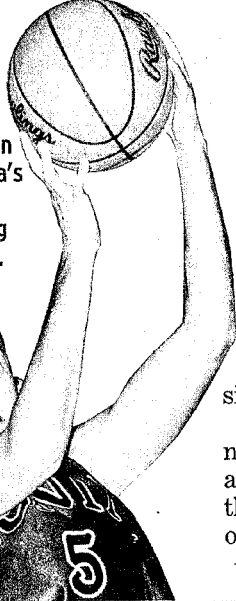


Kellie
Watson
is Ionia's
career
scoring
leader.



It's not a freak occurrence that Ionia guard is state's top senior

BY MICK McCABE
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

Four years ago, Kellie Watson was in Mt. Pleasant for the girls basketball state championships when she spotted Krista Clement sitting in the stands.

Clement of St. Ignace had been named Miss Basketball that week, and Watson was so excited to see her that she asked Clement to autograph one of her basketball shoes.

When she arrived back at her ho-

tel, Watson ran to her mother in the lobby to tell her what had happened.

"I was freaking out about it," Watson recalled. "I was jumping around, and when I looked, Krista was sitting there watching the whole thing. She probably thought: 'Who is that little kid freaking out?'"

Well, that little kid isn't so little anymore, and today she, too, is Miss Basketball.

Watson, a 6-foot-2 guard from Io-

See MISS, 8D

MISS | Ionia's 6-2 guard can jump for joy

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nia, is the 27th recipient of the Miss Basketball Award, given annually to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan, in conjunction with the Free Press.

Watson, who signed with Notre Dame, received 159 of the 373 first-place votes cast and totaled 1,115 points. Finishing second was Birmingham Detroit Country Day's Erica Solomon (714 points), who also signed with Notre Dame.

Benton Harbor's Courtney Webb (712) was a close third, and Brandie Baker of Flint Hamady (608) was fourth.

Watson, a four-year starter, averaged 19.2 points this season despite missing four games when her left shoulder was dislocated eight games into the season. She missed the final six games of her junior season with shoulder problems.

Watson had surgery on both shoulders last winter and will undergo another surgery Thursday.

"I dislocated it again against St. Johns, and it was really bad," she said. "It was out for like three hours. While it was out, it wasn't a good feeling knowing I was going to miss more games."

Watson returned a few weeks later and played with a brace on her left shoulder. It did not permit her to shoot with her left hand and hampered her rebounding, but she was still the best player on the

Dream Team

Former Miss Basketball winners:

Year	Player	High School	College
2006	Brenna Banktson	Frankfort	Western Michigan
2005	Allyssa DeHaan	Grandville	Michigan State
2004	Tiffanie Shives	Lansing Christian	Michigan State / Gonzaga
2003	Krista Clement	St. Ignace	Michigan
2002	Danielle Kamm	Saginaw Nouvel	Marquette
2001	Liz Shimek	Maple City Glen Lake	Michigan State
2000	Tabitha Pool	Ann Arbor Huron	Michigan
1999	Vicki Krapohl	Mt. Pleasant	Duke
1998	Kristen Koetsier	Grandville	Western Michigan
1997	Aiysha Smith	Redford Bishop Borgess	St. John's / LSU
1996	Deanna Nolan	Flint Northern	Georgia
1995	Maxann Reese	Redford Bishop Borgess	Michigan State
1994	Kim Knuth	St. Joseph	Toledo
1993	Sally Sedlar	Manistee	Toledo / Central Michigan
1992	Erinn Reed	Saginaw	Iowa / Kansas
1991	Lisa Negri	Flint Powers	Ohio State
1990	Markita Aldridge	Detroit King	UNC-Charlotte
1989	Peggy Evans	Birm. Det. Country Day	Tennessee / Ohio State
1988	Jennifer Shasky	Birmingham Marian	George Washington
1987	Dena Head	Plymouth Salem	Tennessee
1986	Deadra Charles	Detroit DePorres	Tennessee
1985	Franthea Price	River Rouge	Iowa
1984	Emily Wagner	Livonia Ladywood	Stanford
1983	Michele Kruty	Manistee	Dayton
1982	Sue Tucker	Okemos	Michigan State
1981	Julie Polakowski	Leland	Michigan State

floor.

Coach Andy Barr informed Watson that she won the award Saturday morning as she drove to Notre Dame to watch the Irish play Seton Hall.

"I was excited, but I didn't freak out or anything," she said. "I was more surprised because I didn't get a whole season in, but I'm not complaining about it."

Watson earned a starting spot at the beginning of her freshman season and has been an impact player for four years. She became Ionia's all-time leading scorer as a junior and finished with 1,529 points for a career average of 19.1 points.

"She's been the face of the program for the past four years, not only what she does on the court,

but off the court," Barr said. "Our program is perceived by how she's represented us."

Watson's first competitive basketball experience came as a third-grader when she played on a boys AAU team in Grand Rapids.

"We went to what we thought was a two-day weekend camp," said her mother, Pam. "Then they said: 'She made the team.' We said: 'Oh, it's a team?'"

It was a team that included Kelvin Grady, now a member of Michigan's basketball team. Watson doesn't remember how well she played, but she does recall dominating the boys in one specific drill.

"I just remember I could jump rope better than any of them," she said. "I'd kill them jump roping."

Ionia is between Grand Rapids and Lansing, and that might have helped her win the award.

"I thought she'd have a great shot because of her connections with the Grand Rapids area," Barr said. "A lot of people over there knew her and really promoted her hard when she was a freshman. The fact that our league is in the Lansing area, I thought she had a chance to corner two markets."

Watson cornered the state, just as Clement did four years ago, causing a little girl from Ionia to freak out.

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