

Detroit Edison's Gabrielle Elliott named Michigan Miss Basketball

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Gabrielle Elliott sat in the back of the room last March and watched Detroit Edison teammate [Ricke Jackson accept the Miss Basketball award](#).

A thought crossed her mind: She might have a chance to win the award the next year.

She was right.

Elliott became the 39th winner of the Mick McCabe Miss Basketball award Friday, given annually by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan to the top senior in the state.

Elliott, a 5-foot-11 wing who has signed with Clemson, received 3,891 points in voting. East Lansing's Aaliyah Nye was second with 3,367 points, and Hartland's Whitney Sollom was third with 3,335 points.

The person most responsible for Elliott's victory, other than herself, may be the youngest of her three older brothers, Gregory, a former all-stater and Mr. Basketball finalist at Detroit East English and a junior on Marquette's basketball team.

"He told me: 'Play everybody like you would play me,' " Elliott said. "When I play him, I have to bring everything because he's bigger than me, he's stronger than me. So I've got to win by any means.

"He said: 'If you play these girls like you play me, I promise nobody will be able to stop you.' "

She averaged 22.8 points, 9.1 rebounds, 3.8 assists and 3.6 steals as Edison (23-0) prepared to play Flat Rock in the regional finals Thursday before the MHSAA suspended all of the winter sports playoffs because of the coronavirus pandemic.

This is the first time with back-to-back Miss Basketball winners from the same school, and it was Jackson, who had a terrific freshman season at Mississippi State, who predicted this.

"I told her that I got it and she had to get it," Jackson said. "I think it's very much deserved. When I was on the team, Gabby was always that hard worker. She was always the one coming in first in running. She was that player wanting to get better."

Being Jackson's teammate could have hampered Elliott's chances this season because as a junior, she was overshadowed.

“With me being who I was and all that, and all of the accolades piling in my lap, it was hard to focus on Gabby as much as they should have,” said Jackson, a McDonald’s All-American last season. “If I wasn’t there, she would have gotten way more accolades. Gabby should have gotten everything I got and even more.”

Elliott didn’t go completely unnoticed. She was a starter on three straight state championship teams, and she and her teammates were heavily favored to win No. 4 this month.

“Hopefully they will continue the season,” Elliott said. “Right now we’re just waiting on them to figure out what we’re going to do next.”

The person least surprised by her winning the award might be Gregory. He was her teammate in a church league when she began playing as a third-grader. On her recruiting visit to Marquette last year, she finally beat him in a game of one-on-one, although Gregory pointed out he won the series between them.

“I knew how good she was because she played against me the majority of her life,” he said. “If you can compete with a boy, there was no girl her age or high school period, that could stop her.”

Their father, Greg, remembers the backyard games the two played against each other. You might say they were intense, not to mention physical.

“When I used to hear them out in the backyard, one of them would come in the house crying and it wasn’t always Gabby that came in the house crying,” their father said, laughing. “I told her if she played basketball the way she did in the backyard against her brother, there’s no girl on the face of this earth that can really beat her.”

Because they played together so often, Gregory could see the remarkable improvement in his baby sister’s game.

“Her game has evolved completely,” he said. “At first she was somebody that just made layups. Now I watch her play and she can shoot, rebound. She has every facet of the game right now.”

The only missing link early on was the desire to become a dominating player.

“After a while when it came to basketball she was real serious with it,” he said. “You could just see the fire in her eyes that she really wanted to do something when it comes to basketball.”

In the previous two seasons, Jackson had been described as the best player in Michigan high school basketball history.

Edison coach Monique Brown said it became something of a Michael Jordan-Scottie Pippen situation as Edison won its third consecutive state title last season.

“The reason I’m so, so excited is everyone knew who Rickea was,” Brown said. “When you talked about Edison you talked about Rickea. It’s kind of like a Jordan-Pippen. They forgot about Pippen. He was just as good and just as successful as Jordan was. For her to get the recognition for all that hard work means so much to me.”

To Elliott’s credit, there was never a hint of jealousy over the attention Jackson received.

“It was fun playing with her,” Elliott said. “She was a great player and deserved everything she got. I just went out there and let people know that Rickea may be the main face, but I’m still here. I just waited for my turn.”

Practicing against Jackson every day may not have been that much fun. But it did produce results.

“She was the assignment on Rickea at practice,” Brown said. “It was the true definition of iron sharpens iron. Gabby just played tough, so it helped her and it helped Rickea.”

In a way, it was kind of like going against her brother every day.

In 2017, Gregory finished fourth in the Mr. Basketball voting, which made this award more meaningful for Elliott.

“This is beyond me at this point,” she said. “My brother had a chance to win so I didn’t win this just for me. I won this for the school, I won this for my family.”