

Given their just awards

Glenbard West's Huff named Mr. Basketball; Barrington's Swanson is Ms. Basketball



Glenbard West senior Braden Huff, a Gonzaga University recruit, is the winner of the 2022 Mr. Basketball of Illinois award, while Sophie Swanson, a junior at Barrington High School and Purdue recruit, was named Ms. Basketball of Illinois. John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune (Huff); stacy wescott (Swanson)

BY STEVE MILLAR CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Braden Huff put team success over individual glory while leading Glenbard West to the Class 4A state championship and one of the most dominant seasons in Illinois high school basketball history.

The individual accolades still came.

“It’s nice to see that winning matters, even if you’re not putting up the biggest numbers,” Huff said. “You don’t have to be a selfish player and focus on your stats to get the individual accolades.

“We were able to meet our ultimate goal of winning a state championship and still (be) recognized individually. That’s the cool part about this.”

Huff, a 6-foot-11 senior forward who is headed to Gonzaga, was voted Mr. Basketball of Illinois for 2022.

Barrington junior guard Sophie Swanson, a Purdue recruit, took home the title of Ms. Basketball of Illinois.

Huff averaged 16.4 points, 5.8 rebounds and 3.2 assists, statistics that easily could have been higher if he did not play so unselfishly, according to Glenbard West coach Jason Opoka.

“Those kids have been playing together forever,” Opoka said of his senior class.

“They’ve learned from an early age to trust each other and to sacrifice for the good of the team. That’s blatantly obvious with Braden.

“He could have scored a lot more points. He could have taken more shots, but he trusted his teammates and his overall goal was to win a state championship.”

The Hilltoppers (37-1) won the program’s first state championship, capping a dominant postseason in which they won all six games by at least 22 points.

Along the way Huff became quite a celebrity in Glen Ellyn.

“It was definitely surreal,” he said. “After our first game at home, we finished up and all of a sudden there were all these kids around us asking for autographs and photos and all that.

“I’d have to cut it short to go talk with the team in the locker room, but then I’d come back out and there were still people there. I enjoyed every second of all that. That was a really cool thing that I could have never imagined.”

The awards are voted on by a statewide poll of coaches and media and presented by the Tribune in conjunction with the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association. Players received five points for a first-place vote, three for second and one for third. Huff and Swanson will be honored Saturday evening at the IBCA Hall of Fame Banquet at Illinois State’s Redbird Arena.

Huff was named on 100 of 123 ballots and received 84 first-place votes to easily win the award with 473 points. Yorkville Christian’s Jaden Schutt (192 points, 15 first-place votes) was the runner-up, followed by Thornton’s Ty Rodgers (135, 13).

“It’s crazy,” Huff said. “It’s always been a goal of mine to win this award. It’s a very prestigious award.

“To be in the company of all those great basketball players is a really cool thing for me and a great accomplishment.”

Swanson, meanwhile, won a much closer race for Ms. Basketball.

She received 13 first-place votes and was named on 29 of 76 ballots, finishing with 95 points to edge Kenwood senior Brianna McDaniel. McDaniel, who was named on 18 ballots, received 15 first-place votes and 82 points.

Stevenson’s Simone Sawyer was third with nine first-place votes and 60 points.

Swanson led Barrington (30-6) to the first state trophy in program history with a runner-up finish in Class 4A.

She averaged 21.4 points and 5.2 rebounds, breaking school records for points in a season (750) and a game (40).

“It’s really a blessing because of how hard I’ve worked,” Swanson said. “I had all these goals that I set, and to be able to achieve them is really surreal.”

Swanson showcased her skills on the big stage when she scored 35 points in a state semifinal win against Bolingbrook.

“That was really cool,” she said. “It was a really fun environment. It was definitely like a preview of college. I really enjoyed it.

“The state experience, the playoff experience was unforgettable. We had so much fun as a team.”

Swanson’s ability to score in so many ways is what sets her apart, according to Barrington coach Babbi Barreiro, who has led the Broncos for 30 years.

“In the open court she’s got another gear that makes her really hard to defend,” Barreiro said. “If you do step in to stop her, she can pull up and shoot the ball.

“Then she’s got that step-back 3-pointer, where she steps in and pops back. I joke that it’s almost indefensible. It’s really special.”

By winning Ms. Basketball as a junior, Swanson has a chance to join even rarer company. Four players have won the award in back-to-back seasons, including three-time winners Candace Parker and Brea Beal.

“It’s so exciting,” Swanson said. “It’s really an honor to win this award and to be up there with all those big names. I’m going to keep getting in the gym, keep developing myself as a player, and the goal is to get back to state next year.”

Steve Millar is a freelance reporter for the Chicago Tribune.