

By TOMMY BRYAN, sports editor

Eight area football players will be among the honorees Monday, March 8 at the annual awards banquet for the Middle Tennessee Chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame. The black-tie event will be held at 7 p.m. at the Nashville Airport Marriott.

The banquet gives the Hall of Fame Foundation, along with all of Middle Tennessee, an opportunity to honor 56 high school and seven college scholar/athletes who have distinguished themselves not only as football players but also in their academic and leadership achievements. The NFF will be awarding \$500 scholarships to all high school scholar/athletes and recognizing outstanding community leaders and great Americans by awarding the Fred Russell Distinguished American Award and the Roy Kramer Contribution to Football Award.

Among the high school players set to be recognized are the following from Wilson County: Mt. Juliet quarterback Reed Gurchiek; Wilson Central lineman Anthony Clark; Lebanon WR / DB Phillip Vance; MJ Christian lineman Phillip Harnage; Friendship Christian WR / P Parker Teeter and Watertown quarterback Dalton Phillips. Also honored from neighboring Trousdale County is Yellow Jacket standout Alexander Gregory.

Cumberland University's all Mid-South Conference defensive back Anthony Allen is among the collegiate honorees. Allen was the leader of the defensive backfield that posted 18 interceptions this season. The Belle Glade, Fla., native picked off four passes, ranking fifth in the Mid-South and 22nd nationally. He also had nine pass breakups, ranking third in the MSC and 19th in the nation. The senior recorded 49 tackles this season and returned one interception 94 yards for a touchdown, in the season opener versus Campbellsville.

Former Mt. Juliet High and Tennessee Tech football standout Barry Wilmore is slated to receive the "Fred Russell Distinguished American Award" during Monday's banquet. Wilmore, a NASA astronaut, piloted the Space Shuttle Atlantis (STS-129) on a mission to the International Space Station in November of 2009.

Wilmore, a member of the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame, will be introduced by his former Golden Eagle teammate Dewayne Alexander, head coach at Lebanon's Cumberland University and a member of the NFF Board of Directors.

Also on tap for recognition Monday is Tennessee Tech head football coach Watson Brown. A prep star at Cookeville High who went on to play quarterback at Vanderbilt, Brown will receive the "Roy Kramer Contribution to Football Award". He is best remembered by many Commodore fans for leading Vandy to a 14-10 victory over Alabama in 1969. Brown was named the Sports Illustrated National Back of the Week for his efforts.

Brown, who is married to the former Brenda Arnold of Lebanon, just wrapped up his 25th season as a collegiate head coach and 37th overall in the profession. Prior to taking the TTU job in December of 2006, Brown had spent the previous 12 seasons as head coach at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He also served as head coach at Austin Peay State University and Vanderbilt.

Several local businesses have stepped forward to help sponsor Monday night's affair, including: Perma-Pipe, Bill Erwin; Extra Point Sports, David Elrod; Shoney's and Maggie Moo's, Kay Couch; and Cumberland University.

A limited number of table sponsorships are still available for \$500 each by calling NFF Executive Secretary Scott Brunette at 259-8783. For more information, go to www.nffnashville.org