



Rebecca S. Roth

KNIGHTS CROWNED CHAMPS — McQuaid Jesuit wrestlers captured the City-Catholic League title with a 38-27 win over host Bishop Kearney on Feb. 7. At right, Kearney's Gracen Porreca attempts to pin McQ's Tim Reilly during Porreca's victory in the 105-pound weight class. Above, BK Coach Vince Asito gives Warren Jones a last minute tip during an injury timeout.



Reality of war hits home at sports banquet

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Unlike the jokes and good-natured jabs that usually dominate speeches during the Aquinas Sports Celebrity Dinner every February, this year's gala was more somber since it was overshadowed by the reality of war.

Perhaps no one brought home that reality better than Carlton Bailey of the Buffalo Bills. The middle linebacker's father, who is a chief warrant officer in the 260th division of the Army reserves, is currently stationed in the Persian Gulf region.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Bailey — who attended the banquet in place of teammate Darryl Talley — recalled that the last conversation he had with his father occurred before his team's crucial showdown with Miami last Dec. 23.

"My dad told me to do my best to focus on the game at hand and not to worry about him," said Bailey.

Bailey recalled his father's words telling him that the Bills would win the Super Bowl and that the U.S.-led allied troops will win the war.

"We lost the game, but I know they'll win," said Bailey.

The soft-spoken linebacker touched upon several themes during his speech before

about 450 people at the Diplomat Party House, 1956 Lyell Ave. Bailey said that he takes seriously his responsibility as a role model for young people.

"Students need more positive role models today," Bailey said. "You are never too old to be a role model."

Bailey emphasized that a career as an athlete is only temporary, but that a solid education can take people far in the playing field of life.

"Students should try as hard as they can in school and athletics. They can control their destiny with education," Bailey said.

Bailey said he credits all his success to his personal relationship with God. The born-again Christian recalled how his father used to motivate him to study.

"He used to say, 'Son, the elevator to success is broken, so you have to take the stairs — one step at a time,'" Bailey said.

The professional football player encouraged Aquinas students to hold on to their dreams, too.

He added, "Always shoot for the moon. If you land a little short, at least you'll fall among the stars."

In addition to Bailey, Buffalo Bills offensive tackle Will Wolford also attended the gala, which has been held annually since 1986. In rather brash fashion, Wolford practically promised fans in the

audience that the Bills would win the Super Bowl next January.

"Hopefully, next Super Bowl Sunday you'll be watching us again, and this time we'll win," said Wolford.

Former boxing champion Sean O'Grady was also on hand for the dinner, which benefits the athletic programs at Aquinas. The 32-year-old O'Grady earned the lightweight championship of the world in 1981. He was filling in for his friend John Davidson, the award-winning color analyst for the New York Rangers on the Madison Square Garden Network. The former goaltender for the New York Rangers and St. Louis Blues — Davidson carried the Rangers to the Stanley Cup finals in 1979 — was unable to attend the banquet because of a funeral.

O'Grady said he was honored to step in for his friend. After retiring from boxing in 1983, O'Grady landed a job on the USA cable network. He now works as a color analyst for fights on USA.

The former boxing champ said he remembers his high school years as critical to his success later in life.

"If I can help one kid with his goals then it's worth my time," said the Oklahoma native.

Another member of the head table was Bill Irwin, a blind hiker who completed the

2,168-mile Appalachian Trail. Along with his seeing-eye dog — a 90-pound German shepherd named Orient — Irwin hiked from March until November of 1990.

Irwin said he fell over 5,000 times on his journey, but he got up each time. He said that the idea to walk the trail struck him when he was praying to God in thanksgiving for all the blessings he had received.

The author of the book *But Now I See* said, "Be careful what you pray for, you might just get it."

Other sports celebrities in attendance included Lyn St. James, a race car driver who won at Watkins Glen in 1985 and who plans to qualify for the "Indianapolis 500" this May; Bill Bradshaw, athletic director at DePaul University; Charles "The Natural" Murray, junior welterweight champion from Rochester; Pete Pavia, college basketball referee for The Big East Conference; Jim Pencak, a professional bowler; Jerry Flynn, 1988 Aquinas Hall of Famer; and Bill Ouweleen, director of development at Aquinas.

Father Michael Biondi, deceased member of the Class of 1942; William Able, Class of 1963; Dr. William Stephen, Class of 1954; and Joseph Repko, former head football coach at Aquinas were inducted into the Aquinas Sports Hall of Fame.

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