

By Mick McCabe, Detroit Free Press—March 11, 2008

Four years ago, Mike Redford read a story about Drew Neitzel's selection as Mr. Basketball.

"You remind me a lot of Drew Neitzel," Redford told his son, Brad, an eighth-grader. "I want you to read this article."

Late Sunday night, Brad Redford received a call from Neitzel.

"Congratulations," Neitzel said. "You worked hard for this award."

Welcome to the club.

Redford became the 28th winner of the Hal Schram Mr. Basketball Award, given annually to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan, in conjunction with the Free Press.

Mr. Basketball is the most prestigious award a Michigan high school male athlete can receive. It is named for the former Free Press reporter who covered high school athletics for more than 40 years.

Frankenmuth's Redford, a 6-foot guard who signed with Xavier, totaled 1,402 points in voting by BCAM members. Draymond Green, who led Saginaw to the Class A title last season and signed with [Michigan State](#), was second with 1,245 points. Paul Williams of Detroit Renaissance was third (547) and Romulus' Dominique Buckley fourth (349).

Entering the season, Redford was not the favorite for the award. He was ranked No. 3 in the Free Press preseason ratings, behind Green and Buckley.

And Frankenmuth, whose tallest starter is Redford, wasn't even listed among the top 25 teams in the state. But the 23-2 Eagles are playing in tonight's Class B quarterfinal against Menominee at Houghton Lake.

Redford began with a bang, scoring 47 points against Class A regional finalist Flint Southwestern Academy in the opener.

"It really set the tone for me and my team," Redford said Monday. "It wasn't just me that played well that night. Everybody shot the ball well. When our team gets it going, we're tough to beat."

The Eagles won their first 18 games as Redford continued his scoring assault, averaging 37.2 points. Along the way he made 102 consecutive free throws, a state record and second-best nationally.

His 929 points this season are third-most in state history. He owns the state record for free-throw shooting in a season (201-for-207, 97.1%), career free-throw shooting (467-for-500, 93.4%) and three-point baskets in a season (140).

As word of his accomplishments spread, Redford became a Mr. Basketball contender. It didn't hurt that his highlight video featuring him shooting from far beyond the three-point line has attracted more than 41,000 hits on YouTube.

"That Flint Southwestern game was a statement game for him," coach Tim Crawford said. "We never really thought about Mr. Basketball, but when the ballots came out, we were sitting at 14-0, ranked high, and he's putting up 40 points a game."

Crawford expected to learn by Saturday if Redford was Mr. Basketball. He didn't get word until Sunday and drove to tell Redford.

"I was coming back from the gym and saw him drive by," Redford said. "He did a U-ey (U-turn) and I said: 'He knows. I know he knows.' He wouldn't pick up his phone because he said he wouldn't tell me over the phone."

When they got out of their respective cars, no words were needed. "Just the look on his face, I knew," Redford said.

It led to a restless night's sleep for the kid who became Mr. Basketball four years after Neitzel.

"I remember reading that article on him," Redford said. "It's hard to put in perspective. It's something you kind of dream about. I've kind of had trouble sleeping the last couple of weeks. I just can't wait to play. It's been fun. I don't want it to end yet."

Mr. Basketball never ends. Just ask Neitzel.