

MOST VALUABLE ATHLETIC TRAINER AWARD

Announcing our 2014 Winner Brian Robinson

Glenbrook South High School, Glenview, III.

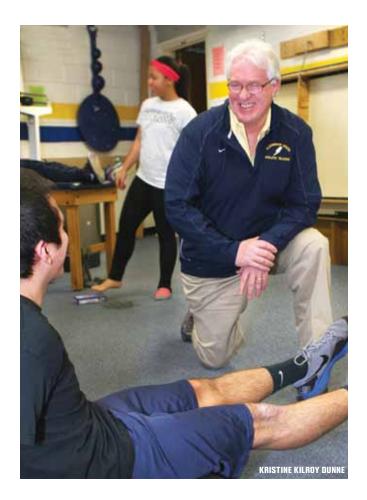
BY R.J. ANDERSON

When administrators at Glenbrook South High School in Glenview, Ill., hired 23-year-old Brian Robinson as the state's first full-time high school athletic trainer in 1977, they handed him a blank canvas. Thirty-seven years later, Robinson, MS, ATC, LAT, who is retiring at year's end, is leaving behind a 2,200-square-foot, state-of-the-art masterpiece manned by three full-time athletic trainers. It is a model athletic training program, at any level.

An architect, trailblazer, and healer, Robinson's expertise and work ethic are held in the highest regard by Glenbrook South's athletes, parents, teachers, coaches, and administrators. The same holds true far beyond the suburban Chicago high school, as Robinson is recognized nationally as a champion for athletic training at the scholastic level. Chair of the NATA Secondary School Athletic Trainers' Committee for seven years and a regional representative for eight, he has worked tirelessly for nearly four decades to enhance the public's perception of and promote the need for high school athletic trainers.

For those reasons, and many more, Brian Robinson is the recipient of the 2014 Most Valuable Athletic Trainer Award, sponsored by Sports Health, to honor professionals at the high school level. He was nominated by NATA Hall of Famers Sue Stanley-Green, MS, ATC, LAT, Athletic Training Program Director at Florida Southern College, and Al Green, MEd, ATC, LAT, Florida Southern's Head Athletic Trainer and Associate Athletic Director, who describe Robinson as a "pioneer and torchbearer for expanding and improving medical care in secondary schools." They cite his athletic training program as one that "initiated the growth of high school athletic training programs all around Chicago and all over the country," adding that Robinson's impact on

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athletic training in secondary schools has been a "significant and important chapter in the history of our profession." A member of the Illinois Athletic Trainers Hall of Fame, Robinson has also been recognized by the NATA as a Most Distinguished Athletic Trainer.

Largely a self-made athletic trainer, Robinson's journey is as notable as his accomplishments. When he was a high school sophomore at Glenwood High School in Canton, Ohio, in 1970, Robinson learned about the profession from his j.v. basketball coach, who had studied sports medicine in college. Intrigued, Robinson ordered a student athletic trainer manual published by Cramer Products and subscribed to its instructional newsletter, "The First Aider."

"I liked science and I loved sports, so athletic training seemed like a natural fit-plus my coach convinced me that my NBA career probably wasn't going to last very long," Robinson says. "Ever since then, an athletic trainer is all I've ever wanted to be."

With a career goal coming into focus, the summer before his junior year, Robinson hopped on a bus bound for Baltimore to attend what would be his first of many NATA National Conventions. "Back then, there were only four college students there, and I was the only high school kid," he says. "I remember talking to so many great people and just

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Hooked, the 16-year-old returned to Glenwood and traded in his high tops for a medical kit. As the school's most experienced—and only—sports medicine voice, Robinson was given a small athletic training room and operated without much oversight, which was typical at the time. Thankfully, his visit to the NATA Convention exposed him to learning materials, resources, and more importantly, a network of knowledgeable professionals he could turn to for help. One of those people was Al Hart, then the Head Athletic Trainer at Ohio University.

"Al took me under his wing and kept in close contact with me," Robinson says. "We would talk anytime I had questions or if he had a helpful book he wanted to send me."

Prior to his senior year, Robinson had been granted early acceptance at Ohio University, where he planned to study

"That first day, I fished a desk out of the dumpster, refinished it, and put it in the room. I'm still using it today and it's probably the only thing that's been at the school longer than me."

athletic training under Hart. But later that summer, Hart called to say he had been hired as the Head Athletic Trainer at Ohio State University. "Al asked if I was interested in joining him and without hesitation I accepted his offer," Robinson says. "Going to Ohio State turned out to be the best thing I could have done."

In August of 1972, six weeks before the start of classes, Robinson arrived in Columbus, and immediately started working with the nationally ranked Buckeye football team. "I learned a lot about work ethic," he says. "During two-a-days we worked 15 hours a day, then the rest of the year, I put in five to eight hours a day on top of my regular class work.

"And there was so much autonomy," Robinson adds. "Back then, student athletic trainers could do a lot of things they're not allowed to do today. I was put in situations where I was in charge and had to figure things out myself. Also, we had top doctors at practice every day, and they were great about letting us look over their shoulders and answering our questions."

After graduating with a BS in physical education, Robinson's next stop was graduate school at the University of Arizona, where he earned an MS in Education with a specialization in Athletic Training. As part of his internship, he coordinated sports medicine coverage at a Tucson-area high school. There, he was hit with a giant dose of reality. "I was coming from a multi-million dollar college operation to a high school with a \$600-a-year budget, and it was a bit of culture shock," Robinson says. "Once I accepted and adjusted to my surroundings, I learned a lot about working at the high school level."

In 1977, Robinson graduated from Arizona, but with the national economy tanking, athletic training jobs—especially at state universities—were scarce. So he headed home to Canton where a job painting houses awaited. He soon received a call from a friend who had just been hired at Northwestern University.

"He told me Glenbrook South had called Northwestern for advice about creating and filling an athletic trainer position," Robinson says. "So right after I got off the phone with him, I called Glenbrook South and inquired about the opening. They informed me they had just completed their interview process, but if I could get there the next day, they would give me a look.

"I drove through the night and sat down with the principal and athletic director the next morning," he continues. "The interview went well and they said the job was mine if I wanted it. They also told me that because they had never had an athletic trainer before, I could shape the program however I wanted to. Though I wasn't wild about working at a high school, I didn't have any better options, so I accepted their offer."

Robinson viewed the position as a stopgap until he could find something bigger and better. "I didn't have any intention of staying," he says. "I figured after two or three years, I would get back to NCAA Division I athletics and that would be my career path. But the longer I was here, the more I liked the atmosphere and the people."

With no existing space for athletic training, Robinson converted an equipment storage closet into an area where he could evaluate, treat, and rehab athletes. "That first day, I fished a desk out of the dumpster, refinished it, and put it in the room," he says. "I'm still using it today and it's probably the only thing that's been at the school longer than me."

Over time, the athletic training room received minor upgrades and small expansions. Then, in 1995, as part of a capital project that included the construction of a new field house, Robinson relocated the athletic training department into a renovated 2,200-square-foot area that now features two whirlpools, four taping tables, six treatment tables, and a vast collection of modern rehab modalities.

Along with enhancing his program's space and equipment, halfway through his tenure, Robinson convinced administrators to expand his staff. "Over the years, our school added more sports and there were more teams at every level of competition," he says. "We reached a point where I was spending time rehabbing injured players in the athletic training room while I was supposed to be providing coverage on the field. I was very uncomfortable with the holes that existed in my coverage, so I went to our administration and asked if they would consider hiring a second athletic trainer."

In lobbying administrators, Robinson offered up hard

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data to quantify the need for additional hands. "I have always kept meticulous records of how many kids we see each day and for what, as well as the type of treatments we are doing and how long they take," he says. "Using those numbers, I convinced our school to create a part-time assistant athletic trainer position, which they eventually upgraded to full time.

"A few years later, I was able to illustrate how many more athletes we could help by adding a third full-time athletic trainer, especially since we had started even more teams," Robinson continues. "Because of the strong data and our past successes, convincing them to add that third position was probably the easiest thing I've ever done." Today, Glenbrook South offers 28 sports with around 1,600 athletes participating each year. And though the quantity of athletes served by Robinson and his staff is impressive, it's the quality of care that stands out, including a number of innovative and cutting-edge programs not normally found at the scholastic level. For example, before it was on most high schools' radars, Robinson implemented a concussion-management program that includes an academic modification protocol.

"About five years ago, we realized that a lot of our concussed athletes were having problems when trying to do homework and take tests, setting back their recovery," says Robinson. "So we designed a phased academic modifi-

BEHIND THE AWARD

or more than three decades, Phil Hossler, MS, ATC, Head Athletic Trainer at East Brunswick (N.J.) High School, has advocated for high school athletic trainers. From serving as President of the Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association to working as Co-Director of the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association's athletic training program to writing for numerous publications, he has been a champion for the profession in many ways.

Two years ago, the four-time athletic training Hall of Famer took his efforts in yet one more direction by helping to create a special award specifically for high school athletic trainers. Now in its second year, the Most Valuable Athletic Trainer Award, sponsored by Sports Health, honors one high school athletic trainer who goes above and beyond by providing outstanding medical care to high school student-athletes, while also giving generously to his or her larger community. Hossler came up with the idea and worked in conjunction with *Training & Conditioning* and Sports Health to get it off the ground.

"Being an athletic trainer at the high school level is a difficult and multifaceted job," Hossler says. "We are versatile sports-medicine professionals because we need to have expertise in dealing with a variety of injuries and conditions, and because we are handling young athletes going through different levels of emotional and physical growth. In fact, the job often requires as much knowledge of psychology as physiology. We also must be accessible and able to work well with coaches and parents whose child who may be injured for the first time or struggling with a recurring injury.

"This award is a great way to highlight the impor-

tant work high school athletic trainers do all over the country," he continues. "We are being perceived as knowledgeable professionals at an increasing rate every year. Athletic communities realize the valuable commodity that they have in the school."

Hossler has served as two-time President of the Athletic Trainers' Society of New Jersey, Co-Director of a state-



wide workshop for student athletic training assistants for 13 years, and Medical Director for the more than 6,000-member New Jersey Garden State Games for 15 years, among other appointments. In addition, he has published many articles in NATA journals, written five sports medicine-related books, and regularly contributes columns to a variety of magazines and newspapers.

Reaching out to those less fortunate is also a priority for Hossler. Over the course of his career, he started an annual clothing drive and a program to collect toys and clothing for a local shelter. "Because athletic trainers are devoted to helping others, volunteer work in the community is something that comes naturally to many of us," Hossler says. "I enjoy giving my time in many different areas."

MOST VALUABLE ATHLETIC TRAINER AWARD

cation program-some people call it return-to-learn-where we work with a concussed student's teachers to arrange a break from homework and tests while they're recovering. The idea is to give an injured brain time to heal, then get the student back to optimal learning as quickly as possible."

Convincing parents, teachers, and administrators to buy into programs like academic modification is no easy task. However, for Robinson, the idea was accepted with minimal pushback. "I think that speaks to how well respected Brian is around here," says Glenbrook South Athletic Director Steve Rockrohr. "Also, his profile is on a national level-he's been featured on ESPN and is a member of NFHS committees on sports medicine-and he gets respect for that. The teachers realize he's an expert and knows what he's talking about, so they defer to his knowledge."

In getting through to teachers, Robinson found it's good to be heard and seen. "One of the smartest things I ever did early in my career was eating lunch in the faculty cafeteria instead of the athletic training room," he says. "That allowed me to introduce myself and share what I do with them.

"It paid off a number of years ago when the administration decided it was going to take \$1,000 from each academic department and put that money in the athletic training program," Robinson adds. "That's a pretty big cut, but there was no argument from any of the teachers or department supervisors because they all understand what I do and that athletic training is in the best interest of the student-athletes."

Being inclusive and sharing knowledge in a patient and respectful manner is one of Robinson's biggest strengths. "He is great about keeping lines of communication open and makes everybody feel like part of the injury-management process," says Rockrohr. "Parents, kids, faculty members, and coaches all love him. I think his confidence and knowledge puts him at ease around people. He enjoys his job-and that really shows."

Robinson's approachability carries over to his hands-on work with athletes—his favorite aspect of his job. "When I'm spending a couple of hours a day rehabbing someone, I really get to know them," he says. "I learn their fears, hopes, and dreams and become attached to them. "I enjoy working with an athlete through a rehab that lasts weeks and months, then seeing them have success on the field," Robinson adds. "Often, that person has struggled physically and emotionally with their injury, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't get a little teary-eyed watching them get back to doing what they love."

Robinson says his secret to making



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headway with high school athletes has been to use his ears more than his mouth. "They have enough people talking at them and they really appreciate it when someone takes the time to listen to what they have to say," he says. "There's an old expression: 'They don't realize how much you know until they realize how much you care.'"

SPORTS

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In addition to improving the lives of students at Glenbrook South, Robinson has been a huge force in enhancing the public perception of high school athletic training, while also helping his peers get more out of their careers. Though he has been a part of countless state, regional, and national organizations, his proudest accomplishments can be traced back to the 15 years he spent on the NATA Secondary School Athletic Trainers' Committee.

"To raise our profile, the Secondary School Committee made a push to have high school athletic trainers conduct more interviews with the media and write more articles on

From there, Robinson convinced NFHS leaders to establish a non-voting position on its Sports Medicine Advisory Committee to be filled by the NATA Secondary School Committee Chair.

important topics involving high school athletes and sports medicine," Robinson says. "For example, I spoke about concussions on ESPN's 'Outside the Lines' and was interviewed on CNN and the 'CBS Evening News.'"

He also helped implement the Secondary School Employment Strategy Workshops, which were presented at NATA district and national meetings. "There is nothing in our college curriculum programs that teaches how to quantify and articulate an athletic trainer's value and worth," Robinson says. "But when you want to add a position to your department, increase the size of your athletic training room or budget—or, heaven forbid, fight for your job—you need to illustrate your value. Through those workshops and various articles I've written, I have drawn upon my own experiences to teach high school athletic trainers how to calculate and communicate their worth to their athletic director, principal, and the athletes' parents."

As Chair of the Secondary School Committee, Robinson was largely responsible for helping thaw what was a chilly relationship between the NATA and the NFHS. "There had been some ill will between the two organizations and I really had to push hard to get leaders from both groups in the same room to work out their issues," he says. "There were some misconceived notions about the role of each organization. For example, I think the NFHS thought of the NATA as being very self-serving in calling for every high school to employ a full-time athletic trainer, but they quickly realized that wasn't the case once they heard the reasons behind our stance. As we talked things out, our rapport improved dramatically, as did our channels of communication."

From there, Robinson convinced NFHS leaders to establish a non-voting position on its Sports Medicine Advisory Committee to be filled by the NATA Secondary School Committee Chair. "The NFHS had always had athletic trainers on that committee, but those people often did not have access to the policies of the NATA and weren't plugged into its leadership," says Robinson, who served on the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee from 2011-13. "Many times, those representatives didn't know what was going on in secondary school athletic training beyond their own personal experience. This new position gave the NATA a clearer voice in the NFHS and allowed it to know our policies and best practices."

With his career as a high school athletic trainer winding down, Robinson has his sights set on spending more time with his wife and two children—one a college sophomore, the other a high school junior—and says he may one day pursue a job in education. "I would love to teach somewhere in an athletic training curriculum program," he says. "But more than anything, I'm looking forward to doing what I want, when I want, rather than having to plan around other people's schedules. In the secondary school environment, our schedules are not necessarily our own. We're on call 24/7 and we get phone calls on holidays and weekends. Over a period of time, that kind of wears on you.

"Still, it is with mixed emotions that I'm leaving Glenbrook South," Robinson continues. "People ask me all the time how many days I have left until I retire. But I have no idea-I'm definitely not counting the days. I love my job."

FINALISTS

The following athletic trainers were finalists for this year's Most Valuable Athletic Trainer Award.

CHRISTINA EMRICH

Praised for providing tireless around-the-clock sports medicine coverage and looking for every teachable moment for students, Christina Emrich, MS, ATC, EMT, Head Athletic Trainer and Lead Teacher for the Sports Medicine and Management Academy at Red Bank Regional High School in Little Silver, N.J., was nominated by one of her students. Also the school's Assistant Athletic Director, she has implemented a cardiac screening program for her athletes and many of her students have gone on to study athletic training in college—two are currently head athletic trainers at neighboring high schools.

Off campus, she is heading into her sixth term as Cap-







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tain of the local EMS squad and was heavily involved in the disaster relief work after Hurricane Sandy. Emrich was honored with the NATA's first annual Secondary Athletic Training Committee/Gatorade Award in 2009, serves on the Executive Council of the Athletic Trainers' Society of New Jersey, and is a member of the Red Bank Regional High School Athletics and New Jersey Scholastic Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

GLEN "LARRY" COOPER

Along with bringing cutting edge care to his student-athletes for 31 years, Larry Cooper, MS, ATC, LAT, Head Athletic Trainer and a teacher at Penn Trafford High School in Harrison City, Pa., has been a champion of improving the athletic training profession at the high school level. Current Chair of the NATA's Secondary School Committee, Cooper is a former Chair of the Pennsylvania Athletic Trainers' So-

HONORABLE MENTION

The following athletic trainers received honorable mention in the awards program.

Sean Ahonen, MEd, ATC, Foley (Ala.) High School

Eric Cardwell, ATC, North Hills High School, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Jason Dodd, ATC, MEd, Van (Tex.) High School

Joe Ewald, ATC, Howell (Mich.) High School

Lori Gill, ATC, Riverdale Country School, Bronx, N.Y.

Anna Griffiths, ATC, Land O' Lakes (Fla.) High School

John Panos, ATC, Fox Chapel Area School District, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Breanne Piatt, MS, ATC, Brookville High School, Rustburg, Va.

Shaketha Pierce, ATC, Lancaster (Texas) Independent School District

Amy Rust, ATC, Tempe (Ariz.) Preparatory Academy

Kai Seshiki, ATC, Colton (Wash.) High School

Michael Shetley, ATC, Appomattox (Va.) County High School

Therese Sparn, ATC, Clarksville (Tenn.) High School

Melinda "Mindy" Therriault, ATC, Bunnell High School, Stratford, Conn. ciety Secondary School Committee, where he helped create regulations for safer weight loss in wrestling.

He has also worked with the Brian Injury Association of Pennsylvania to develop and present free concussion education programs in all 14 of the state athletic association's districts. In addition, Cooper developed a secondary school athletic trainer database that has been instrumental in bringing together high school athletic trainers from across the state.

PERRY DENEHY

Director of Sports Medicine for the Sycamore Community School District in Cincinnati, Ohio, Perry Denehy, MA, ATC, is recognized for his ability to establish deep connections with students, parents, coaches, administrators, and community members. He made such an impression on one set of parents that when their son passed away suddenly, they asked Denehy to deliver the eulogy at the funeral.

He has also served the community as a firefighter for 25 years and works with the Critical Incident Stress Management Team, an organization that provides Southern Ohio caregivers with counseling and other tools in the aftermath of tragic situations. He spent time assisting New York City firefighters after 9/11. A member of the NATA Secondary School Committee and the NATA Board of Certification Standards Committee, Denehy was the 2002 Ohio Athletic Trainer of the Year and was voted into the Ohio Athletic Trainers' Association Hall of Fame in 2010.

MARIA HUTSICK

Nominated by two of her students, with letters of support from several teachers, coaches, and administrators, Maria Hutsick, MS, LAT, ATC, CSCS, has made what Principal Robert Parga calls "invaluable contributions" at Medfield (Mass.) High School, where she has served as Head Athletic Trainer since 2006, after more than 20 years as Director of Sports Medicine at Boston University. Along with providing top-notch athletic training services and developing innovative strength and conditioning programs, Hutsick's calling card is her ability to connect with athletes, coaches, and the students she mentors in the sports medicine program she implemented.

Teachers at the school also laud her skills and compassion, with one commenting that "Maria changed my life when she diagnosed me with compartment syndrome after doctors had told me I had shin splints for 10 years." Hutsick served nine years as athletic trainer for the U.S. Women's Ice Hockey Team and is a past president of the College Athletic Trainers' Society.

NAIRI MELKONIAN

Known for her service to her school and community, Nairi Melkonian, MS, ATC, LAT, CSCS, has volunteered at the Boston Marathon since 1986 and was there when the

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bombing took place in April 2013. Head Athletic Trainer and Assistant Athletic Director at Austin Preparatory School in Reading, Mass., her nomination included tributes from several coaches, including Bill Maradei, a Massachusetts Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame inductee, who wrote, "I have been a football coach for 40 years and Nairi Melkonian is without a doubt the finest, most professional, compassionate, and caring athletic trainer I have had the absolute pleasure to work with."

Melkonian has served as a District One NATA representative since 2005 and has won an NATA Athletic Trainer Service Award. She was inducted into the Athletic Trainers of Massachusetts Hall of Fame in 2011.

DAVID BOGENSCHUTZ

Among 10 letters of nomination for David Bogenschutz, ATC, one from a parent may best sum up the work of the longtime Head Athletic Trainer and teacher at Miamisburg (Ohio) High School: "I am proud to say that I had the privilege to learn from Bogie. I am even more proud to say that my daughter is a second generation to learn from him."

Coaches, students, and parents extol his dedication to helping students through injuries as well as family crises. A member of the Ohio Critical Incident Stress Management Team and the Ohio Athletic Trainers' Association Secondary Schools Committee, he also volunteers with many youth athletic leagues.

SUZANNE NANO

At Gross Catholic High School, in Bellevue, Neb., about 40 percent of the past three graduating classes have majored in health sciences at college, and many of them say they have been inspired by Suzanne Nano, ATC, Head Athletic Trainer and a teacher at the school for the past 23 years. She was nominated by the school's strength coach who lauds her as a "master at communicating with our students and motivating them" and included a video with statements from coaches, students, and administrators.

A letter from Michael Gross, MD, at Gikk Ortho Specialists in Omaha, calls her a great asset to the medical community and a role model to others. Nano also volunteers with the Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy and the Omaha Lancers ice hockey team.

For more information on finalists and honorable mentions, please visit a new special section of our website: www.Training-Conditioning.com/MostValuable.php.

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