

2012 Citizen of the Year

Coach Rick Patton was nominated and chosen as Citizen of the Year because of his dedication to youth and the Wamego Community that goes well beyond his coaching duties. Coach Patton continually focuses on setting and pursuing personal goals. Not just for his student athletes but also for him. He clearly practices what he preaches.

Because of this, Wamego is known across the State and Region for its excellence in running events. Students come into our district for the opportunity to run in Coach Patton's program. As Cross Country and Track Coach Rick is arguably the busiest coach in the system, continually coordinating the dozens of volunteers it takes to pull off one successful event after another. Perhaps more importantly, track and cross country students and parents know that "once a member of Coach Patten's team, always a member"; with runners and parents returning year after year to continue the volunteer tradition.

Students may think they are joining a sports team, they quickly learn they've joined a family. Last year one of the young runners made the statement, "I really hate running and I'm terrible at it, but I come to every practice because everyone is so supportive. I love hanging with them!

It's also important to recognize Coach Patton's major support, his wife Jolene. Her unending enthusiasm and volunteer spirit helps create the family atmosphere. She is famous for spending days making homemade noodles for the annual chicken noodle dinner for XC runners. She has also been known to stay up all night making breakfast burritos for early morning time trials. And she still manages to laugh and acts like it's nothing to run a family, work outside the home and volunteer day after day. Our thanks go out to both Rick and Jolene.

Listed below are just a few of the sentiments sent in by former students and runner of Coach Patton:

I remember the evening after winning the 1984 team state championship in cross country and driving by the Last Stop and reading the marquee that read " State Cross Country Champs" . The Last Stop was owned then by Earl Daylor who I knew was a huge football guy. Seeing the sign and knowing Earl, I realized how Coach Patton's championship team must had made an impact on him. I talked to Earl later in the year and thanked him for putting the message on his sign. He then told me "thanks for putting Wamego back on the map". The bottom line is Coach Patton is still helping keep Wamego on the map. Look the photos in the Wamego Times. I still can't believe the number of kids in the team photos who want to run and compete for him year end and year out. I'm glad to have been part of his training, teaching and mentoring.
Keep up the good work coach,
Shawn Stewart

One Tuesday morning in the spring of 1982 (my junior year of high school), a bus load of WHS track athletes departed for Hiawatha to compete in the Hiawatha Invitational Track Meet. Upon arrival, an unusual sight appeared.....no one was there. No other school buses, no athletes, no fans, no one. Furthermore, Hiawatha High School at that time still utilized a cinder track and there were no chalk-lines applied to the track that day. It was apparent from the lack of activity there was no track meet scheduled that day.

In total dismay, Coach Rick Patton quickly reviewed his printed schedule of events. The “day” printed at the top of the schedule showed Tuesday; however, the “date” actually showed the track meet was scheduled to occur on Thursday of that week. Imagine the shock when we realized we had traveled all the way to Hiawatha to attend a track meet that wasn’t taking place until two days later. After the initial shock, the entire bus load of student-athletes broke out in laughter when we realize what had just occurred.

To avoid the embarrassment of his colleagues, WHS students, and others while trying to explain his mistake, Coach Patton made the decision to not return to school until the school day had ended. Therefore, we made the most of our trip by having practice at Hiawatha’s track. Imagine the curious expressions exhibited by Hiawatha High School faculty, staff, and students as they passed by the track that afternoon. We boastfully explained that our school allowed us to travel to our opponents’ facilities in advance of track meets in an effort gain a competitive advantage. Little did they know we simply had the incorrect day.

Two days later, which was the ACTUAL day of the track, our team once again boarded a school bus and made the 90 mile trek to Hiawatha. It was too long ago to remember whether or not our “on-site” practice gave us any competitive advantage, but traveling to a track meet on the wrong day is certainly something I’ll never forget. Thanks Coach Patton for the memories.

Submitted by,
Kelly Lindenmuth, WHS Class of 1983

From Mindy Tauer Moore, “Rick Patton is more than just a coach. He’s a man who taught us to believe in ourselves. By setting goals and giving us the confidence to work hard, do our best, stay focused and meet those goals. In turn that confidence carries over to life situations and circumstances. It teaches you that working hard and believing in yourself can and does pay off.”