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State Player of Year Finalists

By [Mark Tennis](#) | Published: March 27, 2018

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Aquira DeCosta from St. Mary's of Stockton (left) and David Singleton from Bishop Montgomery of Torrance are finalists for Ms. Basketball 2018 and Mr. Basketball 2018 for California. Winner to be announced April 5-7. Photos: Mark Tennis & Nick Koza.

To get going on this year's selection for Mr. Basketball State Player of the Year and Ms. Basketball State Player of the Year, we decided not to

give away so many of our eventual picks for first team all-state and have gone with a lower total of finalists than from years past. This year, we still have five boys and four girls on the finalist list. Winners will be announced near the end of next week (April 5-7).

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Congratulations to the following five players who have been chosen as finalists for the 2018 selection as Mr. Basketball in California. This is also the Cal-Hi Sports State Player of the Year, which dates back to 1905 and includes Lonzo Ball, Tyson Chandler, Paul Pierce, Jason Kidd, Bill Walton, Paul Silas, Jim Pollard and Hank Luisetti as previous winners.

(All listed in alphabetical order)

James Akinjo (Salesian, Richmond) 6-0 Sr.

Akinjo had a terrific summer that he capped by leading the Oakland Soldiers travel ball club to the prestigious Nike 17U EYBL Peach Jam title. He followed that up with a terrific senior season for a Salesian team that spent plenty of time during the regular season as the state's top ranked team. After earning all-state underclass honors, Akinjo stepped up his game as a senior with averages of 20.7 points, 5.2 assists, 3.1 rebounds and 2.0 steals per game for a 30-2 team. An improved jump shot opened up his game, as Akinjo already was one of the nation's best point guards for attacking and finishing around the basket. Akinjo finishes No. 5 on Salesian's all-time scoring list and is also a fearless defender who is at his best in high intensity games. Originally a UConn recruit, Akinjo received his release after former L.A. Crenshaw all-stater Kevin Ollie was let go as the Huskies' coach. Akinjo is one of the nation's top unsigned seniors with schools such as Arizona, Wake Forest, Virginia Tech, Providence, Tennessee and Georgetown now vying for his services.

Riley Battin (Oak Park) 6-9 Sr.

As many know, we're the history buffs of the state especially for football, boys hoops, girls hoops, baseball and softball. That's why Riley has captured this nod as a Mr. Basketball finalist. He has been a four-year varsity standout at Oak Park and capped his prep career with 2,971 points and 1,528 rebounds. There's only been three others in state history who had more than 2,500 points and 1,500 rebounds in a career — 2004 Mr. Basketball honoree DeMarcus Nelson from Sheldon of Sacramento; Darnell "The Tank" Robinson from Emery of Emeryville (1990-1993) and Wendell McKines of Richmond (2004-07). Battin's team went out early enough in the highly competitive CIF Southern Section D1 playoffs, but he had 43 points, 15 rebounds and four assists in that loss to Long Beach Poly. For the season, Battin averaged 25.7 points with 12.4 rebounds and 4.6 assists per game. The University of Utah-bound center-forward hit for 24.2 points and 12.4 rebounds per game over the course of his high school years.



Spencer Freedman made an immediate impact at Mater Dei after he transferred in from Santa Monica as a sophomore.
Photo: Andrew Drennan.

Spencer Freedman (Mater Dei, Santa Ana) 6-1 Sr.

Head coach Gary McKnight has had a lot of player of the year candidates at Mater Dei, but Spencer is different than many of the others. He's an academically-oriented point guard who is similar to a point guard from McKnight's past who caused him more pain than pleasure: Palo Alto's Jeremy Lin. And like Lin, who led Palo Alto to a win over Mater Dei in the Division II state final in 2006, Freedman is going to Harvard. On Monday of this week, Freedman was named as the CIF Southern Section Open Division Player of the Year. He had 13 points and three assists in a CIFSS Open title game win over eventual CIF Open Division state champ Sierra Canyon and had 22 points and five assists in the semifinals against Etiwanda. For the season, Spencer averaged 16.6 points, 4.9 assists and 2.0 steals per game. Freedman also did something that not even 2014 Mr. Basketball State POY Stanley

Johnson of Mater Dei accomplished. He was chosen MVP of the Trinity League as a sophomore, junior and senior.

Onyeka Okongwu (Chino Hills) 6-9 Jr.

The state's top big man was completely dominant in Chino Hills' playoff run to the CIF state and CIFSS D1 titles despite being the focal point of opposing defenses. Last season, The Big O's scoring totals slightly jumped up (14.8 ppg) after averaging eight points per game for a 35-0 team at Chino Hills that was the 2015-16 mythical national champions. Onyeka was named State Freshman of the Year. This past season, with good friend and last year's State Sophomore of the Year La'Melo Ball no longer part of the program, Okongwu became the focal point of the team for new coach Dennis Latimore. There was an adjustment period for the club with a third coach in three seasons and a new offensive system, but when the Huskies figured it out the results were spectacular from an individual and team standpoint. Okongwu opened up the season with a 38-point performance against Temescal Canyon of Lake Elsinore and closed it with a 27-point, 15-rebound, and five-block performance in the CIF D1 state championship victory over Las Lomas of Walnut Creek. In between, the Big O averaged 28 points, 14 rebounds and four blocked shots per game for the D1 state champs.

David Singleton (Bishop Montgomery, Torrance) 6-4 Sr.

A first team all-state selection as a junior, the 6-foot-4 shooting guard had another fantastic season after being a key cog in the Knights' CIF Open Division state title run last season. After averaging 16.5 points, 5.9 rebounds and 5.6 assists as a junior, Singleton's numbers went to 23.8 points and 5.8 rebounds as a senior when he led Bishop Montgomery to a 28-2 mark and a state No. 2 ranking. In a year when the program suffered through various injuries to multiple starters and didn't get its original starting lineup healthy until playoff time, Singleton was the one constant with his vast offensive skill, senior leadership and competitive nature. Singleton also improved his defense over the course of his four-year varsity career in which he was part of two CIFSS Open Division title teams. Already named Gatorade State Player of the Year, the UCLA commit has also been named to the All-CIFSS Open Division team for a second consecutive season.

Congratulations to the following four players who have been chosen as finalists for the 2018 selection as Ms. Basketball in California. This is

also the Cal-Hi Sports State Player of the Year, which dates back to 1972 and includes Diana Taurasi, Lisa Leslie, Cheryl Miller, Jackie White and Ann Meyers:

Aqira De Costa (St. Mary's, Stockton) 6-3 Sr.

It's a logical progression for De Costa to be a Ms. Basketball State POY finalist. She was the State Freshman of the Year in 2015, the State Sophomore of the Year in 2016 and State Junior of the Year in 2017. Aqira was not able to duplicate her freshman season of being on a CIF Open Division state title team for the rest of her prep career, but St. Mary's and herself were a powerhouse for 2016, 2017 and this season. The McDonald's All-American hit for 18.3 points with 13.1 rebounds, two assists, three steals and two blocks per game. She had more than 1,800 points and 1,100 rebounds in her career. Aqira arguably did even better during recent summers when she was a leading player on the USA U17 world championship team in 2016 and then last summer joined with 2017 Ms. Basketball Destiny Littleton as two of the three girls for USA Basketball's 3x3 U18 World Cup team. De Costa has been ranked as high as No. 1 as a Class of 2018 national college prospect and was No. 4 by ESPNW at the start of this season.



Windward's Charisma Osborne became a more versatile player during her junior season without

McKenzie Forbes (Folsom) 6-1 Sr.

Although McKenzie is in the same CIF Sac-Joaquin Section division as Aqira De Costa, she's done more than enough in her career to a Ms. Basketball finalist alongside her great friend. The two are at the McDonald's All-American Game this week and are the only two California girls who are there.

Forbes, a five-star recruit, not only led Folsom to its greatest season in school history, but she's regarded by many to be one of the best players ever from the Sacramento area. Before she came to Folsom, the Bulldogs were a losing program (including 5-22 in 2013). Forbes, who will play next at Cal, averaged 19.0 points, 6.5 rebounds 5.0 assists with two blocks and two steals per game.

Haley Jones (Archbishop Mitty, San Jose)

giving up any of her scoring abilities. Photo: wavenewspapers.com.

6-0 Jr.

For those who think it's an automatic slam dunk that Windward's Charisma Osborne should be the ultimate winner, just consider that the greatest

women's coach in history, UConn's Geno Auriemma, recently flew out to the Bay Area for a home visit with Jones. UConn has only done that for a handful of California girls, the most recent being current standout Katie Lou Samuelson of Mater Dei. Also consider that Haley was MVP of the top division at the Nike TOC in Arizona and that Osborne's team was in the same bracket of that tourney. Of course, there's more to the final choice than that, but it just shows the greatness of Jones' abilities as well. For the season, in leading Mitty to a 29-1 season and No. 1 national ranking for most of the season, Jones averaged 21.8 points, 10.0 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 2.5 blocks per game. She's already been selected as the Gatorade State Player of the Year.

Charisma Osborne (Windward, Los Angeles) 5-9 Jr.

It's safe to say that Osborne's candidacy as a finalist for Ms. Basketball 2018 was assured before she even took the floor last Saturday at the Golden 1 Center in Sacramento to play in the CIF Open Division state final vs. Pinewood of Los Altos Hills. She was the State Freshman of the Year in 2016, was considered the runner-up to Haley Jones (see above) for State Sophomore of the Year last season and had big outings already in the postseason. Osborne had 25 points and 14 rebounds when Windward beat Harvard-Westlake of North Hollywood for the CIFSS Open Division title and had 22 points, nine rebounds and three assists in a follow-up win by the Wildcats over the Wolverines in the CIF SoCal Open Division regional final. Charisma then wowed the crowd with 26 points, six rebounds, three assists, three steals and two blocks in a win over Pinewood. She is currently considering college offers from Stanford, Cal, USC, UCLA and Ohio State.

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