

Local Student, Others, Honored at Millikin Athletics Year End Awards Ceremony

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DECATUR — After a two-year absence due to the pandemic, the Millikin University Athletics Department held its end of the year dinner and awards ceremony at the Decatur Conference Center and Hotel on May 3.

Individual and team awards were presented for the 2021-22 academic year for student-athletes from all 23 of Millikin's athletic programs.

The winners of the Comeback Player of the Year Award were sophomore women's volleyball player Reece Brown (Bourbonnais, Bradley Bourbonnais H.S.) and **sophomore wrestler Zac Blasioli (Wood River, East Alton H.S.).**

The Academic Athlete of the Year Award, recognizing excellence both in the classroom and in competition, was presented to junior softball pitcher Aly Armstrong (Effingham, H.S.) and senior cross country and track runner Ben Kuxmann (Bourbonnais, Bradley Bourbonnais H.S.)

The Leadership Award was presented to senior women's soccer player Maddy Wood (St. Charles, Mo., Francis Howell North H.S.) and senior wrestler Jordan Carson (St. Louis, Mo., Triton College).

The Newcomer of the Year Award was given to freshman softball outfielder Kendallyn Davison (Avon, Ind., H.S.) and junior transfer wrestler Tommy Russell (Brookfield, St. Cloud University).

The Two-Sport Athlete of the Year was presented to triathlete and swimmer Brigid Duesterhaus (Decatur, MacArthur H.S.) and Kuxmann.

The Millikin Athlete of the Year Award recipients were sophomore women's basketball All-American Elyce Knudsen (Philo, Tolono Unity H.S.) and senior wrestler and NCAA National Champion Bradan Birt (Epworth, Iowa, Western Dubuque H.S.)

Student-athletes were recognized for having a 4.0-grade point average in either the Spring 2021 or Fall 2022 semester, earning All-Region and All-American honors, and receiving the conference's Merle Chapman Awards.

Several team awards were presented starting with the Big Blue Team Award for excellence in the classroom, the community, and in competition. The women's sports Big Blue Team Award was a tie between women's basketball and women's volleyball.

Wrestling won the male sports Big Blue Team Award.

The Millikin women's basketball team was named the Most Successful female team for winning the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin regular-season title and advancing to the Sweet 16 Round of the NCAA Tournament. The Big Blue's two wins over Top 25 teams in the NCAA Regional received the Best Moment Award.

The Millikin wrestling team was named the Most Successful men's team and their win over North Central for its third straight CCIW title won the Best Moment Award.

Athletic Director Dr. Craig White presented the Best Win over Rival Illinois Wesleyan Award to women's tennis and baseball who each posted two wins over the Titans this year.