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# PRESS RELEASE

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## HOCKEY EAST CELEBRATES ITS TOP FANS *Online poll winners endorsed by league committee vote*

As part of the celebration of its 20th anniversary season, the Hockey East Association is pleased to announce the winners of its "Top Fan" promotion.

All fans, friends and followers of the league were invited to nominate themselves or someone else who would make a strong selection as Hockey East's top fan. The contest separated nominees into two categories, current student and general public. Five finalists were selected in each category, and a month-long online voting process identified the most popular choices. A league committee subsequently endorsed those selections as the official winners.

The top current student fan is Pierson Van Raalte, a senior majoring in Economics at Northeastern University and the unofficial leader of "The Dog House", a raucous student fan group that dominates the scene at NU's historic Matthews Arena. Runners-up in the student category were Keith Belanger of UNH, Becca Chao of BU, Sarah Quish of BC and Chelsea Schreiber of UMaine.

Two finalists in the non-student category received so much general support that the committee decided to name them as co-winners for that category. Michael Raymond Walsh, age five, has been a dedicated Hockey East fan since he was two and is likely the youngest season ticket holder at UMass Lowell. Co-winner Stephen Sullivan's primary interest is Boston College, but he also holds season tickets to both UMass Lowell and Merrimack. Coincidentally, both winners live in Methuen, MA. Runners-up in the non-student category were Stephen Daly of North Reading, MA, Craig Thomas of Sacramento, CA, and Marc Turiano of Andover, MA.

Each winner will receive a tournament gift package that includes two tickets to each night of the Hockey East championship tournament at the FleetCenter along with hotel accommodations for two on championship weekend.

The second page of this release contains the nominating essays that led to the winners' selections. Hockey East congratulates the winners and the runners-up, and thanks the many fans and friends that submitted nominations for consideration as well as the thousands that voted online. Hockey East topped the one million mark in total fan attendance in 2002-03, including a record 34,328 for the championship tournament, and is expected to finish with another record high this year.

<b>TOP FANS</b>
<p><u>Top Student Fan</u>  <b>Pierson Van Raalte</b>  <i>Northeastern University</i></p> <p><u>Top Non-Student Fans</u>          (co-winners)  <b>Stephen Sullivan</b>  <b>Michael Raymond Walsh</b>  <i>Methuen, MA</i></p>

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# Hockey East 20th Anniversary Top Fan Award Winners

## **Stephen Sullivan** (as nominated by Andrea DeFusco-Sullivan, his wife)

Please choose my husband as your ultimate fan. The reason that I married him (or, I should say, one of the major reasons!) is that he is a fan of Hockey East. I attended Merrimack College and Boston College, where hockey reigns. I was looking for a husband that was as into hockey as I am and Stephen is that and then some.

During our courtship, we discussed Merrimack's entrance into Hockey East, and BC's crushing defeats vs. Michigan and Maine. We were engaged shortly after BC's victory in Albany in 2001 and were married shortly before the begin of hockey season 2002. Basically, we plan our lives around Hockey East season.

Stephen follows the Hockey East rankings religiously. He drives us to all home and away games for all three Hockey East teams with whom we hold season tickets: Boston College, Merrimack College and UMass Lowell. Our most adventurous trip thus far was to the Icebreaker in Detroit (on the way there we got lost in Canada). We look forward to getting lost in Canada again as we spend our Christmas vacation at the Great Lakes invitational in Detroit.

My husband is exemplary not only because of the number of games he attends (which is a lot). He's a lifelong fan of Hockey East (he remembers Beanpots from the seventies), and is a classy guy that represents courteously. Although his favorite team is BC, he roots for the Hockey East team no matter what—he rooted for UNH in Buffalo last year.

Please select my husband if you want to reward a lifelong fan who really champions the purity, sportsmanship and excitement of Hockey East college matchups.

## **Pierson Van Raalte** (as nominated by Rob Leshin, a friend)

I have known Pierson since 1999, our freshman year at Northeastern. We have been loyal members of the Dog House since our sophomore year. He has assumed the position of leader of the Dog House after literally shadowing the previous leader (who has graduated) for over a year.

Pierson has made it to every home game and almost all of the away games since sophomore year. He has made the lengthy car rides to Orono and every other Hockey East destination numerous times. He has even made the non-league trips to Princeton, NJ, Vermont, and the RPI tournament along with a few other members of the Dog House. This year he even spirited a trip to Denver to see the Huskies out on their west trip.

For the last three years, the NU Huskies have engulfed his life and he honestly can't stop talking about hockey. His room is adorned with every ticket from the last three years as well as the schedule posters with the scores from each game. He follows the league very closely online as well as the rest of the NCAA teams.

Pierson is the first one in Matthews and the last one out on game nights. He sets up the banner and greets the players as well as leads cheers and gets the crowd going. Anyone on campus that is interested in college hockey sees him as the one to approach. Alumni speak with him during intermissions. The players and coaches know who he is and appreciate what he does. He is a very devoted fan who tries his best to get a broader fan base here at NU.

I hope you can select him as a finalist because it would mean a lot to him as he is in his final year at Northeastern University.

## **Michael Raymond Walsh** (as nominated by Michael J. Walsh, his father)

My son Michael is five years old and has been a fan of Hockey East since before he could walk. Michael's uncle Kevin, a BU fan since college, introduced him to Hockey East by taking him to his first game at age 2.

At age 3, Michael could sing the national anthem, recognize all referee calls and recognize all the Hockey East logos. My son and I began to attend UMass Lowell games and he became a huge fan, rooting for all the Hockey East teams. Michael attended the Hockey East Championship weekend for the first time at the end of that season.

At age 4, Michael and I became season ticket holders at UMass Lowell and also saw games elsewhere in Hockey East. In January of 2003, Michael broke his right leg and was placed in a full body cast. While recuperating, he received two very special gifts. The first was a BU hockey jersey signed by the 2002-2003 team, arranged for by his Uncle. The second was a UMass Lowell hockey jersey signed by the 2002-2003 team, arranged for by me. Michael attended his first Hockey East game in his wheelchair only two weeks after the accident. Michael saw all the remaining games that season and made it again to the Hockey East Championship weekend.

This year, at age 5, Michael and I are again UML season ticket holders. Michael can be seen in Section X at the Tsongas Arena, usually one of the first fans to arrive, running about waiting for warmups and waiting for the referees to "high five" him as they come out the "big door" to the ice surface.

Michael should be voted the Hockey East "Top Fan". He truly is!