

Highland's Smith Finalist for WBCA National Coach of the Year

BJ Smith, the women's head basketball coach at Highland Community College, is a finalist for 2012 RUSSELL ATHLETIC/Women's Basketball Coaches Association National Junior/Community College Coach of the Year honor. He is joined by Ron Harris of Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Misty Opat of Rock Valley College (Rockford, IL), Brett Vanna of Louisburg College (Louisburg, NC) and Karen Willey of Kishwaukee College (Malta, IL) as finalists announced Thursday. The winner will be announced during the second annual WBCA Awards Show on Monday, April 2, in Denver as part of the WBCA National Convention held in conjunction with the NCAA® Women's Final Four®.

"The WBCA congratulates these five coaches on being named finalists for this year's RUSSELL ATHLETIC/WBCA National Junior/Community College Coach of the Year award," said WBCA CEO Beth Bass. "Each coach was selected by their peers and is deserving of this honor for their terrific seasons. On behalf of the WBCA and its members, I wish all five of these finalists the best of luck at the WBCA Awards Show in Denver."

"Russell Athletic believes in the 'Power of Team' and no team can be successful without a powerful leader," said Executive Vice President Gary Barfield. "Russell Athletic is pleased to honor the coaches nominated for Coach of the Year and applaud their successes."

Smith is in his first season as head coach at Highland. Smith led the Scotties to a 27-3 record and a second-place finish in the Jayhawk East Conference. With Smith at the helm, the team not only enjoyed its most successful season in history, cracking the top 10 national rankings, but also its first winning season since 1984.

RUSSELL ATHLETIC and the WBCA annually recognize six national coaches of the year – one in each of the WBCA's five collegiate divisions (NCAA Divisions I, II, III, NAIA and junior/community college) as well as high school. This marks the 30th year this award has been presented, which has been selected by the WBCA since 1983.