

Lexi Gussert named Miss Basketball in a landslide

By Mick McCabe Detroit Free Press Sports Writer March 12, 2014

There were signs — years ago — that Lexi Gussert just might be something special when it came to basketball.

As a sophomore, she scored six straight points to erase a five-point deficit in the final 40 seconds to beat Watersmeet in a tournament game for Crystal Falls Forest Park.

As a freshman, she scored 19 points in the fourth quarter and nearly brought Crystal Falls back in a regional final loss to Bark River-Harris, which advanced to the Class D finals.

But before that — she was making three-point shots with regularity — *as a sixth-grader.*

We can go back further to learn why basketball was going to play such a big role in Gussert's life.

“My grandma got me a doll and a baby stroller,” Gussert said. “I just chucked out the doll, threw a basketball in there and walked that around the block.”

And how old was Gussert at the time?

“It was for my first birthday party,” she said. “I was 1.”

Now she is The One.

Gussert became the 33rd recipient of the Miss Basketball Award Wednesday, given annually to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan, in conjunction with the Free Press.

Only BCAM members are permitted to vote for the award, and they did so in overwhelming fashion. Gussert, who signed with Michigan State, totaled 1,938 points, well ahead of runner-up Jessica Walter of Midland, who had

1,180 points, and Three Rivers' Teagan Reeves, third with 791 points.

Coaches are required to vote for three candidates, and Gussert had 319 first-place votes, over three times as many as Walter (105).

Krista Clement (2003) of St. Ignace is the only other U.P. player to be named Miss Basketball.

In electing Gussert, 6-feet, the coaches voted for a scorer deluxe who has 2,593 points, fourth most in state history. This season, she is averaging 29.4 points per game, and in Tuesday's quarterfinal victory over Posen, she hit two three-point shots to set the state record with 101 this season.

Crystal Falls played in Sault Ste Marie on Tuesday, spent the night in St. Ignace and practiced Wednesday morning in Cheboygan. The players thought they were headed to East Lansing for tonight's 7:50 semifinal against Athens when they arrived in Detroit.

That is when they were told they were going to attend Gussert's Miss Basketball ceremony — and the bus almost exploded.

"Getting this award means a lot to me, and not only to me, but the whole team, the community, Forest Park, my family, the coaches," Gussert said. "I'm just glad I can bring this back to the U.P. We show them how we can play, too, up there. This year has been crazy, especially going down to the Breslin right now with you guys. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, that's for sure."

Crystal Falls coach Jeff Syrjanen knew years before Gussert entered high school that he would be coaching a terrific player.

"Seeing her in junior high, she was just way better than everybody else way early," he said. "You could see the fear in all the opponents' eyes when she was in junior high. People would get upset because she was so much better than everybody else. I think everybody thought she was older because she was so good."

She was so good because she grew up in the Crystal Falls gym when her

father, Scott, was the boys varsity coach.

“As he was coaching, I would be the little pesky kid, running in the gym and him yelling — get off the floor,” she said. “But it never stopped me. They told me I was dribbling at 2.”

Gussert’s earliest memory of the Miss Basketball Award came in 2010 when she was in the eighth grade, and East Lansing’s Klarissa Bell was named Miss Basketball.

“Thinking about it back then, I thought no way,” she said. “I was pushing myself to hopefully do that. I know it’s not very common in the U.P. It’s an awesome feeling.”

Gussert said the best part of her day was when she called the school before the ceremony. Her call was put over the P.A. system, and she told her schoolmates she was about to be named Miss Basketball.

“I know I’m making them proud, and I got the opportunity to share it with them,” she said. “They’ve been there with me through this whole process.”

The voting results of the 33rd annual Miss Basketball award:

1. Lexi Gussert, Crystal Falls Forest Park 1,938 points
2. Jessica Walter, Midland 1,180 points
3. Teagan Reeves, Three Rivers 791 points
4. Asia Doss, Country Day 733 points
5. Asia Robeson, Kalamazoo Central 690 points
6. Marte Grays, Detroit King 599 points

** Votes are awarded on a 5-3-1 basis.*

The 32 former winners of the Miss Basketball award:

2013 Tori Jankoska, Freeland (Michigan State)

2012 Madison Ristovski, G.P. Liggett (Michigan)

2011 Jasmine Hines, Central Lake (Michigan State)

2010 Klarissa Bell, East Lansing (Michigan State)

2009 Jenny Ryan, Saginaw Nouvel (Michigan)

2008 Kellie Watson, Ionia (Notre Dame/Grand Valley)

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. Johns/LSU)

1996 Deana 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, 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)