

All-Empire athletes honored

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The Redwood Empire's best and brightest were honored Wednesday night at The Press Democrat's 16th annual All-Empire Athletes of the Year ceremony at the Wells Fargo Center in Santa Rosa.

The top male and female athletes and scholar-athletes from 40 schools were recognized for their accomplishments. In addition, four overall athletes of the year and four scholar-athletes of the year were honored and presented with \$500 scholarships.

The large-school male athlete of the year was Piner's Kameron Rose, an all-Empire standout in soccer, football and baseball. In the fall, Rose, a strong-legged placekicker and punter, was named the North Bay League's Specialist of the Year after launching punts of 82, 73 and 64 yards. He also led the Prospectors in catches, yards and touchdowns as a wide receiver and was a standout defensive back. In addition, he pulled double duty on the soccer team and was a first-team All-Empire defender.

The large-school female athlete of the year was Maria Carrillo's Maya DiRado, one of the nation's top high school swimmers who has accepted an athletic scholarship with Stanford. DiRado owns the state record in the 200-yard individual medley, an event in which she's ranked sixth in high school history. She owns the Empire record in four events, is a four-time All-American and qualified for the 2008 U.S. Olympic Trials in three events.

The small-school male athlete of the year was Cloverdale's Robby Rowland, a 6-foot-6 forward who became the Empire all-time leading boys' scorer this season with 2,548 career points. A two-time Empire Small School Player of the Year, he is also a dominant pitcher who has committed to the University of Oregon. This season, he's thrown two no-hitters, including a perfect game, and has an ERA of 0.24.

The female small-school athlete of the year was Sonoma Academy sophomore Kate Bayes, a soccer and basketball star who led the Coyotes' soccer team to a North Coast section title with 51 goals. Bayes was also a first-team All-Empire basketball player.

The male large-school scholar-athlete of the year was Rancho Cotate's Eric Lu, one of the top breaststrokes in Empire history and a two-time North Bay League champion. Lu, who serves on the Western Region Executive Board for the Future Business Leaders of America, has a 4.6 GPA and will attend Harvard. He had a 5.0 GPA in the fall semester.

The female large-school scholar-athlete of the year was Ursuline's Michelle Stone, the top girls' pole vaulter in Empire history who was recently named the CIF Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Stone is one of two athletes from the area to earn the honor, which was established in 1982. Stone, who is active in community service, has a 4.42 GPA and is her class valedictorian. She will attend UC Davis.

The small-school male scholar-athlete of the year was Fort Bragg's Jake Cimolino,



the only running back in Empire history with two 2,000-yard seasons. Cimolino, who led Fort Bragg to a North Coast Section title, was a first-team all-state selection and the Empire's Small-School Player of the Year. He has earned straight As since sixth grade, has a 4.14 GPA and is Fort Bragg's student body president. He will attend Mesa State in Grand Junction, Colo., on a partial athletic scholarship.

The small-school female scholar-athlete of the year was Calistoga's Megan Hunt, a catcher who ranks among the state leaders with a batting average around .700. Hunt, a two-time first-team all-Empire selection in softball and basketball, played five sports in high school. She was recently one of four students statewide to receive a CIF Spirit of Sport Award, recognizing athletes who are involved in their school and community. Hunt has a 4.12 GPA and will attend UC Davis.

Three coaches of the year were also recognized Wednesday night — Petaluma football coach Steve Ellison, Sonoma wrestling coach Deets Winslow and Analy boys' basketball coach Brett Page.

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