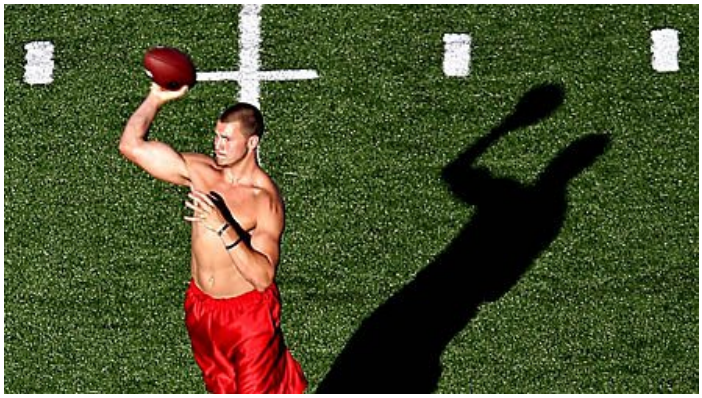

When browsing through the so-called "experts" ranking of Heisman Trophy candidates for this season, this writer had a sudden realization.

Checking out the different rankings and seeing who has quarterback Case Keenum from Houston ahead of Oklahoma State quarterback Brandon Weeden, seeing where people rank Alabama running back Trent Richardson, Stanford signal-caller Andrew Luck and Wisconsin touchdown machine Montee Ball, it became clear that one name was missing. So I delved deeper into the 2011 Heisman rankings and the message board discussions that pitted fan against fan arguing for their favorite candidate.

"Denard Robinson is the most explosive player in college football," one Michigan fan said about the Wolverines' dual-threat quarterback. "Yes, but Kellen Moore is the winningest quarterback in college football history," countered a Boise State fan.

There were so many names mentioned...Darron Thomas and LaMichael James from Oregon, David Wilson from Virginia Tech, Russell Wilson from Wisconsin, Landry Jones from Oklahoma and even Marcus Lattimore from South Carolina, who has been hurt for the last few games...that I was sure my candidate, the guy I think deserves consideration to at least be invited to New York City for the announcement, would get some love from someone.

Nope.

After checking out at least 20 websites and reading page after page of comment sections there was nary a peep about Northern Illinois quarterback Chandler Harnish.

Harnish is having an amazing season, and has his Huskies on track to make a return to the MAC Championship Game. While the MAC doesn't get much national respect or attention, it's a shame the season Harnish is putting together isn't even a blip on the national radar.

Let's take a look at the last two quarterbacks to win the Heisman Trophy, Auburn's Cam Newton last season and Florida's Tim Tebow in 2007. We'll look at their regular season numbers only, since these are the statistics the Heisman Trophy voters use to evaluate players.

Last season, Newton took the college football world by storm with his electrifying playmaking ability and his incredible athletic presence. It seemed like Newton would take over a game any time he wanted, and his leadership and skill carried his Tigers to the National Championship Game. He was a SportsCenter highlight waiting to happen every time he touched the football, and the Heisman voters rewarded him with the trophy.

In 2007 Tim Tebow, with his legs as well as his arm, was a nightmare for defensive coordinators to deal with. Tebow was an amazing athlete that had his Florida Gators in the endzone seemingly at the end of every drive. Women loved him, men envied him and his clean reputation almost, at times, overshadowed his unprecedented athletic ability. Tebow won the Heisman despite the fact that, for some reason, non-Florida fans hated him with intensity. Why Tebow, a tireless worker with none of the personal baggage that seems to accompany most high-profile athletes, remains one of the most hated athletes in sports is a question that mystifies me to this day. The kid likes to pray and is religious...is that a crime?

Newton's 2010 numbers were amazing. As were Tebow's in 2007. However, Harnish is right there with both of these Heisman winners...and he isn't even a candidate.

The statistics in this section are based on 13 games for Newton, 12 for Tebow and 10 for Harnish. Newton had an extra game because of the SEC Championship Game while Harnish's season is not over.

Passing yards: Newton 2,589 (199.2 per game); Tebow 3,286 (252.8); Harnish 2,256 (225.6).

Rushing yards: Newton 1,409 (108.4); Tebow 895 (68.6); Harnish 1,022 (102.2)

Total yards: Newton 3,998 (307.5); Tebow 4,181 (321.6); Harnish 3,278 (327.8)

Touchdowns: Newton 28 passing, 20 rushing, 1 receiving; Tebow 32 passing, 23 rushing; Harnish 20 passing, 9 rushing.

Harnish will probably not be in the same ballpark when it comes to rushing touchdowns, but in every other statistical category he is right there with Newton and Tebow. They won the Heisman Trophy while Harnish might have to settle for MAC Player of the Year.

The Mid-American Conference doesn't get a ton of respect nationally when it comes to football, I get that. However, why the conference's top individual performers get completely overlooked when it comes to national awards and recognition is far beyond my understanding. One would think a conference that produced players like Ben Roethlisberger, Greg Jennings, Josh Cribbs, Jason Taylor, Reggie Corner, James Harrison, Michael Turner, Larry English, Antonio Brown, Chester Taylor and scores of other starters in the NFL would get a little more attention across the country.

Think about this, in 2009 Kent State had three former players in the Pro Bowl (Harrison, Antonio Gates and Cribs). This was tied for second-most from any individual school in the nation. All three were undrafted free agents.

Should Harnish win the 2011 Heisman Trophy? Probably not. Does he deserve to be mentioned as one of the top candidates? Absolutely. There is a disconnect between the Mid-American Conference and the rest of the country and, unfortunately, it's the players that end up paying for it.