

Jonesboro High's M.J. Walker Honored As McDonald's All-American

By Luke Strickland
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JONESBORO — Jonesboro High School celebrated McDonald's All-American M.J. Walker Thursday in the school's gymnasium. Walker was officially honored as one of 24 student-athletes nation-wide to earn the prestigious award.

He is the first player in the history of Clayton County to earn the recognition of McDonald's All-American, which is awarded to the best high school basketball players in the country.

The Jonesboro gym was packed, as many of Walker's closest family, friends and classmates were on hand to congratulate him on his achievement. Walker addressed the crowd, as did Jonesboro head coach Dan Maehlman and representatives from McDonald's and American Family Life Insurance.

Walker made sure to thank everybody who had helped him reach this point in his career, focusing specifically on his family and Maehlman. The scene was emotional at times, as Walker described what it's been like to live in the national spotlight as a teenager.

He thanked his parents for sacrificing in order for him to reach this level of skill. Walker told stories about how his father, James, would wake him up early on the weekends to put in extra work, and how his mother, Jackie, kept on him about maintaining good grades. Walker currently holds a 3.9 Grade Point Average, which makes every school in the country an option for him to play basketball at.

Maehlman also spoke about Walker's relationship with his parents, stating it has been vital to his success.

"M.J. was able to accomplish all this for one big reason, the guidance of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walker," Maehlman said to the crowd. "This is a true testament to how they raised him and how he will continue on in life. M.J., even though this is an incredible honor, I have to say I am most proud of the person that you are and the person that you will remain."

Lastly, it was announced that Walker's teammates will be able to travel to Chicago to take part in all of the festivities surrounding the McDonald's All-American Game. Several local businesses and school board members worked together to raise enough money for the rest of the Cardinals to be able to do so.

Out of 700 high school student athletes around the country, Walker was one of 24 players selected to participate in the 40th Annual McDonald's All-American Game on March 29 at the United Center in Chicago. During his career at Jonesboro, Walker has scored over 2,400 points and recently broke the Clayton County Public Schools record for most points ever scored by a basketball player. He is a three-time Clayton County Player of the Year.

Walker has led Jonesboro to two state championships and one state runner-up. He also holds a gold medal as a member of the 2016 USA Men's U18 National Championship team that won the 2016 FIBA Americas U18 Championship held last summer in Valdivia, Chile.

Walker will look to reach his fourth state championship game of his career in the coming month as Jonesboro begins another state tournament run. The Cardinals will face Richmond Hill Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in the first round of the Class AAAAAA state playoffs.