

Trench Trophy caps Hunter's journey

By Mary Jo Monnin
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Ryan Hunter, the 6-foot-5, 315-pound lineman, felt as humbled as he is big on Wednesday night after being named the winner of the Trench Trophy, recognizing the top lineman in Western New York. The 10th annual award was presented before a gathering of 250 at the Elks Lodge in Lancaster.

“Linemen don’t get the awards as much because, honestly, people are watching the running backs or quarterback or wide receivers. We’re kind of hidden,” he said. “And coming from Canada, and not being from the area originally, I really appreciate what everyone has done for me.”



Mark Mulville / Buffalo News
Winner Ryan Hunter of Canisius holds the Trench Trophy after it was given to him by Jim McNally during Wednesday's ceremony.

A native of North Bay, Ont., about five hours north of Buffalo, Hunter made the most of his two varsity seasons at Canisius, displaying an ability to move people. He played right tackle on the offensive line and nose tackle and defensive end out of the Crusaders' 3-4. With English as his second language — he transferred to Canisius from Ecole Secondaire Catholique Algonquin — he's managed to maintain a 90 average at a demanding school academically.

Hunter bettered a field of nine other finalists. The Trench Trophy's scouts were fixtures at games all season and watched hundreds of hours of film before arriving at their decision.

Hunter was quick to cite his teammates on the offensive line as sharing in the award with him: center Patrick Haley, left guard Jake Muscarella, left tackle Emil DiNardo and right guard David Koeppel. Hunter, who can bench press 350 pounds and squat 550, anchored a line that opened holes for a running game that averaged 251 yards per game. He helped the Crusaders to an 11-0 season and the Monsignor Martin Association championship. Last week he was named The Buffalo News co-Player of the Year.

“We cared a lot about each other and were a really close-knit senior group,” said Hunter. “We’re a good group of friends, we like to hang out and we had a lot of chemistry. We understood the concepts of the offense and our backfield understood what we were trying to do.”

Hunter becomes the second lineman from Canisius to earn the prestigious award, following 2008 winner John Urschel, a redshirt junior at Penn State.

The other finalists were: Jason Bunk (Alden), John Czech (Jamestown), Cortland Haines (Jamestown), Sean Murphy (Timon/St. Jude), Nick Nocek (Fredonia), Michael Senn (Orchard Park), Tyler Studd (Springville), Khalil Summerville (Bennett) and Jake Swan (Maple Grove).

Winning the Trench Trophy also comes with a \$1,000 scholarship named for the late John Gebhardt, one of the Trench Trophy's founders. Hunter plans on applying the scholarship toward his education at Bowling Green University, a Division I program that plays in the Mid-American Conference. He's given his verbal

commitment and is expected to sign his national letter of intent with the Falcons in February. He also has an offer from the University at Buffalo. A possible college major would be psychology.

He said he'll listen to offers from bigger programs if they come, but as of this writing, he likes the relationship he's fostered with the Bowling Green coaching staff and is sticking with his decision.

"I don't have any intention on de-committing for now. I told my parents I want to play the best football I can, and if a better offer comes, I would probably end up taking the better offer. The opportunity hasn't come up yet to take another offer, but I don't want to close all the doors until you have to."

Trench Trophy winners

2012: Ryan Hunter, Canisius

2011: Devon Leach, Orchard Park

2010: Dylan Anna, Pioneer

2009: Jasen Carlson, Southwestern

2008: John Urschel, Canisius

2007: Nick Christman, Sweet Home

2006: Gil Rodriguez, Frontier

2005: Jesse Jesonowski, Iroquois

2004: Jason Weber, Orchard Park

2003: John Livingston, Eden