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Brookline-JP youth football coach nominated for new NFL award

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 20, 2011 09:30 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A local youth football leader and Boston native was nominated this week alongside 27 other pigskin coaches nationwide – including last season’s Super Bowl champ – for a new annual NFL award honoring coaches at all levels of the sport for “integrity, achievement, and leadership.”

Ian Cotterell, chief operating officer and longtime coach for [Brookline-Jamaica Plain Patriots Pop Warner](#), helped turn the program around from one of the worst in the state a decade ago to one of the best now and has mentored countless youth along the way. He said he is thrilled and honored to be nominated for the inaugural Don Shula NFL Coach of the Year Award.

Named after the winning-est coach in NFL history, the award was “created to honor exemplary football coaches at all levels of the sport that display the integrity, achievement, and leadership... [The nominees] were chosen for their character and integrity, inspirational leadership, commitment to the community, and on-field success,” said a league announcement Wednesday.

“I’m so excited,” said the 49-year-old Mission Hill native who lives on the neighborhood’s border with Jamaica Plain. “I love coaching and working with the kids, and I love the sport.”

Cotterell said it’s his first time being recognized publicly for his football leadership. Those he has worked alongside say it is well-deserved.

“Ian has worked tirelessly with all of the jobs he does that are necessary for this to succeed,” said the Brookline-JP program President Darel Moss. “He’s a really great coach. He’s really great with the kids. There are not enough positive things I can say about him.”

Cotterell said he grew up playing both basketball and football. His height – he’s now 6 feet, 2 inches – was particularly beneficial on the court, and he predominantly played hoops in high school, not football.

In 1998, the coach of his 7-year-old son’s youth football team quit mid-season, so Cotterell took up the local gridiron gig and has not looked back since.

A prime motivating factor: “Many of the kids we work with don’t have a father

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in their lives, so as their coach, I can sometimes help fill that father-figure role," the married father of three said by phone Wednesday, adding that his role as a mentor often continues after the players are too old to play in the league.

"A lot of the kids we coach go on to play high school ball and some are heading off to college now, too," he said. "And, they all come back to volunteer and support the younger kids."

The Brookline-JP Pats organization, comprised of six teams divided by age range, has had tremendous success in recent years. It serves around 200 youth, including cheerleading squads, from age 7 to 15. Their home turf is [Harry Downes Field](#) in Brookline, and teams can compete regionally and nationally, including against 45 other programs in Eastern Massachusetts alone.

The volunteer-run, nonprofit organization formed in the mid-1990s and struggled to find any success until recent years.

Moss coached for various sports for two decades before joining the program around the same time as Ian. He remembers teams being outscored 50-0 back when the program was consistently among the worst performing in Massachusetts. Attempting to revive the program meant an effort "starting basically from scratch," he said. In recent years, the program has dominated its division, posted multiple undefeated seasons, won several state championships and one team even earned a trip to compete nationally in Florida.

"It's almost like a miracle," Moss said of the program's surge to success. "If one person should be credited for it, it should be Ian."

"He's been so gracious and generous of his time and money," said Moss, recalling instances in which Cotterell covered equipment, program fees or other expenses for his players out of his own pocket.

This past year, the coach went door-to-door recruiting troubled- and gang-involved-youth from Boston to the program, Moss said. "To be able to turn this program around, and do the other things he has done for players, shows the energy he's invested."

All nominees for the NFL honor are actively coaching and the list contains six NFL coaches, including Sean Payton who led the New Orleans Saints to their first Super Bowl victory last year. The majority of nominees, 16, are at the high school level, while three are college coaches and one coaches middle school. Cotterell is one of two nominees who coach youth football.

"It's really cool knowing I'm up there, nominated with all of these other coaches," he said. "Everybody keeps calling and telling me they're real excited for me."

All but five of the NFL's 32 teams selected a coach from within their market to compete for the national prize. USA Football, the national governing body on youth and amateur level football, also made a nomination. Cotterell was chosen by the New England Patriots, which submitted a letter to the NFL explaining the franchise's choice. To read a portion of that letter, [click here](#).

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The national winner, to be chosen by an impressive lineup of judges, will be invited to the upcoming Super Bowl in Dallas, recognized there at a press conference during the week's media frenzy and awarded \$25,000.

The award's namesake holds the NFL record for most career coaching wins, 347, including back-to-back Super Bowls and a perfect season with the Miami Dolphins in the early 1970s.

"Don Shula not only set coaching records on the football field but also had an extraordinarily positive influence on so many lives," said the league's commissioner in a press release from a year ago when NFL announced the award's creation. "As a coach, he was a teacher and mentor who inspired the men he led to pursue excellence with integrity throughout their lives. It is important for us a league to preserve coach Shula's legacy by continuing to recognize and encourage his inspirational leadership through this award."

The judging panel that will announce the first-ever Shula Award winner on Feb. 4 is comprised of Coach Shula – who will present the award; former Raiders coach, Hall of Famer, and all-around league legend John Madden; league Commissioner Roger Goodell; former Indianapolis Colts Coach and TV analyst Tony Dungy; Former Secretary of State and faculty member at Stanford Condoleeza Rice; Commander of the United States Joint Forces Command General Raymond Odierno; IMB President, CEO and Chairman Sam Palmisano; and Aaron Thomas, athletic director at Aplington-Parkersburg High School in Iowa and son of the school's late football coach Ed Thomas.

To see the full nominee list, [click here](#).

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