

Blair, Dean, Simpson honored with Gruszkowski Youth Star Award

Prior to the start of opening round of the NCAUSBCA 45th Annual Youth Invitational Scratch Singles Tournament at AMF Annandale on January 18, three individuals—Gene Blair, Nicholas Dean, and Michael Simpson—were introduced as the 2014 recipients of the prestigious NCAUSBCA Ted Gruszkowski Jr. Youth Star Award, which is named in honor of the late association Hall of Fame member who was a strong supporter of area youth bowling.

The award winners, honored for their bowling achievement and/or service to youth bowling, each were presented with a plaque and \$200 in scholarship funds, which will be administered through the USBC SMART program. In addition, their names will appear on the plaque that contains the names of the 10 previous award recipients.



Gene Blair

GENE BLAIR, 16 Waldorf, Maryland

Gene Blair started bowling at the age of four. He has won five of the last seven team championships, coming in second in the other two, in his Saturday morning youth league and has won various individual awards. He has competed in the City Tournament every year since he was eight, and has won several team championships, doubles titles, and placed high in singles. He competes in the Vern Burke tournaments, the 600 Club events, and has participated in the Invitational the last few years. He has also competed in the Pepsi Tournament, the Virginia State Tournament, the Commonwealth Games, and the Pennsylvania Junior Bowlers Tour. He bowls in the local Youth Travel League, two years running, and has participated in many Junior Gold Qualifiers.

Gene is a very accomplished athlete who has played football, soccer, and basketball since age seven and has won multiple championships and individual awards in each sport. He currently plays for his High School JV team and starts at linebacker and kicker/punter. He has won several games on field goals and extra points, and as a seventh grader was the championship game MVP. Gene's teams have never had a losing record, and he is a big reason for that.

Gene also has a very good school record. He has been on the honor roll every grading period since he was eligible in the fourth grade. He currently carries a 3.34 GPA, is in a college prep program, and takes honors courses. He has been a member of the school choir since he was in third grade and performs in multiple concerts throughout the year.

Gene also volunteers at the Charles County Teen Court and helps mentor troubled teens. He is required to ask tough questions of the teens and to assign punishments based on their offense, including community service, essays, apology letters, etc. This helps him see both sides of possible problems, which in turn helps him make good decisions based on experiences he is having. Gene has also volunteered at Food for Families during the holiday season, helping with food donations for Thanksgiving baskets for the needy.

During the summer and some weekends during the school year, Gene also works at the family tire business. He has been a part of this since he was born.

He has learned to change tires, load and unload shipments, inventory control, and how to speak with customers in person and on the phone. He is a hard worker and is learning to be a leader.

Gene Blair is an outstanding young man. He has many friends and is well liked by everyone. He is the type of person who is missed when he is not at events or social gatherings. He works hard at everything he does, trying to better himself all the time. He has good leadership skills and is a very compassionate young man. He is also very competitive, which makes him very driven to succeed.

NICHOLAS DEAN, 19 Alexandria, Virginia

Nicholas Dean currently attends Northern Virginia Community College, pursuing a career in criminal



Nicholas Dean

justice, which he studied as a junior and senior in high school. He has been on ride-alongs with the Fairfax County Police, learning their daily routines and how they respond to calls. He also volunteers at the soup kitchen and has helped with environmental projects in the community, such as cleaning the river front and marking storm drains.

His hobbies are bowling, baseball, snowboarding, and school. He works part-time at Bowl America Shirley, where he oils the lanes and works as a pin chaser while also working to perfect his bowling game with the help of NCAUSBCA Hall of Famer **Willie Jelks**.

Nick's greatest passions are bowling and baseball, and when the two sports collide, bowling almost always comes first. He started bowling at age 3, and having learned from his older brother and cousins, he was a natural. He has worked at perfecting his bowling skills ever since, being a sponge for any and all advice that comes his way.

As his youth league downsized at Bowl America Shirley, he took on the challenges and responsibilities of being a mentor. By staying in a small youth league instead of looking for a more competitive one, he was able to help the newer and younger bowlers—an extremely admirable quality that only a few people have. Nick consistently gives advice to bowlers of all ages, passing on his learned skills. He is extremely intelligent but always willing to listen to a coach with a different idea. He's always polite and eager to help in any way he can to better the youth program.

Nick's high scores are 299, 290, 289, 280, and 279, just to name a few. In the last five years, he has bowled about two dozen 700 series, including a 748. His average at age 7 was 94 and improved to 150 by age 10 and to 207 by age 15.

His current average is 218 but has been as high as 225. He has bowled on challenging shots in his youth

Past NCAUSBCA Ted Gruszkowski Jr. Youth Star Award recipients

2008 — Eric Helmrich, Adam Mitchell,
Allen Windsor

2009 — Alonso "A.J." Kinney Jr.

2010 — Malcolm James

2011 — Jason Eman, Brandon Lowe,
Kayla Meadows

2012 — Zahir Holmes

2013 — Conner Kolessides

league, not always the easy house shots. He practices on harder sports/challenge patterns to better himself. He's not always looking to have the highest average, just looking to improve his ability to compete.

He is extremely humble and has a great attitude with coaches and peers alike and is always respectful of fellow bowlers. He has a laid-back attitude and lets his bowling do his talking. Even when he doesn't bowl as well as he would like, he maintains a positive attitude, consistently laying the ball on the lane smoothly as though it is his first ball of the game.

His passion for the sport leads him to constantly participate in tournaments, winning several along the way. He has bowled in tournaments since his first City Tournament when he was seven. Since then, he has bowled in pro-am tournaments, state tournaments, Pepsi-Cola tournaments, David Dahm's Memorial tournaments, the Virginia State High School Tournament, the USBC Youth Open Tournament, no-tap tournaments, and numerous 600 Club, Vern Burke, Invitational, and Junior Gold events.

His most notable tournament was the NCAUSBCA 2013 Youth Invitational Scratch Singles, where he stayed within the top four bowlers after every round and finished second, averaging 211.

Nick has bowled in the Junior Gold National Tournaments in Indianapolis, Las Vegas, and Detroit. In the 2011 Survivor Tournament in Las Vegas, he finished 28th, averaging 232 and qualifying for the 2012 tournament in Indianapolis.

Nicholas Dean's natural skills at being a mentor and leader will help him throughout his career. His passion for bowling is lifelong. There is no doubt he will take his love of the sport to bring others into it as he moves forward into his adult life.

MICHAEL SIMPSON, 19 Woodbridge, Virginia

Bowling runs deep in the veins of Michael Simpson, as both his mother, who successfully battled breast cancer, and his father are fairly well-known throughout the bowling community in this area.

From numerous Junior Gold Qualifiers to Mid-Atlantic Youth Bowling Extravaganza (MAYBE) scholarship events, to one of the greatest performances this area has seen at the NCAUSBCA 2013 Youth Invitational Scratch Singles Tournament, Michael always finds a way to captivate us all with his ability on the lanes. His first certified 300 game in the Woodbridge Area High School League came only weeks after he claimed his first Virginia High School State title in Midlothian.

In total, he has rolled a dozen perfect games, half of which are certified.

Last season, he was a member of the first-ever, self-proclaimed "NCAUSBCA Jr. Dream Team," which took top honors in the Scratch All Events category of the NCAUSBCA Youth Championship Tournament, with Michael's 2,020 nine-game total (224.44 average) leading the way.

Earlier this season, he went on a tear, winning three events, including the Vern Burke Scholarship Tournament at Bowl America Manassas, where he rolled his first 800 series, an 801, and where he also won a Junior Gold Qualifier by more than 190 pins.

Michael Simpson inspires many of his competitors and encourages them to give it their all with each and every shot. He is a most worthy recipient of this award.



Michael Simpson