

rw27-----

u s AM-FBC--HeismanTrophy 02-22 1085

AM-FBC--Heisman Trophy ,1084<

By RICK WARNER=

AP Football Writer=

NEW YORK (AP) — Charlie Ward, who ran away from defenders all season, ran away with the Heisman Trophy on Saturday.

The elusive Florida State quarterback won college football's most prestigious award by the second-largest margin ever. Ward beat Tennessee quarterback Heath Shuler by 1,622 points, trailing only O.J. Simpson's 1,750-point victory over Leroy Keyes in 1968.

"It's an honor. I'll always cherish it," Ward said. "Maybe in 10 years it will sink in."

Although Simpson won by more points, Ward received the highest percentage of first-place votes and points in the Heisman's 59-year history. Ward got 91 percent of the first-place votes, topping the previous record of 85 percent by 1991 winner Desmond Howard of Michigan.

Ward, leader of the nation's highest scoring offense and top-ranked team, is the first Heisman winner from Florida State or the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Ward's mother and father attended the ceremony at the Downtown Athletic Club. Ward dedicated the trophy to his late grandfathers.

"I tried to stay as team-oriented as possible," Ward said.

"I'm not a guy who wants all the attention, but for some reason, I get it."

The 6-foot-2, 190-pound senior from Thomasville, Ga., completed nearly 70 percent of his passes for 3,032 yards and 27 touchdowns with only four interceptions. He also ran for 339 yards and four TDs.

But Ward isn't a player who can be measured merely by statistics. His amazing ability to dodge tacklers, make big plays and keep cool under pressure left opponents bewildered and brought Florida State to the brink of its first national championship.

"He is phenomenal — the greatest college quarterback that I have ever seen," Miami coach Dennis Erickson said after the Hurricanes lost to Florida State 28-10.

After Ward threw for 446 yards and four touchdowns against Florida, Gators coach Steve Spurrier said: "You can't catch him. He's the best scrambler ... I've seen in college football."

Ward swept all six voting regions, receiving 740 first-place votes and 2,310 points in balloting by the media and former Heisman winners. Shuler got 10 first-place votes and 688 points, while Alabama all-purpose star David Palmer finished third with 16 firsts and 292 points.

Shuler and Palmer also attended the ceremony.

"He should have won it because he had a great season and he has a chance to lead his team to the national championship," Palmer said of Ward.

San Diego State running back Marshall Faulk, who was runner-up last year to Heisman winner Gino Torretta, finished fourth. He was followed by Boston College quarterback Glenn Foley, Northern Illinois running back LeShon Johnson, UCLA receiver J.J. Stokes, Michigan running back Tyrone Wheatley, Fresno State quarterback Trent Dilfer and Georgia quarterback Eric Zeier.

Despite his Heisman victory, Ward might not play pro football. He also is a star point guard for Florida State's basketball team, and might choose the NBA.

Ward said he will decide his future in April after the Seminoles end their basketball season.

"I'm going to make a decision one day and stick with it," Ward said.

Largely because of Ward, Florida State is in position to win the national title against No. 2 Nebraska in the Orange Bowl. He set a host of school and ACC records as the Seminoles went 11-1, including six victories over bowl teams. They lost 31-24 at Notre Dame, but Ward threw three touchdown passes and nearly rallied his team from a 17-point deficit.

If Florida State beats Nebraska, Ward could become the first player to win the Heisman and a national championship in the same season since Pittsburgh's Tony Dorsett in 1976.

Although Florida State is a 17(-point favorite, Ward is not taking the Cornhuskers lightly.

"It's going to be a tough game," he said. "We're preparing for it like we do for Miami, Notre Dame and Florida."

Ward wasn't an instant success in college football. Coming out of high school, he lacked the required test scores to enter Florida State so he attended junior college to improve his academic standing.

At Florida State, he spent one year as a punter, another as a redshirt and a third as a benchwarmer before becoming a starter last season. He threw eight interceptions in his first two games as a junior, but blossomed when coach Bobby Bowden switched to a no-huddle, shotgun offense that better utilized his talents as a scrambler and improviser.

This year, Ward set a school record for total offense (3,371 yards) even though he missed one game with bruised ribs and sat out the fourth quarter of six other games.

"There is nobody who can play the game the way he plays it," Bowden said.

Ward also is admired for his off-the-field activities. He worked with disabled patients at a hospital last summer, became a big brother to freshman Warrick Dunn after Dunn's mother was killed, served as vice president of the student body and earned a degree in four years.

"He's the most humble person I've ever seen," team chaplain Clint Purvis said. "He keeps it all in perspective."

Shuler threw a school-record 25 touchdown passes at Tennessee. The 6-3, 212-pound junior completed 65 percent of his passes for 2,354 yards.

His second-place finish matched the highest by a Tennessee player. Hank Lauricella in 1951 and Johnny Majors in 1956 each were second.

Shuler said he has not decided whether he will return to Tennessee next season or turn pro. He is concerned about being injured as a senior, he said.

"Coming back and getting hurt would be very tough to handle mentally," he said. "If you're in that situation and you get hurt, you may still go to the draft, but you may fall to the fourth or fifth round."

Palmer set Alabama records with 61 receptions for 1,000 yards and averaged 163 all-purpose yards per game. The 5-9, 170-pound junior was used as a runner, receiver, quarterback, punt returner and kick returner.

Palmer's third-place finish was the highest ever by an Alabama player. Johnny Musso was fourth in 1971.

Palmer said he will return to Alabama for his senior season in hopes of winning the Heisman.

"Being up there is my lifetime dream, so I will return next year to have a chance," he said.

AP-NY-02-22-98 1711EST<