

Isaiah Livers named Mr. Basketball 2017

Brandon Folsom Detroit Free Press 3/20/17

Kalamazoo Central senior Isaiah Livers says he always took basketball seriously. But after the Maroon Giants lost to Lansing Everett in the postseason a year ago, the 6-foot-8, 220-pound power forward decided to step it up.

Livers worked on his game nightly. He increased his shooting range and improved his passing and ballhandling skills. He picked up a scholarship offer from Michigan in July, committed in August and signed with the Wolverines in November.

Today, Livers was named the 37th recipient of the Hal Schram Mr. Basketball Award. He will be honored this afternoon at a ceremony at the Free Press offices.



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Kalamazoo Central's Isaiah Livers, a future Wolverine, is awarded the 2017 Mr. Basketball award Monday Mar. 20, 2017 at the Detroit Free Press. *(Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)*

The award is given annually to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan, in conjunction with the Free Press. The award is named for Schram, who covered high school athletics for the Free Press for more than 40 years. "He's a once-in-a-lifetime player, and it's big for our school and big for our team and big

for the city Kalamazoo that he was able to win this award," Kalamazoo Central coach Ramsey Nichols said. "It's huge. (It) shows that there's definitely talent on this side of the state, just like there is talent on the east side of the state, as well."

Livers edged Michigan State-bound Xavier Tillman of Grand Rapids Christian in the voting, 2,811 points to 2,739. Tillman had more first-place votes (363 to 333), but Livers had more second-place votes (313-249) and third-place votes (207-177). Points are awarded on a 5-3-1 basis. Only BCAM members are permitted to vote. There were 1,212 coaches who voted.

Jason Whitens of Powers North Central finished third, with 1,911 points, followed by Detroit East English Village's Greg Elliott (1,672), North Farmington's Amauri Hardy (988) and Detroit Cornerstone's Jamal Cain (787).

Livers is the first player from Kalamazoo Central to win Mr. Basketball. But he's just as proud of securing his first regional championship, which came with a 75-60 win over East Lansing on Wednesday. Central is 21-3 and set to play Tillman's Grand Rapids Christian team in a Class A quarterfinal Tuesday at Lansing Eastern.

"We've lost in the regional round three years in a row, and it stung the most last year," Livers said. "On the bus ride home from that game, that's when the team decided we needed to change something. We agreed to change for the better.

"We were a lot more serious. We always took it seriously before, but this time, we made sure we were being on time at practice, owning up to our mistakes and doing the small stuff right to keep the team winning. It's a cheesy line, but it's true: There's no 'I' in 'team.' And we learned that, when we don't play together, we lose. It's all about getting results."

Nichols said he likes Livers' game because of his versatility. The coach likened Livers, who averaged 17.5 points, 14 rebounds and 2.4 blocks during the regular season, to Grant Hill because he can play multiple positions -- and defend all five of them. Livers led the Maroon Giants in blocked shots and rebounding and was a scoring presence inside and outside. Nichols pointed out Livers' "underrated" court vision and also called him "the ultimate teammate."

"They enjoy playing with him, and he's a selfless player," Nichols said. "He's always willing to make the right play and play within the confines of the team. That's one of the major things about this season: Other players have been able to flourish in our system because of him. He cares about the success of his teammates as much as he cares about his own success."

Undefeated Grand Rapids Christian beat Central, 53-51, in overtime March 2. The winner of the rematch will move on to the state semifinals Thursday at the Breslin Center in East Lansing.

"My favorite memory so far is when I looked at the end of (the win over East Lansing) and thought about all the close regional losses we've had and how we finally got it," Livers said. "But winning Mr. Basketball also means a lot. Ever since I was a child, I've been working on this."

"I used to watch T.J. Buchanan (Kalamazoo Central/Rhode Island) and Doug Anderson (Kalamazoo Central/Detroit Mercy) growing up, and I'd go to the Breslin and say I'd want to be there. Not only did I want to win the championship, but I wanted to win Mr. Basketball, and this is a big stress off my back."