

Jamestown's Stephen Carlson wins Connolly Cup

By Miguel Rodriguez
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Jamestown's do-everything senior Stephen Carlson has been named this year's Connolly Cup winner, awarded by the Riverside Athletic Club to Western New York's top scholastic football player of the year.

The 43rd recipient of the Cup, the linebacker/wide receiver for the state Class AA champion Red Raiders earned the honor out of a group of finalists that included Jamestown teammate, classmate and good friend Zack Panebianco, Cheektowaga's Zak Ciezki, Williamsville South's Sam Castronova, Kenmore West's Terrell Ford, Canisius' Mitch Thomas, Sweet Home's Brandon Smiley, Maple Grove/Chautauqua Lake's Ryan Miller, Bennett's Isaiah McDuffie and South Park's William Burgess.

"I just want to thank everyone who's helped me along the way. my coaches, my family and friends," Carlson said. "I feel blessed to get this award and I thank everyone involved."

"It's a very prestigious award; it represents the best of Western New York football," Jamestown coach Tom Langworthy said. "I'm pleased the Connolly Cup committee chose him as the winner."

Carlson, a two-time Buffalo News All-Western New York first team selection, played perhaps his best football in the Red Raiders' biggest games. He made two interceptions, returning one for a TD, and had a hand in every Jamestown touchdown during a 19-0 Week Seven win over Orchard Park that enabled the Raiders to win the Class AA South Division title.

In Jamestown's 24-0 win over Victor in Far West Regionals, he was the game's most dominant player on both sides of the ball -- making clutch and spectacular catches during a 135-yard receiving day and forcing and recovering a fumble in Victor territory that led to a touchdown.

He finished the season with 53 catches for 919 yards and eight touchdowns, while leading the Red Raiders with 138 tackles to go with three sacks and 19 passes defended.

"It's great to go out on top with our seniors and now this," Carlson said. "It's just really a testament to our entire community and team. ... It feels great to end my senior season like this."

Carlson also was a finalist for The Buffalo News Player of the Year honor. The Buffalo News awarded its Player of the Year Award -- published in today's All-Western New York issue -- to Canisius senior TJ Wheatley.

Carlson gives Jamestown not only its fifth Connolly Cup winner but back-to-back honorees. Quarterback Jake Sisson earned the Cup last year.

"To have two back-to-back winners is a great feeling," Langworthy said. "It's a very elite club."