

Triad's Tejada takes top honor

David Wilhelm - News-Democrat

Jared Tejada isn't a trash-talker or a chest-pumper. He relied on traditional ways to garner attention.

Tejada, a fleet-footed senior forward on the Triad High boys soccer team, racked up 29 goals and 17 assists as the Knights breezed to the championship of the Mississippi Valley Conference and finished 21-4-1 overall.

Tejada's big season made it easy for coaches to select him the News-Democrat's Class 1A-2A Player of the Year in boys soccer.

"It's huge for me. I'm very proud," said the 5-foot-6, 145-pound Tejada, the son of Robert and Stacey Tejada. "I came into this season hoping to make an impact for the team. Winning the conference was the first thing I wanted to do.

"Making it far into the playoffs is another thing I wanted to do, and we did both of them."

Tejada had 67 goals and 47 assists in his career. During that time, the Knights were 75-22-1 with three MVC titles. This season, Triad advanced to the Jacksonville Class 2A Super-Sectional, where it lost 3-0 to Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin.

"Even among the large schools, when we had our all-state meeting, he was picked as the best player," Triad coach Mike Villa said. "He had a great year. I think he's the best player we've had at Triad. He's got great ball skills, he's quick, he has a nose for the goal, and he's unselfish.

"He's got all the things you want, as a coach, in a player. He's a pretty quiet kid. He's not a rah-rah, push-the-guys (player). He leads by example. Obviously, he gives a good example of how you should act both on the field and off."

Tejada broke onto the scene as a freshman and provided four goals and three assists, showing signs of the type of player he would become.

As a sophomore, Tejada's totals grew to 10 goals and 14 assists while playing midfield. His breakout season came as a junior when he recorded 24 goals and 13 assists.

"My role on the team was to make things happen and score the goals that we needed, and I think I did that consistently," said Tejada, who considered his senior season his best. "We had a lot of players on the team that got the job done. Kenji Kobayashi and Gus Wagner knew how to find the back of the net, too."

Tejada was the focal point of opposing defenses the last two seasons. Still, it did nothing to slow him down. Even when double-teamed, Tejada managed to frustrate defenders, who were unable to counteract his speed and dribbling skills.

"His scoring ability developed over the four years," Villa said. "He was always little. As he got a little older, he got a little stronger and I think his quickness came on. And having played select ball for St. Louis Scott Gallagher and Metro United for a long time, developing the skills, he just steadily progressed until he had the whole package.

“He’s quick with the ball. It’s like you’re standing there and you’re marking him and then all of a sudden, whoa! He’s gone and he’s got a shot off. Even in games he didn’t score, he was always dangerous. He’s consistent. He doesn’t have games where he doesn’t show up and give it an effort.”

When it came to finishing, Tejada always was on the mark.

“He’s got the whole package,” Villa said. “The only thing he probably doesn’t have is size. If you could be as good as he is and be big, too, I guess that would be about the only thing.

“But he’s pretty durable. I’ve had him for four years on the varsity and I don’t recall him being hurt.”

Tejada made a verbal commitment to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville before the season began. The Cougars are making the transition to the Division I level and will play in the Missouri Valley Conference beginning in 2010, factors that made the decision a no-brainer for Tejada.

“D-I was obviously something I was looking at,” said Tejada, who also considered Evansville and Northern Illinois. “SIUE has a promising future and I really like the coach (Kevin Kalish). They’re more of a passing team, and I’m actually looking forward to getting to a system where you make consistent passes and keep possession.

“I’ll miss high school, but I’m looking forward to college.”

Villa said Tejada benefited by making his college decision so early.

“That was a good thing,” Villa said. “He didn’t have to worry about that, because people were calling about him. We said, ‘He’s already committed.’

Jared Tejada plays in the St. Louis Scott Gallagher USSF Developmental Academy under the direction of Program Director Dale Schilly. Jared was also named to the Midwest Region All 11 Team for the USSF Developmental Academy and was recently named to the St. Louis Post Dispatch All Area Team. Jared is one of three Tejada’s in the program (Rachel U16 and Eric U11). Congratulations on these achievements Jared!