

Dave Wright honored with MIAC's Mike Augustin Award

Posted: Oct 30, 2006

St. Paul, Minn. --

This is one of those exciting weeks for Dave Wright: His beloved Tigers are in the World Series for the first time in 22 years; It's also Tommie-Johnnie time in football; And this week, an award will permanently link Dave with one of his favorite guys in the media business.

Wright has been the voice of Tommie football and basketball for 17 years, and will soon start his 35th season as the voice of Tommie men's hockey. His 30-year local resume ranges from announcing, to public relations, to sportswriting, from preps to the pros. He's the only sportswriter in the world to cover both the Minnesota Kicks and Minnesota Lynx. His part-time paychecks are sometimes small, but his energy and passion are always huge.

So it was a no-brainer when Wright was nominated and unanimously approved as the 2006 recipient of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's Mike Augustin Award. He received that award at Saturday's St. John's-St. Thomas game.

The award was created following the death of longtime Minnesota sportswriter Mike Augustin in December 1997. "Augie," a St. John's graduate, wrote for the St. Cloud Times and later for the St. Paul Pioneer Press. He covered his share of Vikings, Twins, North Stars and Gophers, but had a flair and appreciation for the MIAC/small college beat as well as the high schools.

"It's an honor to win an award named for one of the finest persons I have ever known," Wright said. "Mike Augustin was a terrific writer and an even better human being. I am in the words business, but I have none that adequately express how grateful and honored I am to the MIAC for naming me this year's recipient."

Wright said "Augie" had a knack for being positive without being a "homer."

"As much as Mike loved St. John's football, he never let it get in the way of his writing," Wright said. "He wrote a terrific piece about the 1979 game when St. Thomas delivered a crushing 30-3 loss to the Johnnies that turned the race into a four-way tie -- and ruined the Johnnies' post-season hopes. He never kicked anybody when they were down. He understood that a 50-point beating hurt like crazy to the losing team but the winning team deserved the praise."

Wright fondly recalls working some cable TV games with "Augie."

"Mike and I did some TV broadcasts together many years ago for Comcast," Wright recalled. "Although he would seem like the last guy in the world who would be comfortable on TV, he turned out to be very good at it. He didn't try to pretend he knew stuff he didn't. It was a lot of fun."

Gene McGivern has been an MIAC sports information director 19 seasons at Augsburg and St. Thomas. He called Augustin "an old-school reporter" who went to lunch or hung out at practice and really got to know coaches like John Gagliardi and Steve Fritz.

"Mike understood the rivalries and personalities in the MIAC and was a terrific storyteller," McGivern said. "He would rather be at a game in St. Peter or College-ville than in the Metrodome. He often had to convince his Pioneer Press bosses to cover big games or to give stories better play, but he knew that readers cared. The MIAC lost probably its No. 1 ally with Mike's passing."

Augustin covered Dennis Denning's acclaimed Cretin-Derham Hall baseball teams during the coach's 17-year tenure with the Raiders. After Denning's 1994 hiring at St. Thomas, Augie predicted a berth in the Division III World Series within five years, and an eventual national title for Denning. Although no MIAC team had ever reached the World Series, Denning's 1999 team did it -- in year five. The Tommies took second in 1999 and 2000 and proved Augie correct when they won the NCAA crown in 2001.

Wright has been a friend of and contributor to MIAC sports since his undergraduate days at St. Thomas in the 1970s. The Michigan native landed a manager job with the hockey team as a college freshman, and the public-address announcer job fell into his lap. He earned the nickname "Stats," which is still his moniker for many of his old Tommie friends.

Wright worked one season with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, but he's best known for his two stints as a full-time employee of the St. Paul Saints. As Saints' public relations director (1992-97 and 2001-present), his long hours and enthusiasm has made a huge impact behind the scenes on one of America's best sports organizations. He's trained and mentored several young people, often MIAC students, in intern jobs with the Saints.

Wright also has worked as sports information director at St. Thomas and at Concordia-St. Paul; as a United Press International and Associated Press freelance writer (Kicks soccer, Twins, Gophers, Vikings, Lynx and prep state tournaments); worked as editor of Viking Update and Let's Play Hockey; and been the public-address voice for state tournament games for the Minnesota State High School League.

Though hardly an old-timer, Wright is often called on with historical questions about the last 35 years of Tommie and local sports. A member of the UST Athletic Hall of Fame Committee, Wright took several media calls recently when reporters wanted background on new Minneapolis police chief Tim Dolan, a four-year Tommie hockey player in the 1970s.

"Dave is a real pro, at whatever job he's doing," McGivern said. "It's no coincidence that everywhere he works in public relations, his teams

get greater visibility in the newspapers. As an announcer, he adds to the excitement of a game but doesn't try to be the show. He gets the pronunciations right, double checks the starting lineups and tracks down the officials to get their names spelled correctly. He's like a fourth official on the bench in basketball and hockey as he watches the shot clock and officials' signals and keeps order."

For a guy who toils behind the scenes, Dave Wright has always been ahead of the curve. Just like his old pal, Augie.

| [Mike Augustin Award](#) |