

# Northeast Conference

200 Cottontail Lane • Vantage Court North • Somerset, NJ 08873  
(732) 469-0440 • Fax (732) 469-0744 • [www.northeastconference.org](http://www.northeastconference.org)



For Immediate Release

May 20, 2009

Contact: Ralph Ventre (ext. 7)

## Wagner Claims Two of Northeast Conference's Four Major Baseball Awards

*Mount St. Mary's Shane Eyler Named Akadema NEC Player of the Year of Year*

*Wagner's Matt Watson Awarded Akadema NEC Pitcher of the Year honors*

*Fairleigh Dickinson's Matt Holsman Garnered Akadema NEC Rookie of the Year Status*

*Wagner's Joe Litterio Tabled Akadema NEC Coach of the Year*

**Somerset, NJ** -- Wagner added to what has been a landmark baseball season on Staten Island Wednesday night. Fresh off their first-ever Northeast Conference regular season crown, the Seahawks saw two of their own receive major honors when the NEC hosted its annual postseason awards banquet. Wagner junior right-hander **Matt Watson (Howell, NJ/Howell)**, the league leader in earned-run average, claimed the *Akadema* NEC Pitcher of the Year honor and the veteran skipper **Joe Litterio** walked away with *Akadema* NEC Coach of the Year accolades. Mount St. Mary's sophomore outfielder **Shane Eyler (Taneytown, MD/Francis Scott Key)** was a near-unanimous selection for the *Akadema* NEC Player of the Year award, the first time since 2005 a non-senior has held the honor. Fairleigh Dickinson freshman second baseman **Matt Holsman (Coral Springs, FL/Stoneman Douglas)** captured *Akadema* Rookie of the Year honors to give FDU its first major NEC postseason honor since the start of the decade.

Sacred Heart, the runner-up to Wagner in the NEC standings, placed the highest number of representatives on the All-Northeast Conference Teams, which the league also unveiled on the eve of the 2009 NEC Baseball Championship *presented by Akadema*. Seven Pioneers claimed all-NEC accolades for their efforts bringing SHU back to the postseason following a two-year absence and a seventh-place NEC finish in 2008. Twenty-four student-athletes received recognition through the 2009 All-NEC First and Second Teams. Each unit consists of 12 members – two pitchers, one catcher, one first baseman, one second baseman, one third baseman, one shortstop, three outfielders, a utility, and a designated hitter.

Wagner had three of its players take home all-NEC honors, none bigger than Matt Watson. Premier pitching is becoming somewhat of a staple on Grymes Hill. Joe Testa was billed the league's top hurler in 2008 before graduating and moving into the professional ranks. Now, Watson is the *Akadema* NEC Pitcher of the Year. The Seahawks' right-hander took over Testa's spot atop the NEC's earned-run average leader board. His 3.10 ERA made him the ace of the league's top-ranked pitching staff. The thing that Watson did best was win. The 6-foot junior claimed responsibility for seven of Wagner's program-record 17 league victories, winning (7-0) during every weekend of NEC play. Watson posted a 9-1 overall record while striking out 30 batters over 58.0 innings of work. He kept any damage to a minimum throughout the season as he allowed only 15 extra-base hits.

Recruiting back-to-back NEC Pitchers of the Year is only a piece of Joe Litterio's resume since signing on at Wagner. The 10<sup>th</sup>-year head coach has more wins than any skipper in program history and continues to bring the program to new heights. Litterio oversaw Wagner's only NEC title in 2000 and now presides over the school's first regular season championship. The Seahawks set the program record for wins (27) in 2008, only to post 30 victories this season. The Seahawks' skipper has brought his team to the four-team NEC Tournament in five of the past six seasons in search of a second conference crown.

Eyler, the first underclassman this decade to claim Player of the Year honors, made certain Mount St. Mary's suffered no shortage of power following the graduation of 2008 NEC Tournament MVP Josh Vittek. The *Akadema* NEC Player of the Year ranked third amongst the league leaders in batting average (.380), tied for second in home runs (15), and second in slugging percentage (.717). Eyler was a near-impossible out during conference play. The Mount's sophomore outfielder slugged .889 against NEC pitchers and homered 12 times in 26 games. His

(NEC Baseball All-Conference Release; 1-of-5)

Central Connecticut State University • Fairleigh Dickinson University • Long Island University  
Monmouth University • Mount St. Mary's University • Quinnipiac University  
Robert Morris University • Sacred Heart University • St. Francis (NY) College  
Saint Francis (PA) University • Wagner College • Bryant University (2012-13)

on-base percentage rose from .446 overall to .490 against conference competition while 33 of his 46 RBI came in NEC play. Eyler did not make a single error in the outfield where he earned all-NEC first team honors.

One of numerous talented young ballplayers Fairleigh Dickinson head coach Jerry DeFabbia has signed, Holsman accomplished something now FDU freshman did since the turn of the Millennium when Tom McLaughlin was named the NEC Rookie of the Year. Holsman stepped right into a starting role at second base and played the position as well as anyone in the league. The right-handed hitting rookie batted .323 over 50 games, 49 of which were starts. He tallied 14 of his 19 RBI in conference play and was as tough as any to strike out. Opposing pitcher fanned Holsman only 16 times in 192 at-bats.

Wagner and Monmouth were home to both all-NEC first team pitchers last season, and this year is no different. Former Seahawk Joe Testa (2008 NEC Pitcher of the Year) and former Hawk Brad Brach signed professional contracts following graduation, making room for Morrison and Monmouth junior **Ryan Buch (Yardley, PA/Conwell Egan Catholic)** on the first team.

Buch moved up from the All-NEC Second Team where he spent his freshman and sophomore seasons. The three-time all-league honoree has posted a 22-7 record in a Monmouth uniform, including a 7-4 mark this season. His 22 wins and 222 career strikeouts are both second-most in program history. The 6-foot-3 right-hander fanned 80 batters, one short of the league lead, and walked 28 in 65.0 innings of work as a junior. Buch pitched to a 4.15 overall ERA, but saved his best stuff for NEC opponents against whom that number shrunk to 3.32.

The top-three NEC hits leaders in his are the all-conference first, second, and third basemen with Monmouth's **Chris Collazo (Wall, NJ/Wall)** leading the way. The senior second baseman returns to the all-NEC first team for a second consecutive season. Collazo's topped his 2008 total of 62 hits by logging a league-high 78 this time around. Collazo, who has batted at least .305 in each of the past three years, set career highs in batting average (.370) and RBI (40). The contact hitter, who struck out only 12 times over 211 at-bats, provided more pop than usual. After tallying only nine combined extra-base hits as a sophomore and junior, Collazo laced 12 doubles, hit a triple, and launched two long balls. The hits haven't stopped coming for Collazo since he began donning the Blue & White. He enters this week's NEC Tournament with 237 career hits, which ranks third all-time in Monmouth's hits history.

All three of Sacred Heart's first team selections are on the infield, starting behind the plate.

Sacred Heart senior catcher **Jeff Heppner (Aquabogue, NY/Riverhead)** drove in a NEC-high 58 runs in 51 games. The right-handed power hitter produced a .344 batting average and slugged .600 in helping Sacred Heart raise its team batting average by 56 percentage points from one year ago. Heppner crushed seven of his 11 home runs during NEC play where he saw his average shoot up to .381 and his slugging percentage to .676. Heppner's play behind the plate was equally impressive. The senior backstop posted a .991 fielding percentage and made only two miscues in 50 starts.

Senior first baseman **Jeff Hanson (Woodstock, NY/Onteora)** had just as much to do with Sacred Heart's surge up the NEC standings as Heppner. All-NEC honors are nothing new for Hanson. He earned a place on the 2006 Second Team before moving up to the top unit in 2007. An injury limited him to only 11 games in 2008, but Hanson came back in a big way. He homered in each of season's first five games and was a three-time *Akadema* NEC Player of the Week by week three. Hanson, who has hit no lower than .333 in any of his last three full seasons, won the NEC batting title (.420) in leading a trio of Pioneers who ranked amongst the Conference's Top 10. Sacred Heart's No. 3 hitter posted the league's top slugging percentage (.728), too, while driving in 48 runs over 45 games.

Across the diamond, senior **Tyler Santos (Johnson City, NY/Johnson City)** played a key role in the Pioneers' power surge. The first team all-NEC third baseman steady Santos was the league's only player to connect on more than 20 doubles. His 21 two-baggers, six home runs, and one triple resulted in a .562 slugging percentage. Joining Heppner and Hanson in exceeding the 40-RBI mark, Santos drove in 43 runs. The steady Santos, who has started 105 games in the past two seasons, batted a career-high .367 to rank seventh in the NEC.

The other half of the first team infield's left side hails from the other half of the Sacred Heart-Central Connecticut Nutmeg State rivalry. Junior shortstop **Anthony Scialdone (West Hartford, CT/Hall)** hit .361 to lead a Blue Devils' lineup that posted the NEC's top team batting average (.322). Scialdone is responsible for the Conference's longest hitting streak (28 games) this season, which spanned the first six weekends of the conference schedule. Scialdone thrived under the lights NEC play. The left-handed hitter connected on all four of his home runs against conference rivals while 21 of his 30 RBI came in those games as well. He had 43 hits and scored 28 runs in 27 NEC contests.

Eyler takes his place in the all-NEC first team outfield alongside Wagner senior **Damian Csakai (Howell, NJ/Howell)** and Monmouth sophomore **Nick Pulsonetti (Old Tappan, NJ/Northern Valley Regional)**. Both Csakai and Pulsonetti earned all-NEC honors last year, but only Csakai did so in the outfield. Wagner's centerfielder claimed second-team accolades in 2008 while Pulsonetti was the designated hitter on the all-NEC first team.

(NEC Baseball All-Conference Release; 2-of-5)

Csakai gives Wagner a prototypical lead-off hitter. The speedy centerfielder hits well (.344 BA), gets on base often (.427 OBP), and steals bases (37) more frequently than anyone in the Northeast Conference. His 50 runs rank third in the league. NEC pitchers had an especially difficult time in keeping the Seahawks' leadoff man off the base paths. Csakai, who struck out only 22 times in 186 overall at-bats, hit .388 and posted .456 OBP in conference games.

Showing no inkling of a sophomore slump, Pulsonetti produced similar power numbers to the ones that landed him on the 2008 first team. The right-handed hitter belted 10 home runs, one short of his rookie total, and laced 14 doubles. Pulsonetti saw his batting average jump up more than 30 percentage points. He went from a .323 hitter as a freshman to owning the league's 10<sup>th</sup>-best batting average (.358). The second-year Hawk made only one error taking on his expanded role on defense. The outfielder posted a .984 fielding percentage.

Missing from the all-NEC first team outfield is Long Island's **James Jones (Brooklyn, NY/Telecommunication HS)**. The third-year Blackbird retains his first team status, but, more fittingly, moves over to the utility position. There is little that Jones cannot do on the diamond. The ace of LIU's pitching staff batted a team-high .364 (8<sup>th</sup> in NEC) and his .395 average in league play was Conference's third-best. Playing the outfield of first base when not on the hill, Jones posted the NEC's fourth-highest on-base percentage (.453), sixth-most runs (47), sixth-best slugging percentage (.618), and seventh-most home runs (9). Looking every bit like what professional scouts have billed a five-tool player, Jones stole 20 bases (3<sup>rd</sup> in NEC) in 23 attempts.

Central Connecticut State sophomore **Pat Epps (Waterford, CT/Waterford)** celebrates his second season as an all-NEC designated hitter. Moving in the same direction as his batting average, Epps went from .319 hitter and second team selection as a rookie to a first team honoree sporting a .349 mark. His 51 RBI ranked third amongst league leaders. The second-year Blue Devils drove in 33 of those runs during NEC play, the venue in which he hit .385 and posted a .458 on-base percentage.

Sacred Heart occupies one-third of the 2009 All-Northeast Conference Second Team. Junior left-handed pitcher **Jared Balbach (Pine Bush, NY/Pine Bush)** is one of the four Pioneers on the 12-man unit. Setting the tone for Sacred Heart's pitching staff, which lowered its team ERA by nearly two runs from last season to the current campaign, Balbach (8-2, 4.08 ERA) cut 1.05 runs off his 2008 earned-run average. The SHU southpaw threw three complete games on his way to a 4-1 NEC record.

The other member of the second-team pitching staff resides at the northern end of the Merritt Parkway rivalry. Senior southpaw **Chris Gloor (Bay Shore, NY/Bay Shore)** accounts for Quinnipiac's all-NEC representation. The Conference's strikeout leader fanned 81 batters in 81.2 innings. The workhorse twirled 50.1 innings in conference play to the tune of a 5-1 record and 3.93 ERA.

Catcher **Sean Parker (Worcester, MA/Maine)** is one of three Blue Devils on the Second Team. The senior backstop hit .343, one of six CCSU players over .320, and tallied the ninth-most RBI (41) in the NEC. Parker started all 27 conference games, raising his batting average to .367 and slugging percentage to .622 during that span.

Moving around the horn on the second-team infield, one will find a representative from each of the four teams that qualified for the 2009 NEC Tournament. Monmouth senior **Paul Bottiglieri (Milford, CT/Garden City CC)** plays first base, Wagner sophomore **Seth Boyd (Perth Amboy, NJ/Perth Amboy)** stands at second, CCSU junior **Sean Allaire (Bristol, CT/Bristol Eastern)** mans the hot corner, and Sacred Heart senior **Phil Tantillo (Blue Point, NY/St. John the Baptist)** is the shortstop.

Bottiglieri produced elite power numbers at his power position. The fourth-year Hawk won the 2009 NEC Home Run title by belting 17 bombs and his 54 RBI ranked second amongst league leaders.

Boyd batted cleanup in Wagner's balanced lineup. The sophomore second baseman hit .314, including a .345 clip in conference play, and his 34 RBI were second on the club.

As was the case on the All-NEC First Team, the left side of the second-team infield has one member from each end of the Nutmeg State rivalry.

Starting all 46 of CCSU's games, Allaire tied for the NEC lead in runs scored (53). He batted .345 and was only one of four NEC players with at least 70 hits. The junior third baseman drove in 23 runs from the leadoff spot and suffered only 21 strikeouts in 203 at-bats.

No other NEC shortstop had a better average than Tantillo's .370 mark, which ranked fifth amongst overall league leaders. The SHU senior pounded out 67 hits and 39 RBI in 47 games.

Junior outfielder **Richie Tri (Everett, WA/Barnstable)** missed the 2008 season, but returned to Central Connecticut State's lineup in all-conference form. Earning a spot on the Second Team as an outfielder, Tri batted .339 and drive in 39 runs. More than 40 percent (21-of-

52) of his hits went for extra bases. Senior **Matt Maher (Peekskill, NY/JFK Catholic)** gives FDU an all-NEC outfielder for the second straight year. Stepping up following the graduation 2008 first teamer Jeff Vincent, Maher batted .339 and posted a .426 OBP. Junior outfielder **Mike Drowne (South Hadley, MA/South Hadley)** was one of five Sacred Heart hitters to rank amongst the NEC's Top 20 in batting average. Drowne posted the league's 11<sup>th</sup>-highest average (.354). He exponentially increased his run production when the NEC season started, tallying 21 of his 23 RBIs against league foes.

The second-team designated hitter is a freshman for the second consecutive year. CCSU's Pat Epps held the honor last year, but moved up to the First Team this season to make room for Sacred Heart rookie **Mike Olszyk (Hamden, CT/Suffield Academy)**. The lone freshman on either of the two all-NEC teams, Olszyk batted .263 and hit eight home runs. Two of his long balls came in a pair of victories over CCSU.

FDU is home to the second team all-NEC utility player once again. Steven LaForge claimed the honor in 2008, and now senior **Zach Sand (San Diego, CA/Mission Bay)** keeps it in Teaneck. Sand ranked amongst the NEC's top four players in batting average (.379, 4th), slugging percentage (.621), and OBP (.464).

The 2009 All-Northeast Conference Teams were announced as a precursor to the league's 17th annual baseball championship. Postseason play begins on Thursday, May 21 at New Britain Stadium where four teams will take aim at the NEC's automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament. The 2009 Northeast Conference Baseball Championships presented by Akadema are set for May 21-24 with play beginning at 12:00 pm EST each day. Sunday's scheduled game will only occur if necessary.

**2009 NEC Baseball Major Award Winners****Player of the Year**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Yr</b>	<b>B/T</b>	<b>Ht</b>	<b>Wt</b>	<b>Hometown/Highschool</b>
Shane Eyler	Mount St. Mary's	So.	R/R	6-0	200	Taneytown, MD/Francis Scott Key

**Pitcher of the Year**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Yr</b>	<b>B/T</b>	<b>Ht</b>	<b>Wt</b>	<b>Hometown/Highschool</b>
Matt Watson	Wagner	Jr	R/R	6-3	195	Howell, NJ/Howell

**Rookie of the Year**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Yr</b>	<b>B/T</b>	<b>Ht</b>	<b>Wt</b>	<b>Hometown/Highschool</b>
Matt Holsman	Fairleigh Dickinson	Fr	R/R	5-9	170	Coral Springs, FL/Stoneman Douglas

**Coach of the Year**

<b>School</b>
Joe Litterio

**2009 NEC Baseball All-Conference First Team**

<b>Pos</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Yr</b>	<b>B/T</b>	<b>Ht</b>	<b>Wt</b>	<b>Hometown/Highschool</b>
1B	Jeff Hanson	Sacred Heart	Sr.	R/R	6-5	245	Woodstock, NY/Onteora
2B	Chris Collazo \$	Monmouth	Sr.	R/R	5-10	180	Wall, NJ/Wall Twp.
3B	Tyler Santos	Sacred Heart	Sr.	R/R	6-1	230	Johnson City, NY/Johnson City
SS	Anthony Scialdone	Central Conn. St.	Jr.	L/R	6-1	195	West Hartford, CT/Hall
OF	Damian Csakai ^	Wagner	Jr.	R/R	5-9	160	Freehold, NJ/Freehold Twp.
OF	Shane Eyler	Mount St. Mary's	So.	R/R	6-0	200	Taneytown, MD/Francis Scott Key
OF	Nick Pulsonetti \$	Monmouth	So.	R/R	6-1	210	Old Tappan, NJ/Northern Valley
C	Jeff Heppner	Sacred Heart	Sr.	R/R	6-1	220	Aquabogue, NY/Riverhead
DH	Patt Epps ^	Central Conn. St	So.	R/R	6-3	225	Waterford, CT/Waterford
UT	James Jones \$	Long Island	Jr.	L/L	6-3	185	Brooklyn, NY/Telecommunications HS
P	Matt Watson	Wagner	Jr.	R/R	6-3	195	Howell, NJ/Howell
P	Ryan Buch ^	Monmouth	Jr.	R/R	6-3	195	Yardley, PA/Conwell Egan Catholic

**2009 NEC Baseball All-Conference Second Team**

<b>Pos</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Yr</b>	<b>B/T</b>	<b>Ht</b>	<b>Wt</b>	<b>Hometown/High School</b>
1B	Paul Bottiglierio	Monmouth	Sr.	R/R	6-0	205	Milford, CT/Garden City CC
2B	Seth Boyd	Wagner	So.	L/R	6-1	180	Perth Amboy, NJ/Perth Amboy
3B	Sean Allaire	Central Conn. St.	Jr.	R/R	5-10	180	Bristol, CT/Briston Eastern
SS	Phil Tantillo	Sacred Heart	Sr.	R/R	5-11	175	Blue Point, NY/St. John the Baptist
OF	Richie Tri	Central Conn. St.	Jr.	L/R	6-2	200	Everett, WA/Barnstable
OF	Mike Drowne	Sacred Heart	Jr.	R/L	5-10	175	South Hadley, MA/South Hadley
OF	Matt Maher	Fairleigh Dickinson	Sr.	R/R	6-0	190	Peakskill, NY/JFK Catholic
C	Sean Parker	Central Conn. St.	Sr.	R/R	6-0	200	Worcester, MA/Maine
DH	Mike Olszyk	Sacred Heart	Fr.	L/R	6-6	220	Hamden, CT/Suffield Academy
UT	Zachary Sand	Fairleigh Dickinson	Jr.	R/R	6-2	200	San Diego, CA/Mission Bay
P	Jared Balbach	Sacred Heart	Jr.	L/L	6-2	200	Pine Bush, NY/Pine Bush
P	Chris Gloor	Quinnipiac	Sr.	L/L	6-6	255	Bay Shore, NY/Bay Shore

\$ - 2008 All-NEC First Team

^ - 2008 All-NEC Second Team