

Del Norte's Van Hook wins close race for T-S boy's MVP

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Oh, what a season. And to think, we're not done yet.

The process of choosing an MVP, let alone first and second teams, is one that is sure to bring lots of arguments, statistics and talk of season highlights. But most of all, it brings discussion.

And all of the student-athletes, not just those who were chosen to these highly subjective lists deserve our attention. After all, they gave us countless hours of entertainment, brought about from countless hours they spent working in practice and in the classroom.

That said, after having several meetings, arguments and lots of discussion, the Times-Standard came up with consensus picks for the boys and girls first- and second-teams, and honorable mentions for the 2008 Humboldt-Del Norte Conference basketball season.

Perhaps most interesting to our readers was our choice for the boys MVP.

Keep in mind, these lists are independent of what the league will put out in the coming week. The conferences selections are based on where teams finished in the standings, ours are based solely on our observations of how the players played, regardless of where their teams placed in league.

We chose Del Norte's Cliff Van Hook as the boys MVP for the 2008 season.

That's not a slight to any of the other players in the conference. Not by a long shot. You could easily make a case for several players, and word is that was the case when the coaches sat down this week to choose their conference MVP.

We had the argument broken down to three players: Arcata's Jordan Bianco, Eureka's Greg Allen and Van Hook.

Allen is a fantastic player. If you only watch one game next year, make sure you catch one where he's playing. Preferably a re-match game against Arcata.

He's as fluid a player as you'll see at this level. A force on both ends of the court, he is a factor in every play. The one hangup we came across was, for all his spectacular moments, his leadership and ability to shoulder the load, Eureka finished third in the Big 5 and lost to Arcata all three times the schools met this year.

Bianco is another player who gave local crowds a show each night he stepped on the floor. The senior guard could create a shot as well as anyone, his defense was unrelenting -- who knows how many times he stole a lazy in-bounds pass and converted it for a quick layup -- and he somehow always seemed to come down with a rebound when his team needed it most.

It didn't hurt that after every momentum-turning play, the Arcata crowd, and self-proclaimed sixth man, doused the gym in chants of "MVP, MVP!"

He was this close.

Then Van Hook hit that game-winner to beat Arcata



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in the Tigers' gym late in the season.

His long jumper, a shot he created after catching an in-bounds pass from the scorers table, clinched the biggest win of the season for Del Norte. Warriors coach Blaine Lopez said after the game, "Cliff is our go-to guy and everyone knows it. In clutch situations, we want the ball in his hands and he wants the ball."

The one game he missed, at home against St. Bernard's, the Warriors lost.

Take nothing away from the Crusaders -- defeating Del Norte in that raucous gym is a tough task no matter what -- but that pretty much defines value.

Oh, and Lopez also conceded that Van Hook is the best defender on his team, which was arguably the best defensive team in the entire conference.

Van Hook led his team in scoring, and though he obviously had a talented roster to play with, the Warriors won a Big 5 league that was chock-full of talented rosters.

It was a great season that hopefully won't be over for about a week.

For some, it was an even greater debate as to who was the MVP this year.