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Freshman Nominated for Spirit of Sport Award

APRIL 11TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - Poplar Bluff High School freshman Savannah Hicks was Missouri's nomination for the National High School Spirit of Sport Award for returning to the basketball court just six short weeks after open-heart surgery.

The executive director of the Missouri State High School Activities Association nominated the 15-year-old for the award because she exceeded expectations, overcame challenging circumstances and displayed exemplary sportsmanship.

"I visited with Dr. Kerwin Urhahn, executive director of MSHSAA, about Savannah Hicks and the obstacles she has overcome to return to the court/field," R-I Athletic Director Kent Keith announced. "I then forwarded (reporter) Ben Striker's DAR article about Savannah for him to read. Dr. Urhahn was touched by what he heard and read."

Over the summer, medics discovered a heart murmur or an irregular heartbeat during sports physicals provided by volunteers for student athletes. Upon further testing, Savannah was diagnosed with atrial septal defect, which is a hole between the two upper chambers of the heart.

Savannah postponed treatment until completing the varsity softball season. On Nov. 22, she received successful open-heart surgery at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in St. Louis. A week later, she attended a home basketball game to cheer on her junior varsity teammates. She proceeded to help keep a stat book until she received clearance from

doctors to return to the court at the end of the year. On Jan. 2, she participated in practice. Four days later, she played in her first game of the season.

In addition to basketball and softball, Savannah has just learned that she made the girls soccer team. She is a member of the Mule Barn, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, active in her church youth group and in the top 10 percent of her class, according to her nomination form.

The national recipient of the award was a student athlete in Minnesota who, despite being born a paraplegic, plays football, sled hockey, wheelchair softball and track, according to a press release issued by the National Federation of State High School Associations. All 50 state associations, plus Washington, D.C., have the ability to submit a nominee to the selection committee each year, according to MSHSAA Communications Director Jason West.

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