

Mainieri named Coach of Year



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

LSU baseball coach Paul Mainieri holds the NCAA Championship trophy during a celebration Thursday at Alex Box Stadium. Friday, Mainieri won another honor: Collegiate Baseball's National Coach of the Year.

Baseball skipper follows Bertman's footsteps with title, honor

- By [PERRY N KEYS](#)
- Advocate sportswriter
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When he agreed to take over the LSU baseball program, Paul Mainieri knew what he was getting into.

He knew plenty about Skip Bertman, about the dynasty Bertman built in the 1990s, and about the standard Bertman set.

Wednesday night, after LSU finished the College World Series with an 11-4 win over Texas, Mainieri and Bertman had something in common: They had both led the Tigers to a national championship.

Now they have something else in common. They've both been named Coach of the Year.

Mainieri picked up his honor Friday, as announced by Collegiate Baseball. It comes nine years after Bertman was named Coach of the Year for the fifth and final time.

It also capped a storybook season, one that began with expectations as tall as the State Capitol.

“We started out ranked No. 1 in the country. What an awesome responsibility,” Mainieri said in a statement.

“We had a brand new stadium, and everybody had high expectations for this season. Lesser people than these kids would have crumbled under that pressure, but these kids had the composure, poise, confidence and work ethic, and the belief in each other that if they just took it one day at a time, they knew they could accomplish great things.”

That they did. LSU won 56 games in 2009, its second-highest win total in program history — trailing only the 1997 team, which won 57 games.

The Tigers ended their season with a strong finishing kick, winning 15 of their final 16 games. They won the regular-season Southeastern Conference championship and the SEC tournament.

They won an NCAA regional and a super regional. They also won their first title since the College World Series shifted to a best-of-three series in the championship round.

For all that, LSU won its sixth national title in program history — the first since Bertman stepped down in 2001, and the first for Mainieri, who has piled up a 134-62-2 record in three years since he came to Baton Rouge.

When he took the job, and when this season began, he knew what he was getting into.

“I can vividly remember the first team meeting in August on the first day of school when we talked about winning the national championship. We believed it, but it was a long way away,” Mainieri said. “We knew that we were going to have a lot of challenges if we were going to get to Omaha, so we didn’t think about Omaha. We just thought about the next game in front of us.”