"Two of my boys were QBs and I was the line coach," he said, "so I didn't coach them directly. Once in a while, I would sneak a peek at them but I had to make sure I did my job."

Chickanosky has been around so long that he is now deep into a batch of second-generation players.

See "Chick" on page 13

With four young kids at home, Chickanosky did not want to miss their youngest years.

"I had four kids in elementary school," he said. "I needed to spend a little more time with them and get them going into some sports and activities. It was just a time that I thought I had to be there."

His three sons all ended up playing football at Chenango Forks. His daughter Leslie was also an athlete.

"She grew up with three brothers," Chickanosky said, "and because of that, she is one tough dude. She did very well for herself."

Chickanosky's hiatus last just 5 seasons.

"As they got a little older it was OK for me to go back," he said. "I went back in 1982 and have been there ever since. I think it's a total of 34 seasons."

Chickanosky taught Biology at Chenango Forks until he retired in 2001 - but he stayed with the football program even after he retired from teaching.

"Our program has been successful," he

Chickanosky

continued from page 12

"With a lot of our kids, I coached their fathers," he said. "I've had a ton of second-generation players but I haven't had a third yet. Probably won't be long, though."

Chickanosky has also helped Chenango Forks fashion an incredible won-lost record over the years.

The Blue Devils record with Chick on staff is 325-92-3.

The 325 wins he has been a part of would rank third in New York State history if he were a head coach.

"That's an incredible record," Hogan said. "He wasn't the head coach but obviously he was a big part of that many wins. Everyone associated with our program knows he has so much to do with every one of those wins."

Chickanosky deflects the praise and says that he is not responsible for the 325 wins.

"I have worked with some really good head coaches," he said.

"People need to understand just how good Kelsey Greene and Dave Hogan are as head coaches. I am blessed with good kids, great community support and great head coaches."

While many old-timers lament the problems with the current generation, Chickanosky says that today's players aren't much different than the players of the 1960s.

"When they are on the football field they are no different," he said. "They are very motivated to play football. You don't have to talk them into playing because they have expectations of doing well. We had tough kids then and we have tough kids now."

Chick says that the difference is society, not the players.

"So many kids have situations that are very different from when I started," he said. "There are so many things that they are exposed to that just weren't there in the 1960s and 70s. I think today's kids have a lot of nice things but they are also missing stuff that could be very good for them."

One thing that hasn't changed over the years is

Chickanosky himself.

"I still get a little exuberant," he said. "But everything I have ever said or did is because I have the players best interest in mind. I loved every kid, then and now."

Chickanosky also coached track and softball during his career. In nearly 50 years of coaching, he has never been

a head coach in any sport.

"I've never had an aspiration to be a head coach," he said. "I was good at being an assistant coach. It doesn't mean anything to me to be in charge. Dave lets me do my job. Kelsey let me do my job and before that Dick Russ let me do my job."

The fact is, Chickanosky likes being an assistant coach.

"It's a great job," he said. "Head coaches have to do a lot more than just coaching. I just

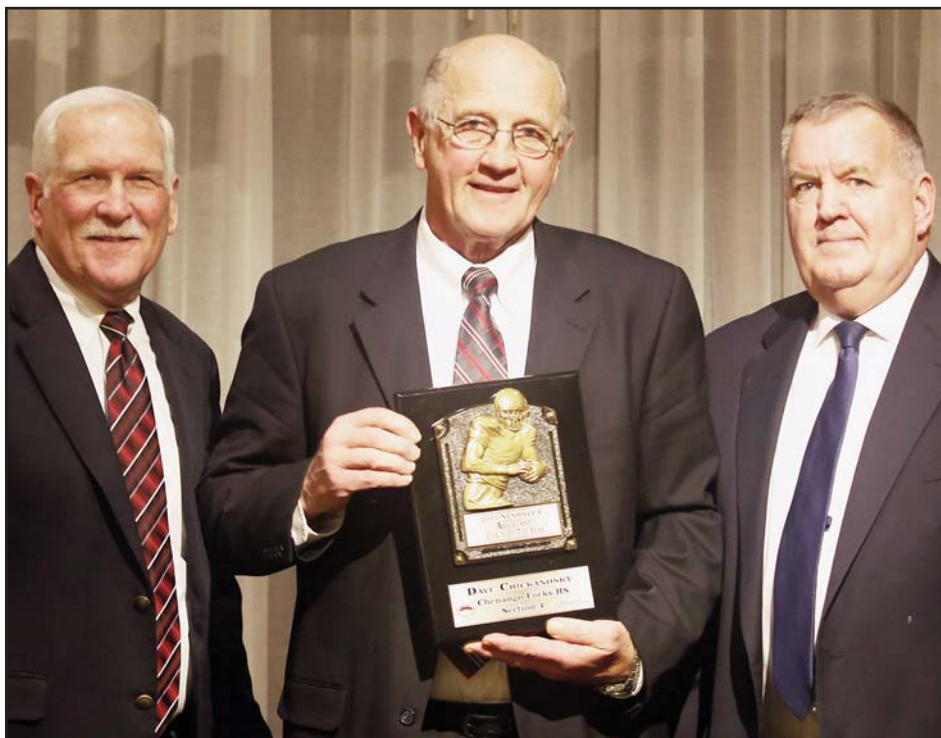


Photo by U

Dave Chickanosky has been on the sidelines for 325 wins at Chenango Forks. If he were a head coach, that figure would be third on the NYS all-time wins list.

wanted to teach."

Hogan says that having a coach with such a positive attitude on staff is a gift.

"It's priceless," Hogan said. "I tell people how lucky we are. I don't take him for granted at all."

Hogan also says that Chick, 71, shows no signs of slowing down.

"What surprises me is the enthusiasm he brings year after year," Hogan said. "He has the energy level of a 35-year-old coach. Every day, he comes ready to coach. He is definitely serving his purpose in life. He loves football as much as anyone. He'll talk with football with anyone who wants to listen to him."

Hogan also says that he will not be shocked if Chickanosky outlasts him on the Forks staff.

"I wouldn't count him out," Hogan said. "I've been coaching for 21 years and I thought he was on his way out when I got hired. He is 71 years young and it wouldn't surprise me if I retired before he does. He is certainly welcome for as long as he wants to coach here."

Baker Wins 12th Man

Watertown IHC Junior Works to get back on the field

Silas Baker, a junior at Watertown Immaculate Heart Central, was named the recipient of the prestigious 12th Man Award at the recent NYSHSFCF banquet.

The award is given to one player who has overcome severe obstacles to continue playing football.

Baker has played football since he was 5 years old and, until his freshman year at IHC, had never suffered any injury of any kind.

But before the start of his sophomore year, on the first day of contact drills, Baker suffered a subluxation of the patella in his right knee.

"Basically, my kneecap slid off," he said. "I didn't need an operation but I had to wear a brace. It wasn't fun."

IHC coach Paul Alteri, a 12-year veteran, was mystified as to how Baker injured his knee.

"It was the first day of contact but he didn't even get hit," Alteri said. "He just stepped over a pad and went down. It was very strange, just a freak accident."

Baker missed the entire season as he underwent three months of rehabilitation. He would also need to wear a brace for the remainder of his sports career.

Doctors cleared Baker to play basketball and the season started well. But, 12 games into the season, he suffered another setback - this one a little more scary than a knee injury.

"We had just finished a full-court drill in practice," Baker said. "My chest suddenly felt heavy and I was having trouble breathing. I tried to walk it off. I sat down and tried to breathe but something wasn't right."

No one quite knew what was happening or just how serious Baker's struggle was.

"The coach told me to call my father," Baker said. "The assistant coach drove me to the hospital and my dad met us there. No one really thought it was anything major."

Doctors discovered that Baker had suffered a primary pneumothorax - a collapsed lung.

"They had to re-inflate my lung," Baker said. "They put a chest tube in and I was in ICU for three days."

Baker had several blebs - small air pockets - in his lung. These blebs can rupture, which causes the lung to deflate.

Alteri was stunned when he heard what had happened.

"I got the call that night," Alteri said. "We were all shocked. The more I heard, I started to realize how dangerous this was. In 12 years, I have never had anything like this happen to any of my players."

Baker would miss the rest of the basketball season, undertaking another 3-month rehab. He was not released for sports until 6 games into the spring baseball season.

Unfortunately, the day he was released to resume sports, his lung collapsed again.

"I was just walking around the school and I felt chest pains," Baker said. "I knew what it was right away. I went to the nurse and called my dad."

A chest x-ray confirmed that his lung had collapsed a second time. This time, doctors determined that he would need surgery.

"They went in and removed a sliver of my lung,"



Photo Submitted

Silas Baker, a junior at Watertown IHC, overcame a knee injury and two collapsed lungs to return to the field.

See Baker on page 15

Baker

continued from page 14

Baker said. "They just took out a small piece that had the blebs on it."

Baker was, obviously, out for the baseball season - the third straight sports season that he would miss.

"Depending on who you are," he said, "the full rehab for this is three to four months, so I was rehabbing into the summer."

Alteri was amazed that one person could suffer so many setbacks in one year.

"My son Vincenzo and Silas are best friends," Alteri said. "Silas has been at my house many times. I was just amazed that this kept happening to him."

Over the summer, Baker was determined to play football once school started again.

"All summer long we were all talking," Alteri said. "His parents, his doctors and the coaches. We all knew he wanted to play but we just didn't know if he could play with the contact."

Eventually, Baker grew tired of being held back.

"He would have nothing to do with it anymore," Alteri said. "He was going to play."

Baker was released to play football the Friday before the season started. He started the season wearing a brace for his injured knee, and a special shield that wrapped around his chest and back to protect his lungs.

Initially, Baker was hesitant.

"In the beginning of the season I wouldn't do any of the tackling drills," he said. "I wanted to be in good shape for the games. After a while I felt more comfortable."

Baker finished the year with 28 catches for 380 yards and 3 TDs. He also worked his way into the line-up on defense and made 21 tackles, broke up 2 tackles and recovered a fumble.

"A couple of times he dove into the pile to make a tackle and I held my breath," Alteri said, "but he always got right back up. He has come all the way back."

Alteri marvels at Baker's perseverance.

"He is persistent," he said. "He was on a mission to play and he just didn't stop working until he was back on the field. He had a great season for us."

Baker, who maintains an academic average in the 90s, had perfect attendance until this past school year.

"But ever since I got back to school, I haven't missed a day," he said. "I'm a little more cautious. It's always in the back of my mind but I try not to focus on it."

Alteri is ecstatic that Baker was named the 12th Man Award winner.

"To me, this award means more than any award given out due to statistics," he said. "This award speaks to a kid's individual resolve and I'll take that award above any others."

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Gene Zinni's Passion



New York State football lost a passionate defender of the sport when Buffalo State offensive line coach Gene Zinni passed away at the age of 79 in early March.

Zinni had spent a total of 18 seasons at Buffalo State. Bengals' coach Jerry Boyes hired Zinni in 1990 after talking with longtime Sweet Home coach Joe Shifflet.

"Joe had retired as the coach of Sweet Home and he put me in touch with Gene," Boyes said. "I brought Gene on board and he stayed with me for 11 years."

Those years were the Bengals glory years.

"The kids in our first recruiting class were seniors in 1990," Boyes said. "They had gone 1-8 every year until they finished 7-2 that year."

The program went on to become a force in the Division III ranks.

"We went 9-2 and got our first ECAC Bowl game in 1991," Boyes said. "After that, we were in the NCAA Playoffs every year until the year 2000. Gene added a level to our offensive line that had an impact on the entire program."

When Boyes stepped away as Buffalo State coach to take the Athletic Directors job, Zinni left the program.

Zinni didn't leave football, however. He took a role as an assistant coach with the Buffalo Gladiators, a local semi-pro outfit.

After the Bengals suffered through three dismal seasons, Paul Shaffner was hired as head coach and Zinni returned to Buffalo State.

"He coached at just about every level," Boyes said. "He coached high school, college and semi-pro. At every level, his players loved the heck out of him and he would do anything for them."

Zinni had a way with players, especially linemen.

"The offensive line is always a very close-knit group of guys," Boyes said. "They have to rely on each other and they do it without any fanfare. They just go about their business and make everyone else succeed."

That was Zinni. He just went about his business and made everyone else look successful.

At first glance, it may not appear that Zinni would cast

such a large shadow over the sport. He appeared to be a rumpled, gentle grandfather.

Underneath, however, Zinni had a passion for football that burned bright. He once tried to postpone heart surgery so he could go to a banquet and recruit a few more players.

"That was Gene," Boyes said. "The game was his life and his passion."

Underneath his passion was a sense of character that was rock solid.

Zinni was an offensive lineman on the 1958 University at Buffalo team that won the Lambert Cup. The Bulls had earned an invitation to play in the Tangerine Bowl in Florida but were told their two black players would not be allowed to play in segregated Florida. Unanimously, the players refused to play in the game.

That team was forgotten over the years, until the 50-year anniversary when the story was re-visited by ESPN and Hollywood.

"Those players were ahead of their time," Boyes said. "To do something like that, in that time period, just proves the character of every one of those team members."

Along the way, Zinni quietly went about his business, coaching football for over 50 years.

He was inducted into the UB Football Hall of Fame in 1995.

Three years ago, a reporter asked him when he was going to retire.

"If I ever retire from football I'll die," Zinni said. "If I can't be in football, I'll have no reason to be here."

Honestly, what would Gene Zinni do without football?

"That's how much the sport meant to him," Boyes said. "He meant it..."

Zinni announced his retirement in December. On January 12th, he was involved in a serious auto accident which left him nearly paralyzed.

"He didn't have any movement in his arms and legs but he had feeling," Boyes said. "They did surgery last week and thought it went well."

But, during his recovery from the surgery, it was discovered that Zinni had Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer.

"One thing about Gene," Boyes said, "He would not want to be a burden on anybody. He just wouldn't want to be that kind of a burden to his family. If he wasn't going to have any quality of life, he would want to move on. He knew it was time."

Zinni entered a hospice facility and died three days later.

"He lived his entire life doing what he loved," Boyes said. "He was coaching the game of life through football. He will be missed."



Gene Zinni.