

## Jordan Walker Named Miss Basketball 2017

Brandon Folsom – Detroit Free Press 3/14/2017

Jordan Walker never has been one to lie on the floor for too long after an injury. She's too tough and too driven.

But two years ago, during a routine drill with some new freshmen at a summer practice, the Muskegon Mona Shores guard didn't have a choice. The then-junior passed to a teammate like she had done before at least "100 billion times." Then she fell to the ground.

"My ACL tore and just popped," Walker said. "I instantly went to the ground. I'm not the type of player to cry or be on the ground for too long, so I knew it was something bad. It was my first practice of the summer, and I was just going through some drills and plays for the freshmen."



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Jordan Walker from Mona Shores High School in Muskegon, was named the 2017 Miss Basketball Monday March 13, 2017. She poses with her trophy at the Detroit Free Press. (Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)

That moment instantly changed the trajectory of Walker's life.

She lost a summer of AAU basketball as well as months of extra practices on the side with Mona Shores. The Big Ten schools recruiting her stopped picking up the phone or visiting her. She lost some mobility and couldn't use the moves she once relied on as a freshman and sophomore to scoot to the basket and score.

But she gained a newfound love for basketball. It only fueled her more to return from her injury and prove doubters wrong. She wanted to show she could play at a higher level.

Walker put her faith into her comeback.

It paid off this past season, when she eclipsed career marks at Mona Shores and

signed with Western Michigan. It paid off again today, when she was named the 36th winner 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.

Walker received 375 first-place votes and totaled 2,482 points. Warren Cousino's Kierra Fletcher finished second with 291 first-place votes and 2,382 points. Birmingham Detroit Country Day's Destiny Pitts (1,814) was third, followed by Southfield At&T's Deja Church (1,338) and Dearborn Heights Robichaud's Kamaria McDaniel (1,191).

When Walker was told she won the award, she described it as a dream come true, especially after how her career almost ended two summers ago.



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Jordan Walker from Mona Shores High School in Muskegon, was named the 2017 Miss Basketball Monday March 13, 2017. She poses with her trophy at the Detroit Free Press. *(Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)*

"Where I'm at now to win this award, it's all on God because, without Him, I wouldn't be here where I'm at right now," she said. "You take so many things for granted like running up and down the court and shooting the ball and different things like that. You take it for granted every single time you play."

"To have that taken away from me for five months, it's a huge thing when you really love the game of basketball. I grew to love it deeper during that time."

## **A summer of rehab**

Mona Shores coach Brad Kurth remembered when his daughter tore her ACL, so he acted swiftly when he saw Walker's knee buckle after that routine pass in practice two summers ago.

"He just advised me to sit this practice out and call my mom," Walker said. "I called my mom (Danielle Walker), and she came down to the gym because she is a guidance counselor at our school, and she was in the office working. She ran down. She could tell something was wrong by the tone of my voice."

The school's athletic trainer was called. Then she was rushed to the hospital, where her family met with a knee specialist.

The doctor instantly diagnosed her with a torn ACL.

"I was hysterical and busted out into tears," Walker said. "I couldn't believe it because the ACL is a career-ending and career-changing injury. I had never sprained my ankle before, and my first injury was this one."

"Everything was going so well. I had just come back from the Olympic trials and had just started off my AAU season. I was scheduled to go down to camps at different schools. For this to happen, I was just devastated."

A week later, Walker was in surgery and a week after that, she began what was supposed to be a six-month stint of rehabilitation – maybe longer, depending on how surgery went.

It was only the middle of June, and her basketball future looked dire.

"She was on her way to big and great things," Kurth said.

During rehab, Walker put trust in her faith, and she dug deep and relied on hard work to make her return, the same hard work that has helped her family reach high levels in basketball.

Her older sister, Jasmyn, was playing for Valparaiso at the time, and both her parents, Danielle and Jarvis, played at Ferris State.

Their success kept her inspired to get to the next level.

"From that point on, I was there working, but I really see now that it was God, honestly, working for me and doing these things for me," Walker said. "Without Him, I wouldn't have been able to do any of that. It changed the trajectory of my recruiting. Going into your junior year, it's a huge year for your recruiting. That changed the way coaches looked at me."

"But I just wanted to be out there again. This was all my faith, so I knew that if I worked hard and took care of it on my end, God would do good things for me, too, so I was just working hard, and that's all my mind-set was for everything that I did in rehab."

It wasn't easy for Walker, though, and she remembers the early weeks of rehab when she would sit on the medical table and not be able to fully extend her leg or even flatten it out.

But she ramped up her effort each time she went and in her downtime, she was at summer practices – coaching her teammates and inspiring them as a junior leader

since the previous Mona Shores squad graduated seven seniors.

"She did only a five-month recovery, which is basically unheard of," Kurth said. "She hit that recovery like no other. My daughter tore her ACL, and I was in that training room with her all the way through, and I saw a lot of kids rehab in there, and Jordan hit it like I've never seen before."

Added Walker: "I remember practices where I would just sit on the sidelines and coach or point out some things you don't see in the game, but you can see on the sidelines. I was the assistant coach for the summer. I worked on the little things, but I couldn't do a lot and couldn't move. I was slow and couldn't do much running or jumping. For the longest time, I was just on the sideline and trying to contribute and continue to help."

## **Returning for junior season**

The doctors medically cleared Walker to play the final practice before the start of her junior season.

She had to wear a knee brace, but because she trained hard during rehab, she didn't miss a single game for Mona Shores, which proved to be a boon for the Sailors (21-4), who won a Class A district championship and appeared in the regional final during that 2015-16 season. She averaged 20.7 points per game.

Her game was limited – she couldn't use some of the lateral moves she once used to beat defenders – but she could still score, and she continued to play at a high level.

Midway through the season, she eclipsed the 1,000-point career scoring mark.

"She was a huge part of the offense, and she had to score for us," Kurth said. "A goal of hers was certainly to score 1,000 points, but I think more of it was she just wanted to come back and play. The game she loves was taken away from her."

Walker verbally committed to WMU during the school year.

She entered her final summer of high school AAU basketball almost back to 100%. Her travel team won a national tournament in Atlanta, knocking off a handful of teams with top recruits.

"They beat teams with five, six BCS-level kids on their teams," Kurth said. "People who were in that gym know what she can do. Realistically, if she had reopened her recruiting at that point, she would have been flooded with offers from BCS schools.

"She maintained her loyalty to the school that told her, 'We'll take you with one leg. We don't care what the other schools say because we're going to take you with one leg.' They knew her from the get-go, and the loyalty they showed to her was something she wanted to show back to them."

Another motivator for Walker was shortly after she committed to WMU, her sister, Jasmyn, transferred into the program as well.

The two played one season together at Mona Shores.

"Western, they've always been there for me, but when my sister transferred there, it was like the icing on the cake," Walker said. "When I was a freshman, it was one of the best seasons I've ever had and the most fun while playing basketball because I had my sister on the team to look up to, lead me and give me that extra voice and point things out that I couldn't see. Being able to play with her for a second time is truly a blessing and amazing."

## **A stellar senior season**

For the second year in a row, the Sailors' bid to make it to the Breslin Center was halted by Hudsonville in the state playoffs.

But that didn't stop Walker, the 5-foot-7 guard, from leading Mona Shores to a 19-4 record. She averaged 22.1 points, 8.5 rebounds and 5.5 assists per game and shot 43% from the floor.

In January, Walker broke Mona Shores' all-time scoring record, one that existed for 22 years, by reaching 1,365 points, leaping ahead of former Miss Basketball finalist Jamie Ahlgren.

Walker thought finishing with the Miss Basketball award herself was a great way to cap a stellar career before she gets to WMU.