

DEFENSE PRODUCES IMPRESSIVE LIST

HOUSTON-- For the second consecutive year, the defense has held its own as four defensive players have been named finalists for the 2002 Rotary Lombardi Award.

The four who will gather in Houston on December 11th for the announcement are linebacker E.J. Henderson of Maryland, Defensive tackle Tommie Harris of Oklahoma, and defensive ends Cory Redding of Texas and Terrell Suggs of Arizona State.

Henderson is the fourth consecutive representative from the ACC to be named a finalists and the conference has produced the last two winners (Jamal Reynolds and Julius Peppers). Harris and Redding give the Big XII Conference its first multiple set of finalists. Suggs is the first finalist to represent the Pac-10 since fellow Sun Devil Juan Roque in 1996.

They were selected in a vote of more than 400 members of the Rotary Lombardi Selection Committee, which is comprised of all Division I head coaches, a selection of sportswriters and broadcasters from around the country, and the 30 living past winners of the award.

Henderson is the second Terp to be named a Rotary Lombardi finalist, joining 1974 winner Randy White. He led Maryland's remarkable run to the Orange Bowl last season and has sparked a turnaround this year that has seen the Terrapins win seven straight games. He has again topped the century mark in tackles for the third straight season and has set a Maryland record with 55.5 tackles for loss.

"It is an honor for me to have been named a finalist for this year's Lombardi Award," Henderson said. "I appreciate that those who are voting recognize me as a player who is deserving of the honor. Hopefully, I can continue to perform as this year goes on and earn a shot at more consideration."

Despite constant double-teaming by opponents, Harris remains a force in the middle of the Sooners defensive line. His is the 11th Oklahoma finalist and is looking to become their third winner, joining Lee Roy Selmon (1975) and Tony Casillas (1985).

"It's a blessing," Harris said. "To be considered among the best players in college football, in a group that includes all of the other players who have been finalists for this award and for an award that has Coach Lombardi's name, it's just a blessing. I am honored to represent my coaches and team and I want to continue playing to the best of my ability to prove my worthiness for this honor."

Redding is the first Longhorn finalist since Tony Degrate won in 1984 and is vying to become the first Houston-area product to win the Rotary Lombardi Award. He has been at his best in posting 25 tackles (18 solo), 14 TFLs, 5.5 sacks, 13 QB pressures and a forced fumble over the Horns last five games (three vs. Top 25 opponents and at Nebraska). Leads the team in sacks (5.5), TFLs (16) and QB pressures (30).

"It's really exciting to be a finalist for the Lombardi Award," Redding said. "Personally it is a great honor and it also speaks volumes for how our defense has played this year and the respect we are getting."

"Being in a position to win the Lombardi Trophy is a very prestigious honor. To be able to put so much time and passion into something you love and then be considered for an award like the Lombardi Award is the ultimate reward. Growing up in Houston where they present the award, I always associated the Lombardi Award with big, noble, players. Tough players. To be associated with guys like that and an award that has been around for a long time is what you dream about from the first day you step on a football field."

Suggs is looking to become ASU's first Rotary Lombardi winner and the first from a Pac-10 school since Steve Emtman of Washington in 1991. He has smashed all of the official sack records, chalking up 19.5 with a pair of games left this season. He is just 2 sacks away from breaking the ASU career record.

The four finalists will be flown to Houston to attend the gala Rotary Lombardi Award Dinner, which will be held on the field of Houston's Reliant Stadium on December 11th. Former President George Bush is the Honorary Chairman of the 2002 event and will speak at the dinner, as will legendary Green Bay Packer lineman Jerry Kramer and Houston Texans owner Bob McNair.

This marks the first time the Rotary Lombardi Award Dinner has moved from a hotel ballroom and also marks the first time an event of this type will be hosted in the newly-opened Reliant Stadium.

Now in its 33rd year of honoring the top lineman or linebacker in Division I football, the Rotary Lombardi Award Dinner

has raised over \$2.6 million for The American Cancer Society since it was first held in 1970. Table sales for the 2002 Lombardi Award Dinner are currently underway. For more information about participating in, or supporting the 2002 Dinner as a sponsor, please call (713) 942-1209 or travel here and indicate your interest in the text space provided.