

# Best of the 2000s

Division II Bulletin *looks back at the best of the best from the first decade of the new millennium*

by Gary Rubin, Editor and Publisher

**B**est of lists are hard to put together. Good thing we only do this once a decade. For the second time, *Division II Bulletin* reveals its picks for the Best of the Decade, this time the 2000s.

Here's a look at the Best Program, Best Team, Best Player, Best Coach and Best Championship Game of the last 10 years. ●

## Best Program

**Winona State.** With two national championships during the decade, and three title game appearances, Winona State lays claim to the best Division II men's basketball program of the 2000s.

The Warriors were a second away from a three-peat, but fell short against Barton in 2007, and set an NCAA Division II single-season record for wins (38-1) in 2008. They also put together a 57-game win streak.

**Runners Up:**

**Metro State** — two national titles under Mike Dunlap during the decade.

**Kentucky Wesleyan** — four straight title game appearances and one championship for the Panthers. Although one appearance was forfeited, KWC still was the cream of the crop mid-decade.

**Virginia Union** — two title games and one trophy for one of the most successful Division II programs.

**Bentley** — Three straight Sweet 16 appearances late in the decade and a 143-24 record the second half of the 2000s.

## Best Coach

**Mike Leaf** has led the Warriors of Winona State for 11 seasons, and his record in the 2000s speaks for itself: A 273-86 record, three national championship game appearances, two Division II titles, two Molten/*Division II Bulletin* Coach



of the Year awards, and a 100 percent graduation rate earn him the Best Coach of the 2000s.

**Runners Up:**

**Mike Dunlap, Metro State** — Led the Roadrunners to two national titles and was a Molten/*Division II Bulletin* Coach of the Year.

**Ray Harper, Kentucky Wesleyan** — Had the Panthers sitting high in the mid-decade with four straight title appearances. He captured his second *DIIB* Coach of the Year award during the decade.

**Ron Niekamp, Findlay** — Leader of the decade's only unbeaten team and a national coach of the year.

**Dave Robbins, Virginia Union** — Became just the third man to win three Division II national championships in a career and the first to win at least one title in three different decades.

## Best Player



Winona State's **John Smith** made his national debut as a sophomore when he was named the Elite Eight MVP and

helped the Warriors host a national trophy. For the next two seasons, he dominated and was the *Division II Bulletin* Player of the Year twice, the only player during the 2000s to earn back-to-back honors. His senior year, he averaged 17.7 ppg and 8.6 rpg and cut down the nets once again.

**Runners Up:**

**Jerome Beasley, North Dakota** — Averaged a double double his senior year of 28.4 points and 10.2 rebounds. Was the *DIIB* Player of the Year in 2003.

**Josh Bostic, Findlay** — Led the undefeated national champions at 18.6 ppg, 6.2 rpg. Player of the Year in 2009.

## Best Final

Division II basketball has had some dramatic finishes, and none better than these two. That's why they tie for the distinction as Best Championship Game:

- **2007.** In one of the most dramatic finishes in Division II basketball history, Barton forced a turnover and senior guard Anthony Atkinson scored with less than a second remaining in the game to give the Bulldogs a 77-75 win over defending champion Winona State in the 2007 Division II championship game.

The win snapped the Warriors' division record 57-game winning streak.

Winona State appeared to have the game in hand as it held a 74-67 lead with 45 seconds, but Barton rallied to tie the score at 75-75. As the game neared the conclusion, Barton guard Bobby Buffalo came up with a steal and fed the ball ahead to Atkinson streaking down the floor. It was just a matter of whether or not he would beat the clock as he headed to the basket. Atkinson converted his layup just before the clock hit zero.

- **2009.** In the birthplace of basketball, Springfield, Mass., Findlay's Tyler Evans took an inbounds pass outside the three-point line with 2.4 seconds remaining in overtime, dribbled left and buried a step-back three-pointer from 26 feet as time expired, delivering the Findlay Oilers a 56-53 overtime victory over Cal Poly Pomona and their first national championship.

The Oilers capped an undefeated season and became the first NCAA Division II men's champion to go 36-0, and the first to post a perfect record since Fort Hays State (34-0) in 1996.

### What do you think?

Agree? Disagree? Let us know what you think of our Best of the 2000s selections.

Send us an email or DM on Twitter about the teams, coaches, players and games that you would add to our lists.

We want to hear from you!

## Best Team

It's hard to argue with perfection. At 36-0 and the decade's only unbeaten national champion, Findlay can claim the Best Team label for its 2008-09 squad.

The Oilers were the Preseason No. 1 selection in the DIIB Top 25 and went out and proved that it was the best team.

### Runners Up:

**Winona State, 2008** — The Warriors were unbeaten against Division II opponents that season, having lost their only game to a Division III program. Winona set an NCAA Division II single-season record for wins (38-1) in 2008.

**Bentley, 2008** — Finished the regular season unbeaten for the second straight year and lost only to Winona State in the Elite Eight, giving them a 34-1 record.

**Virginia Union, 2005** — Finished 30-4 and defeated four number-one seeds in consecutive games to win the national title. The Panthers defeated Bowie State University, Metro State 78-63, Lynn 76-61, and Bryant.

**Adelphi, 2001** — 31-1. Lost its only game in the Elite Eight to Tampa.

**C.W. Post, 2009** — Unbeaten until the Elite Eight, where the Pioneers fell to unbeaten Findlay. Finished 30-1.

## Best Conference

**Great Lakes Valley Conference.** The GLVC defended its title as the Best Conference of the decade (see sidebar).

A GLVC member, either Kentucky Wesleyan or Southern Indiana, appeared in the first five national title games of the decade. Although that was it for championship games for the GLVC for the rest of the 2000s, no other league had as many.

## Biggest News

We've covered the number of teams that have made the move to Division I status many times on these pages. However, the loss of the North Central Conference after so many years of Division II participation (formed in 1922) cries out for recognition. Division II powerhouse teams like North Dakota, South Dakota, North Dakota State and South Dakota State left for Division I and left the league paralyzed. After years of trying to fill the void, the league ceased operations in 2008.

## Best of the 1990s

Since our debut in 1991, *Division II Bulletin* has covered Division II basketball inside and out. The last time we put together a Best Of was for the 1990s.

Wondering what the Best Of the 1990s picks were? Here's a look back at our selections from the December, 1999, issue:

### Best Final:

1995 — Southern Indiana 71, UC Riverside 63. USI battled back from a 30-8 deficit and 39-21 halftime hole to win the title.

### Most Amazing Feat:

Troy St. 258, DeVry 141. Troy set eight NCAA records in the Jan. 12, 1992 game.

### Best Conference:

Great Lakes Valley Conference  
The GLVC produced three national titleists during the 1990s and had a team in the title game for six straight seasons.

### Best Player:

Kebu Steward, CSU Bakersfield

### Best Coach:

Pat Douglass, CSU Bakersfield

### Best Team:

Fort Hays St., 1996

### Best Program:

CSU Bakersfield