

# 2022 Michigan Mr. Basketball: Detroit King's Chansey Willis Jr.

By Mick McCabe

It is still happening, but it is about to end for good.

Chansey Willis Jr. will be walking through the halls at Detroit King and a fellow student will tell him: "You suck at basketball."

It began last fall when the football players said that as a way of telling Willis how important he was to the football team, of which he played an integral role in King's crusade to the Division 3 state championship. The basketball degradation was supposed to end after the football season, but it continued even after Willis led King to the Public School League championship when he was named the PSL's Mr. Basketball.

"They still say it," Willis said shaking his head. "They said it even more after we got knocked out of the state tournament."

Maybe this will help:

Willis is the 42nd recipient of the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan's Hal Schram Mr. Basketball award.

The award is named for Schram, who covered high school athletics for the Free Press for over 40 years. In voting done by BCAM members, Willis earned 2,620 points and was followed by Kyler Vanderjagt of Grand Rapids Northview (2,384 points), Kareem Rozier of Orchard Lake St. Mary's (2,079), Jack Karasinski of Grand Rapids Catholic Central (1,990) and Ferndale's Treyvon Lewis (1,799). He also had the most first-place votes (341) of the 1,208 cast, 45 more than the runner-up.

"This is great," Willis said. "It's actually a dream come true."

The dream did not begin until Benton Harbor's Scooby Johnson won the award in 2020.

"I was playing with the Family in AAU," he said. "I asked Joe Mack, the coach, what's Mr. Basketball. He said it's the best player in Michigan. I never knew who Scooby was and we went to see him and he dropped 43 on Jalen Green, who's with the Houston Rockets now."

Willis has no idea where he will play next season. He holds offers from Toledo, North Carolina A&T, Eastern Michigan and Detroit Mercy.

He began in basketball under the watchful eye of his father, a 1995 graduate of Detroit Northern where he earned All-Detroit and All-State honors.

His father raised him to be a basketball player.

"I wanted him to be way better than me," his father said. "It was tough when I came up, but Robert Traylor named me as his best competition. I didn't back down from nobody."

His father was an outstanding player, but doesn't speak much about himself and his past accomplishments. He is more concerned about his son.

"He doesn't really bring up basketball and his days," Willis Jr. said. "He teaches me more stuff because he's been there already. He wants me to continue on the journey."

"When I go in with him, it's mainly shooting. He makes my arm get tired, I shoot until, basically, my arm falls off."

The time was well spent. This season Willis averaged 25.5 points with 9.5 rebounds, nine assists and four steals.

But there is much more to his game than just numbers. This season, he became the team leader in the drive to the PSL title.

"There are certain times in the course of a game when he gives me a look and let me know that: 'I've got it, don't worry about it,'" said King coach George Ward. "He'd come to the huddle and a guy misses a shot and I get on him, Chansey's the one who tells them to keep shooting."

"He's never come to the huddle and say: 'Give me the damn ball.'"

The state's class of 2022 began with the likes of Emoni Bates at Ypsilanti Lincoln, Fletcher Loyer at Clarkston and Ty Rodgers at Grand Blanc, who are all gone.

Loyer transferred to a school in Indiana, and after leading Grand Blanc to last year's Division I state championship, Rodgers transferred to a Chicago area school.

Following his sophomore year, the much-heralded Bates left to play for his father's team, which was aligned with a charter school. He reclassified himself up a year and is now at Memphis.

Ward believed when Bates left Ypsilanti Lincoln that Willis would be a Mr. Basketball contender no matter what anyone else did.

"Honestly, once Emoni left I just figured that with everything that surrounded him and all the hoopla, once he left I figured Chansey's got a shot," Ward said. "Even with Fletcher being here and Ty, I thought Chansey had a chance because in all fairness to you guys, the award has never been a popularity contest." Ironically, Willis may have received as much attention from playing football before this basketball began. He caught 32 passes for 684 yards and seven touchdowns.

But it was one of his shortest pass reception from quarterback Dante Moore that was the most important play of his career. Clinging to a 25-21 lead in the state title game, King faced a third-and-6 from its 5-yard line with 2:22 left.

King didn't want to be forced to punt to offensive juggernaut DeWitt and were desperate to pick up the first down.

"Everybody thought the ball was going to LJ," Willis said of Lynn Wyche-El. "I thought the ball was going to LJ, too. I went to the huddle like: 'You might as well just throw to the ball to LJ.'

"But he called double slants on both sides for whichever one is open. Coming out of the huddle DJ said: 'I'm throwing it to you.'"

Willis was beyond surprised, but responded: "All right, bet."

It was only a 7-yard completion, but it was the one that permitted King to run out the clock and gave Willis his first state title.

Willis didn't waste time making an impression on the basketball court. In his first game as a freshman he hit the game-winning shot to knock off River Rouge, then the preseason No. 1 team in the state.

"They basically just gave me the ball for the last shot and I said here I go," Willis said. ""That's' when I really knew I was good at basketball."

Willis has never been about the hype or who was ranked where in either sport. He just wants to compete. That is why receiving the Mr. Basketball award is so special to him.

"I really just go out and play, play basketball," he said. "In both sports, I just go out and play. I don't worry about none of that other stuff, but I'm really happy to be Mr. Basketball."

The added bonus in being Mr. Basketball is quieting some of his annoying fellow students, who probably don't know if a basketball is stuffed or inflated.

"I'm going to get a video of this," he said, laughing. "I'm going to go to them and ask if I still suck."

Once and for all, the answer will be no.