

Street Kids Awards Banquet a Huge Hit

Joe Horvath wins three awards
including overall MVP

The Street Kids annual awards banquet was a huge hit at the Marriott Hotel in South Bend on Saturday, with guest speaker Rusty Bumgardner of Combat Sports and Team USA Softball highlighting the event as the guest speaker.

SKS outfielder Joe Horvath took home three awards, including the overall Most Valuable Player award. He also won the tournament player of the year award and the offensive player of the year, given to the player who leads the team in hitting.



It was the second straight MVP award for Horvath, who took home the award in 2009 despite battling injuries. This year, he was healthy and even at age 40, defied logic with some of his ability on the field. Horvath led the team in six offensive categories, including winning the triple crown, the player who leads the team in average, home runs and runs batted in. His 123 home runs this year tied the team record.

"This means a lot to me tonight because my mom and dad are here," said the three time batting champion when getting his MVP award, which was presented to him by Rusty Bumgardner. "In almost 20 years of softball, they have only seen me play one game, and for them to be here tonight to see this means a lot."

Horvath beat out Jason Jeffery, who did not go home empty handed himself, for the MVP award. Horvath finished with 565 points, with Jeffery getting 420, and Chris Firebaugh getting 210 total points. Nick Bishop, Justin Newcomer and Scott Martin rounded out the top six. Horvath had 21 first place votes, 12 second place votes and five third place votes. Jeffery took home 13 first place votes, 10 second place votes and 12 third place votes. Bishop received four first place votes and Firebaugh received three first place votes.

Along with winning the offensive player of the year and overall MVP, Horvath was also the landslide winner of the tournament player of the year, which was presented by Jim Kimmel of the National Softball Association. Horvath took home 21 of the 44 first place votes and finished with 560 total points, with Jason Jeffery again finishing second with 335 points (seven first place votes) and Chris Firebaugh, who led the tournament team in batting average, finished third with 320 points (nine first place votes). Nick Bishop (190 points, five first place votes), Scott Martin and Justin Newcomer rounded out the finalists. Martin took home the other two first place votes.

It was also a great night for Jason Jeffery, who won the Comeback Player of the Year award after increasing almost every offensive statistic from the year before, including improving his batting average 64 points from last year. Later on in the evening, Jeffery was presented the League Player of the Year award by Mishawaka League

commissioner Chad Meyers. Jeffery was second to Horvath in almost every category this season, and host Lanny Fisher even stated at one point in the night if *"Horvath had two broken legs all we would be talking about is Jay Jeffery."* But when all the votes were in, Jeffery edged Horvath - who had a phenomenal league season once again - in total points, 615 to 610, or the difference of one third place vote (five points). Jeffery had 23 first place votes, and Horvath had 21. Firebaugh finished third with 205 points (two first place votes) and Justin Newcomer finished fourth with 115 points. Scott Martin had 100 total points, but took home the final two first place votes.

"We had a great season this year, sure we had our ups and downs, but in the end it was awesome," said the infielder.

To see the complete description of all the nominees, [click here](#).

Rusty Bumgardner was the main attraction of the night, coming up from N than that, spending Friday night at dinner with teammates (that he insisted Care activities.

"I have been following Street Kids for over a year now and along with them being a great team on the field, its their work off the field that really got my attention," said the 24-time major world champion. "I spent an hour straight on Thursday night before I came here to South Bend just watching videos and I will tell you, I was in tears over some of that stuff. You guys - all of you here - are amazing people and this will be one of the highlights of my life, coming here, not just softball, but my entire life. I mean that."

Rusty spoke about several things, including the banquet weekend, and how much he enjoyed spending time with some children at the Childrens Hospital in South Bend.

"We had a great time at the hospital, especially meeting little Hector," Bumgardner said. "He was pretty excited and I was too! We gave away some Combat shirts and some posters... it was just a great time there for sure." See the video [here](#)...

Following the visit to the hospital, Rusty went to the Penn Township Food Pantry, where we gave away some toys to Mike Hayes, the director, to be given away to some needy families.

"That was really neat going to their place in Mishawaka. Mike Hayes and the folks at Penn Township do a great thing and I was just happy that TJ and I could go over there and help out," he said.

The entire evening was recorded by Josh Taylor and photographs were taken by SJ2 Photography, a new sponsor of Street Kids Softball, so for those that missed the event, there will be avenues for you to see how awesome the event was. Videos should be released later this week.

Lanny Fisher hosted the event this year and did a fantastic job. Using his normal wit and sense of humor, Lanny kept the evening refreshing and light, and at times made sure he reminded people just how special Street Kids Care is and encouraged everyone to get involved.

"You don't even have to be a member of this team to come to some of the events," Fisher said near the end of the night. "Come see first hand what its like and I promise you, you will go away with a new feeling you never had before."

Myself, TJ Jorgensen, spoke briefly prior to Rusty being introduced and made sure I thanked the sponsors, including two of which were in attendance on Saturday, Home Comfort Experts and Pinnacle Athletic Club. I also made sure to thank my beautiful and supportive wife, Courtney. People never realize that if your wife or girlfriend does not want you to play, you will not play! I am fortunate that my wife understands my passion and of course has a huge hand in what we



do with Street Kids Care. A lot of times you may not see it because she is not at every event, but many times she is the one that coordinated it, sent emails, phone calls, etc and she deserves a lot of credit.

I also made sure to thank my teammates, who without them and their own passion, we would have no Street Kids Care. For all the people that call and email me or stop me at the store and say what an amazing thing I put together, I remind them that its not like I just set this up and force these guys to come. They come because they really do care and its a life changer for us also. That was never more evident than last year when Mark Hershberger gave an emotional speech after winning the Humanitarian Award. Meeting Dillon, our young friend who beat cancer, changed Mark's life. I never put the passion into these guys, all I deserve just as much credit for the accolades I receive.

After Rusty's speech, it was time for awards to be handed out. Brent McElroy presented the award for "True Leaders". After that, he presented the award for best defensive Street Kids player before...



"I will be the first to admit it. I didn't like any of you guys," said the middle infielder from Fort Wayne. "I played against SKS when I was with Cousins Roofing and I couldn't stand the Street Kids team. But when I joined the Fort Wayne SKS team, and got to know more about what SKS is all about, I made a 180 and now I'm a big fan and love to see the things this organization does."

FW SKS Most Valuable Player went to Darrin Eicher, who was not in attendance.

Following the Fort Wayne awards, Jason Jeffery presented two awards to the B3 Street Kids team that was in attendance. Mike Miller was named the B3/SKS Gold Glove winner and Brian Forray was named overall MVP. Both gave nice speeches as they accepted their awards, and you will see that in the video highlight being released later this week.

The team also made a special award for umpire Terry Sherrill for his huge season in NSA this year. Sherrill umped more than 1,000 games this year and did seven world championships in 2010. New SKS pitcher Steve Schroeder presented the award on behalf of the team to Sherrill, who was in attendance with his mother, daughter and girlfriend.

"I love what I do," said the 2007 NSA national umpire of the year winner. "I think we have the best umpires in the game, especially here in Northern Indiana. When we go to other tournaments and see some umpires, I know that they do not measure up to what we do, and the reason for that is you guys, the players deserve better. We strive to be the best. But I love this team. TJ, you and this team... The things you guys do off the field is what makes you head and shoulders above everyone else, and you are not only great players, you are great men. This award means a lot because this night is about you guys, and you made the efforts to honor me, which was not necessary but so appreciated. And for that, Street Kids will always be ri-ri- right there."

After Terry accepted his award for umpiring excellence, Lanny introduced Todd Mann of Home Comfort Experts, the chief sponsor of Street Kids Care, who presented the award for Humanitarian of the Year to the player who best represented himself off the field with Street Kids Care. That player was Shane Varga. The presentation speech that Todd gave was moving, including how he revealed that night that his family had been diagnosed with a rare blood disease and how they went through treatment at an oncology ward at a local hospital, the same place that children with cancer get their treatments.

"We have been getting treatment for this rare blood disease for a little over four years now," the quiet yet professional presenter said. "But the one thing that made it very difficult was seeing the children in their battling this terrible disease. TJ was unaware of my condition so when he sat down with me a few years back and talked about partnering up with Street Kids Care, it really was a no brainer. Sometimes you have to recognize things that happen for a reason."



Todd went on to describe how the winner of this award went through his own battles and was very deserving of the award.

"The individual that was selected this year has went through his own battles and struggles and we have been able to witness a part of

that through the website and him keeping us informed," he continued. "He's overcome some of those challenges because of faith, teammates, support, and family to be where he is at today."

Shane Varga was presented the award and was welcomed to the stage with a standing ovation by those in attendance. When he accepted the award from Todd, he saw the picture on the plaque and was immediately moved emotionally.

"I am really appreciative to be the one up here, but this award could go to anyone," said Varga, fighting through emotion. "I made it my goal to get back to playing with my team, with my friends but I made sure that even through my struggles I would do my best to give back to the community. Not only does it feel good, but I feel like it's my moral obligation to do it."

Varga went on to talk about the different things that Street Kids Care took part in this year and when he got to the story of Carter, a young boy who was battling cancer from New Carlisle, he began to get even more emotional.

"This little guy had been through so much," Varga added. "He is only five years old and we were able to go as a team and get him a brand new Wii with about 30 games and a bunch of us delivered it to him and his family had a big picnic for us and everything. He is the neatest little kid and it breaks your heart to see someone so young have to go through that (cancer). When I went through it, I was a mature adult, I was fully aware of the challenges ahead of me. But when you are just five years old, you have no clue what's happening to you. They don't understand how you have to get sick to get better (chemotherapy), and it was just heartbreaking.

"Every year we set out to win championships. That's what teams do, they make goals on the field and do what they can to achieve them. But this award is so meaningful to me because after my playing days are done, no one will remember how many championships I won. But I know that there are a lot of people that we helped that will remember that about our team and those involved."

After Shane's moving speech, which can be seen in its entirety later on video later, Lanny introduced Joe Horvath who accepted his first of three awards on the night, the offensive player of the year award. This award goes to the batter who leads the team in hitting. Joe won the triple crown for the second straight year, and the batting title for the third straight year.

"Thanks to my teammates for putting me in the situation to drive them in or swing away, which in league was practically every time," joked Horvath.

Shane Varga presented the coach of the year award to Teddy Panagakos, who just finished his second year coaching with Street Kids. The veteran player began playing softball in 1975 with Legus Shell out of Niles, which would become Stadium Dental. He remained with that team for 19 years.

"I just want to thank my wife, Ellen, for allowing me to continue to chase my dream of winning another state title," said the former Michigan State Class BB MVP. "Also to my teammates, it's been a lot of fun these past two years. I know I don't play, and some guys are like who is this guy? But I have a blast being with you guys. I was pretty sick this year and missed a lot of action, but I told my wife that I had one goal, and that was to make it back before the end of the season and get on the field. TJ gave me that opportunity at the end of the season, giving me a chance to pinch hit. I grounded out, but it meant the world to me."

The next award was the comeback player of the year, presented by last year's host, Terry Patesel. The winner was Jason Jeffery. Jeffery improved almost every offensive category and stepped up his defense tremendously as well. Not known for many words in front of a crowd, he kept it short and sweet.

"I haven't been myself these past couple of years," the soft-spoken leader said. "With some knucklehead things off the field, to my mom being sick to Berto passing, it's been rough. But I feel like I'm back and I don't plan on going anywhere."

The next award was the Pinnacle Gold Glove Award, presented by Dave Wolfram and Stephanie Hazen of Pinnacle Athletic Club, one of the sponsors of Street Kids Softball. As mentioned earlier, Chris Firebaugh won the award and similar to Jeffery, isn't much of a speaker.

"I just want to thank everyone for voting for me," said the newest member of Pipac/Easton in USSSA Conference in 2011. "I want to thank Pinnacle and TJ for everything, and my old lady for letting me play so much. There were a lot of days I left before the sun came up and didn't get home until the sun went down just for softball. So this means a lot. Thanks."

Following the gold glove award, Chad Meyers of Mishawaka Softball presented the winner of the league player of the year to Jason Jeffery, who narrowly beat Horvath, but deserved it so much. Meyers spoke briefly prior to giving the award.

"The SKS team has been a part of this league for about seven years, and each year they seem to come away with at least one title, in either summer or fall, and in most cases both," said Meyers. "The level of competition has been raised because of Street Kids and

they have been known as the Yankees of local softball, meaning everyone wants to beat them. And despite the 69-2 overall record, it was one of the teams I play with - Tasers Softball - who snapped their 62-game winning streak!

"But seriously its been a pleasure having SKS in my leagues, a team who dedicates themselves on and especially off the field, for all these years."

Upon winning the league player of the year, Jeffery began by thanking the people who stand by him the most.

"First of all, I want to thank my teammates," he said. "Without you this is not possible. We went through our ups and downs this year with some people coming and some going, but we stuck together when it matters most. Thanks guys."

Jim Kimmel of the NSA was on hand to present the tournament player of the year award, but prior to doing that he took the time to make a very special announcement.

"On the national level, I was elected into the NSA Hall of Fame in 2005," said the 2005 inductee. "And it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. And I want to be able to return that so what I am doing is this. I am also on the Hall of Fame committee for the NSA national level, and I want to tell you that I am nominating Street Kids Care for the Hall of Fame."

After some applause, Kimmel continued.

"The second thing I am doing is making announcement right now, and this is the first time its been released, that effective tomorrow at our NSA state meeting, we will have the Northern Indiana Softball Hall of Fame. And I just want to say to TJ and to all of you, that I will be nominating Street Kids Care for election into that as well."

After his speech, Kimmel presented the tournament player of the year award to Joe Horvath.

"It was nice to have an injury free year," said Horvath. "We had a good year, too. It started out kind of rough, we had to bring Lanny out of retirement, but TJ held it together. Its like Lanny said earlier, we took 10 guys to Minnesota, and Dan Garey drove all night to be with us the next morning. We could have easily packed it in after our loss Sunday morning, but we kept fighting and came back to the championship game. We had a good year though and got into Sunday a lot. Not only did we have a good year, but Jay Jeffery had a great year, too. I like to tease him that if we were the Chicago Bulls, he would be my Scottie Pippen. He responded by saying he'd rather be Robin to me being Batman, and I said whichever you want to go, man."

After Lanny talked a little more about how far Joe Horvath has come, he introduced Rusty Bumgardner once again who would introduce the overall Most Valuable Player award. Prior to doing so, Rusty explained to everyone exactly how the voting system works, and also what an MVP is. You can see all of this in the video next week. When he concluded talking, he introduced to the stage for the third time, Joe Horvath.

"My parents have only seen me play one game in my career," the two time MVP said. "It was at Belleville many years ago, Jim Kimmel brought in a major team and we drew Rusty Bumgardner and the Long Haul team. The only thing we won that day was the coin toss. And it pissed them off because we took visitors, so they could only bat twice, and we lost 29-2. That was the only time my parents had seen me do anything for softball, so I invited them out tonight and I am really glad they are here to see that I can win something!

But you know what, I appreciated that ass kicking on that day. Because it showed us where we are at that time and if you ever want to get better, you need to take the lumps, take the ass beatings. I really wish more of these younger players and teams thought like that. B3 was a good example. They loved playing teams that might be better than them, because thats how you get tested, thats how you get better. And I applaud B3 for that, because most teams just want to show up and find the easiest way to win a trophy.



The first time I really played good competition was against guys like Todd Marvin, DD Hudnal and they pounded us. I watched DD hit some of the farthest balls I have ever seen and I remember thinking that I wanted to quit right then and there because I didn't want to play if it was always going to be like this. But you know what, it always gets better and it did for me."

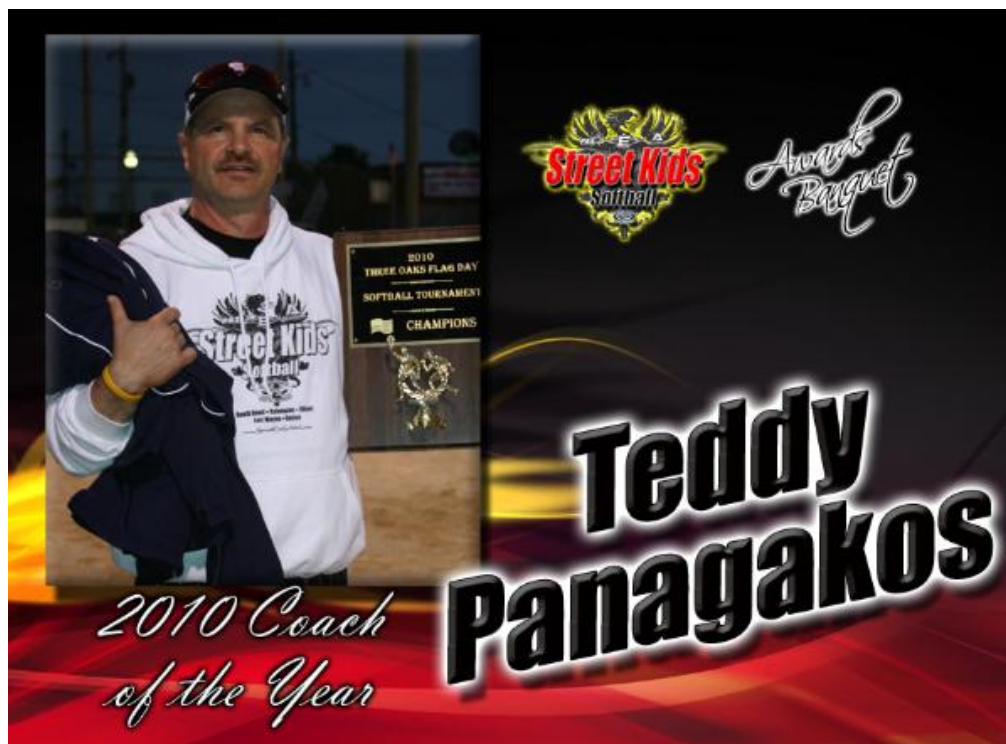
The night concluded with a drawing that was done to give away some Combat t-shirts and Easton pants and pullovers, and also three softball bats. Two Combat bats and one Easton. Rusty and I had some fun on the stage poking fun at each other's bat company (Combat vs Easton) and in the end, everyone had a great time. The night carried over to the after party at Club Noma, where about 50 people attended, including Rusty, to finish off the 2010 season in style!

Look for some big announcements in the coming weeks including new additions to the SKS family.

So that does it for another year of Street Kids Softball. As we have said during the banquet, and I will say it again now, we could not have done any of this without the help of all of our sponsors, including a few that must be mentioned: Easton Sports, Pennsylvania Avenue Sports, Matt Lavender of Suburban Softball, Home Comfort Experts, Buffalo Wild Wings, Langer Sports, Center Street Pub, State Farm-John Dunkel, Starcraft Bus and Pinnacle Athletic Club, just to name a few. And we cannot leave out our players, who made the season memorable on and off the field, and finally to our wives and girlfriends. Without you, we would not be able to do this at all. You women understand our passion and love for this game and instead of trying to stop it, you enable it, thus making us hopefully all stronger husbands and boyfriends.

To my wife, Courtney, thanks for everything. Behind everything, no matter what I do, who I help, or what I write, there's you. It's always been you.

To see over 100 pictures from the event,  some from the after party, "like" the Street Kids Fan Page on Facebook or just click this Facebook logo.. >>>>





*Awards
Bouquet*

**Jason
Jeffery**

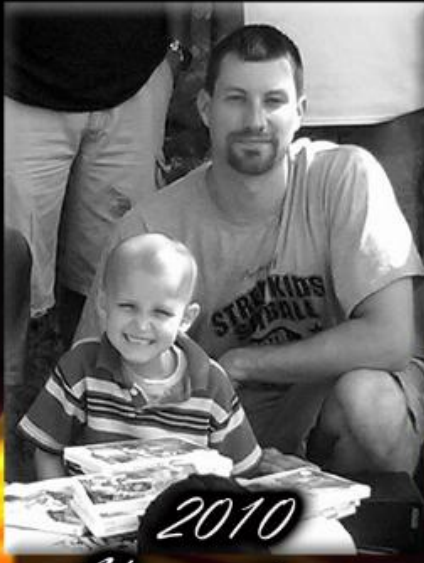
*2010
Comeback
Player of the Year*



*Awards
Bouquet*

**Chris
Firebaugh**

*2010
Pinnacle
Gold Glove Award*



*2010
Humanitarian
of the Year*



*Awards
Banquet*

**Shane
Varga**

Street Kids



*2010
League
Player of the Year*



*Awards
Banquet*

**Jason
Jeffery**



*Awards
Banquet*

*2010
Most Valuable
Player*

**Joe
Horvath**



Umpire Award

*Awards
Banquet*

**Terry
Sherrill**



**Joe
Horvath**

*2010
Tournament
Player of the Year*