

## A night of 28 stars

Written by Scott Unash

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This past Sunday night was the 11th Annual Celebration of Sports Banquet. This banquet honors not only the Athlete's of the Year from each of the Linn County High Schools, but also celebrates the achievements of the East Central Iowa Special Olympians for the year.

Each year a Male and Female Athlete of the Year for Linn County is selected from the 28 athletes assembled. It is the oldest cliché in the book, but any of the athletes in attendance could hold that honor. This year the two recipients were Prairie's Matt Stocker and Linn-Mar's Kiah Stokes.

I had the honor of emceeding the banquet again this year. This night sort of puts a "ribbon" on the high school sports year. Yes, I know that baseball and softball are just getting underway and will not crown champions until July, but this night is a chance to look back and reflect on what transpired during the past 10 months of competition.

This group of athletes won a total of 270 letters during their athletic careers - 164 for the girls and 106 for the boys. Many will go on to play sports in college, some will concentrate on their academics and prepare for the next stage of their lives. They all are winners.

Two of the biggest winners of the night were the Special Olympians of the Year that were honored. Ashley Courtney was the Female Athlete of the Year, while Brad Flinn earned the Male Athlete of the Year honor. The dedication that these two athletes have shown throughout their lives is an inspiration to all who are involved in athletics.

The guest speaker was Iowa State men's basketball coach Fred Hoiberg and he capped off the evening with a great message about the merits of being a multi-sport athlete and being a leader on and off the playing field.

Every year after this night I reflect on the past school year and ask myself, "Will it ever be this good again?" Will there be more great games, great performances and state and individual

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championships? Each year I doubt it will be this good again, and each year I'm wrong. The next season is usually even better.

So congratulations to the Class of 2011, and here's looking ahead to the seniors of 2012!