

Roxana Junior Gavin Huffman Is Harry Gallatin Boys Basketball Player Of Year

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ROXANA - Gavin Huffman, a 6-foot-2 junior forward for Roxana, was recently named the Harry Gallatin boys Player of the Year for the Riverbend area, the first Shells' player to be honored since Hunter Reine won back-to-back awards in 2012 and 2013.

The award, which celebrated its 75th anniversary this season, is named for Gallatin, a member of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. Gallatin played for Roxana High before playing at Northwest Missouri State University, now known as Truman State

University, in Kirksville, Mo. Gallatin was one of the best players in the early days of the NBA, playing nine seasons for the New York Knickerbockers before playing one final season with the Detroit Pistons. He appeared in seven NBA All-Star Games before retiring as a player, going into coaching with SIU-Carbondale, then in the NBA with the St. Louis Hawks and Knicks before becoming the first coach at SIU-Edwardsville. Gallatin died in 2015.

The annual banquet honoring Huffman, girls Player of the Year Anna Hall of Civic Memorial and other honorees, was cancelled this year because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Huffman was given his award in a ceremony last week.

It was a very good season for Huffman, indeed, in leading the Shells to a 20-13 record, playing in the IHSA Class 2A regional final to Marquette Catholic at Larry Milazzo Memorial Gym. During the season, Huffman led Roxana in scoring with a 17.3 points-per-game average. He was named honorable mention on the Associated Press' Class 2a All-State team.

Huffman is looking ahead to his senior year, with all five of the Shells' starters returning, and thinks his team are poised for big things ahead.

"I'm only a junior, so I've got one more year left," Huffman said during a recent interview, "but it's an awesome accomplishment, and I think I've got a lot more to go, so I just want to move up with it and do well next year."

The Shells' record was one of the program's best in recent years, and Huffman feels that the team has progressed mightily, and is looking forward to a very successful 2020-21 campaign.

"As a team, we've progressed really well from the following years," Huffman said, "and we just want to keep progressing and make our senior year awesome."

The Shells only lose one senior --- forward Jake Golenor --- and return all five of their starters next season. Huffman feels that the Shells will be facing very good competition next season, and knows that they'll be ready to go.

"We've got all five of our starters coming back next year," Huffman said, "we've only lost one player, and we've got some good competition next year. We've got a big gap to fill with Jake, but we think we can do it."

Next season will be the Shells' next-to-last in the South Central Conference, as Roxana is set to join the Cahokia Conference in 2022-23. Huffman thinks the change in conference will do the school's programs very good.

"I don't know really much about the conference," Huffman said, "but hopefully, it'll be more competition to prepare our school."

But Huffman is focusing on his upcoming senior season, and he thinks that Roxana is poised for a big year on the court, and he's willing to provide the leadership for the team to be successful.

"We should have a big year next year, especially in basketball," Huffman said. "We get all our starters back, and I think I'll be the leader on-court, since it will be my last year."

Huffman beat out a strong field to win the award, including Alton's Moory Woods, Marquette's Brett Terry, Civic Memorial's Alex Reams and East Alton-Wood River's Jake Wells. In other awards, the Explorers' Iggy McGee was named the winner of the 110 percent award, with the other finalists being the Redbirds' Jake Lombardi, the Eagles' Grant Lane, the Oilers' Spencer Slayden and Golenor.

Huffman also won the free throw percentage award, as he connected on 76.5 percent of his foul shots, while Alton was presented with the team sportsmanship award.

The Player of the Year award was first presented in 1946 by the now-defunct Alton Exchange Club, and Huffman is the seventh Roxana player to win the award. All the previous boys and girls Player of the Year award winners have been invited back to next year's banquet, in which the 75th anniversary of the award will be celebrated.