

Northeast Conference

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For Immediate Release

March 1, 2011

CCSU's Ken Horton Named Northeast Conference Men's Basketball Player of the Year

Bryant's Alex Francis Tabbed NEC Rookie of the Year

St. Francis (NY)'s Akeem Bennett Picked NEC Defensive Player of the Year

Mount St. Mary's Lamar Trice Chosen NEC Most Improved Player

Long Island's Jim Ferry Wins Jim Phelan Coach of the Year Honors

Somerset, NJ -- Central Connecticut State junior forward **Ken Horton (Ossining, NY/Ossining)** was chosen as the 2010-11 Northeast Conference (NEC) Men's Basketball Player of the Year in a vote conducted by league head coaches. Bryant freshman forward **Alex Francis (Harlem, NY/Holderness Prep (NH))** was picked as the NEC Rookie of the Year, while St. Francis (NY) senior guard **Akeem Bennett (Long Island, NY/West Hempstead ((W. Oklahoma St.))** was selected NEC Defensive Player of the Year. Mount St. Mary's junior guard **Lamar Trice (Philadelphia, PA/Imhotep Charter)** was voted the NEC's Most Improved Player. Jim Phelan Coach of the Year honors went to **Jim Ferry** of NEC regular season champion Long Island. The honorees were announced on a media teleconference this morning to promote the 2011 NEC Men's Basketball Tournament, which begins on Thursday with quarterfinal play at four campus sites.

Horton becomes Central Connecticut State's fifth NEC Player of the Year award winner since joining the league in 1997, the most of any conference program in that time span. After missing the 2009-10 season nursing a hip injury, Horton came back stronger than ever and added even more wrinkles to his ever-expanding game. In fact, the junior forward can lay claim to being one of the most versatile players this league has ever produced. Horton can mix it up on the inside, but at 6'6" is equally adept at beating defenders off the dribble or popping out to the three-point line. In leading the Blue Devils to a fourth place regular season finish, Horton was a five-time *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week honoree. He leads the NEC in scoring (20.0 ppg), blocks (1.6 bpg) and double-doubles (12), and also ranks third in rebounding (9.0 rpg) and free throw percentage (.866), eighth in steals (1.5 spg) and ninth in field goal percentage (.495). The Ossining, NY native cracked the 30-point mark on four occasions this season, and is the NEC's active leader with five 30-point outings and 32 games of 20 or more points in his career. Horton, who was a second team All-NEC performer as a sophomore in 2008-09 and named to the NEC All-Rookie team in 2007-08, has racked up 1,410 points and 577 rebounds in his three years in New Britain. Rick Mickens (1998-99), Corsley Edwards (2001-02), Rob Robinson (2003-04) and Javier Mojica (2006-07) preceded Horton as NEC Player of the Year honorees for the Blue Devils.

Francis quickly developed into a dominant interior force for Bryant, which improved by eight games in the win column in its second year as a member of the NEC. Armed with a diverse offensive repertoire, the 6'6" forward seemed unfazed by the adjustment to the collegiate game. Whether it was breaking defenders down in the halfcourt, finishing on the break or crashing the boards, Francis looked like anything but a rookie. He is the lone freshman in the conference to lead his team in point production and finished the regular season as the top freshman scorer on the circuit with 14.8 ppg. Francis currently ranks ninth in the league in scoring, fourth in rebounding (8.0 rpg) and double-doubles (eight), and eighth in field goal percentage (.507). Ending his year with a flourish, the Harlem, NY product erupted for a career-high 43 points against Long Island on February 24, which set an NEC freshman record and was the highest total by an NEC player in nine years. It marked the most points scored by a freshman in the country this season and his 20 field goals in the game established a new league standard. Francis was a six-time *Choice Hotels* NEC Rookie of the Week winner, which ties him for fourth on the league's all-time list.

(2010-11 NEC Men's Basketball All-Conference Release; 1-of-5)

Bryant University (2012-13) • 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

Bennett is the second player in St. Francis (NY) history to win NEC Defensive Player of the Year honors, following in the footsteps of former Terrier ball hawk Greg Nunn, who claimed the award a decade ago. An outstanding on-the-ball defender with great anticipatory skills, Bennett leads the NEC and ranks eighth in the country with 2.8 steals per game. The 6'3" guard from Long Island has also blocked 17 shots to rank second on the club.

Playing behind all-time Mount great Jeremy Goode the last two seasons, Trice had few opportunities to showcase his game. That changed in 2010-11 as the Philadelphia native assumed the starting role at the point for first year head coach Robert Burke. After averaging just 1.9 points a year ago, he now holds the distinction of being the NEC's most improved scorer, lifting his average to 13.5 points per outing this season. With an explosive first step and outstanding range on his shot, Trice has led the Mount in scoring on 16 different occasions and also paces the Mountaineers with 2.9 apg, 1.0 spg and 61 three-pointers.

Under Ferry's tutelage, Long Island entered the season as a program on the upswing, but this year's breakthrough performance has exceeded all expectations and generated considerable interest in the Blackbirds in the New York market. Despite losing Jaytornah Wisseh - one of the NEC's top players and a three time all-star - to graduation, the Blackbirds did not miss a beat in 2010-11. After being picked third in the preseason coaches poll, LIU went on to capture its first NEC regular season title since 1997-98 and is assured of playing past the NEC Tournament with an automatic berth to the Postseason NIT. Now in his ninth year, Ferry led the Blackbirds to a 24-win regular season, the highest total for the program since 1941-42 when legendary Clair Bee was at the helm. LIU's 16 conference victories also established a new school record, and its 13 road wins are the most in the country this season. Likewise, the 24 wins is the highest victory total among the 19 New York City metro area Division I programs. With an assortment of weapons from which to choose, Ferry assembled a high-octane offense that ranks in the top-10 nationwide in scoring despite no player averaging more than 13 points per game. Aggressive by design, LIU has also taken more free throws per game than any other Division I team. As the top seed, the Blackbirds will host NEC Tournament games as long as they remain alive in search of their third conference championship.

In examining the composition of the All-Conference teams, it should be noted there are just four seniors among the ten honorees this season. This is in contrast to 2009-10, when seven of the ten award winners were seniors.

Central Connecticut State junior forward **Ken Horton (Ossining, NY/Ossining)**, the league's Player of the Year, is joined on the first team by Quinnipiac senior forward **Justin Ruty (Newburgh, NY/Newburgh Free Academy)**, now a three-time first team All-NEC honoree. Long Island sophomore forward **Julian Boyd (San Antonio, TX/William H. Taft)**, Quinnipiac junior guard **James Johnson (Queens, NY/Bishop Loughlin)** and Wagner junior guard **Tyler Murray (Toronto, Ontario/Eastern Commerce)** are all first-time award winners.

Ruty hopes to close out his star-studded career by adding an NEC championship to his long list of individual accomplishments at Quinnipiac, which include three first team All-NEC honors and recognition as the 2009-10 NEC Player of the Year. At 6'7" and 240 lbs., Ruty is a bruising presence down low and a rebounding force on a team that prides itself on its ability to control the glass. It was the Newburgh, NY native's return from an elbow injury that sparked the Bobcats to nine wins in their last ten outings entering the playoffs. In fact, Quinnipiac has gone 18-4 with Ruty in the lineup this season. He averages 14.5 ppg, paces the NEC with 9.1 rpg and ranks fifth in field goal accuracy at 51.9 percent. Ruty has also recorded ten double-doubles this season (second in the league) and 40 in his career, which leads all active NEC players and is a Quinnipiac Division I record. While Ruty's chase to become the NEC's career rebounding leader was slowed down by the injury, he still has a chance to make history with a strong postseason. His 999 career boards is third on the league's career list and just 24 behind CCSU's Ron Robinson, who established the all-time mark with 1,022 rebounds from 2000-04. Ruty, who was twice honored as *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week, has amassed 1,477 points to rank second among current NEC competitors.

Boyd's ability to play at an elite level after recovering from a heart ailment that sidelined him last season is one of the most inspiring stories in all of college basketball. Named the 2008-09 NEC Rookie of the Year, the 6'7" forward is a gifted athlete and the centerpiece of LIU's deep frontcourt. Boyd was brought along slowly early in the year, but really came into his own over the last month of the regular season, posting seven double-doubles in that span. A commanding presence on the boards - he is the NEC's second-leading rebounder with 9.0 per game - Boyd is also quick enough to beat defenders one-on-one and has built a reputation as an above-the-rim finisher on the break. The San Antonio, TX product leads a balanced Blackbird scoring attack with 13.1 ppg, and ranks second in the conference in double-doubles (ten) and field goal percentage (.532). He was a two-time *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week honoree.

Johnson is a star who shines brightest when it counts the most. Adept at closing out games with a big shot or defensive stop, the six-footer is the floor leader of a Quinnipiac team that has posted its second straight 20-win season and enters the NEC Tournament as the #2 seed. Johnson's all-around contributions to the Bobcats cannot be denied. He ranks in the NEC top-15 in no less than six categories. He is the league's top-ranked three-pointer shooter (2.6/game) and also ranks fourth in scoring (16.3 ppg), second in assist/TO ratio (2.43), third in steals (1.6 spg), eighth in free throw percentage (.817) and 11th in assists (3.7 apg). Johnson, a Queens, NY native who holds the Quinnipiac record for consecutive starts (93), has already racked up 1,175 points and 366 assists in his three-year career. He was tabbed the *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week on January 31.

Murray made great strides this season for the Seahawks, who have been the league's biggest surprise after being picked 11th in the NEC preseason coaches poll. The silky-smooth 6'5" junior with the sweet shooting stroke emerged as a dynamic combo guard in a terrific backcourt that includes NEC All-Rookie performer Latif Rivers and junior sharpshooter Chris Martin. Murray has ranked near the top of the NEC leaderboard in scoring all season, and enters the playoffs third in the conference with 16.9 ppg. He is also fifth on the circuit in three-point accuracy (.404), seventh in free throw percentage (.823) and 13th in made three-pointers (1.9/game). Murray, who hails from Toronto, has compiled nine games of 20+ points on the year. He was named *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week on January 10.

The all-NEC second team features St. Francis (NY) senior guards **Akeem Bennett (Long Island, NY/West Hempstead (W. Oklahoma St.))** and **Ricky Cadell (New York, NY/The Patterson School (NC))**, both two-time honorees. They are joined by Sacred Heart sophomore guard **Shane Gibson (Killingly, CT/Killingly)**, Bryant senior forward **Cecil Gresham (Bloomfield, CT/Maine Central Institute)** and Saint Francis (PA) sophomore guard **Umar Shannon (Atlantic City, NJ/Atlantic City)**.

Bennett makes a return appearance on the All-NEC second team following a terrific all-around campaign for St. Francis (NY). The Long Island native exudes confidence on the court, and as such, is most comfortable with the ball in his hands in late-game situations. With his ability to break down defenders and go strong to the rim, he can be nearly impossible to guard one-on-one. Heading into the NEC Tournament, Bennett ranks among league leaders in scoring (14.0 ppg, 12th), rebounding (5.7 rpg, 13th) and assists (2.8 apg, 19th), and has drilled 38 shots from three-point range. He also impacts the game on the defensive end of the court with his quick hands. The NEC Defensive Player of the Year leads the NEC with 2.7 steals per outing, a figure that ranks him eighth nationally. Bennett earned *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week accolades on December 6.

After collecting second team All-NEC honors as a sophomore, Cadell hopes to wrap up his career in style as the Terriers enter NEC Tournament play in search of their first league title. Red-hot down the stretch, the New York City native scored 20+ points in each of the last four games heading into the playoffs, and on the final day of regular season became St. Francis (NY)'s all-time leading scorer. With 1,624 points he eclipsed Darrwin Purdie's school record that had stood for over 20 years and now ranks 35th on the NEC career scoring list. Cadell boasts NBA range on his shot and can create his own scoring opportunities with an array of isolation moves. He is the league's sixth-leading scorer (16.1 ppg) and three-point shooter (2.2/game), and has made 221 career trifectas. Cadell was picked as the *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week on February 21.

After a promising rookie campaign in 2008-09, Gibson sat out last season, and in that time, incorporated a host of new facets to his game. An explosive scorer, he possesses one of the league's smoothest and most fluid jump shots and is equally adept at creating plays for himself off the dribble. Gibson is currently the NEC's second-leading scorer with 17.2 ppg and tallied 12 games of 20 or more points over the course of the regular season. He also ranks third in the league in three-pointers made (2.6/game), sixth in free throw percentage (.837) and ninth in steals (1.4 spg). Gibson, who hails from Killingly, CT, was a two-time *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week and will enter his junior campaign with 748 career points.

Primed for a big year in 2009-10, Gresham played just eight games for the Bulldogs before going down with an injury that cost him the remainder of the season. The 6'5" forward from Bloomfield, CT didn't miss a beat upon his return in 2010-11, and as one of the first stars of the Division I era at Bryant, posted the best statistical year of his career. Gresham's versatile offensive skill set is often punctuated by his ability to heat up from long range and carry the Bulldogs for long stretches. He hit at least three three-pointers 14 different times this season and ended his senior year ranked second in the NEC with 2.6 trifectas per outing and a 42.7 percent success rate from outside the arc. Gresham is also 11th on the loop in scoring with 14.3 ppg. He closed out his career with 1,386 points (13th all-time at Bryant) and 510 rebounds.

Lightning quick and with unlimited range on his shot, Shannon has been practically unstoppable for the playoff-bound Red Flash since the middle of January. He scored 20 or more points in nine of his last 13 games to close out the regular season and earned his first *Choice Hotels* NEC Player of the Week award back on January 24. The Atlantic City, NJ native has also displayed a flair for the dramatic throughout the 2010-11 campaign, hitting a number of big shots down the stretch of games for Saint Francis. Shannon closed out the regular season fifth in the NEC with 16.2 ppg, and was even better in league play with 18.5 ppg. He ranks fifth in the conference in made three-pointers (2.3/game) and eighth in three-point percentage (.391).

This year's NEC freshman class made quite an impact, led by Bryant forward **Alex Francis (Harlem, NY/Holderness Prep (NH))**, the NEC Rookie of the Year.

One of the key elements to Wagner's turnaround this season was the emergence of **Latif Rivers (Elizabeth, NJ/Avon Old Farms (CT))** at shooting guard. Following an 18-point debut against Lafayette, Rivers was off and running, posting six games of 20+ points, including 28 points against Hofstra and a career-best 30 points in a win over Quinnipiac. He claimed *Choice Hotels* NEC Rookie of the Week accolades on six occasions, which ties him for fourth on the league's all-time list. There were few players this season who delivered more in the clutch than the Elizabeth, NJ native whether it be from long range or at the line, where he ranks second in the NEC in free throw percentage (.882). Rivers ranks second among all NEC freshman and 14th overall on the circuit with 13.9 ppg. He has also drained a team-best 56 shots from three-point territory and ranks 12th in the league with 1.9 treys per game.

Long Island's **Jason Brickman (San Antonio, TX/Clark)** immediately established himself as one of the NEC's most entertaining players with pinpoint passing skills that rival any point guard of recent vintage. Despite coming off the bench and playing only 22 minutes per game, Brickman is the NEC leader with 5.3 apg and sports a stellar 3.04 assist-to-turnover ratio that ranks him seventh in the nation. He had a pair of double-digits assists games, including a career-high 11 against Bryant on February 24. Brickman's play has been near flawless over the last two weeks as he dished for 34 assists and committed just four turnovers over a four-game stretch to close out the regular season. On the year, he has pitched in with 5.7 ppg and made 36 shots from outside the arc. The San Antonio, TX native was a three-time *Choice Hotels* NEC Rookie of the Week.

Stocked with young talent, Sacred Heart should be in good hands the next three years as All-Rookie honoree **Chris Evans (Stamford, CT/Stamford (The Taft School))** teams up with classmates Louis Montes and Evan Kelley, who also had impressive freshman campaigns. Despite measuring just 6'2", the versatile Evans proved he could play effectively at various positions - even down on the block - on a Pioneer team long on athletic ability but short on size. Hailing from Stamford, CT, he ranks third on the Pioneers with 9.1 ppg and is 11th in the conference in field goal shooting at 46.8 percent.

Over the second half of the season, Monmouth forward **Marcus Ware (Vineland, NJ/Vineland South)** showcased the skills that will make him a fan-favorite for seasons to come in West Long Branch. Ware came on strong in league play, reaching double-digits in 11 of his last 15 contests. Long, athletic and with the ability to play effectively both in the low post and facing the hoop, the 6'7" forward from Vineland, NJ finished his freshman season with 7.6 points per game and ranked second on the Hawks with 4.3 rebounds per outing.

2010-11 Northeast Conference Men's Basketball Award Winners

Player of the Year

Ken Horton	CCSU	F	6-6	195	Jr	Ossining, NY/Ossining
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Rookie of the Year

Alex Francis	Bryant	F	6-6	205	Fr	Harlem, NY/Holderness Prep (NH)
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Defensive Player of the Year

Akeem Bennett	St. Francis (NY)	G	6-3	180	Sr	Long Island, NY/West Hempstead (W. Oklahoma St.)
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Most Improved Player

Lamar Trice	Mount St. Mary's	G	5-11	165	Jr	Philadelphia, PA/Imhotep Charter
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Jim Phelan Coach of the Year

Jim Ferry	Long Island
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2010-11 Northeast Conference Men's Basketball First Team All-Conference

Name	School	Pos	Ht	Wt	Yr	Hometown/High School (Previous School)
Julian Boyd	Long Island	F	6-7	225	So	San Antonio, TX/William H. Taft
Ken Horton	CCSU	F	6-6	195	Jr	Ossining, NY/Ossining
James Johnson	Quinnipiac	G	6-0	195	Jr	Queens, NY/Bishop Loughlin
Tyler Murray	Wagner	G	6-5	200	Jr	Toronto, Ontario/Eastern Commerce
Justin Rutty	Quinnipiac	F	6-7	240	Sr	Newburgh, NY/Newburgh Free Academy

2010-11 Northeast Conference Men's Basketball Second Team All-Conference

Name	School	Pos	Ht	Wt	Yr	Hometown/High School (Previous School)
Akeem Bennett	St. Francis (NY)	G	6-3	180	Sr	Long Island, NY/West Hempstead (W. Oklahoma St.)
Ricky Cadell	St. Francis (NY)	G	6-2	180	Sr	New York, NY/The Patterson School (NC)
Shane Gibson	Sacred Heart	G	6-2	170	RSo	Killingly, CT/Killingly
Cecil Gresham	Bryant	F	6-5	205	Sr	Bloomfield, CT/Maine Central Institute
Umar Shannon	Saint Francis (PA)	G	5-11	175	So	Atlantic City, NJ/Atlantic City

2010-11 Northeast Conference Men's Basketball All-Rookie Team

Name	School	Pos	Ht	Wt	Yr	Hometown/High School (Previous School)
Jason Brickman	Long Island	G	5-10	165	Fr	San Antonio, TX/Clark
Chris Evans	Sacred Heart	G	6-2	195	Fr	Stamford, CT/Stamford (Taft School)
Alex Francis	Bryant	F	6-6	205	Fr	Harlem, NY/Holderness Prep (NH)
Latif Rivers	Wagner	G	6-1	175	Fr	Elizabeth, NJ/Avon Farms
Marcus Ware	Monmouth	F	6-7	230	So	Vineland, NJ/Vineland South