

Girls Coach of the Year - 2006

Bob Keefe - Belleville West

Already a member of the IHSTCA Hall of Fame, Belleville West coach Bob Keefe once again steps into the spotlight as the 2006 girls coach of the year selection.

As his Hall of Fame selection proves, Coach Keefe's accomplishments leading up to the 2006 season were truly noteworthy. In 31 years, Bob's dual record of 325 and 32 speaks for itself, as do his 23 straight sectional titles (25 in all) and twelve top ten finishes in the state. Combine all of this with Belleville West's third place state finish in 1992 and his incredible 124 match winning streak between 1988 and 2000 and you get a clear picture of the excellence personified in Coach Keefe's career.

What did Bob Keefe do this past season to garner the association's 2006 award? As so often happens, the true measure of a great coach is his or her ability to meet adversity and still find a way to win. For Coach Keefe in 2006, the adversity came in the form of injuries. The injury bug bit early and often for the Maroons, as number one singles player Mallory Weber was sidelined with back spasms hours before the team's first tournament. She suffered through the season, leading her team to a fourth place finish at state while finishing fifth place in singles.

Weber's injury, though, was only the beginning. Number one doubles player Carli Connors suffered a back stress fracture and did not play a singles match all season and only a few doubles matches before the sectional. Her partner, Abby Allgire, was released just days before the season opener after knee surgery. Despite these setbacks, this doubles team won their second consecutive sectional title, earned a top eight seed at state, and finished fourth after upsetting the number three seed.

The Maroons also found a way to advance another doubles team to the state tournament with almost no varsity experience. Junior Taylor Cook and partner Kelsey Delsignore finished second to their teammates at the sectional and contributed to the team's state success by winning one main and two back draw matches. This gave West a total of ten main draw victories as well as four back draw wins, helping the team nail down its fourth place finish.

"I could not be more proud of a team for the effort, attitude and success they achieved in a year where injuries and inexperienced players played such a huge role during my last coaching year at Belleville West. This was truly a very special year for me," said Coach Keefe.

Maroon athletic director Bill Schmidt commented on Coach Keefe: "Bob Keefe is rightly perceived as a professional in every sense of the word. He has displayed great character. Administration, parents and coaches all view Bob in a light that few coaches share: he is viewed as a caring, competitive insightful sportsman who has been perhaps the strongest ambassador for tennis in the state of Illinois for the past 30 years. You can speak to many generations of people who have known Bob, and you will not hear an unkind word."

Congratulations to Belleville West coach Bob Keefe, the girls coach of the year for 2006.

