Hollis Named SBJ's 2012 Athletic Director of the Year

Fourth-year Michigan State athletics director was presented the trophy Wednesday night (May 23) at the Sports Business Awards ceremony in New York City.

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EAST LANSING, Mich. - Michigan State's Mark Hollis has been selected as the 2012 Athletic Director of the Year by Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal/Daily. Hollis was honored Wednesday, May 23 during the fifth-annual Sports Business Awards ceremony, held at the New York Marriott Marquis in Times Square.

Other finalists for the SportsBusiness Journal's Athletic Director of the Year award included Temple's Bill Bradshaw, Michigan's Dave Brandon, Arkansas' Jeff Long and Baylor's Ian McCaw.

"Mark Hollis is a true visionary and innovative leader, and we take pride in this well deserved recognition for Mark and for Team MSU," MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon said. "He's thoroughly engaged in his profession, combining a deep appreciation of the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education with a flair for visualizing fresh ways to present it."

The 49-year-old Hollis is credited with developing some of college athletics' most innovative events. It was his vision that led to Michigan State playing North Carolina last November in the first basketball game to be played on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. In 2003, Hollis was the architect of the "BasketBowl," which established a then-world record crowd of 78,129 who witnessed the Michigan State-Kentucky game at Detroit's Ford Field. The concept, which involves placing the court in the center of a football stadium, has been used at the last four NCAA Final Fours.

In 2001, Hollis helped mastermind the Michigan State-Michigan outdoor hockey game that attracted a then-world record crowd of 74,554 in Spartan Stadium. As a result, the number of outdoor hockey games has steadily increased, and on Jan. 1, 2013, the NHL's Winter Classic comes to state of Michigan with the intent of breaking another attendance record.

In 2011-12, Michigan State won three Big Ten Championships (women's cross country, men's basketball and women's golf).

In addition, the Spartan football team won the 2011 Big Ten Legends Division title and played in the inaugural Big Ten Championship Game. Michigan State became bowl eligible for a school-record fifth consecutive year and finished ranked No. 10 in the final USA TODAY Coaches Poll after tying the school single-season record with 11 wins, including a dramatic 33-30 triple-overtime victory over Georgia in the 2012 Outback Bowl.

Michigan State's men's basketball team captured a share of the conference regular-season championship and won the 2012 Big Ten Tournament title. The Spartans advanced to the NCAA Sweet 16 for the 10th time in the last 15 seasons. During Hollis' tenure, MSU has appeared in 15 consecutive NCAA Tournaments - the longest current streak among Big Ten schools and the third longest in the nation.

Often recognized for thinking outside the box, Hollis raised some eyebrows when he hired former CCHA Commissioner Tom Anastos as hockey coach in March 2011. In his first year behind the bench, Anastos led the Spartans to their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2008.

Overall, eight sports participated in their respective team NCAA Championships, while individuals competed in five more NCAA Championships. The Spartan volleyball team advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2007, while the women's basketball team earned its fourth-straight trip to the NCAA Tournament. The women's cross country team placed 16th in the NCAA Championships - its best finish since 2008. After two rounds of the NCAA Championships, the women's golf team sits in tie for 21st place. Thirty-one members of the MSU track and field team have qualified for the upcoming NCAA Regionals, and this weekend, the women's rowing program will make its 14th appearance in the 15-year history of the NCAA Championships in this sport.

During his tenure, Michigan State student-athletes have excelled not only in competition, but in the classroom as well. In the

spring of 2012, the athletics department posted the highest grade-point average in program history with a 3.0644. It marks the third consecutive semester that student-athletes have posted better than a 3.0 cumulative GPA. The department also set another benchmark as 17 teams achieved a 3.0 or higher term GPA during the spring semester.

Hollis is chair of the Division I Amateurism Cabinet, a member of the NCAA's Men's Basketball Issues Committee and a member of the Division I Men's Basketball Committee.

"It's very humbling to receive an honor like this," Hollis said. "Individual awards are difficult to accept in higher education and athletics; however, they do recognize the innovation and teamwork necessary to achieve success. I value working with people at Michigan State University, the Big Ten Conference and the NCAA in providing educational opportunities for our student-athletes and engagement through sports for our alumni and supporters.

"I respect and share a unique bond with athletic directors across the nation. Within our programs, we each have our individual constraints and opportunities. We all serve a diverse and broad range of constituents. Most importantly, we all strive to provide opportunities for young men and women to improve themselves everyday - academically, athletically and socially.

"Michigan State University has champions across our campus in every academic college and operating unit," Hollis continued. "Our student-athletes, coaches and athletic department staff strive to complement those champions in the classrooms and research labs. We are fortunate to have a staff that is innovative, determined that always places the focus on our student-athletes.

"From the flight deck of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier to the inaugural Big Ten Football Championship Game, from the academic honors of our student-athletes to postseason competition of our teams, from the commitment of our coaches to the passion of our supporters, Michigan State University excels in opportunities.

"In accepting this honor, I share it with everyone that has ever worn the Green and White. Our Board of Trustees, University administration, faculty and staff, and supporters all share in our day-to-day success. Our coaches, staff and student-athletes strive to improve every day. Working together, they are the reason Michigan State University is being honored with this award."

He earned his undergraduate degree from Michigan State in 1985, serving as student manager for the Spartan men's basketball team under legendary coach Jud Heathcote. Hollis earned a master's degree from Colorado in 1992 and then joined the staff at the Western Athletic Conference, working his way up from administrative assistant to assistant to the commissioner and then assistant commissioner. From there, he spent two years as assistant and associate athletic director at Pittsburgh before returning to Michigan State in 1995. As senior associate athletics director, Hollis oversaw all external operations, including marketing and promotions, community relations, fundraising for special events, sports information, ticket operations, spirit groups, broadcast services and corporate sponsorships. He also had sports management supervision of the men's basketball program while also supervising the cheerleading, dance teams and band programs.

Previous SBJ Athletic Director of the Year award recipients include: Texas' DeLoss Dodds in 2011, Ohio State's Gene Smith in 2010, Oklahoma's Joe Castiglione in 2009 and Wake Forest's Ron Wellman in 2008.