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2008 Forsythe Award Presented To Jamie Gent & William Newkirk

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Feb. 11 – Jamie Gent, who has served Haslett Public Schools for 41 years, including 18 as athletic director; and William Newkirk, who recently retired after 35 years of service to educational athletics, the last 11 at Sanford Meridian Public schools, are the recipients of the Michigan High School Athletic Association's Charles E. Forsythe Award for 2008.

This annual award is in its 31st year of existence and is named after former MHSAA Executive Director Charles E. Forsythe, the Association's first full time and longest-serving chief executive. One or two recipients are selected each year by the MHSAA Representative Council, based on an individual's outstanding contribution to the interscholastic athletics community. Gent and Newkirk will be presented the award on March 15 at the Breslin Student Events Center in East Lansing at halftime of the Boys Basketball Class B Final.

Gent's career of service to educational athletics has been spent entirely at Haslett, where he started as a middle school teacher in three subjects and high school coach in three sports in 1967. He served in various teaching, coaching and administrative capacities in the district before beginning his second stint as the school district's athletic director in 1991, serving in that role since, exclusively since 2004. In his coaching career, he was the head coach at the school in track and field, boys basketball, and football at different times. He has also served as a registered official for over 15 years in basketball, baseball and softball.

Leading by example as a tireless worker, there may not be an athletic administrator who has hosted more MHSAA post-season tournament events than Gent. Over 100 tournaments, from Districts and Regionals in nearly every sport; to Football Playoff Semifinals; to MHSAA Finals in Cross Country and Wrestling; have been directed by Gent with the assistance of a dedicated school staff and enthusiastic community.

Gent's contributions have also been substantial to his peers in assisting them in their work with young people. He helped develop and deliver programming to athletic administrators on legal issues. He has been a speaker for numerous workshops on a variety of topics conducted by the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association and the MHSAA. He also developed a guide for schools to use covering emergency actions to be taken when necessary during athletic competitions and practices. He is being honored by the MIAAA as its 2008 Athletic Director of the Year, and he has also been named the Midwest Athletic Director of the Year by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

He has also been active in community work with 20-plus years of service with the local Kiwanis Club, and for three years was a local facilities director for the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life. Gent is a 1962 graduate of Bangor High School, where he was a multi-sport athlete. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from Central Michigan University in 1967, and a Master's Degree from Michigan State University in 1972.

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2-2-2 – Gent, Newkirk Honored With Forsythe Award

Newkirk retired following the 2006-07 school year after 35 years serving the educational community, the last 11 at Sanford Meridian. He had previously been superintendent from 1991 to 1996 at Maple City-Glen Lake; spent 15 years as an assistant principal, athletic director and principal at Clare High School; and started his career with teaching positions at Leroy Pine River and White Cloud. Central Michigan University is where he earned his Bachelor's, Master's and Specialist's Degrees.

He coached baseball, basketball and football during his educational career; and was a registered official in those sports, as well as cross country, softball and track and field. His baseball teams at Pine River won 87 percent of their games in a four-year period. As an official, he earned MHSAA Finals assignments in softball and cross country.

As an athletic administrator, he managed 37 MHSAA tournaments from the District through the Finals levels; and as a top-level district administrator, was involved in a variety of projects to improve the quality of education in every community in which he served.

While principal at Clare, Newkirk was first elected to the MHSAA's governing board, the Representative Council, on which he served for 20 years as he moved on to Maple City Glen Lake and Sanford Meridian, representing Class C and D schools in the northern part of the Lower Peninsula. As a Council member, he has been elected on multiple occasions to serve as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Association, and sat on numerous committees, including the Finance Committee.

Professionally, he has been active with the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals and the Michigan Association of School Administrators. In his community work, Newkirk has served on a variety of boards and committees, and now works on the Clare County Board of Commissioners.

In 2007, Newkirk was honored by the MHSAA with the Allen W. Bush Award for his service to educational athletics. He becomes the 11th Bush Award recipient to also be presented the Charles E. Forsythe Award.

“A lifetime of service to educational athletics can take you down two distinctively paths and lead you to the same end – making things better for young people – and Jamie Gent and Bill Newkirk are great studies in leadership by example,” said John E. “Jack” Roberts, Executive Director of the MHSAA. “Jamie Gent’s hands-on style, and Bill Newkirk’s vision for education and educational athletics have led them to make great contributions to our schools. We’re pleased to honor both with the Charles E. Forsythe Award.”

Past recipients of the Charles E. Forsythe Award are:

1978 - Brick Fowler, Port Huron; Paul Smarks, Warren
1979 - Earl Messner, Reed City; Howard Beatty, Saginaw
1980 - Max Carey, Freesoil
1981 - Steven Sluka, Grand Haven; Samuel Madden, Detroit
1982 - Ernest Buckholz, Mt. Clemens; T. Arthur Treloar, Petoskey
1983 - Leroy Dues, Detroit; Richard Maher, Sturgis
1984 - William Hart, Marquette; Donald Stamats, Caro
1985 - John Cotton, Farmington; Robert James, Warren
1986 - William Robinson, Detroit; Irving Soderland, Norway
1987 - Jack Streidl, Plainwell; Wayne Hellenga, Decatur

(more)

3-3-3 – Gent, Newkirk Honored With Forsythe Award

1988 - Jack Johnson, Dearborn; Alan Williams, North Adams
1989 - Walter Bazylewicz, Berkley; Dennis Kiley, Jackson
1990 - Webster Morrison, Pickford; Herbert Quade, Benton Harbor
1991 - Clifford Buckmaster, Petoskey; Donald Domke, Northville
1992 - William Maskill, Kalamazoo; Thomas G. McShannock, Muskegon
1993 - Roy A. Allen Jr., Detroit; John Duncan, Cedarville
1994 - Kermit Ambrose, Royal Oak
1995 - Bob Perry, Lowell
1996 - Charles H. Jones, Royal Oak
1997 - Michael A. Foster, Richland; Robert G. Grimes, Battle Creek
1998 - Lofton C. Greene, River Rouge; Joseph J. Todey, Essexville
1999 - Bernie Larson, Battle Creek
2000 - Blake Hagman, Kalamazoo; Jerry Cvengros, Escanaba
2001 - Norm Johnson, Bangor; George Lovich, Canton
2002 - John Fundukian, Novi
2003 - Ken Semelsberger, Port Huron
2004 – Marco Marcet, Frankenmuth
2005 – Jim Feldkamp, Troy
2006 – Dan McShannock, Midland; Dail Prucka, Monroe
2007 – Keith Eldred, Williamston; Tom Hickman, Spring Lake

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,600 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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