

Celebrate!
Pinellas County Schools
Athletics



2019 - 2020

2019 - 2020 PCAC OFFICERS

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**PINELLAS
COUNTY
SCHOOLS**

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Dear Guests,

This is the time each year that we hold a banquet to celebrate another memorial year in Pinellas County high School athletics (2019-2020). Unfortunately, this year we are unable to get to together in person in celebration. Consequently, the athletic banquet will be recorded this year and is dedicated to all the Spring Sport athletes and coaches who were unable to finish their seasons, especially the senior athletes who have missed finishing their high school careers on the field with their teammates. We have recognized all the Spring sport seniors in a special slide show presentation posted on the Pinellas County Schools website.

Congratulations, to the Coaches of the Year, for the fall and winter sports. This is always a special honor because it is voted on by their peers. In addition, it is our privilege to announce the recipients of the athletes of the year for Pinellas County.

Finally, help us recognize all the Coaches, Athletic trainers, Game Officials, and Volunteers who make Pinellas County athletics the best!

Sincerely,

Al Bennett

Directors of Athletics- Pinellas County Schools

Girls Cross Country Coach of the Year

Peter "Pete" Eagleson, Osceola Fundamental High School



Pete Eagleson is a nine-time Coach of the Year recipient and works endlessly with our Cross Country and Track and Field Programs. Year after year, our program has succeeded in a large turnout of participants. This year, our team totaled 17 girls. Under his leadership, the girls secured the PCAC Championship, were District Champions, placed 3rd in Regionals and 9th in States. One of our three graduating seniors from the team has secured a running scholarship with Wake Forest. As we have a lot of returning runners, we are expecting continued success in the future under Pete's guidance and high expectations.

Boys Cross Country Coach of the Year

Steven Wilcox, Northeast High School

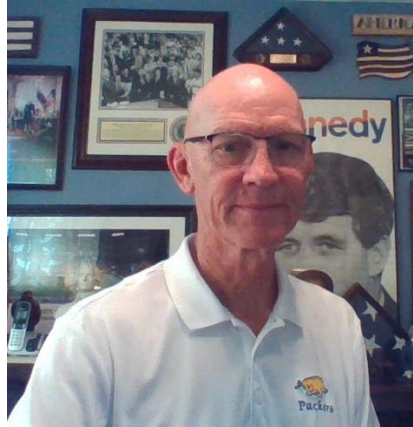


After graduating 5 of its top 7 boys varsity runners from last year's team, the expectations for this year's team were low coming into the season. Thankfully, this year's team Captain was able to recruit some in-house talent and that combined with an outstanding Freshman class led to the team's success this year. Some of this year's highlights include:

- *A 9th place team finish out of 44 teams at the Jim Ryun Invitational early in the season.*
- *A 1st place team at the Dunedin Mini Invitational #2.*
- *A 1st place team finish at the Palmetto Invitational.*
- *A 1st place team finish at the City of St. Petersburg Championships for back to back City Championship titles.*
- *A 2nd place team finish at the County Championships **hosted by Northeast High.***
- *A 3rd place team finish at the District Championships which qualified the team to move on.*
- *Then a 5th place team finish out of 19 teams at the Regional Championships which qualified this year's team for the State meet.*
- *A return to the State Championships by the Northeast boys for the first time in 5 years.*

Girls Golf Coach of the Year

Mike Klapka, Largo High School



Mike Klapka took the reigns as a first-year coach of the Largo Girls Golf team for the 2019-2020 season. This was the first time in over twenty years that there were enough young ladies to form a separate team from the boys. Coach Klapka had been an enthusiastic volunteer coach for the mixed group for the past five years.

In this first year, Coach Klapka had a break out girls' return to the green. Largo won the District Championship and went on to become fifth in the region. One of his sophomores went on to state and hopes to advance even further next season.

Coach Klapka is a legend at Largo High, extending his talents from the classroom onto the greens.

Boys Golf Coach of the Year

Adam Stuck, Northeast High School



Coach Stuck's team won the District Championship the previous year with having four seniors on the team and advanced to Regional Championship. His young team this year still managed to come in 4th place in the District Championship and had one individual advance to the Regional Championship. His coaching philosophy was to focus on the fundamentals of the game including the proper techniques, mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the game. A side from performing on the course Coach Stuck made sure his student athletes understood the importance of their academics. His team maintained a 3.72 GPA. It was more important to Coach Stuck to take full advantage of every opportunity to support the student athletes in their education, character development and life-enhancing values that will have a positive impact on each student athlete's life far past their time at here at Northeast High School "It's More Than a Game"

Volleyball Coach of the Year

Joseph Abad, St. Petersburg High School



Coach Joe Abad took over the St. Petersburg High School Volleyball team in the middle of the 2018 season and made an immediate impact on the team with not only his hard-work and dedication, but also his attention to detail and care for the players on his team. He is always giving up days and hours of his time to help his players better themselves and looking for opportunities that promote individual and team growth. He sets his expectations high for the players by pushing them to be the best they can, but also is caring person that is always there for his players. In a short period of time, he has promoted a team environment that is both successful on the court and embraces the principles essential for a high-performing team.

In 2019, his first full season as the head coach of the Green Devil Volleyball team, he led the team to an impressive 25-4 record and district championship. Even during a highly-successful season, the team continued to show improvement throughout the year, and concluded with an impressive run to the regional semi-finals in the 6A state playoff before losing to Fort Myers High School. Coach Joe Abad has created a positive and winning culture with the team that resulted in a season that exceeded even their own expectations and has set the stage for continued improvement in the coming seasons.

Football Coach of the Year

Cory Moore, Lakewood High School



Coach Cory Moore just finished his 12th season as the head football coach at Lakewood High School. This last year, the Coach Moore lead the Spartans to an undefeated regular season, something that has not been done since 1988, which was the only other time in history the Spartans were undefeated. He led the team to the State Semifinals this year, where they only lost by two points in a tough loss. Coach Moore was also named the Bucs High School Coach of the Year. His dedication to the program at Lakewood is apparent to the kids and the community and he looks forward to bringing the team to states next year and bringing home a state title!

Girls Swimming Coach of the Year

Scott Hernon, Countryside High School



Coach Scott is from Warren, OH. He received his BA degree from Fairmont State University in Physical Education & Health and continued to earn a MA Ed Sports Sciences from Ashland University. Swimming was his crafted sport and he became the First Four-year All-American in Fairmont State Athletics history achieving All-America Swimming status in 15 events over his career and maintained this elite status in the United States Marine Corps, while reaching the rank of Captain. In 2016 he was inducted into the prestigious Fairmont State University Athletic Hall of Fame. Coach Scott has been coaching since the early 80's starting his collegiate career at Fairmont, East Carolina University and ended at Ashland University in 1992. Moving to Florida to support his family, he began teaching and coaching at various coaching clubs in the Tampa Bay area to include USA Swimming Clubs in Tampa, Dunedin, and East Lake and with High School teams at Tarpon Springs HS, J. W. Mitchell HS and now at Countryside High School. He has coached 42 NISCA All-American Swimmers, 17 FHSAA State Champions and more importantly, over 78 NISCA Academic All-Americans. He is currently the Head Coach of Swimming at Countryside High School and is on the coaching staff at Radiant Aquatics in Clearwater, Florida.

Coach Scott is a member of American Swimming Coaches Association and NISCA (National Interscholastic Swim Coaches Association). Coach Hernon is also a serving member of the FHSAA (Florida High School Athletic Association) Swimming & Diving Rules Advisory Committee. Coach currently teaches Driver Ed and Health at Countryside High School in Clearwater, FL. He is married 32 years to Doreen and has a Son Camden who is working for a degree in Criminology at St. Petersburg College.

Boys Swimming Coach of the Year

Danielle Spurgeon, Seminole High School



Danielle is an SHS graduate. She swam as a Warhawk under long time Head Coach Haight. She began her coaching career at East Lake High School and made the move to Seminole to take over the program when he retired in 2007. She is also the Academy Lead for the Center of Educational leadership and a teacher leader at SHS. In her 10 years leading the Swim and Dive team at SHS she has built a program that has a positive culture where student embody the growth mindset that is transferred into success out of the pool, the classroom, college and career. During her tenure she has been honored to coach multiple PCAC, District, Regional and State Champions. This season her Boys Swim team broke two school records and a PCAC records. Multiple swimmers placed in the top 3 finishers at the championship and the Boys team finished 4th overall in the state.

Wrestling Coach of the Year

Sam Pruitt, St. Petersburg High School



Coach Sam Pruitt has truly been one of the prominent figures of wrestling in Pinellas County for over 40 years. As a wrestler at St. Petersburg High School, he was a state champion in 1980 and is a member of the school's athletic hall of fame. As a coach of the Green Devil wrestling team, he has built winning program that has produced individual and team successes for over 25 years. Despite losing key members of last year's team, the Coach Pruitt led the team to a successful season that exceeded expectations. Ultimately, under his leadership, three of his wrestlers qualified for regional competition in their respected weight classes. While his accomplishments in victories, both as a wrestler and a coach, are quite clear, it is the time and care that he gives on a daily basis to help his student-athletes that may be the significant and notable impact of his work as a coach. He continuously goes out of his way to help his wrestlers, including helping them with things completely unrelated to the sports. He goes above and beyond to help all of his wrestlers, including always working to help struggling students, to help them become to only better wrestlers, but better people with a strong sense of pride and confidence. All members of his team know he is there for them, not just by his words, but also his actions on a daily basis.

Girls Basketball Coach of the Year

William White, Northeast High School



Anyone who has been around long knows the success that Coach White has brought to the teams he has coached. However, many don't know that he's also a remarkable teacher teaching 7 out of 7 classes of mainly Dual Enrollment courses through St. Petersburg College. He was also voted on by the students as teacher of the month this year. He's spends countless hours behind the scenes to help all the players in the county. Academically, his team had the 3rd highest Girls Basketball Public School GPA in the county this year and top 10 in the state in their classification.

Coming into the season I believe many in the are thought the team would have a down year since they only returned 3 players from the varsity team from the previous season. So the team was going to be made up of all players that came up through the JV system. No transfers. No freshmen who came in as stars already, just players who loved Northeast and worked hard. They ended up with a tremendous season going 22-6 where they reached the post-season as the #5 seed in a very tough region and a very tough district. In one of the craziest games I've ever seen they lost in the first round of playoffs by 1 to the eventual regional Finalist. The team finished 2nd in the PCAC South for the 4th time in the last 5 seasons. It was their 6th regional appearance in the last 7 years having only made the regionals 1 time in the school's history before he arrived 8 years ago.

Both seniors received scholarships to play in college even though both started out as JV players (beginners) their freshman years. His team was voted the Sportsman of the year by the PCGBCA (Pinellas County Girls Basketball Coaches Association) which shows that not only does his teams perform well but they also are respectful. This is Coach White's 2nd PCAC Coach of the year while at Northeast and his 5th Overall PCAC coach of the year award. It is my tremendous honor to recognize Coach White as the Pinellas County Athletic Conference girls basketball coach of the year.

Boys Basketball Coach of the Year

Britt Taylor, East Lake High School



It is with great pleasure and distinction to introduce Coach Britt Taylor as Pinellas County Boys Coach of the year. Coach Taylor is currently in his sixth season as the Head Coach of East Lake High School. Coach Taylor graduated from the University of North Carolina, where he was a member of the men's track and field Team. Coach Taylor is married to Jennifer Taylor and they have a son named Brayden who is 8 months old. This past season was historic for the Basketball program at East Lake High School. The program set records for wins in a season, back to back District Championships, Regional Champions, Final Four participant in State Semifinal, and #1 ranking in class 6A for most of the season. Coach Taylor has transformed the program with his enthusiasm, passion and devout work ethic. The energy, excitement and leadership he brings on daily basis to his players and assistant Coaches makes them take the same approach. There is one particular moment during the season that defines the characteristic and persona of Coach Taylor, the team was losing by 1 point and it was 4 seconds remaining in the first round of Regional playoffs. The task seemed insurmountable and the situation was not favorable, but Coach Taylor called 2 timeouts to advance the ball closer to the basket. At this time, he designated a play for his best player to take the shot in which he made the shot to help salvage the season and advance to the next round. Coach Taylor is truly an asset to East Lake High School and the community!

Girls Soccer Coach of the Year

Rui Farias, St. Petersburg High School



Rui Farias is truly one of those coaches that needs no introduction. He has been a highly-successful soccer player and coach for most of his life and for years has had countless positive impacts on the game and players in this area. In his time at St. Petersburg High School, he has created a girls soccer program that has been not only been successful on a yearly basis, but is also a highly-recognized and respected throughout the region with almost 400 wins while serving as head coach and many players going on to play at the collegiate level. In just the last four years, Coach Farias has led Green Devil girls soccer team to the regional finals three times, including a state semifinal appearances in 2017 and 2019. Few coaches exhibit the level of hard-work, dedication and preparation that he does on a daily basis, and it shows not only in the number of wins recorded, but also in amount of respect and care his players and colleagues have for him both as a coach and a person.

Coming into this season, the girls soccer team lost some great players from last year's final four team to graduation, including one of the best goalkeepers in the state of Florida. Much like any dominate athletic program, Coach Farias was able to maintain the high-level of success with his program by fielding a team that not only included highly-skilled players, but also played with a team approach that enabled them to continue the high level of success in the district and throughout the region. Under his leadership, Coach Rui Farias led the St. Pete High girls soccer team to an 18-4-2 record and earned another district championship, the ninth of his coaching career. Coach Farias's team made an inspiring run in the 4A state playoff, ultimately losing a close game to Venice High School, the ninth ranked team in the nation (MaxPreps) and eventual state runner-up. But as a testament to the strong soccer program that he has built and maintained for over 15 years, six of his seniors have received offers to play collegiate soccer beginning in the fall and eight of his players were selected as members of the 1st Team for PCAC South Girls Soccer. It is with this extremely dedicated approach, high level of success and wide-ranging recognition of his program that make Coach Rui Farias a worthy recipient for the PCAC Girls Soccer Coach of the Year.

Boys Soccer Coach of the Year

Brandon Vaughan, Lakewood High School



Coach Brandon Vaughan just finished his 3rd year as the boys and girls head soccer coach at Lakewood High School. He has turned around the boy's program at the school. When he started a few years ago, the team was not winning many games; last year the team only won 5 games and tied 2. With his hard work and dedication to the team, they went on to the regional quarterfinals where they lost in a shootout. Coach Vaughan is excited about the next season and hoping that the team makes it even further and is looking forward to bringing the team to states on day to bring home a state title!

Henry Deck Female Athlete of the Year

Anabel Ellison, Tarpon Springs High School



Tarpon Springs high school is very proud of Anabel for her all of her accomplishments on and off the court. During her career at Tarpon Springs high School she has scored 1730 career points. She was voted in and participated in multiple all-star games including FACA All-Star game, Blue Chip All-Star game in New Orleans, and MVP Pinellas Senior All-Star Game. Her accomplishments have been noticed by multiple Division I schools. She has accepted a Division I scholarship to Marist College for basketball. She has also won multiple awards including Pinellas County Player of the Year Award, 1st Team All-Conference team for four straight years, and scholar athlete award for having a 3.9 GPA. She also holds multiple school records for most points in a game (44) and highest scoring average at 25.2 points per game. Her leadership has also been noticed by her teachers and peers and she was voted team captain for three years. We cannot express how proud Tarpon Springs High School is of Anabel for all her accomplishments that she has attained during her time at Tarpon. We look forward to seeing all her future accomplishments to come.

Henry Deck Male Athlete of the Year

TJ Tampa, Lakewood High School



TJ Tampa is multiple sport athlete, playing both basketball and football, excelling in both. TJ has been first team all-county south for the last two years for basketball. He is also the first team all PCAC in football and was on the PCAC All Star team for Football as well. He is involved in the Health squad at Lakewood High School, and was recognized for his academic achievement, being on honor roll first semester of his sophomore year, by the Eta Rho Omega Psi Pi chapter. During the season you can find him out in the community serving others and helping out with different community service activities that the football team is involved with. TJ is going to be attending Iowa State in the fall on a football scholarship.

Mike McPheron Award

Stevanie Copponi, Boca Ciega High School



Stevanie is a two sport, 4-year athlete in both Cross Country and Track. She is also the Salutatorian of the class of 2020. Stevanie is a diligent student-athlete and has overcome a great deal in her home life as well as her own battling with anxiety. Stevanie spent part of her childhood living with grandparents when her single mother could not take on her and her sisters. She lost her grandfather within this time and his death took its toll on her. She grew fearful of an unknown and unfulfilling future for herself. This fear turned into focus and pressure on her academics. She felt this was what she did have control over- not her family or where she may be living but the success that would follow if she were to succeed to the max in school.

She began battling her own anxiety and panic attacks during her middle school years and this is battle she continues to struggle with. When she began high school, she joined the cross-country team. Although she was not the most talented runner, she allowed running to be her outlet and used it to help maintain her mental health and drive. During her Junior Year, Stevanie was named captain because of her leadership abilities and motivation. She held this role through her senior season. During her career, she never became the number one runner but that did not stop her determination. She would take her small gains in stride, never missed a practice or a workout. Even on the weekends, she would find a way to make it to an optional weekend run. On top of the demands of cross country and track she clearly maintained all her academic goals she set as a young child and has finished second in her class. She will be attending the University of Florida and plans to become a Nurse Practitioner. A career motivated by the loss of her grandfather.

Athletic Administrator of the Year Award

James "Jim" Casey, Largo High School



Jim Casey is a maverick. He has continued to be a pillar of stability at the Largo High school, serving as the Athletic Coordinator since 2000. He has worked with six different Assistant Principals for Athletics during this time. Coach Casey never misses a step as staff changes around him. Throughout the years, Coach Casey has built relationships with all coaches and student athletes. This is where he goes above and beyond any expectations. Jim takes the time to build real relationships with people.

Mr. Casey is creative and was the driving force behind our Largo Hall of Fame which started in 2016. It has been a boost to the community to bring back star athletes of the past to celebrate them one more time. Coach Casey heads the nomination and selection committee and was instrumental in the purchase of the HOF board nameplates and plaques in the gym. He also found funds, did research, and had championship banners for all sports hung in the gym for the first time ever at Largo.

Mr. Casey is an excellent teacher. I know because I am his supervising administrator. He does not ever let our scholars down. His expectations are high in the classroom, on the court, and the field. Coach Casey moves fast and will have buses, athletic packets, insurance list, budgets, ordering equipment, rosters done before you can think of all the work piling up.

Since his arrival he has proved he will continue to seek what is best for Largo High School, its students, and all staff members. No one works harder or is more deserving of this award than James "Jim" Casey. He believes that we can build better men and women through what we do now as their teachers, coaches, and mentors. I see him live his life this way daily and I thought it not robbery to stand up and ask to have James Casey recognized for the amazing trail he is blazing on the campus of Largo High School.

Superintendent's Challenge Cup

Top GPA:

Osceola Fundamental High School

GPA: 3.502

2nd Place:

East Lake High School

GPA: 3.435

3rd Place:

Largo High School

GPA: 3.384

***Congratulations to all of our Award
Winners!***



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