

# Benton Harbor's Carlos 'Scooby' Johnson named 2020 Michigan Mr. Basketball

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The 2019 school year was coming to a close and [the Benton Harbor school district was under siege](#).

Governor Gretchen Whitmer had recommended that the low-performing, debt-ridden district be dissolved.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad wanted students to speak on behalf of the entire district at a city hall rally and the first person he thought of was Carlos "Scooby" Johnson.

"I was trying to reach out to influential people because the shutdown was imminent," Muhammad said. "I called him and asked if he would use his voice and he didn't hesitate."

Why would the mayor want a basketball player to speak? Well, in Benton Harbor Johnson is much more than just a basketball player.

"He was one of the student leaders that came out and spoke," Muhammad said. "He was out front in 'Hands off of Benton Harbor.'"



Benton Harbor's Carlos Johnson was named Michigan Mr. Basketball at the State Champs offices Monday, March 23, 2020. (Photo: Kirthmon F. Dozier, Detroit Free Press)

Speaking in front of a large crown can be intimidating for a high school student, but Johnson felt obligated to tell the people the way he felt.

"I talked about me just growing up in Benton Harbor and always wanting to be a Tiger and go to the high school and graduate from there," he said. "I was talking about the younger generation coming after me and having a high school for them in our city limits."

And maybe he wanted a place in Benton Harbor's massive trophy case to feature his Mr. Basketball award.

Johnson became the 40th winner of the Hall Schram Mr. Basketball award Monday.

The award, named for the former Free Press sports writer who covered high school athletics for over 40 years, is given to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan.

Johnson, 6-feet-6 and signed with Butler, accumulated 2,949 points in the vote and Flint Beecher's Jalen Terry was second (2,760 points), Orchard Lake St. Mary's Lorne Bowman II was third (2,312), Matt Nicholson of Clarkston was fourth (1,678) and Tyson Acuff of Detroit Cass Tech was fifth (1,497).

Only BCAM members are permitted to vote. Johnson had 413 first-place votes and Terry had 306.

This is the third time a Benton Harbor player is Mr. Basketball and each of them have come 15 years apart; Anthony (Pig) Miller won it in 1990 and Wilson Chandler in 2005.



**2020 Michigan Mr. Basketball winner Carlos "Scooby" Johnson of Benton Harbor on March 23, 2020.** (Photo: Kirthmon F. Dozier, Detroit Free Press)

"Before I got to high school, I knew Wilson and Pig had won this," Johnson said. "I think it's a blessing for me and a big accomplishment as a high school player to look forward to."

In August, the state backed off its plan to close the district. Johnson went on to average 25 points, 11 rebounds, six blocks and three steals a game.

He is known as Scooby by people in town and it is from the TV show "Scooby-Doo."

"I've been called that as long as I can remember," he said. "It came from my dad; it was his name, too, because he liked the show. After a while I became a fan of "Scooby-Doo," too."

Benton Harbor coach Cory Sterling first saw Johnson play when he was in the fourth grade and playing alongside Sterling's fifth-grade son.

"I knew Carlos was something special then," he said. "I just kept my eye on him. I knew he'd do great things, not just for the basketball program, but for the city. He's involved in a lot of stuff."

He is most involved at the city's Boys and Girls Club, which began as a summer job and ended up being so much more.

"He's always up there tutoring or playing basketball with them," Sterling said. "He loves giving back to the city. A lot of people in the city like him just because he's a down-to-earth kid. He doesn't play a superstar role when it comes to his community. People love him for that."



Family members of Benton Harbor's Carlos Johnson take pictures after he was named Michigan Mr. Basketball at the State Champs offices Monday, March 23, 2020. (Photo: Kirthmon F. Dozier, Detroit Free Press)

During his four years at Benton Harbor, Johnson had been a shining light in the city.

"He's a prime example for the youth of Benton Harbor that it ain't all bad here in Benton Harbor," Sterling said. "And you can do the same as Carlos Johnson."

Johnson began at the Boys and Girls Club in 2016 and has a presence there even when he isn't getting paid to be there.

"It became something I liked doing," he said. "I like seeing how the kids grow through everything they do. I'm a mentor to the younger kids. Whatever they need help with and ask for I'll be right there."

Often times the eventual winner of the Mr. Basketball award had a successful state tournament run as a junior and had been seen by a lot of coaches.

Last season Benton Harbor lost to the eventual state champ in the regionals, but as a sophomore Johnson led the Tigers to the Class B state championship with a game-high 24 points.

And to be sure coaches remembered him, [Johnson nailed the game-winning 3-point shot with 14 seconds left in overtime.](#)

“I had taken a shot before that and it went in and out,” he said. “So I had enough confidence to take it again.”

Although he was a terrific prospect entering ninth grade it took time for Johnson to bloom into a star.

Initially he was strictly an inside player before expanding his game to the perimeter.

“He had a funky jump shot, but he developed a jump shot, credit to my assistant coaches,” said Sterling. “He was shooting it too flat. Being that tall in elementary school he was always just down low. He never really worked in his jump shot because he was scoring so easy on offensive rebounds or post moves.”

The most overlooked aspect of his game is his tremendous outlet pass, which ignited Benton Harbor’s fast break.

“He always told me: ‘Coach, I got some Kevin Love for you tonight,’” Sterling said. “That’s when Kevin Love would get the rebound and flick it to LeBron. Carlos lived by that. He gets just as excited from throwing a good outlet pass for a score as scoring himself.”

Johnson became a priority recruit by a number of schools and [turned down offers from Michigan and Michigan State and others to go to Butler.](#)

“Butler, it kind of made me feel like I was back at home,” he said. “And then there were the relationships I built with the people there and the coaches.”

This season, the Tigers were ranked No. 1 in Division 2 and had advanced to the district final before the state tournament was put on hold because of the coronavirus outbreak.

[Johnson is hoping it will be resumed](#) so he and his teammates might experience another state title.

“It’s every high school team’s goal, to be holding that trophy at the end of March Madness,” he said. “It was kind of big for me.

“It would mean I finished my résumé off.”

Being named Mr. Basketball is a pretty good resume closer, too.

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- 2020 Mr. Basketball voting

Here are the results of the 40th annual Hal Schram Mr. Basketball award, given by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan. Only BCAM members are permitted to vote:

1. Carlos "Scooby" Johnson: 2,949 points
2. Jalen Terry, Flint Beecher: 2,760 points
3. Lorne Bowman II, Orchard Lake St. Mary's: 2,312 points
4. Matt Nicholson, Clarkston: 1,678 points
5. Tyson Acuff, Detroit Cass Tech: 1,497 points

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