

NEWS RELEASE

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NIAAA to Honor Ten Athletic Administrators with Distinguished Service Awards

Indianapolis, IN (December 3, 2024) — Ten individuals who have made outstanding contributions to interscholastic athletics have been named recipients of the 2025 Bruce D. Whitehead Distinguished Service Award given by the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA).

These individuals will be honored at the 56th National Athletic Directors Conference, conducted jointly by the NIAAA and the NFHS. The celebration of the award recipients will take place on Monday, December 15, 2025, at the National Conference Awards Banquet.

The Bruce D. Whitehead Distinguished Service Award is presented annually to NIAAA members in recognition of their length of service, special accomplishments, and contributions to interscholastic athletics at the local, state, and national levels. Nominations are submitted by state athletic directors associations, screened by the NIAAA Awards Committee, and selected by the NIAAA Board of Directors.

This year's award winners include **Larry Cochren**, CMAA, District Athletic Director at Washington High School in New Washington, Indiana; **Deran Coe**, CMAA, District Athletic Director for Wake County Schools in Cary, North Carolina; **Damian Frassinelli**, CMAA, District Athletic Director at Stafford High School in Stafford Springs, Connecticut; **Kellie Hutcheson**, CMAA, Events

Coordinator for the Georgia Independent Athletic Association in Georgia; **Dwayne Johnson**, CMAA, District Athletic Director at Clallam Bay High School and Elementary School in Clallam Bay, Washington; **Lisa Langston**, CMAA, District Athletic Director for Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas; **Rick Lilly**, CMAA, Education Specialist for Student Activities for Henrico County Public Schools in Henrico, Virginia; **Ryan Miller**, CMAA, Assistant Principal/Athletic Director for Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey; **Jenny Wagner**, CAA, District Athletic Director/Assistant Principal for Centennial Jr./Sr. High School in Utica, Nebraska; and **Greg Warren**, CMAA, District Athletic Director at Blind Brook High School in Rye Brook, New York.

The following are biographical sketches on this year's award recipients.

Larry Cochren, CMAA

New Washington, Indiana

Larry Cochren, CMAA is the District Athletic Director at Washington High School in Indiana, holding 22 years of experience in the profession. He is a consistent contributor to athletic administration, whether it be at the local, state, or national levels.

In the NIAAA, Cochren holds a 22-year membership, earning his Certified Master Athletic Administration (CMAA) certification in 2014. He has attended 11 National Athletic Directors Conferences (NADCs), as well as taken 16 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs) to further his education on leading athletic programs.

As a member of his state organization, the Indiana Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (IIAAA), Cochren has served in leadership roles, including President and Vice President. He is a 22-time attender of the IIAAA state conference and current member of their Board of Directors.

In the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA), Cochren served as President from 2024-2025 and remains on their Executive Board. He has hosted

multiple IHSAA sectional, regional, and semi state events in sports such as basketball, tennis, and wrestling.

At the local level, Cochren recently oversaw a 4.5-million-dollar football field and track renovation in his school district. In the Southern Indiana Athletic Conference (SIAC), he was the Secretary-Treasurer for over a decade and has hosted many SIAC basketball tournament games.

Before Cochren became an athletic administrator, he coached boys and girls tennis, as well as girls basketball. He was also a teacher at East Allen Co. School District.

Cochren has been honored with many awards, including the NIAAA State Award of Merit, IIAAA Charles A. Maas Distinguished Service Award, District 4 and 6 Athletic Director of the Year, Educator of the Year at Benjamin Bosse High School, and he was an inductee into the Greater Evansville Sports Hall of Fame.

Deran Coe, CMAA

Cary, North Carolina

Deran Coe, CMAA holds 21 years of experience in athletic administration, currently serving as the District Athletic Director for Wake County Schools in North Carolina. His dedication to his profession has been evident in the work he's done across the country and locally.

As a member of the NIAAA, Coe has taken initiative to further his professional development by taking 40 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs). He is also a National Faculty member for LTC 709 and a co-author for LTC 717.

Further involvement in the NIAAA includes being a member of and co-chairing the Resolutions Committee, where he helped create resolution statements for the NIAAA on pertinent topics.

In addition, Coe has presented at workshops at the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC), attends the annual PDA Summit in Indianapolis, IN regularly, and is a graduate of the NIAAA U Leadership Cohort. He went on to mentor those in the NIAAA U Mentor Cohort.

Coe is a leader in the North Carolina Athletic Directors Association (NCADA), having served as their Secretary, Vice President, and President. Coe remains on their Executive Board and has attended every state conference since 2006.

In his local community, Coe founded the Wake LeADership Symposium in 2019. This annual professional development opportunity for over 60 athletic administrators was created to bring in national-level speakers and NIAAA National Faculty for the benefit of local athletic directors in North Carolina.

Coe also helped grow the number of certified athletic administrators in the Wake County Public School System from three to 17. His goal is to have all directors of athletics in the district certified within three years of being hired.

In addition to being an athletic director, Coe holds experience in coaching soccer, football, and wrestling, as well as track and field at a Special Olympics event.

Coe's honors include receiving the NIAAA Section 3 Frank Kovaleski Award, NIAAA State Award of Merit, NCADA Citation of Merit, NCADA Athletic Director of Excellence, and NFHS State Award of Outstanding Service.

Damian Frassinelli, CMAA

Stafford Springs, Connecticut

Damian Frassinelli, CMAA has been an athletic administrator for over 19 years, currently working as the District Athletic Director at Stafford High School. His time spent in his profession has been filled with service and leadership at the local, state, and national level.

Frassinelli started out volunteering with the NIAAA in 2014-2015 as a member of the 4th Strategic Planning Committee. He assisted with creating a five-year plan for the NIAAA to improve and grow. Then, Frassinelli served on the NIAAA Credentials Committee for 4 years before joining the Board of Directors in 2020.

As a member of the Board, Frassinelli served as President in 2023 and his theme for the year was "Our PATH Together." His acronym for PATH stood for Purpose, Aspiration, Trust, and Humility. Frassinelli graciously stepped in as President once President-Elect Becky Moran, CMAA accepted a staff position at the NIAAA headquarters.

In his state association, the Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors (CAAD), Frassinelli served as their President from 2016 to 2018. He volunteers as their State Conference Assistant Coordinator, Awards Banquet Emcee, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, and a Leadership Training Institute (LTI) State Instructor.

Furthermore, Frassinelli is a CAAD representative on several Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) committees, including football, baseball, and unified sports.

Locally, Frassinelli has been the By-Law Committee Chair, Schedule Committee Chair, and President for the Pequot Athletic Conference. In the North Central Connecticut Athletic Conference, he is their President and Schedule Chair.

Frassinelli also holds experience in coaching for several sports such as baseball, golf, football, and basketball – all at Stafford High School.

His honors include receiving the CAAD Distinguished Service Award, Unified/Special Olympics Coach of the Year, and Unsung Hero Award in Special Olympics Connecticut.

Kelli Hutcheson, CMAA

McDonough, Georgia

Kelli Hutcheson, CMAA holds 12 years of experience in athletic administration and now works as the Events Coordinator for the Georgia Independent Athletic Association. Prior to this, she worked at Henry County Schools as their Director of Athletics.

As a volunteer with the NIAAA, Hutcheson still serves as a Conference Advisory Committee member. She is also a co-author for Leadership Training Course (LTC) 717, is a National Faculty member for two courses, and has presented workshops at the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC).

In the Georgia Athletic Directors Association (GADA), Hutcheson is the current President and was their Vice President last year. She also helped with the Strategic Plan Committee, serving as Membership Chair. From 2021-2024, Hutcheson was GADA's NIAAA/GADA Initiative Chair, raising over \$50,000 over a three-year period.

Furthermore, Hutcheson has presented at GADA's State Conference many times, has attended every conference since 2016, and is on their Leadership Training Institute (LTI) Faculty. In the Georgia High School Association (GHSA), Hutcheson has volunteered on their Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, and hosted State Wrestling Tournament Sectionals.

While Hutcheson was the Director of Athletics at Henry County Schools, she added middle school girls flag football and Esports, opening opportunities for countless students. She also added scholarship offerings for Henry student-athletes, created an Honor Athlete Cord for students who meet service and academic requirements, and started an Athletic Parent Advisory Council with delegates from each school.

In addition, Hutcheson helped with the development of a Student Athlete Sports Network, which includes a podcast and reporting interviews. She launched a school spirit and sportsmanship social media campaign as well.

Hutcheson has an incredible background in cheer, working as event staff for the State Cheerleading Competition five times in the 1990s, co-founding and leading within the Georgia Cheerleading Coaches Association, and working as a head cheerleading coach for 30 years.

Hutcheson's honors include the Georgia Cheer Coach of the Year, Region Coach of the Year, and Region AD of the Year.

Dwayne Johnson, CMAA

Clallam Bay, Washington

Dwayne Johnson, CMAA has been a dedicated athletic administrator for his community, state, and in the NIAAA. He holds 16 years of experience in the field

and is the District Athletic Director at Clallam Bay High School and Elementary School in Washington state.

Accomplishments within the NIAAA for Johnson include attaining his Certified Master Athletic Administrator (CMAA) certification, completing 53 out of 60 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs), and completing the NIAAA U Leadership Cohort.

Johnson serves on the NIAAA Hall of Fame Committee and is a frequent attendee of the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC). Johnson is also a certified coach through the NFHS, earning his Accredited Interscholastic Coach (AIC) and Certified Interscholastic Coach (CIC) certifications in 2015.

In the Washington Secondary Schools Athletic Administrators Association (WSSAAA), Johnson is an Executive Board member and was President for 2024-2025. In 2024 he was their State Conference Chair, and he has presented several times at their conference.

Furthermore, in the WSSAAA Johnson has been a volunteer on the Constitution and State Conference committees. He has presented at the WSSAAA state conference several times as well.

In the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, Johnson is an Executive Board member and State Gymnastics Meet Director. He is involved as a tournament manager for several sports in the West Central District 3, in addition to serving as President on their Executive Board for 2015-2016.

At the local level, Johnson has served with local leagues in managing tournaments for sports such as cross country, gymnastics, wrestling, track and field, and basketball. He is also the Liaison between the City of Port Angeles and PASD Civic Field.

Johnson's honors include receiving the WIAA Gareth Giles Award and WSSAAA Outstanding Service Award.

Lisa Langston, CMAA

Fort Worth, Texas

Lisa Langston, CMAA is a veteran athletic administrator, holding 27 years of experience in the field and serving in leadership roles at the state and national levels. She is currently the District Athletic Director for Fort Worth Independent School District in Texas.

In her time as an NIAAA member, Langston was selected to serve on the Board of Directors. She eventually became President in 2021 and led with the theme "Embrace," inspiring hope and a commitment to love others as the world recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to serving on the Board, Langston was a member of the Certification Committee for six years, as well as a member of the Coaches Education Committee. She is also an author of and National Faculty member for Leadership Training Course (LTC) 706, as well as an author and chair of LTC 635.

In addition, Langston has been heavily involved with the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC), volunteering as a member on the NADC Host Committee in 2024, while speaking and facilitating at several other conferences.

In the Texas High School Athletic Directors Association (THSADA), Langston has been a member since 1999 and is a state instructor for LTCs. She has presented at a THSADA conference and been a panelist numerous times.

In Fort Worth, Langston is a part of the Fort Worth ISD After School Coordinating Board and has spoken at one of their Principals Professional Learning Events. She is on the Texas A&M University Sport Management-Interscholastic Athletic Administration – Ed.D. Steering Committee and the Texas A&M Coaching Academy Advisory.

Prior to her current role, Langston was the Assistant Director of Athletics for Fort Worth ISD, as well as a Coordinator for Middle School Intramural Sports in Fort Worth ISD and a teacher and coach.

Langston's honors include being in the Dallas Independent School District Athletic Hall of Fame for basketball, Texas A&M Athletic Hall of Fame for women's basketball and track & field, receiving the NIAAA State Award of Merit, and receiving the NFHS Citation.

Rick Lilly, CMAA

Henrico, Virginia

Rick Lilly, CMAA is the Education Specialist for Student Activities for Henrico County Public Schools in Virginia. He is a 19-year athletic administrator, continually proving his commitment to the profession and serving others.

Lilly started his NIAAA membership 2007 and has prioritized his professional development as a director of athletics. He's taken 23 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs) and attained his Certified Master Athletic Administrator (CMAA), all while attending the National Athletic Directors Conference every year he's been a member.

In addition, he's presented at the NADC eight times and represented Virginia as a State Delegate five times, voting on items such as NIAAA bylaw changes, Secretary elections, or general association updates. Lilly is on the NIAAA

Coaches Education Committee and also volunteers as a Certified Test Administrator, helping others gain their certification.

Lilly has been a member of the Virginia Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (VIAAA) since 2007 as well, participating with a couple committees. He's served as the Public Relations Committee Chair and Strategic Plan Chair twice. Moreover, Lilly spent time on the VIAAA Board of Directors and was their President in 2016.

In his local community, Lilly oversees nine high schools and 12 middle schools for Henrico County. He's also an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. He's served with the Virginia High School League (VHSL) as a Foundation Board member, Foundation Advisory Board member, and Football Ratings Committee representative.

Furthermore, Lilly has been the Northwestern District Treasurer, Vice Chairman of the Jefferson District, Jefferson District Handbook Chairman, and the Region II Handbook Chairman.

Lilly has been awarded with the VIAAA Outstanding Service Award, Virginia State Athletic Administrator of the Year for Class 3A/4A, NIAAA State Award of Merit, and Virginia Frank Kovalski Professional Development Award.

Ryan Miller, CMAA

Scotch Plains, New Jersey

Ryan Miller, CMAA is the Assistant Principal/Athletic Director for Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School in New Jersey. He is a 19-year athletic administrator, leading in several capacities to further the profession.

In the NIAAA, Miller completed the NIAAA U Executive Leadership Cohort, displaying his desire to continue his professional development. He's also completed 25 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs) and is a National Faculty instructor for LTC 720.

Other involvements with the NIAAA include Miller presenting workshops at the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC) and authoring several articles for the Interscholastic Athletic Administration (IAA) magazine.

In the Directors of Athletics Association of New Jersey (DAANJ), Miller volunteers as a Board of Trustees member and has experience on several other committees. He's served as the Hall of Fame Committee Chairperson, served on the Nominating Committee, the Mentoring Committee, and the Program of Excellence Award Committee.

At the DAANJ state conference, he's been a moderator for over 10 professional development sessions. He's also presented over 10 times at those same sessions and instructed many LTCs.

Miller is active in the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJIAA), as he currently serves on their Constitution, Controversies, Advisory, and Cross Country committees. He is also their Statewide Officials Committee Chairperson.

In his local area, Miller has been engaged with several of the conferences and leagues. He was the first elected Vice President of the Northwest Jersey Athletic Conference, volunteers on the alignment committee for both the boys and girls North Jersey Interscholastic Lacrosse League, and is a member of the North Jersey Interscholastic Ice Hockey League Executive Committee.

Prior to being an athletic administrator, Miller worked as a teacher and coach at the high school level. His awards include the North II Sectional Award of Merit,

Robert Hopek Professional Development Award, and the Neil Rosa Program of Excellence Award.

Jenny Wagner, CAA

Utica, Nebraska

Jenny Wagner, CMAA is the District Athletic Director/Assistant Principal for Centennial Jr/Sr. High School in Nebraska. She's still early on in her athletic administration career, holding seven years of experience yet she's shown her commitment to the profession.

Wagner earned her CAA in 2020 and has completed 21 Leadership Training Courses (LTCs). She recently served on the NIAAA 6th Strategic Planning Committee, specifically the Finance subcommittee where she led as Secretary. Wagner played a crucial role in developing the plan that will help guide the NIAAA from 2026 to 2030.

Additional involvements in the NIAAA include volunteering as the Section 5 Secretary, presenting at the National Athletic Directors Conference (NADC), and acting as a Nebraska State Delegate.

In the Nebraska State Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NSIAAA), she is on their Board of Directors as the Secretary/Treasurer and is a state instructor for LTCs. She has mentored multiple athletic administrators, helping them get acquainted with their work, and was also a member of their Scholarship Selection Committee.

Wagner also leads in the NSIAAA New AD Cohort, serves as the Golf Meet Co-Coordinator, and is a Female Athletic Administrator Panel leader.

At Centennial, Wagner is in her 16th year as either a teacher, coach, or administrator. She holds experience coaching every level from youth sports to high school in volleyball and basketball. She created and hosts the Centennial Classic All-Star Volleyball and Basketball Games, where 50 volleyball, girls basketball, and boys basketball athletes from 90 area schools compete in an all-star game – one of the top competitions in the state.

Wagner has also improved their facilities, bringing Daktronics videoboards to their gyms and football field. She also brought Hudl Athletic Packages to the athletic department and has presented for both Daktronics and Hudl.

Wagner has been honored for her achievements with the NIAAA State Award of Merit.

Greg Warren, CMAA

Rye Brook, New York

Greg Warren, CMAA is a dedicated athletic administrator, holding 22 years in the field and contributing wherever he can. He is the District Athletic Director at Blind Brook High School in Rye Brook, New York.

As an NIAAA member for 21 years, he is a Leadership Training Course (LTC) National Faculty member for LTC 616 and has completed 41 LTCs himself. He has attended 10 National Athletic Directors Conferences and completed the NIAAA U Executive Leadership Cohort.

In the New York State Athletic Administrators Association (NYSAAA), Warren served on their Executive Board and was President for a year. He currently is a New York State Coordinator for the Leadership Training Institute (LTI).

Additionally, Warren is the Aspiring AD Co-Chair, a state LTI instructor, and been an active participant at 17 New York state conferences. He has attended Section 1 meetings, served on the first New York Strategic Planning Committee, and conducts the annual First Timer/New AD meeting at the state conference.

Warren has used his writing skills to further the athletic administration profession, being a published author in the Vanguard Magazine and NYSAAA Newsletter.

In his local community, Warren has experience as Secretary/Treasurer for the Mid-State Athletic Conference. He oversaw finances, secured sites for league championships, scheduled and conducted CPR/AED and First Aid certification for coaches, and supervised league championships and awards.

Warren also holds experience in coaching back when he lived in Maryland. He was the head coach for a boys basketball championship in 1998 and was named the Basketball Coach of the Year as well.

Additional achievements for Warren include receiving the NIAAA Outreach Grant in order to get rural athletic administrators in New York certified and he received the Cal Ripken Jr. Foundation Grant.

About the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA)

The NIAAA is an accredited organization and is the professional organization for interscholastic athletic administrators. Based in Indianapolis, IN, the NIAAA's mission is to provide professional development options for directors of athletics, and to enhance the athletic administration profession. With a current individual membership of over 16,000, the NIAAA consists of member state athletic administrator associations in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, as well as internationally. For more information, visit the NIAAA website at www.niaaa.org.