

Rotary Lombardi Award Finalists Announced

Laurinaitis, Maualuga, Orakpo, Smith named Rotary Lombardi Award Finalists.

Three defensive players and one offensive player - three seniors and one junior - were named today as finalists for the 39th Rotary Lombardi Award, presented by Wachovia. This year's award dinner will be held on December 10 at the Hilton Americas Hotel in Downtown Houston. Houston Dynamo President and former Houston Oiler Oliver Luck will be the featured speaker at the event.

Ohio State linebacker James Laurinaitis returns to the finalist list after being chosen as the only junior among the final four for the 38th Rotary Lombardi Award, which went to LSU's Glenn Dorsey. Returning as captain for his senior season, Laurinaitis is the 13th player to be named a finalist from The Ohio State University, which boasts six winners, the most from any school. A.J. Hawk was the last Buckeye to win the award in 2005.

University of Southern California linebacker Rey Maualuga is the sixth Trojan finalist. USC's leading tackler in 2007, Maualuga returned for his third season as the Trojans' starting middle linebacker as a senior in 2008. USC has not had a Rotary Lombardi Award winner since 1979, when Brad Budde took home the award.

University of Texas defensive end Brian Orakpo is the 11th Longhorn finalist. Orakpo is a senior who battled a knee injury for the entire 2007 season but ended the year by earning Defensive MVP honors at the Holiday Bowl. The last winner from Texas was Tony Degrate in 1984.

Alabama offensive lineman Andre Smith is both the lone offensive player and junior among this year's finalists. Smith is the sixth finalist from the University of Alabama and is looking to become the second Alabama winner since 1986, when Cornelius Bennett took home the prize. Smith has started in every game of his career at left tackle and lost 25 pounds prior to the 2007 season, increasing his mobility.

Founded in the weeks following the 1970 death from cancer of legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, the Rotary Lombardi Award has consistently delivered upon the mission set forth by Marie Lombardi when she granted the use of her late husband's name. Her only stipulation was that all net proceeds from the event be donated to the American Cancer Society. Millions of dollars have been raised since that time.