

Best of the 2000s

DIII News looks back at the best of the best in Division III basketball from the first decade of the new millennium

by Gary Rubin, Editor and Publisher

Best of lists are hard to put together, so it's a good thing we only do this once a decade. For the second time, *DIII News* reveals its picks for the Best of the Decade, this time the 2000s.

What a decade it was. Five teams appeared in back-to-back national title games. Two teams defended their championships. Three title games went down to the last seconds.

Here's a look at the Best Program, Best Team, Best Player, Best Coach and Best Championship Game of the last 10 years, as determined by the *DIII News* staff. ●

Best Program

Washington University. With two national championships and three straight Final Four appearances during the decade, UAA member Washington University lays claim to the best Division III men's basketball program of the 2000s.

Runners Up:

Wis. Stevens Point — two straight national titles under Jack Bennett during the decade.

Amherst — Four Final Four appearances in the 2000s and one national title put the Lord Jeffs in elite company.

Virginia Wesleyan — Out of the south the Marlins broke through with a national title and a second-place trophy in back-to-back years.

Williams — Consecutive Division III title game appearances, one national trophy and a 31-1 record in 2003.

Best Coach

The best programs naturally were led by the best coaches. **Mark Edwards** led the Washington University Bears to three straight Final Fours, captured two titles, and was named the Molten/*DIII News* Coach of the Year three times, earning him Best Coach of the 2000s.

Runners Up:

Jack Bennett, Wis. Stevens Point — Led the Pointers to two national titles and was a Molten/*DIII News* Coach of the Year.

Dave Hixon, Amherst — Four Final Four appearances, one title, and a *DIII News* Coach of the Year.

Dave Paulsen, Williams — Back-to-back title games and a national coach of the year honor.

Glenn Robinson, Franklin & Marshall — became the all-time wins leader in Division III history by recording his 667th victory on February 14, 2004 at home versus Muhlenberg College.

Dave Macedo, Va. Wesleyan — A *DIIIN* Coach of the Year in 2006.



Best Player

With an increasing level of talent at the Division III level, only one player captured back-to-back *DIII News* Player of the Year awards in the 2000s.

Baldwin-Wallace's **Tori Davis** earned national Player of the Year honors in 2007 and 2008. He averaged 22.4 points and 9.1 rebounds a game his senior campaign, is the school's all-time leading scorer, and was named the OAC's most valuable player twice. For his career, he was a four-time all-OAC selection.

Runners Up:

Troy Ruths, Washington — A two-time *DIIIN* first-team All-American. Was the publication's Player of the Year in 2008.

Derek Reich, Chicago — Four-time All-American and POY in 2003.

Andrew Olson, Amherst — Played in three Final Fours and captured first-team *DIII News* All-American honors.



Tori Davis, Baldwin-Wallace

Best Final

Division III basketball has had some dramatic finishes, and none better than these three. That's why they tie for the distinction as Best Championship Game in the 2000s:

- **2003.** Williams led for only 18 seconds of the second half, but it was enough for a national title as the Ephs rallied for a 67-65 win over Gustavus Adolphus.

Tim Folan's pair of free throws with two seconds remaining provided the Ephs with the game-winning points.

- **2004.** Nick Bennett tallied a game-high 30 points and Jason Kalsow hit the game-winning jumper with 0.2 seconds left to lead Wisconsin-Stevens Point to an 84-82 win over defending champion Williams College in the 2004 Division III men's basketball final.

- **2006.** Sophomore guard Ton Ton Balenga sparked a second-half rally and hit the game-winning shot as Virginia Wesleyan edged Wittenberg 59-56 to win the 2006 Division III national title.

Balenga hit a lay-up, stole the ball and then canned a short jump shot with 1:54 left to tie the game 52-52. Wesleyan grabbed its first lead when Brandon Adair got a lay-up with 1:20 to push the Marlins ahead 54-52.

Adair also tied the game 56-56 when he hit a pair of free throws with 49.3 seconds left. After Wittenberg's Daniel Russ was called for traveling, Balenga sent a 3-point shot whistling through with 2.1 seconds left for the game-winning shot.

Best Team

With a 31-1 overall record, and a national championship, Williams claims the Best Team label for its 2002-03 squad.

The Ephs were the only Division III champion during the decade with only one loss.

Runners Up:

Washington, 2009 — The Bears successfully defended their national championship, one of only four Division III teams to ever accomplish the feat.

Amherst, 2007 — The Lord Jeffs rolled to a 30-2 season and brought home the program's first national title.

Calvin, 2000 — The Knights began the decade with a 30-2 overall mark and a national championship.

Wis. Stevens Point, 2005 — The Pointers captured their second straight national title and posted a 29-3 record.



The Wisconsin Stevens Point Pointers's 2005 team earned the school's second straight title and compiled a 29-3 record.

Best of the 1990s

Since our debut in 1993, *DIII News* has covered Division III basketball inside and out. The last time we put together a Best Of was for the 1990s.

Wondering what the Best Of the 1990s picks were? Here's a look back at our selections from the December, 1999, issue:

Best Final:

1999 — UW Platteville 76, Hampton-Sydney 75. The game was the first double-overtime contest in the history of the Division III men's tournament.

Best Conference:

NESCAC. The league began accepting invitations to the NCAA tournament during the decade and sent at least five teams every season to the tournament.

Best Player:

Steve Honderd, Calvin

Best Coach:

Bo Ryan, Wis. Platteville

Best Team:

Wis. Platteville, 1995, 31-0

Best Program:

Wis. Platteville

What do you think?

Agree? Disagree? Let us know what you think of our Best of the 2000s selections.

Send us an email or DM on Twitter about the teams, coaches, players and games that you would add to our lists.

We want to hear from you!

Best Conference

University Athletic Association. A UAA member captured the final two championships of the decade when Washington went back-to-back. Rochester also appeared in a Final Four during the decade. What set the UAA apart was the three *DIII News* national Player of the Year Awards and three Coach of the Year awards in the 2000s.

Runner Up: The NESCAC had a representative in four national title games and brought home two titles, one by Williams and one by Amherst, which were some of the top teams of the decade.