

Urschel wins Trench Trophy

Canisius tackle is top lineman

By Mary Jo Monnin
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Seeing John Urschel compete against Aquinas and St. Francis was all Charlie Graver needed to convince him he was looking at this year's Trench Trophy winner.

The organization's head scout and 30 other committee members agreed as the Canisius senior was named winner of the sixth annual award Wednesday night before 200 at the Lancaster Elks.

"Considering Aquinas' reputation and the linemen and the size they had, even though Canisius lost the game, he was dominant," said Graver. "He was all over the field on every play on offense and every play on defense. He had that never-quit attitude."

The award, sponsored by the Lancaster Elks Lodge No. 1478, recognizes the top lineman in Western New York. The committee includes members of the Elks Lodge, local coaches and former players. During the 13-week season, the committee scouted all 87 teams in WNY. Urschel was chosen from an original list of more than 300 candidates.

The 6-foot-4, 275-pound Urschel was a two-way tackle for the Crusaders (6-4), runners-up to St. Francis in the Monsignor Martin Association's League AA. Urschel was named to the All-Catholic first team in all three of his years as a starter.

His tremendous skills, along with a 94 academic average, has allowed him to consider Stanford, Princeton, Cornell and the University at Buffalo.

The timing of the award couldn't have been better for Urschel, who had an in-home visit with Princeton's head coach after the award presentation.

"This is a great feeling," said Urschel, who wanted to recognize his line coach Rich Robbins and head coach Brandon Harris. "I wasn't sure I was going to win it; these are all great players. It could have been any of us."

The event's guest speaker was longtime NFL offensive line coach and Kenmore native Jim McNally. He encouraged the athletes and their parents to "enjoy the journey" their high school years offer.



John Hickey / Buffalo News
High grades on the field and in the classroom helped two-way tackle John Urschel of Canisius earn the Trench Trophy, recognizing WNY's top lineman.