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49th NFF Annual Award Dinner Highlights

*Bowden Accepts the Gold Medal for himself and Paterno;
Hennings Responds for the Hall of Fame Class;
Leonard Wins the Draddy*

By Bo Carter, NFF Correspondent

NEW YORK, December 5, 2006 - If “In the Stairwell” Air Force Academy singing cadets’ group with its rendition of the National Anthem was not enough to get the patriotic juices flowing in the audience, presentations of the annual awards by the National Football Foundation & College Football Hall of Fame had a decided “honor America and its great game” message with inductions of the 14 members of the NFF & College Football Hall of Fame Class of 2006.

Florida State head coach Bobby Bowden and Penn State head coach Joe Paterno (unable to attend due to rehabilitation of his injured leg) highlighted the evening as Co-Gold Medal winners – first awarded to U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the inaugural NFF Awards Dinner in 1958.

The Distinguished American Award also was presented posthumously to All-Pacific 10 Conference and summa cum laude graduate of Arizona State Pat Tillman. Tillman disrupted a promising professional career in 2002 to enlist in the military and was later killed in Afghanistan while serving as an Army Ranger. Accepting for the Tillman family was Pat's brother Kevin Tillman of Los Angeles.

A father-son tandem received the NFF Official of the Year laurel for the first time as A.C. (Butch) Lambert, Sr. (posthumous) and Jr. (with Mrs. Lambert, Sr., also in attendance) of Tupelo, Miss. (also the hometown of Elvis Presley) and the Southeastern Conference were accorded dual honors.

"My dad is watching as we receive this award," said Butch Lambert, Jr., "and I want to thank the coaches, administration, coordinators, and many friends in the SEC for their support and kindness down through the years."

The John L. Toner Award, for excellence in athletics administration, went to 20-plus year veteran DeLoss Dodds, who also served as AD and track coach at Kansas State after a stellar running career at KSU.

"It is such an honor to receive an award named after John Toner (in attendance and presenting the trophy) at this wonderful event," Dodds said. "I have so many great head coaches and administrators who make my job easier, and I am thankful to have many members of my family visiting New York with us this week."

Rutgers' Brian Leonard, one of 17 finalists out of a field of 148 semifinalists for the Vincent DePaul Draddy Trophy for scholastic, football and other areas of key leadership, was named as the recipient of this prestigious honor – given in memory of longtime NFF leader and ultra-successful businessman Vin Draddy.

“I’m very honored to receive the Draddy Award,” said Leonard. “This is the highlight of my college football career, and I have been very fortunate to play for head coach Greg Schiano and to be part of the outstanding football program at Rutgers.”

Penn State All-America LB and 2004 Dick Butkus Award recipient Paul Posluszny responded on behalf of the 17 finalists for this award – each of whom earned \$18,000 postgraduate scholarships.

“On behalf of all these student-athletes,” he said, “I want all of you to know these scholarships will be used for purposes even more important than football. It’s an honor to be on the dais with coach Bobby Bowden after Penn State played FSU in the 2006 (FedEx) Orange Bowl, and I know coach Paterno wishes he could be here to receive his award.”

Bowden kept the crowd in stitches with several football-related stories and then closed the regular program on a serious note after Chad Hennings of Air Force spoke on behalf of the the Class of 2006.

“Football is the greatest leadership lab in which young men can learn,” Hennings stated. “From the first time you put on the football pads and feel the excitement of any level of football, you can give thanks to God, your parents, coaches, teammates, and your universities for their encouragement and support.”

“I have been coaching for 54 years and married to (wife) Ann for 56 years,” Bowden began. “Football offers you the greatest opportunity for a coach to succeed in any sport. Now, Joe Paterno’s old (79). I’m just 77! I’m looking out on this audience and seeing many people who haven’t lived their lives. They have so much ahead of them, and, just as with all six of my football jobs in four different states, I know that you have to have faith/belief – I’m not talking about Fate. I have been very fortunate in my profession, and this is just a wonderful award. I am truly

honored.”

With 120 chapters and 12,000 members nationwide, The National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame, a non-profit educational organization, runs programs designed to use the power of amateur football in developing scholarship, citizenship and athletic achievement in young people. The NFF presents the MacArthur Trophy, the Draddy Trophy presented by HealthSouth and releases the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) Standings. NFF programs include the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, Ind., Play It Smart, the NFF Center for Youth Development Through Sport at Springfield College (Mass.), the NFL-NFF Coaching Academy, and scholarships of over \$1 million for college and high school scholar-athletes.

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