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College Park guard earns County Most Valuable Player award

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By Jay Langley

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College Park guard Monique Smalls lives by the philosophy that defense wins championships.

Although the Lady Cavaliers came up short in their quest for a state title this season, Smalls was chosen The Courier's All-Montgomery County Most Valuable Player for the second season in a row, in large part for her effort on the defensive side of the court.

In 2009 the Texas Tech recruit averaged 12.1 points, 6.7 assists and seven steals per game.

"I don't really play basketball for individual awards," Smalls said. "But it's nice to know that you can get recognized for your hard work."

College Park head coach Kip Anderson said the numbers do not tell the whole story when it comes to Smalls.

"She is our catalyst," Anderson said. "She's been a leader on the court for four years. It's been a real pleasure for me to coach Monique."

In January Smalls recorded her 1,000th career steal in the District 14-5A opener against Oak Ridge.

"She might not score as many points as some of the other girls," Anderson said, "but Monique's defense creates so much offense for us."

The Lady Cavs (35-3) finished with more wins than any team in school history and reached the Region II-5A finals for the first time. Anderson was chosen the Montgomery County Coach of the Year.

"It's not about the coaches," Anderson said. "I was fortunate enough to have a great group of kids who worked their tails off for me."

But Smalls said her coach is too modest.

"Coach Anderson has been one of the biggest influences on my life," the point guard said. "Without her I wouldn't be half the player or the person I am."

Willis junior Renata Marquez averaged 14.4 points per game in 2009 and was chosen the All-County Offensive MVP.

The Ladykats also set a school record in wins going 30-6 and 14-0 in District 18-4A. While other players might have averaged more points per contest than Marquez, it was her ability to put the team on her back that set her apart. Marquez scored 30 against Magnolia High and put 28 on Oak Ridge.

"She has the confidence to carry the team and wants the ball in her hands at crunch time," Willis head coach Kelly Savoy said. "I think that comes with experience and being a three-year starter."



College Park's Monique Smalls (23), the County MVP, dribbles downcourt as she is pursued by Conroe High School defenders Candace Virgadamo, PK White, Valencia White and Haley DeBaugh during 14-5A play.

Tangekur Payne, of Conroe, was chosen Defensive MVP after averaging 4.5 steals and 17.7 points per game this past season.

"It's kind of funny because this year I really changed her defensive assignments so she could concentrate more on her offense," Conroe head coach Deidre Hinze said of Payne. "But she still goes out and wins defensive player of the year.

That shows how quick she is and what great defensive instincts she has."

The Woodlands freshman Anna Strickland was chosen Newcomer of the Year. She averaged 6.2 points and seven rebounds per game in 2009. But Strickland stepped up her game when it mattered most averaging 10 points and nine rebounds in District 14-5A games.

"She almost averaged a double-double in district play and that's really good for a freshman," Lady Highlanders coach Dana Bruton said.

Four players from the county also received nominations for the McDonald's All-American team but did not make the final cut. They were Smalls, Payne, College Park's Allie Messimer and Amanda Anderson of The Woodlands. Smalls was also a finalist for the Women's Basketball Coaches Association's All-American team.

While Smalls has played in many important games, nothing compares to what is in her immediate future.

Her next competitive basketball game will be as a member of the Lady Raiders against Pat Summitt and the Lady Vols in a tournament in San Antonio in November.

"I'm kind of nervous but excited at the same time," Smalls said of her impending college career. "It should be a lot of fun."

The Courier's All-Montgomery County Girls Basketball team

Most Valuable Player: Monique Smalls, College Park

Offensive MVP: Renata Marquez, Willis

Defensive MVP: Tangekur Payne, Conroe High

Newcomer of the Year: Anna Strickland, The Woodlands

Coach of the Year: Kip Anderson, College Park

First team

Amanda Anderson, The Woodlands; Nicole Morgan, College Park; Candace Virgadamo, Conroe High; Brittany Wilkerson, Willis; Allie Messimer, College Park.

Second team

Kelly Loukanis, Magnolia High; Shayna Clardy, Oak Ridge; Shauna McClure, Splendora; Corey Walker, Covenant Christian, Joi Munoz, Caney Creek.

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