



2021 NCAA Coach of the Year Finalists Announced

April 14, 2021 - The United States Fencing Coaches Association is pleased to the finalists for the 2020-21 Women's Team Coach of the Year awards. Award winners will be announced during the week of April 19-23rd. The finalists have been placed on a ballot that has been sent to all USFCA member programs to vote on award winners.

Representing programs across divisions, the USFCA presents awards the following collegiate coaching awards: Women's Team Coach of the Year, Division III Women's Team Coach of the Year, Women's Team Assistant Coach of the Year, and Division III Women's Team Coach of the Year.

This year's finalists include numerous coaches and programs who have achieved program-best results and accomplishments. These are all the more impressive given the nature of this season and the challenges created by the pandemic. A breakdown of each finalist's contributions and accomplishments is included below.

Women's Team Coach of the Year Candidates

Gia Kvaratskhelia – Notre Dame

Coach Kvaratskhelia led the Notre Dame women's team to a first place finish at NCAA Championships and secured the NCAA Championship as a combined team. With this championship, the Notre Dame Fencing Team now has the most championships of any sport at Notre Dame.

Individually, the team had finishes of second and third in women's epee, first and fourth in women's foil, and first and eleventh in women's saber.

During the regular season, the team finished undefeated with a record of 16-0 in dual meet competition.

Ivan Lee – LIU

In his second year leading the program, Coach Lee led the Long Island women's team to a tenth place finish as NCAA Championships and a fifteenth place finish as a combined team. Individually, the team had the women's epee champion, eleventh place in women's foil, and twelfth place in women's saber.

The team finished with a season record of 6-2 in dual meet competition.

Lisa Milgram – Stanford

Coach Milgram helped lead the Stanford program through an incredibly challenging season. After learning that Stanford would be cutting the fencing team following the 2020-21 season, Coach Milgram valiantly led the charge to help keep the program while trying to give her student-athletes the best experience possible in what could be the program's final season as an NCAA team. Through this, she was able to qualify all of her participating fencers to NCAA Championships and get strong results in limited competition.

The team finished ninth as a women's team at NCAA Championships and eleventh as a combined team. Individually, the team had finishes of fifth in women's epee, sixth in women's foil, and seventh in women's saber.

In conference competition, the team finished fourth at the Western Conference Championships with individual finishes of first in women's epee, first in women's foil, and first in women's saber.

Zach Moss – Northwestern

Coach Moss led the Northwestern women's team to a program best third place finish at NCAA Championships and a tenth place finish as a combined team. Individually, the team had finishes of second and fourteenth in women's saber, seventh and eighth in women's foil, and thirteenth and fifteenth in women's epee. The second place finish in women's saber is a program-best individual finish.

In conference competition, the Northwestern women's team finished as Co-Champions of the Central Collegiate Fencing Conference with squad finishes of Women's Foil Squad Champion, Women's Saber Squad Co-Champions, and second place Women's Epee Squad. The program finished with a regular season record of 17-9 in dual meet competition. Coach Moss was also the recipient of the CCFC Women's Team Coach of the Year award.

In addition to competitive success, Coach Moss demonstrated significant commitment to the Collegiate Fencing Community over the past year. Helping to establish and serve on the current USFCA Coaches Committee, he helped to grow the sport of fencing at the collegiate level. Within the Midwest, he worked to establish the Central Collegiate Fencing Conference for its inaugural season and to create as much fencing opportunity for all fencing programs within the Midwest. This helped to allow many programs to have a season and for there to be a conference championship for the student-athletes.

Division III Women's Team Coach of the Year

Peter Grandbois – Denison

In Denison's second season as a varsity program, Coach Grandbois continues to help the team get stronger every season and ensure that the student-athletes have a tremendous experience. In competition, the team finished with a season record of 5-9 in dual meet competition with wins over Division II program Wayne State and Division I program Incarnate Word.

In conference competition, the team finished fifth as a women's team in the Central Collegiate Fencing Conference and fourth as a Women's Saber Squad.

Eric Momberg – Lawrence

Coach Momberg took the reins of the Lawrence program during the pandemic and was able to produce strong individual results with a reduced roster. The team qualified a women's foil fencer to NCAA Championships, but Lawrence's travel policy related to covid would not allow her to compete. This was Lawrence's first qualifier to NCAA Championships since 2016. In addition, Coach Momberg produced three All-Americans.

In conference competition, the team finished fourth as a women's team in the Central Collegiate Fencing Conference.

Vince Paragano – Drew

Coach Paragano produced two All-Americans and led the team to a combined sixteenth place finish at NCAA Championships. While the team did not qualify any women to NCAA Championships, this was a program-best finish led by Coach Paragano and his staff.

Competing the entire season without top epee and saber fencers, the Drew finished with a season record of 8-12 with wins over Division I programs Lafayette and Wagner. The team finished with more regular season victories than any other Division III team.

Women's Team Assistant Coach of the Year

Tasia Ford – Temple

Coach Ford helped lead the Temple women's team to a seventh place finish at NCAA Championships and a twelfth place finish as a combined team. As the team's saber coach, she helped the women's saber fencers finish eighth and seventeenth individually at the Championships.

In addition, she helped lead the team to a season record of 11-4 in dual meet competition.

Melissa Forsythe – Temple

Coach Forsythe helped lead the Temple women's team to a seventh place finish at NCAA Championships and a twelfth place finish as a combined team. As the team's epee coach, she helped the women's epee fencers finish sixth and sixteenth individually at the Championships.

In addition, she helped lead the team to a season record of 11-4 in dual meet competition.

Adam Kaszubowski – Penn State

Coach Kaszubowski helped lead the Penn State women's team to a second place finish at NCAA Championships and a second place as a combined team. As the team's foil coach, he helped the women's foil fencers finish second and third individually at the Championships. Under his coaching, first-year foilist Samantha Catantan had a historic run coming out undefeated from the pool play part of the competition.

Additionally, he helped lead the team to a regular season record of 7-3 in dual meet competition.

Dennis Kolakowski – Northwestern

Coach Kolakowski helped lead the Northwestern women's team to a program-best third place finish at NCAA Championships and a tenth place finish as a combined team. As the team's saber coach, he helped the women's saber fencers finish second and fourteenth individually at Championships. Under his coaching, the women's saber team had the most victories of any saber team at NCAA Championships and first-year Sky Miller went 20-1 in the pool play part of the competition. Additionally, the second place finish in the individual competition is a program best for an individual at NCAA Championships.

During conference competition, Coach Kolakowski helped lead the women's team to a Co-Championship in the Central Collegiate Fencing Conference and helped the women's saber squad finish as Squad Co-Champions. The team finished with a 17-9 record in dual meet competition during the season.

Division III Women's Team Assistant Coach of the Year

Keri Ecker – Drew

Coach Ecker helped lead the Drew team to a sixteenth place finish as a combined team at NCAA Championships. While the team did not qualify any women's athletes, they did produce two All-Americans and finished the regular season with more wins than all other Division III women's teams. With a season record of 8-12 in dual meet competition, the Drew team earned victories over Division I programs Lafayette and Wagner. Showing great depth, they competed most of the season without their team captain and starters in both foil and epee.

Matt Zich – Brandeis

Coach Zich serves as the saber coach for Brandeis. While the school decided not to compete this season, Coach Zich went above and beyond to work with the team to help each athlete improve and grow during this challenging time.

During the 2019-20 season that was cut short by the pandemic, Coach Zich helped the women's saber squad qualify two athletes to NCAA Championships and earn All-American status. This doubled the number of women who had represented Brandeis at NCAA Championships in program history.