



Former FWAA president Sittler named 39th winner of Bert McGrane Award

Dave Sittler, a staple of journalism in the Oklahoma and Nebraska areas for more than a half century, has been named the 39th winner of the FWAA's Bert McGrane Award.

The Bert McGrane Award, symbolic of the association's Hall of Fame, is presented to an FWAA member who has performed great service to the organization and/or the writing profession. It is named after McGrane, a Des Moines, Iowa, writer who was the executive secretary of the FWAA from the early 1940s until 1973.

Sittler, the 2001 FWAA president and a member since 1973, first proposed the idea of the Volney Meece Scholarship (named after the FWAA's late executive director) in the mid-1990s. He has been the only selection chairman the award has known. The annual \$1,000.00 grant, awarded since 1997 and renewable for up to four years, is given to a deserving son or daughter of an FWAA member.

Sittler, 66, recently retired from his full-time job as columnist at the *Tulsa World*, but plans to still work part-time for the paper and continue to appear on the Tulsa Sports Animal radio show.

A 1971 University of Nebraska graduate, Sittler has worked for five papers and has covered college football as either a beat writer or columnist in Ne-

braska and Oklahoma from Nebraska coach Bob Devaney to Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops.

Sittler began his career at the *Lincoln-Journal State* in 1971 and moved over to the *Omaha World-Herald* in 1978 and stayed until 1985. From there he went to Tulsa, where he worked for *The Tribune* from 1985 to 1992. Sittler spent seven years at *The Oklahoman* before landing at his final stop, *The Tulsa World*, in 1999.



Dave Sittler

A native of Hebron, Neb., Sittler has won numerous local and national writing awards and has been elected 10 times as the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Oklahoma Sports-writer of the Year. He claimed the Hebron High School Distinguished Alumni Award in 2003 and two years later was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

Sittler and wife Ann, a native of Australia, have two grown children, Geoff and Brian.



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President's column



LENN
ROBBINS

This has been one of the most challenging years in college football history. Some of the elite programs around the country have faced difficult issues. Re-alignment continues to have fans wondering if they should hold off on purchasing their next T-shirt. And the future of how the national champion will be decided remains

a contentious issue.

But the game itself is spectacular. The players are dazzling. The fans are passionate. And the sights, smells and emotions that are there for the senses make college football unique — it is part World Cup, part NFL, part high school football.

It is with that backdrop that I write to say how proud and humbled I am to have been chosen to serve your FWAA president for the next year. My job is simple: I am here to serve you, each of the more than 1,200 members that make up this important organization.

Before I go further I went to thank last year's president Tommy Hicks, who assured me that even a reporter from a city that doesn't have an FBS team, can be president. Past president Dick Weiss, of that other tabloid newspaper, assured me he's ready to lend a hand. And Tony Barnhart, who says I have an accent, has also promised his guidance.

And, of course, where would the FWAA be without Steve 'Tiger' Richardson and, before him, Volney Meece, who I also had the pleasure of working with? Their devotion is without equal.

Although college football remains a wonderful part of the American sports landscape, there are issues we in print, magazine and the Internet are forced to contend with, sometimes on a daily basis. I believe many of these issues can be addressed with better communication, starting with the FWAA.

I am hoping my friends on the board will agree to quarterly conference calls to discuss issues in a more timely fashion. This might enable us to make a positive impact and avoid trying to tackle all the issues once a year.

And I hope coaches, SIDs, conference commissioners and conference media relations personnel will be willing to discuss, both this offseason and at league preseason media events this summer, opportunities to create a healthier atmosphere between the media and coaches. This might help facilitate better access.

The FWAA needs to show it will not be taken lightly, either by the people-service industries to whom we offer millions of dollars in travel and lodging business, and to the colleges and universities whom we provide the most thorough coverage on a day-to-day basis. That is public relations that can't be bought and must continue to be respected.

I also believe it is time to mend fences between print and Internet sites. At the end of the day, responsible reporters, regardless of affiliation, are seeking to provide insightful, accurate information in as timely a fashion as possible.

In closing I'd like to make this pledge and request. I will do my best to honor those that have held this position before me and serve those of you who miss holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and countless other family functions for the job and the love of the game.

I am here for you. You can reach me via cell 917-337-3530 or email Lenrobb@aol.com. I will try my best to respond in a prompt manner. My request is that you reach out. I can't reach out individually to each of you, and for those of you who read my weekly college football picks, I'm clearly not clairvoyant.

Alabama is SEC's sixth straight winner of Grantland Rice Trophy

NEW ORLEANS — Following its 21-0 win over LSU in the Allstate BCS National Championship Game, the Alabama Crimson Tide (12-1) was presented the 2011 Grantland Rice Trophy by the Football Writers Association of America. FWAA president Lenn Robbins of the *New York Post* made the presentation to head coach Nick Saban at a morning news conference.

A panel of veteran FWAA members selected Alabama as the association's national champion after the Crimson Tide held LSU to 92 total yards of offense, committed only one penalty and didn't allow LSU to cross midfield until late in the championship game.

Earlier in the season, previously unbeaten LSU had defeated Alabama, 9-6, in overtime in Tuscaloosa on Nov. 5 as part of its run to the Southeastern Conference championship. That forced the Crimson Tide to make the BCS title game as an at-large team and set up the rare postseason rematch. But the second meeting was all Alabama behind its stellar defense, five field goals from Jeremy Shelley and the passing of quarterback AJ McCarron.

"It was tougher losing a game," Saban said after the game. "And I think that demonstrates the character of the people in that locker room to come back from that

game and finish the season like they did."

No matter who won last night's BCS title game, the SEC was going to continue its dominance. This marks the sixth straight season the SEC has won the Grantland Rice Trophy. Auburn won it last season, with Alabama (2009), Florida (2008), LSU (2007) and Florida (2006) claiming titles in the four previous seasons.

Alabama now has won a record six FWAA national titles, the most of any school. Its previous titles have come in 1965 (along with Michigan State), 1978, 1979, 1992 and 2009. Saban also was Alabama's head coach in 2009.

The Grantland Rice Trophy has been presented by the Football Writers Association of America to college football's national champion since 1954. Named for the legendary sportswriter, the Grantland Rice Trophy was the first national championship award to be presented after the college football postseason.

Although the FWAA does not conduct a final poll at the end of the season, it will conduct a 2012 preseason poll during the summer when the entire membership will vote. The poll will be released in late August before the beginning of the upcoming season.

FWAA President Lenn Robbins presents the Grantland Rice Trophy to Alabama Coach Nick Saban.
(Photo by Parker Waters)



THE FIFTH DOWN



The Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year Award Presentation in New Orleans

Photos by Parker Waters

Emcee Mark May of ESPN (above) and FWAAs members Chris Dufresne, Wally Hall and Mark Blaudschun (right).



Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year Mike Gundy of Oklahoma State with the Fiesta Bowl's Robert Shelton (left) and Eddie Robinson Jr. (right).



Wilbert Ellis (left) chatting with friends of the Eddie Robinson Museum.



Buddy Davis (left) and Ted Lewis (center) converse with Tony Barnhart.



Gundy, Kevin Klintworth, Dennis Dodd and Rachel Bachman.



Chuck Neinas and Eddie Robinson Jr.



FWAAs members huddle around Gundy for a quick Q&A after the award presentation.

Michigan State cancer survivor named winner of Courage Award

DALLAS — Michigan State's Arthur Ray Jr. has been named the winner of the 2011 Discover Orange Bowl/FWAA Courage Award. Ray, a senior offensive lineman from Chicago, returned to football this season, four years after bone cancer derailed his career.

The award was presented at the AVMed Orange Bowl Coaches Luncheon on Jan. 3 in Miami, and Ray was honored again the following day on the field during the Discover Orange Bowl.

"This is a tremendous award for a young man who has conquered all of the odds up against him," Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio said. "He's played in games this year and has participated on the practice field daily. It's been a long road. He was on crutches for almost two years, from 2007 to 2009. He's really a living example to our football team on what you can do with a positive attitude and if you just continue to work, how you can conquer all obstacles."

Ray signed with Michigan State as a highly recruited lineman from Chicago's Mount Carmel High School in 2007, but was soon diagnosed with cancer in his left leg. Through nine surgeries — including four bone grafts — countless rounds of chemotherapy and several outbreaks of infection, he was unable to practice or play. For almost two years, he was unable to walk without crutches.

He had been given a medical disqualification and remained on scholarship with Michigan State. But last April, doctors cleared him to resume football.

"I just cried tears of joy," Ray told the Associated Press. "It felt so good because it just represents so much now. I just feel like I have to represent everybody that's still dealing with bad things, like chemo."

Still, practicing was one thing; playing quite another. On Sept. 3, when the Spartans opened the season against Youngstown State, starting left guard Joel Foreman — a fifth-year senior and a team co-captain — asked Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio if he could give up his position to his friend. Foreman had started 22 straight games and 36 of 38 in his career.

"I know he probably thinks it was powerful for him, but it was just as powerful for me to watch him out there," Foreman said. "It's something he deserves and something he earned. It's not something I did."

During a team meal on the eve of the opener, Dantonio asked Ray to stand, and then said, according to the *Detroit News*: "Young man, you are going to start your first college football game."

Ray participated in only the first play, but blocked two



Orange Bowl Committee member Nat Moore, 2011 Courage Award Winner Arthur Ray Jr. and FWAA Member and ESPN.com reporter Andrea Adelson.

players.

Said Ray: "I've been waiting for this moment for so long, it was just a great feeling. Actually, I had butterflies for about two hours before the game. Man, I missed that feeling for so long."

Ray played in two more games, against Florida Atlantic and in his final home game against Indiana.

"I'm really appreciative of this great award, and I know that every single player who was nominated deserves to receive it," Ray said. "I'm just grateful that I'm blessed with this opportunity. It's been a hard process, but my love of football never stopped. I've always had this fire. Even in my weakest of moments, when I didn't really want to go to that doctor's visit or go to that rehab session, just every rough step along the way, I always kept football on my mind."

"The opportunity to play and practice means everything. I was talking to an old friend the other day from when I first started playing football, and from back then, I always dreamed to be in this position to play major college football. And my dreams are coming true. I'm still not satisfied, but at the end of the day, I've come a real long way. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world than wearing these pads and being with my teammates."

(Continued on page 8)

New York Post's Lenn Robbins becomes FWAA's 69th president

Lenn Robbins of the *New York Post* became the FWAA's 69th president on Jan. 9 in New Orleans at the association's annual breakfast before the BCS 1-2 game.

Robbins, 52, is the first president from the *New York Post* and the first FWAA president from the New York area since Dick Weiss of the *New York Daily News* in 2004.

Robbins is a New Yorker through and through, seldom straying far from that area or the Northeast corridor.

"Some of it is the ankle bracelet. I am only allowed to go so far," quipped Robbins, who went to high school at Canarsie in Brooklyn and graduated from Stony Brook University on Long Island in 1981 with a bachelor of arts in psychology and a minor in journalism.

Robbins' high school was a basketball powerhouse, winning the City Championship in 1976 during Robbins' junior year. So he had an early brush with an outstanding team.

Two of the stars on that 1976 title team, Ty Ladson and Curtis Redding, did leave the area and went to the Little Apple, Manhattan, Kan., and played for Kansas State. Their high school coach, Mark Reiner, went with

them as an assistant for the Wildcats, although Redding later transferred back to St. John's.

"It was a package deal," said Robbins. "I will take two players, and then I will coach."

Robbins began his journalism career in 1982 at the *Greenwich Times/Stamford Advocate*. From 1985-1990, he covered sports for the *Bergen Record*, interrupted by a stint at *The National* (1990-92). He returned to *The Record* for a second tour of duty that lasted until 1999. Then he landed at the *New York Post*, becoming a nationally recognized columnist covering college football and basketball.

Robbins, who is actively involved in several charities, has won numerous writing awards, including the Jim Murray Outstanding Sportswriter Award and the Met Basketball Writers Mike Cohen Good Guy Award. He has frequently appeared on television/cable in *Cold Pizza*, *First Take* and *SNY* over the years.

Robbins, whose favorite food is eggplant parmesan, has a passion for gardening on two terraces off his Manhattan apartment. He and his wife, Amy Adler, a professor of law at NYU, have one child, Harry, 7, and might be seen dining at Il Vagabondo on special occasions.

Nebraska girl wins Volney Meece Scholarship

NEW ORLEANS — Alaina Martens, a senior at La Vista High School in Papillion, Neb., has been the named 15th winner of the Volney Meece Scholarship.

The scholarship is awarded annually by the Football Writers Association of America and named for the late Volney Meece. Meece served 22 years as the FWAA's executive director and was the organization's president in 1971.

The scholarship is a \$1,000 annual grant for four years. It is given to a deserving son or daughter of an FWAA member.

The 17-year-old Martens is the daughter of long-time FWAA member Lee Barfknecht of the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Alaina's impressive academic record at Papillion-La Vista High School includes membership in the National Honor Society and membership on the school's Honor Roll all four years. On a 4.0 scale, Alaina accumulated a 4.5 weighted GPA while taking several advanced placement courses.

In addition to her academic achievements, Alaina has been involved in numerous extracurricular projects. Some of her co-curricular activities include membership on the school's dance team, student council and show choir. She has also been active in her church, served on mission trips, worked with the elderly, was a volunteer for Kids Against Hunger and the Salvation Army and received the Lions Club Leo Gold Volunteer Service Award.

David Herbener, who taught Alaina for two years in AP psychology, wrote in his letter of recommendation: "Alaina is one of the top students that I have had the pleasure of teaching in my 25-year career. She is motivated, displays numerous talents, is likable, self-disciplined and trustworthy. She will be a tremendous asset to any university and I recommend her as highly as possible."

Alaina, who will graduate in May, plans to attend Texas Christian University, where she will study psychology.

FWAA Best Writing Contest

CATEGORIES

- Game Story (Immediate Deadline)
- Feature Story/Profile
- Enterprise/Investigative
- Column/Analysis/Commentary

You may begin sending entries now.

• You must be an FWAA member in good standing to enter.

• Entries sent after the deadline of **June 15, 2012** WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

• Limit: One (1) article per category, although a series of articles may be submitted in the enterprise category.

• Entries must have appeared in print or on line between Feb. 1, 2011 and Jan. 31, 2012.

• Entries must be submitted electronically to contest@fwaa.com.

• Entries not sent to this e-mail address will not be accepted

- Send MS Word or text files only

• DO NOT SEND HTML files, Word Perfect files, stories in other word processing software or links to stories on the Internet or electronic libraries

• Make your entry easy to read by taking out unnecessary carriage returns (They can give your entry an odd look when opened by a judge's word processing program)

• Delete any embedded advertising, photos and cutlines from the files (The file should contain only your story and your identifying information)

At the top of each entry, the following information should be included:

- Writer or writers
- Publication or online service
- Category

- Date of publication
- E-mail address and telephone number for the writer or writers) of the entry

The entries will be sorted and stripped of identifying information and forwarded to the judges.

• Files containing your entries should follow this naming convention: `yourname-category.doc`

• The category must be one of these five words: Game, Loose, Feature, Enterprise or Column

• Example: `KenStephens-game.doc`

Only entries sent electronically will be accepted and all entries will be sorted and stripped of identifying information and forwarded to the judges.

FWAA BEAT WRITER OF THE YEAR AWARD

We also have created a special award for the top beat writer as judged by a special FWAA committee headed by long-time FWAA member Malcolm Moran, Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society and Director of the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Penn State University.

If you have a nomination of a beat writer who covers a major college football team or conference, or you want to nominate yourself, send an e-mail/letter explaining the qualifications of the person (no more than 250 words) to:

Malcolm Moran
Penn State University
College of Communications
5 Carnegie Bldg.
University Park, PA 16802

Malcolm's e-mail is mum24@psu.edu. Malcolm and his committee will then make inquiries into the FWAA members nominated. To qualify the nominee must have been an FWAA member during the 2011 season. Questions? Email ken.stephens@sbcglobal.net.

Courage Award (continued)

(Continued from page 6)

Added Dantonio: "Arthur has tremendous faith and has been a role model for so many people in the Greater Lansing community in his fight against cancer. He's made a difference in so many people's lives I can't even begin to count, not just in our players' lives, but everybody who is around him, he makes life a little bit better. He makes it a little bit easier for people to make it through their problems."

For the sixth straight year, the Football Writers Association of America and the Discover Orange Bowl announced a weekly nominee for the Discover Orange Bowl/FWAA Courage Award each Wednesday during the season. A blue-ribbon panel determined the award's recipient from those weekly nominees.

The Courage Award was created by *ESPN The Magazine* senior writer Gene Wojciechowski, also an FWAA member. A select group of FWAA members vote on the recipient each year. The requirements for nomination include displaying courage on or off the field, including overcoming an injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through hardship.

Previous winners of the award are Rutgers defensive tackle Eric LeGrand (2010), the University of Connecticut team (2009), Tulsa's Wilson Holloway (2008), Navy's Zerin Singleton (2007), Clemson's Ray Ray McElrathbey (2006), the Tulane football team (2005), Memphis' Haracio Colen (2004), San Jose State's Neil Parry (2003) and Toledo's William Bratton (2002).