Editor's Note: *This special coaching award goes to a former Madrid resident and Wheatland graduate.*

Dennis Tjaden has been selected to receive the 2009 Southwest Section Coach of the Year award for the sport of boys basketball by the NFHS (National Federations of State High Schools). The Southwest Section includes Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico and Colorado.

Dennis Tjaden has coached boys basketball for a total of 26 years, 23 of which were as head coach. As head coach, Tjaden has coached three State Champion teams, a runner-up team, a third place team, and a consolation champion team. As assistant coach, he has seen two state runner-up teams.

"I was lucky enough to be in six state final games as a head and assistant coach," said Tjaden. "Those all have great memories, though some of them are fading. Being able to watch the guys live their dreams is a great feeling. There are a lot of other games that stand out. The "97" Swink semi-final, the "93" Highland district game, the "08" Lutheran Parker district game just to name a few. I coached in 522 games in all of these years and was lucky enough to coach in a lot of "big" games," said Tjaden about his most memorable game in boys basketball.

Tjaden was also named 2A Coach of the Year three times for boys basketball. Even though Tjaden is no longer coaching basketball, he still works at Julesburg High School as a teacher and athletic director.

"I think I still can prepare students for the 'real world',"said Tjaden. "When they leave the four walls of the school they are no longer 'protected.' While they're in school they're a small to big fish in a little pond. But when they leave here they become a small fish in a really big pond. They've got to be ready for this big step and I try to prepare them, not only with the academics but the real life things."

The NFHS has been awarding coaches since 1982. NFHS recognizes coaches in three award levels: state, sectional, and national.

To be considered for an award, a coach must be selected by the NFHS contact person in the coach's respective state. This contact person requests that each selected coach complete a profile regarding the coach's record, membership in and affiliation with coaching and other professional organizations, involvement with other school and community activities and programs, and coaching philosophy.

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Kara Lanckriet of the Julesburg Advocate