

2022 Michigan Miss Basketball: Detroit Edison's Ruby Whitehorn

By Mick McCabe

Three years ago, Ruby Whitehorn sat in a conference room at the Free Press and watched Detroit Edison teammate Rickea Jackson accept the Miss Basketball award.

Whitehorn was quite impressed.

"As soon as she won it," Whitehorn said, "I thought: 'Now I've got to get this right here.'"

A year later, she watched another teammate, Gabby Elliott, be named Miss Basketball.

"Now," she said, "I definitely have to get this."

One year ago, Whitehorn was there when DeeDee Hagemann became the third straight Edison player win the award.

"Oh," she thought, "I can't mess this up now."

She didn't mess up anything.

Whitehorn, who signed with Clemson, captured the the 41st annual Mick McCabe Miss Basketball award on Monday, given to the state's top senior by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan in conjunction with the Free Press.

She's the fourth straight Edison player win the most prestigious award a female high school athlete in Michigan can receive. In voting from BCAM members, she accumulated 3,025 points to finish ahead of finalists Abbey Kimball of Grand Rapids West Catholic (2,697 points), Mya Petticord of Ypsilanti Arbor Prep (2,509) and Theryn Hallock (2,335) of Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central.

Of the 1,174 votes cast, Whitehorn earned 389 first-place votes, 86 more than her nearest competitor.

Before this stretch, no school had ever had even consecutive Miss Basketball winners.

This season, the 6-foot Whitehorn averaged 25.6 points, 12.7 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 4.3 steals in leading Edison to the No. 1 ranking in Division 2 and a spot in Tuesday's quarterfinals against defending champ and No. 3 Portland at Williamston.

"I'm super proud," she said. "I know I made a lot of people proud and that's what made me happy."

Whitehorn was anything but happy as a freshman when Edison coach Monique Brown created a "B team" so Whitehorn could get more game time.

"When she first got here Rickea was a senior Gaby was a junior and they were so aggressive and so 'Alpha' players and she was so 'Little Ruby,'" Brown said. "I thought she was going to transfer because it was so hard for her."

The "B team" also allowed Whitehorn to dominate against other varsity teams as opposed to sitting and watching.

"She was good enough to be on the 'A team,' but I wanted her to do what she is doing now," Brown said. "I wanted her to stay in that mindset. I knew if she came with the 'A team' she would get second fiddles to Gabby and Rickea and she would be kind of passive."

Even though Whitehorn played mainly with the "B team," she practiced with the "A team" and was challenged on a daily basis.

"It kept me in go mode," Whitehorn said. "It kept me being aggressive and not passive so I really appreciate Coach Brown. Back when I was experiencing it and going through it, at times I was bored because practice would be harder than the games."

"But, like I said I always test the process."

The process for Whitehorn began at different Detroit recreation centers across the city.

Lisa Bryant, her godmother, worked for the Detroit recreation department for over 20 years and every summer wherever Bryant went, Whitehorn went and played a variety of sports.

"She played every sport — lacrosse, boxing, wrestling, swimming — and she was really good in all of them," said Bryant. "I even started a mom and pop rec basketball team for Ruby. But as she got older, I thought it was time to get her to a real program and play with just girls.

"It was time for her to show what she could do."

Even at a young age, Whitehorn excelled on every team at every level. Her parents loved watching her play and were proud she was so good.

But they didn't realize she was college scholarship good.

"We didn't know how good she was until the eighth or ninth grade," said her mother, Mechelle. "That's when college coaches came around offering full-ride scholarships. We were like: 'You're going to pay for everything for how many years?' That's when we knew she was special."

Someone else who saw a tremendous amount of potential in Whitehorn was Jackson.

Before she left for college she handed Brown a pair of shoes she was given at the McDonald's All-America game.

She instructed Brown to give them and a message to Whitehorn when Brown thought she was ready.

The summer before Whitehorn's sophomore season Brown pulled the shoes out of the trunk of her car and handed them to Whitehorn and relayed Jackson's message.

"Rickey's message to me was: 'These aren't to wear. Go get your own,'" Whitehorn said. "It was really surprising to me. It was surprising that all this time she's had faith in me. She's had confidence in me the entire time and that's what gave me confidence."

That confidence led Whitehorn to receive an invitation to play in this year's McDonald's game.

Whitehorn has enjoyed a terrific season, but she never considered herself a shoe-in for the Miss Basketball award.

"Abbey Kimball, wow," she said. "When we had a scrimmage against them in the preseason I saw how good she was. I knew Theryn was good because she played AAU with Abbey. And Mya is like my best friend.

"Honestly, if I didn't win it I would have been very happy because they are great competition. I would have thought they would have deserved it."

There were many defining moments to Whitehorn's career. One came a year ago when Edison defeated Division 1 runner-up Detroit Renaissance.

"It was a close game," Brown said. "In a timeout I told Ruby it was her turn to take over. She went on a 10-point spree. I thought: 'Oh, man, we've got something here.'"

The COVID-19 pandemic prohibited Edison from winning state titles the last two seasons, which has made Whitehorn more determined than ever.

In a much anticipated regional showdown against No. 4 Redford Westfield last week, Whitehorn grabbed the defensive rebound on the first possession of the game and took the ball coast-to-coast and laid the ball in the basket.

She finished with a career high 35 points on 14 of 18 shooting and added 12 rebounds and blocked four shots in an overwhelming 85-43 victory.

"It was a very energized game for me and my team," she said. "We felt like we had a statement to make."

After the game, Brown asked Whitehorn what had just happened out there.

"Coach," she said, "it's time to win a championship."