

# 2024 Michigan Mr. Basketball: Grand Rapids Catholic Central's Durrall Brooks



**Kirkland Crawford**

Detroit Free Press

The hardest thing to get past when it comes to Grand Rapids Catholic Central's Durrall Brooks is his nickname: Phat Phat.

"I've been called that since I was like 1-year-old," Brooks said. "I was a super chubby baby and I used to eat non-stop so they called me Phat Phat and it stuck ever since."

Until now.

From now on, Brooks has a new nickname: Mr. Basketball.

A 6-foot-2 , 185-pound guard who has signed with Michigan basketball, Brooks is the runaway winner of the 44th annual Hal Schram Mr. Basketball award, given to the state's top senior by the Basketball coaches Association of Michigan in conjunction with the Detroit Free Press.

The award is named for the late Hal Schram, the Hall of Fame sports writer who covered high school athletics for the Free Press for over 40 years.

Brooks collected 512 of the 1,150 first-place votes and totaled 3,562 points on a 3-2-1 voting system. Tyler Ode of Saginaw Heritage was second with 337 first-place votes and 2,915 points. Onsted's Ayden Davis was third with 2,012 points and Zeeland West's Merritt Alderink was fourth with 1,861 points.



This season, Brooks is averaging 26 points, 7.5 rebounds and 5.5 assists entering Tuesday's Division 2 quarterfinal against No. 1 Grand Rapids Christian at Hamilton.

CC coach TJ Meerman informed Brooks that he had won the award in the final minutes of last week's regional final victory over Spring Lake.

"I was by half court and he pulled me aside and told me," said Brooks. "He said: 'You got it.' I was like: 'Got what?' Then it hit me and I said: 'Oh, the thing.' I didn't want to say 'Mr. Basketball' because I didn't want people to hear me.

"He told me congrats, he was proud of me and he loved me."

This is the climax of a brilliant four-year career in which Brooks has been front and center since he helped CC win a state championship as a freshman.

"You saw signs of special in him right from Day 1," said Meerman. "He came into our program a little bit like Mateen Cleaves in that when he went to Michigan State, he wasn't afraid to be as vocal as he could be as a freshman. That type of leadership stood out.

"Freshmen don't come in and ask to cover the other team's best player whether he's a forward or a point guard."

In that state championship game, Brooks hit 4 of 9 shots for 11 points and added 10 rebounds and had five assists.

In the semifinal victory over an outstanding Ferndale team, Brooks had eight points and seven assists, but it was his defensive performance that was crucial to CC's victory.

"It was one of the toughest games we played," said Meerman. "He guarded both of their Division I guards and definitely didn't look like a freshman out there playing on the court."

After his play in the tournament that year Brooks shot to the head of the Class 2024, but he tried to not to pay attention to the hype.

"I didn't go out there and play to win Mr. Basketball," he said. "I kind of went out there to help my team get better and hopefully get in position to where we can win a state championship. I figured if I went out and played how I always played then stuff will come to me."



The “stuff” did come to Brooks, who also helped CC to a D-2 runner-up finish as a sophomore.

BCAM voters have long memories and players who do well in the final four as underclassmen often do well when it comes to Mr. Basketball voting, which is why Meerman saw this coming.

“I had never said it to him,” Meerman said, “but I thought his freshman year would help. We had won a state title, he had played out of his mind throughout the season in big games.”

Meerman first saw Brooks when the youngster was in seventh grade when he accompanied his older brother, Jordan, to an open gym at CC.

“He was the little sidekick tagging along,” Meerman said. “You couldn’t tell he was that young unless you knew. He was always a couple years advanced for his age.”

Brooks credits Jordan, a redshirt freshman at Ferris State, for much of his development. He believes his older brother put him in position to be Mr. Basketball.

“He was always a better shooter than me growing up, so whenever we worked out I would always try to keep up with him and try to be as consistent as him,” Brooks said. “He’s just as competitive as me. He has a chip on his shoulder, he doesn’t want to lose to his little brother in any kind of drills that we do.

“He had his license before me, so he always took us to the gym whenever I wanted. He’s been by my side through it all. He’s a big reason why I’m the player that I am today.”

The two spent hours alone in the gym with the shooting machine trying to perfect his shot.

Jorden said it was the first day of practice in his brother's freshman year that he thought he could wind up as Mr. Basketball.

“At our first practice, we were scrimmaging and somebody went in for a lay-up and he blocked it off the glass and it was above the rim,” Jorden said. “And when we started our first game of the season against South Christian he guarded their best play and then each team's best player.”

Brooks' father, Eric Tatum-Brooks, was overwhelmed when he learned of the Mr. Basketball award. He played at Grand Rapids Creston and remembers how Drew Neitzel, a fellow west-sider, won the award at Wyoming Park in 2004 the year after Tatum-Brooks graduated.

“Phat Phat's humble, but I know deep down you can't have no choice but to be excited about it,” his father said. “It's something that a lot of kids want. You're in front of a lot of great talented kids that wants it as bad as you and for you to come out on top and get that Mr. Basketball label, that's special.”



Like Meerman, Brooks' father thought the freshman semifinal performance against Ferndale was something that separated him from the other top players in the state.

“I always talked since his freshman year about building that little legacy up,” his father said. “I was always talking about building a name for himself so when he comes back to school or when people mention it that it's nice to have his name as a legacy and inspire that person to be just like him.”

Brooks remembers Pierre Brooks — no relation — of Detroit Douglass winning Mr. Basketball in 2021, but that was the first time he had heard of the award,

He said the prestige of the award never really sank in until former teammates, Kaden Brown, finished third last year.

The truth is, it was other people's expectations that made Mr. Basketball a thing for Brooks, which led to a lot of undue pressure.

"I'm excited especially since that's all I've been hearing since my freshman year," he said. "People were saying that I was going to win Mr. Basketball or that I had to win Mr. Basketball. That was the goal, at least individually.

"I don't really think too much about individual goals, but that was the goal that people gave for me so I'm very excited to win it."

Originally, Brooks' nickname was spelled "fat fat," but several years ago his father changed it to "Phat Phat."

"That was to make it different now because it was starting to become a name," his father said. "Honestly, I think I've only called him his real name maybe three times his whole life."

Now he can call him: Mr. Basketball.

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## **The voting**

Here are the results of the 44th annual Hal Schram Mr. Basketball award, given by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan. Only BCAM members are permitted to vote:

1. Durrall Brooks, Grand Rapids Catholic Central: 3,562 points

2. Tyler Ode, Saginaw Heritage: 2,915 points

3. Ayden Davis, Onsted: 2,012 points

4. Merritt Alderink, Zeeland West: 1,861 points

1,150 votes cast