

Detroit Pershing's Derrick Nix is Mr. Basketball

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DETROIT (AP) -- Derrick Nix lost 40 pounds last summer. The enormous Mr. Basketball trophy will make up for a good deal of that.

Nix, a senior center at Detroit Pershing, collected the award Monday -- one day before the Doughboys play Warren DeLaSalle in the state quarterfinals.

"We've got a system, and we know if we play our system, we can beat anyone in the state," Nix said.

Last season, playing at around 335 pounds, Nix helped Pershing to the championship game, and had 12 points and 10 rebounds in a 19-point loss to Saginaw.

However, he only played 15 minutes in the game, and saw Saginaw's center, Draymond Green, go for 21 points and 19 rebounds against him. That helped Nix decide that it was time to get into much better shape, and he spent last summer following a grueling program of diet and exercise.

"I had to give up all that fast food -- no more KFC or Burger King," he said. "Instead, I was eating baked food, and a lot of rice, and Coach had me running every day in the park."

It paid off, though, as Nix's greater stamina has helped him become a consistent force for Pershing's star-studded team.

"Before, Derrick was a very good player, but he would play hard for a couple plays and then have to take five or six plays off," Pershing coach A.W. Canada said. "Now he isn't doing that."

Now carrying 293 pounds on his 6-foot-9 frame, Nix averaged 15 points and 15 rebounds for Pershing, enough for him to narrowly defeat Cadillac's Ben Simons for the award. Simons led in the early voting, but Nix pulled ahead after Cadillac was beaten in the district playoffs, and ended up with a final margin of 1,726 points to 1,638.

Zeeland East's Korey VanDussen was third, ahead of Dion Sims (Orchard Lake

St. Mary's) and Eso Akunne (Ann Arbor Gabriel Richard).

"I was up against some great players, so it was really an honor for me to win this," Nix said. "A lot of that is because of our coaches and my teammates."

After posing for dozens of pictures with the large trophy, Nix finally got a chance to read some of the other names on it -- including NBA stars like Jason Richardson, Shane Battier, Chris Webber and Glen Rice.

"Those guys all won this, and all went on to be big-time pros," Nix said. "That's where I want to be some day."

Before that, though, Nix will be going to Michigan State, where he will join Green, his nemesis from last season's title game. After finding out Saturday that he had been named Mr. Basketball -- an honor that eluded Green -- he spent Sunday watching his future teammates beat USC in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

"That was a great game, and the Trojans hung tough, but I knew we were going to win it," he said. "That's just how Michigan State does it."

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