

Tigers Sterling named AP Class B Coach of the Year

BH's Johnson named first-team all-state; Hopkins, Coloma's Goodline receive honorable mention

By HP STAFF AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

It took six seasons for Benton Harbor coach Corey Sterling to put together and train a championship team. It was well worth the wait as the Tigers ended a 53-year drought with a 65-64 overtime win against Grand Rapids Catholic Central for the Class B state title.

Not only was it a historic win for Benton Harbor, but the victory also earned Sterling The Associated

Press Class B Coach of the Year honor.

"I feel extremely blessed," Sterling said. "I looked up to our great coaches and our history, and wondered if I would ever be mentioned. It's just an awesome feeling that I credit to my staff and players."

Benton Harbor finished its season with a 27-1 record, and was led primarily by sophomore standout Carlos Johnson and senior leader Shawn Hopkins.

Johnson was named first-team all-state for Class B for the second straight year, and Hopkins received honorable mention.

"That's a big honor for Carlos to be first-team all-state in back-to-back years," Sterling said. "That's impressive for any player from Benton Harbor

to say they've done that.

"Shawn told me before the start of the season he wanted to make all-state. It was a huge goal and that's huge that he received honorable mention. He was behind Carlos in points and rebounds this year, he's very deserving."

Johnson (6-foot-6) averaged 19.2 points and 13.3 rebounds with 4.4 assists per game. He's a Division I recruit.

Hopkins (6-4) average 13.2 points, 8.5 rebounds and 2 steals a game. He's been generating Division II interest and has a scholarship offer from Oklahoma Christian.



STERLING



JOHNSON

Coloma's Zach Goodline also received honorable mention for the second straight year.

The 5-10 junior guard averaged 26.4 points per game with 4.7 assists and 3.4 steals. He averaged 54 percent from the field, 43 percent from the perimeter and made 83 percent of his free throws, leading the Comets to an 18-3 season with two of the losses coming to Benton Harbor.

He's generate interest from Ferris State and Grand Valley State University.

When asked about where he hopes to see his team in 10 years, Sterling said he

hoped to see more championships and a positive legacy.

"I hope people say we did it with hard work. We didn't cut corners, we are workaholics and we develop our kids," he said. "We had guys shooting in the gym this spring break, and it means history, it means that we will be remembered for something positive. We are getting back to playing Benton Harbor basketball."

New Haven's Romeo Weems raised his game and profile as he was named the AP's Class B Player of the Year for the second consecutive season.

The Rocket's standout spent the last weekend in March at the NCAA Final Four as a member of an all-injunior USA Basketball

squad that participated in exhibition games against teams organized by the NBA.

A week earlier, Weems led the Rockets into a second consecutive state semifinal game at the Breslin Center, capping a season in which he averaged career highs of 23.5 points and 10.8 rebounds per game.

New Haven was unable to defend its 2017 state championship, losing to Grand Rapids Catholic Central 69-53.

Weems, however, enhanced his stature as one of the state's premier 11th-graders as he helped New Haven to a 26-0 record and an overall winning streak of 52 games before the semifinal defeat.

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“Romeo had a great season for us,” New Haven coach Tedaro France II said. “He has made tremendous strides in his game and he continues to get better every day.

“With him, it starts in the gym. His work ethic and leadership are second to none and are contagious to everyone in our program.”

Weems, who missed two games in December with an arm injury, scored 590 points this season. That raised his career total to 1,497 and moved Weems

to within 343 points of the New Haven record that has stood since 1971.

“I just take things one day at a time,” the 6-foot-7 Weems said.

College coaches pursuing Weems saw a more consistent perimeter shooter this season.

“One of the biggest strides he made was his ability to shoot the 3-point shot,” France said. “He could beat you in so many ways, but he struggled at being consistent behind the arc last season. This past off-season he was determined to improve his ability to shoot the ball, and he became one of the top shoot-

ers on our team.”

He was 51-of-126 (40 percent) from 3-point range. As a sophomore, he made 31 percent (20-of-64) from behind the arc. Weems, who has received offers from Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State and Oregon, among others, gave some of his more memorable performances against the Rockets’ better opponents.

He had 26 points and 12 rebounds in an 81-70 regular-season victory over Flint Beecher, which at the time was the defending state Class C champion.

Weems turned in a quadruple-double that included 19 points and 16 rebounds

in a 92-74 victory over Detroit Country Day in a regional championship game.

Weems’ backcourt steal and basket with less than two minutes to play gave the Rockets a 10-point lead after the Yellowjackets had cut a 22-point deficit to eight.

“I’m just playing hard at all times,” Weems said, recalling the tide-turning steal. “I’m going to keep playing no matter what.”

Weems played for the gold-medal-winning USA Basketball U16 team last summer. At New Haven, he has been part of three consecutive regional championship teams.