

THE Bedford Bulletin

Athlete of the Month – Senior cager shoulders weight of leadership

March 28, 2008

BY [RYAN O'CONNOR](#)

Athlete of the Month sponsored by Indian Head Athletics

He didn't have much choice in the matter. Michael Stys, whose mother played basketball at Boston College and whose brother rode a full hoops scholarship to the University of Hartford, was destined for success on the court.

"It was laid out for me," said Stys. "I was expected to be a basketball player."

But it wasn't until the summer between his sophomore and junior years in high school that he began to realize his potential.

Stys, coming off two full seasons playing on the JV squad while watching his varsity counterparts claim back-to-back Division I titles, was approached by Central's coach, Doc Wheeler.

"You can be our fifth starter or you can be the 10th guy coming off the bench," said Wheeler. "I'll let you decide."

A year and a half later, the coach's tone was noticeably different.

"(Stys) is asked to do more than probably any player in the league," said Wheeler following the Little Green's season-ending 46-42 loss to state champ Salem in the Class L semifinal. "He leads us in scoring every game, has to guard the other team's best big man, and he's got to handle the rebounding."

True to form, Stys' stat line sat on top of the Central box score with 20 points in the Salem contest.

For his three-game playoff performance, and for leading his team on a five-game winning streak following a 16-point home setback to Salem on Feb. 22, Stys has been named the **Indian Head Athletics'** Athlete of the Month for March.

Becoming that kind of player wasn't an easy transition.

After coasting on natural talent since he was 10, Stys became a workhorse as a high school junior, dedicating countless hours inside the gymnasium and mentoring many of the team's younger players.

Salem's coach, E.J. Perry, is just happy to be rid of the forward for good.

"You can tell he is a gym rat. I love him as a player, and he had to really hold that team together because on some nights they only had two real scoring threats," said Perry, referring to Stys and junior Will Bayliss. "I told (Stys) at the Senior (All-Star game) I had nightmares because 10 years earlier his brother had knocked us out of the tournament when we were the (No.) 3 seed and Central was the (No.) 6 seed at UNH."

Knowing Stys had hit three buzzer-beaters earlier this season and recognizing the senior had already nailed several big shots in the semifinal game, Perry cringed when he saw his squad ahead by two with little more than 10 seconds remaining in the contest.

But the Blue Devils made it a two possession game and never gave Stys a chance to sink them.

Still, Perry said no matter where the hard-nosed player ends up, like his brother, he'll continue "getting the job done."

(Editor's note: The Athlete of the Month receives a \$50 gift certificate courtesy of **Indian Head Athletics**.)