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## News and Features

October 13, 2007

### AVP to hand out awards Thursday The best on tour will be recognized at the annual banquet

By Mike Scarr / avp.com

The AVP Crocs Tour will pass out the hardware when it holds its annual awards banquet Thursday.

For both men and women, that includes Most Valuable Players, Rookies of the Year, Most Improved Players and Offensive and Defensive Players of the Year. The Crocs Cup champion teams will also be honored.

The awards are determined through a vote by the players. Here is a quick look at the leading candidates for the postseason honors.

#### Men

##### MVP

**Todd Rogers:** The reigning MVP put himself in a solid position to repeat. Rogers set a series of three goals for 2007 and while he and teammate Phil Dalhausser fell short of total domination, they made a nice run with 10 team titles. A God of the Beach repeat title eluded his grasp, but Rogers routinely put his team in a position to win and also eclipsed the \$1 million mark in career earnings.

**Phil Dalhausser:** If a player unseats Rogers, the strongest candidate is his own partner. Dalhausser won Most Improved honors last season for his tremendous growth as a player and in 2007, the 6-foot-9 blocker was the tour's dominant force at the net on the men's side. Dalhausser also played in the God of the Beach final.

**John Hyden:** Just as Rogers helped Dalhausser improve last season, Hyden paired with Brad Keenan and helped last season's Rookie of the Year reach his first career final. Hyden also won God of the Beach honors in 2007.

##### Honorable mentions

Stein Metzger, Mike Lambert, Jake Gibb and Sean Rosenthal

##### Rookie of the Year

**Will Strickland:** Starting the season with Nick Lucena and closing with Canyon Ceman, Strickland enjoyed nine top-10 finishes in 2007 and a season-high of fifth.

**Eyal Zimet:** A native of Israel who lives in Hawaii, Zimet fought through the qualifiers for much of the season before hooking up with Mike DiPierro for a ninth-place finish in Chicago.

**Vincent Robbins:** Robbins pulled off one of the season's biggest upsets when he and Jason Wight defeated second-seeded Lambert and Metzger in Huntington Beach. Robbins posted a season-high 13th in Cincinnati.

**Billy Allen:** The 2007 season was a shot in the arm for Allen, who discovered he could play with the tour's best by reaching the main draw in 11 tournaments, nine of those coming through qualifying.

**Russ Marchewka:** Using a total of seven different partners in 2007 didn't keep Marchewka from posting his 11 best finishes of his young career.

**Jon Mesko:** Paired with John Moran, Mesko earned a career-high 13th in Chicago and also posted two 17ths.

##### Most Improved

Keenan had one third-place finish in 2006 but enjoyed a second and five thirds in 2007. Anthony Medel had three third-place finishes in 2007, all career highs. Among nominees for top rookie, Strickland jumped 44 spots in ranking while Zimet elevated his ranking by 68 slots. Marchewka jumped 41 slots, Robbins improved by 46, Allen by 27 spots and Mesko by 22.

##### Team of the Year

There is no mystery here as the top team has already been determined by virtue of the Crocs Cup championship. Dalhausser and Rogers were the class of the field with a tour-leading 10 team titles. Their lowest finish on the year was a fourth in the Best of the Beach at the end of the season.

##### Honorable mentions

Metzger and Lambert were second in the Crocs Cup and second in victories with four team titles. Gibb and Rosenthal won twice and led the tour with seven second-place finishes.

##### Best Offensive Player

Dalhausser has won the last two offensive awards and is a probable unanimous choice to win the award for the third time. Jake Gibb, Mike Lambert and Sean Rosenthal also deserve recognition.

##### Best Defensive Player



Israeli native and Hawaiian resident Eyal Zimet is one of the top men's contenders for Rookie of the Year honors. (Theresa Kwok / Special to avp.com)

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Recognized by his peers as the best defensive player on tour, it's likely Rogers will win his fourth straight award for best defense. Casey Jennings, who won the award in 2003 before Rogers began his run, also deserves consideration.

### Women

#### MVP

**Misty May-Treanor:** She's the world's best player and will likely be honored with her third straight MVP award. About the only thing she did not accomplish in 2007 was a Goddess of the Beach title. But May-Treanor did not play in the event due to sore knees.

**Kerri Walsh:** May-Treanor's partner also put together a campaign worthy of MVP honors. Her dominant play at the net allowed May-Treanor to excel in the backcourt.

**Elaine Youngs:** The veteran is a darkhorse for the award but Youngs' efforts in 2007 cannot be overlooked. She helped Nicole Branagh win her first three professional events and then Youngs went to Las Vegas and earned a surprise victory in the Goddess of the Beach tournament.

#### **Honorable mentions**

Rachel Wacholder and Jennifer Boss

#### Rookie of the Year

**Jenny Kropp:** Playing with Julie Romias and Jen Pavley this past season, Kropp enjoyed three top-10 finishes in 2007 and placed third in Chicago.

**Chrissie Zartman:** The 24-year-old played with six different partners in 2007 and had seven 17th-place finishes.

**Claire Robertson:** Robertson had three 13th-place finishes in 2007, all career highs.

**Sara Dukes:** Playing in nine events in 2007, Dukes earned her six best career finishes with a high of 13th.

**Angela Knopf:** The native of Troutdale, Ore. finished a career-high 17th six times in 2007.

**Tara Kuk:** With Kim Whitney as her partner, Kuk posted a career-high ninth in Louisville this past season.

#### Most Improved

April Ross placed as high as ninth in 2006 but elevated her game in 2007 with two seconds, four thirds, seven fifths and three sevenths. Tyra Turner's previous career high was a third-place finish in 2006 before she finished second four times and earned seven third-place finishes in 2007. Among rookie candidates, Kropp jumped 233 slots on the rankings list while Zartman jumped 31, Robertson improved by 19, Dukes jumped 35, Knopf improved by 28 and Kuk elevated her standing by 25 spots.

#### Team of the Year

Aside from a blip on the radar screen in the season opener in which they failed to reach the final, May-Treanor and Walsh were absolutely dominant. Without even playing a match at the regular season closing tournament in Cincinnati, May-Treanor and Walsh won the Crocs Cup for the second straight year with a haul of 13 team victories.

#### **Honorable mention**

Elaine Youngs and Nicole Branagh won three times on tour and finished second seven times. They also handed May-Treanor and Walsh their lone defeat in a final this season.

#### Best Offensive Player

May-Treanor has won the last three offensive player awards and should win her fourth while partner Walsh, who won in 2003, and Nicole Branagh will draw some attention.

#### Best Defensive Player

May-Treanor is favored to complete the triple crown by winning her second straight defensive player award with Wacholder also receiving consideration.

*Mike Scarr is a senior reporter for AVP.com.*