

DCA's Mbugua heads girls All-Area team for second straight year

BY MIKE MARSEE
Contributing Writer

Grace Mbugua, who became one of the most dominant players ever in this area as she led Danville Christian to its most successful season to date, has been voted The Advocate-Messenger Area Girls Basketball Player of the Year for the second consecutive year.

Mbugua was the top vote-getter in exclusive balloting of area coaches for The Advocate-Messenger 2024-25 All-Area Girls Basketball Team, prevailing in an extremely close race for player of the year.

Mbugua, a 6-5 junior who signed with Louisville in November, finished in the top 10 in the state in rebounding and the top 15 in the state in scoring as she led DCA to a 27-8 record, the All "A" Classic championship, a second consecutive 12th Region championship and the semifinals of the Girls Sweet 16.

She was named the 12th Region Player of the Year by the Kentucky Association of Basketball Coaches and was a McDonald's All American Game nominee.

She averaged 22.3 points and 12.7 rebounds over 23 games after returning from an offseason knee injury, and she shot 54.7 percent from the field and 74.6 percent from the free throw line.

She had 70 points, 43 rebounds and 14 blocked shots in three state tournament games, and she finished her high school career with 2,519 points and 1,818 rebounds.

Mbugua edged Alexys Moore of Garrard County, a top-five scorer in Kentucky this season, in the voting for the top spot on the All-Area team.

Moore finished fourth in the state in scoring with 24.6 points per game, accounting for 42 percent of the Lady Lions' total offense.

She scored 831 points in 36 games at Garrard - 29

this season and seven last season - after moving from Tennessee - and scored at least 40 points twice and at least 30 points six times this season while shooting 44 percent from the field and 34 percent from 3-point range.

Moore received player of the year votes along with Mbugua.

Other players on the All-Area first team are:

- Tayvionna Caldwell, who became Danville's top offensive option this season and led the Lady Admirals in scoring (14.9) and rebounding (9.6).
- Alaya Quisenberry, who finished second in scoring (13.4) while running the offense at Danville Christian.
- Addison Yates, the leading scorer (16.2) at Boyle County and one of the area's most prolific 3-point shooters.

Amauri Blackford of DCA, Elizabeth Forbes of Casey County, Alyssa Burkhardt and Alexia Baldock of Lincoln County and

Myla Turner of Danville were voted to the second team.

Mbugua made the All-Area first team for the fourth consecutive season, and Quisenberry is on the first team for the second year in a row.

Forbes, Burkhardt and Turner made the second team for the second straight year.

The All-Area team is open to players from schools in Boyle, Casey, Garrard, Lincoln and Mercer counties. Coaches may not vote for players from their own teams.

Brian Britt of Boyle County and Hayley Hellyer of Danville tied atop the voting for The Advocate-Messenger Area Girls Basketball Coach of the Year.

Britt led Boyle to a 16-14 finish, a runner-up finish in the 45th District and its first 12th Region Tournament appearance in four years.

Hellyer led Danville to an 11-20 record, including

wins in four of its last nine games, in her first season as a head coach.

Billy Inmon of DCA and Cassandra McWhorter of Garrard also received votes for coach of the year.

**THE ADVOCATE-
MESSENGER 2024-25 ALL-
AREA GIRLS BASKETBALL
TEAM**

First Team
Name, School Ht. Yr. Pos. Pts. Reb.

Grace Mbugua, Danville Christian 6-5 Sr. F 22.3 12.7
Alexys Moore, Garrard County 5-3 Sr. G 24.6 5.0
Tayvionna Caldwell, Danville 5-7 Jr. G 14.9 9.6
Alaya Quisenberry, Danville Christian 5-3 Sr. G 13.4 5.6
Addison Yates, Boyle County 5-8 Fr. G 16.2 3.5

Second Team
Name, School Ht. Yr. Pos. Pts. Reb.

Amauri Blackford, Danville Christian 6-0 So.

F 11.0 10.0
Elizabeth Forbes, Casey County 5-6 Jr. G 17.6 3.3
Alyssa Burkhardt, Lincoln County 5-5 Fr. G 14.0 1.9
Alexia Baldock, Lincoln County 5-8 Sr. G 10.1 3.5
Myla Turner, Danville 5-6 Sr. G 12.9 5.4

Honorable Mention
Boyle County - Maggie Burke, Kynslee Leffew
Burgin - Jemma Jenkins, Gabrielle Thompson
Casey County - Molly Gill
Danville - Aniah Byrd
Danville Christian - Paisley Metz
Garrard County - Erica Heibenthal, Reagan Powell
Lincoln County - Rylee Townes
Mercer County - Izzie Carlton

Co-Area Coaches of the Year
Brian Britt, Boyle County
Hayley Hellyer, Danville

Boyle baseball team eager for offense to ignite

BY MIKE MARSEE
Contributing Writer

A seven-run inning isn't that uncommon in high school baseball, but it was big news for Boyle County earlier this week.

The Rebels scored more runs in the second inning Monday than they had gotten in any of their previous eight games, and they were hoping that was an indication that their offense was about to get untracked.

Offense has been an issue for Boyle in the early weeks of the season, but sound pitching and defense have allowed the Rebels to win as many as they've lost.

And they believe the big inning and the double-digit score they put up in an 11-3 rout of Rockcastle County could be a sign of better days ahead at the plate.

"It's definitely a confidence booster, and now we've got to keep it rolling in the next games coming," Boyle center fielder

Austin Bodner said.

Bodner sent a 359-foot bomb over the right-field fence at Centre College's Gary Wright Field for the big blow in Boyle's big inning Monday. It was his second home run and only the third of the season for the Rebels. (Collin Wise has the other.)

Boyle totaled nine hits - including two each by Kyler Claunch and Logan Perry - which was well above its season average of 5.8 as it raised its scoring average from 4.8 runs per game to 5.4.

Coach Adam Blair said one good day at the plate didn't mean the Rebels were over their early-season slump - they were held to three runs two days later in a 4-3 loss at Scott County that dropped them to 6-6 - but he said it's a pretty good start.

"There's guys that are in the lineup that have been fluctuating, that are playing depending on who's pitching and all that ... so we're utilizing a lot of guys, seeing what helps us

in certain situations, and today was the day that they put it together," Blair said. "And I told them, 'We've got to keep building on this.'"

Blair said he isn't worried about whether the offense will come around, though the Rebels have been shut out twice and have been held to three runs or less seven times so far.

"We've not gotten timely hits, and we've faced some good pitching," he said.

The lineup has been heavily overhauled following the loss of 10 seniors to graduation last year, and Blair said he knew it would take time for some players who batted primarily in junior varsity games before this season to make the transition to the varsity level.

"They're adjusting and learning how to change their approach, because the velocity is a little bit different, the breaking balls are a little bit sharper, the changeups are a little bit nastier," he said. "We

were (striking out) a lot early on, and we've just been working constantly on our approach and on our two-strike approach and about just putting the ball in play."

Meanwhile, pitching and defense have carried the day, as Boyle allowed three runs or less in eight of its first 11 games.

"Our defense has been super solid, and our pitching has been really good," Blair said. "We've lost one-run games, two-run games, three-run games."

Boyle's team earned-

run average was at 2.30 after the win over Rockcastle, and starting pitchers Caeden Patterson - who earned the win against the Rockets - Landon Parness and Claunch were all well below 2.00. And they have been backed by a defense that gives up few extra outs.

"We have really good speed, and we've got really good defensive kids, and ... that's kept us in those one-run ballgames," Blair said.

Bodner said team chemistry is also an asset

for the Rebels.

"I love playing for these guys, they love playing for me. I know they have my back at all times," he said.

Boyle begins 45th District play next week with a series against archrival Danville on Tuesday and Wednesday. And with all of its district games and more than half of the regular season remaining, Bodner said the ceiling is high for the Rebels.

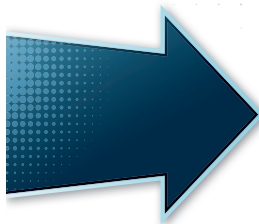
"I'd say it's pretty high," he said. "(We can make) a good run in region. I believe it."



Austin Bodner (2) returns to the dugout with Boyle County teammate Ethan Milburn (23) following Bodner's three-run home run during the second inning of the Rebels' win over Rockcastle County on Monday. (Photo by Mike Marsee)



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