

Coach of the Year

Timpanogos' Nelson made right moves

By TONY JONES
The Salt Lake Tribune

Really, *The Tribune's* Coach of the Year award could've gone to a number of baseball guys around the state.

It could've gone to Alta's Barry Harrington, who endured nearly being fired, never let his team lose focus and advanced to the playoffs where they made a slight run. It could've gone to Riverton's Jay Applegate, whose team had the most consistent

regular season of any. It could've gone to Cottonwood's Jon Hoover, who fielded a young squad that started the season 3-7, yet never panicked in leading the Colts to a third consecutive Class 4A state championship.

Instead, it goes to Timpanogos' Kim Nelson.

Why? Because of all the aforementioned coaches, Nelson is the only one who was forced to enter the last week of the regular season needing to win a

game or two in order to secure a postseason berth. That and he got the ship turned around just in time to win the Class 5A title without having to spend any time in the losers' bracket.

Included in that playoff run was a 12-1 win at Viewmont, a No. 1 seed that was hands down one of the most explosive offensive teams in the state this season. It also included a win at Alta, a win over Bingham in the title game and a win over Riverton in the winners' bracket final.

Some say that Timpanogos got hot at the right time. Some say that Gentry Croft coming back from injury to pitch well for the Timberwolves also helped.

But none of that would've been readily possible without Nelson's leadership. He made seemingly every right move at every right time. He coached by feel, even dipping into a maligned bullpen for crucial innings in the title game. And because of that, his team came out on top, despite

entering the postseason as a No. 4 seed.

"It was a combination of a couple of things. Senior leadership of guys who knew that goal of being state champions was still there. We needed some other guys to step up and do better. Think that definitely happened. In the tournament when Gentry was able to pitch more confidence, we were able to see this thing through to the end."

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ALL-STATE BASEBALL

Picture perfect

Whether at the plate or the mound, the MVPs made big marks

CLASS 4A

Ryan Thomas

COTTONWOOD SENIOR

Thomas was an offensive machine this season. Thomas, an infielder, hit .524 for the season with 10 homers and 47 RBIs. He was the hub of Cottonwood's offense, a kid who was able to hit for power and average equally well. He was as good in the playoffs as he was during the regular season. He's still undecided as to where he will go to college.



CLASS 5A

Rhett Nelson

TIMPANOGOS JUNIOR

Nelson went 10-0 this season on the mound and was one of the most feared pitchers in the state. His most important contribution this season may have come before the playoffs, as he went to Spanish Fork and picked up a shutout when his team absolutely needed a win, lest they face not making the playoffs altogether. "I went 10-0, but it was definitely a team 10-0," Nelson said. "I had as much run support as I could ask for and I had a great defense behind me. So the 10-0 looks good on paper, but credit definitely has to go to my teammates."

CLASS 3A

Joe Pond

JUDGE MEMORIAL SENIOR

He was possibly the best pitcher in Utah this season, with a blazing fastball, a nasty curve and the ability to throw a hard slider. Pond led the Bulldogs to the state title for the first time in his career. He threw a one-hitter in the winners' bracket final against Juan Diego, shutting down a potent offense that seemed due to break out. He's all set to play at Utah next season. "We went through lots of hard work this season," Pond said. "Losing in the playoffs the last two seasons made me want to work that much harder to win a state championship."



CLASS 2A

Kevin Nay

GUNNISON SENIOR

Nay went 11-1 this season and now holds the state career strikeout record with 340. He's long been one of the best pitchers around, and he led his school to a second consecutive state championship. Nay will play his college baseball at the College of Eastern Utah. "This year was different than last season," Nay said. "There was more pressure this year because everyone expected us to win. Last year was unexpected. The goal was to work harder than everyone else out there. That's what we did."

—Tony Jones

PHOTOS BY FRANCISCO KJOLSETH/The Salt Lake Tribune

Three season milestones

1. Barry Harrington

Harrington, the Alta coach, almost lost his job midway through the year, only to be told at the 11th hour that he would be able to stay on. Still, he was able to lead the Hawks to the playoffs, where they went a few rounds before falling to Bingham in the consolation bracket.

2. Brighton

The Bengals started the season by losing their first nine games. Then a funny thing happened. The Bengals won 10 region games, and had a chance to gain homefield advantage in the playoffs, but lost to Alta on the final day of the regular season. Although Brighton lost the first two games of the playoffs, the run it had just to get there was a memorable

one and an inspiration to all young teams everywhere who suffer slow starts.

3. Timpanogos

The Timberwolves were leading Region 4 for most of the season. Then they were swept by American Fork and they limped into the playoffs as a No. 4 seed. Then they

went on a roll, one that didn't stop until they won the Class 5A state title. It was a great run by Timpanogos, one made even greater by the fact that it was able to make a turnaround so quickly.

"I'm not going to retire until I win a game at American Fork," quipped Timberwolves coach Kim Nelson, who in 12 years has never won at A.F.

— Tony Jones

College-bound players

Players	School	College
Derek Amicone	Jordan	Utah Valley State
Colby Berg	Davis	SLCC
Kyle Beverley	Cottonwood	Oregon State
Jefferson Court	Alta	BYU (football)
Gentry Croft	Timpanogos	Southern Nevada
Gavin Green	Layton	Utah
Bret Lopez	Timpanogos	BYU
Kevin Nay	Gunnison	College of Eastern Utah
Joe Pond	Judge Memorial	Utah
Brock Whitney	Bingham	BYU
Tyler Yagi	Skyline	Utah
Daniel Sechrest	Lone Peak	BYU