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★ OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY ★ WABASH COLLEGE ★ WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY ★ COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

NCAC Football Special

For Release

**NORTH COAST ANNOUNCES FOOTBALL PLAYERS OF THE YEAR;
WOOSTER'S SUTTON, WABASH'S HAMMER TAKE TOP HONORS**

November 25, 2003

CLEVELAND -- Wooster junior **Tony Sutton (Akron, OH/Archbishop Hoban)** and Wabash senior **Blair Hammer (Carmel, IN/Carmel)** have been honored for outstanding seasons by being named North Coast Athletic Conference Players of the Year. Sutton receives the Mike Gregory Award as the NCAC's Offensive Player of the Year after earning Newcomer of the Year recognition in 2002. The award is presented by Richard Gregory of Columbus, in honor of his father, a multi-sport standout at Denison in the 1920s. Hammer, meanwhile, is the Defensive Player of the Year for the first time and receives the Hank Critchfield Award, commemorating the 1927 Wooster graduate.

Sutton, a junior running back, was the North Coast's leading rusher this season. He set five single-season conference marks. His records include 2,203 all-purpose yards, 1,955 rushing yards, 30 rushing touchdowns, 31 total touchdowns and 186 points to put him at No. 1 in the conference record book in all five categories. He also broke the NCAA Division III record for total touchdowns per game (3.44), narrowly surpassing **R.J. Bowers'** 1998 mark of 3.40 (34 in 10). Sutton currently leads all NCAA divisions in rushing (217.2 ypg), scoring (20.7 ppg), and all-purpose yardage (244.8 per game). He finished the season with the fourth-highest rushing average per game in Div. III history, while his total rushing yards ranked No. 8.

Hammer, a senior defensive lineman, led the stellar Little Giant defense with 24 solo tackles and 18 assists for a total of 42, and added 9.5 tackles for a loss of 45 yards in 2003, despite being hampered by serious injuries to both ankles. He paced a defensive unit which finished at the top of almost every defensive category. Wabash allowed the fewest points per game (12.5) and was equally adept at stopping the run and the pass, leading the league in rushing defense (88.5 ypg), passing defense (133.9 ypg) and total defense (222.4 ypg). The Wabash defense is fourth in Div. III in total defense. Hammer, the only active player named to the NCAC 20th Anniversary football team earlier this fall, recorded five sacks this fall to tie his brother **B.J.'s** school record for career sacks with 27.5.

Wabash running back **Aaron Lafitte (Goodyear, AZ/Ironwood)** is the North Coast's Newcomer of the Year. Lafitte was the only freshman on the All-NCAC First Team and the first freshman to be voted that honor since Wittenberg's **Dustin Goldsbury** in 1998. He led Div. III in freshman scoring with 96 points and a 9.6 points-per-game average. Lafitte shattered the Wabash freshman rushing record this year, carrying 156 times for 1,008 yards and 16 TDs, becoming the first freshman to top the 1,000-yard mark in a season at Wabash. He finished third in the conference in rushing average (100.8 ypg), third in all-purpose yards (124.1 ypg), and third in scoring (9.6 ppg).

Allegheny's **Mark Matlak** has been named Coach of the Year for the first time after guiding his team to its eighth North Coast crown, and first since 1997. The Gators went unbeaten (7-0) in conference play for the first time since 1996 and were only the second team ever to open a season 0-3 and advance to the NCAA playoffs. Matlak is 12-8 (.600) in only two seasons at Allegheny.

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