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SCB Announces Finalists for 2026 Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award

Fort Meyers, FL – Small College Basketball is excited to announce the 2026 finalists of the Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award. The official announcement was made this afternoon at the Small College Basketball Social in Indianapolis, IN. The Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award is sponsored by the Kraft Family Foundation. John McCarthy had this to say about this year's finalists:

"The Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award has tremendous meaning, and is a really special award," stated McCarthy. "Through this platform, we are thrilled to bring national attention to the remarkable stories of these five finalists. Congratulations to each and every one of them. Their stories inspire us all."

The intent of the Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award is two-fold: 1) To keep the story and legacy of Ryan Turell alive and continue to tell his story to the next generation, and 2) To provide a national platform to honor a player that has faced adversity, handled it with tremendous character and perseverance, and ultimately became an inspiration and role model for others. We shall use the various platforms under the Small College Basketball umbrella to fulfill these intentions.

The five finalists include Curtis Harrison of Wheeling University, Luke Chicone of John Carroll University, Mason Brandt of the University of Findlay, Mayson Quartlebaum of Rollins College, and Zevi Samet of Yeshiva University. Below is a brief description of why each of them were nominated for the award.

Curtis embodies not only the mission of the Wheeling University program, but the spirit of the award. Along with a friend, Curtis started the Sole Bros Inc charity, which has since its inception collected and handed out shoes to over 7,000 people. Curtis has also persevered through personal setbacks. After a debilitating injury early in his college career, instead of giving up he worked extremely hard over multiple years to get back to as close to 100% as possible and has contributed to Wheeling's success this year.

Luke has left his impact at John Carroll University. Returning for his graduate year to earn a teaching certificate, he continues to operate a basketball training company, which allows AAU opportunities for your players in the program. Luke has an amazing ability to lead, while also lifting up those around him through his daily interactions. Furthermore, Luke has taken time to personally connect with a young man with severe depression and has deeply impacted the young man's life to the point that this young man took time to nominate Luke for this award. He plans to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather Mike Moran, the longtime coach at John Carroll, and his uncles Pete and Pat Moran.

After a very successful high school career, that landed Mason on Sportscenter Top 10 for his extraordinary dunks, he started at University of Findlay in the fall of 2022. After being diagnosed with a chewing disorder in High School, Mason struggled with gaining weight in college. During the summer after his sophomore year in college, Mason was diagnosed with eosinophilic esophagitis (E.O.E). Following this diagnosis and after extensive research and meeting with professionals, a plan was created for Mason to not only gain weight but get his self confidence back. Mason continues to show young kids with E.O.E that anything is possible.

In just a short time at Rollins College, Mayson has left a lasting impact. Mayson battled Hodgkin's Lymphoma and endured four months of chemotherapy after graduating from University of Missouri St. Louis. He took the entire 2024-25 school year to recover and enrolled at Rollins for his final year. Mayson has worked extremely hard this year, coming back much earlier than expected from multiple injuries. He has also proactively initiated Rollins' relationship with Team Impact, partnering with a young six-year-old that was diagnosed with cancer.

Zevi has garnered numerous accolades the season, including: Skyline Player of the Year, Skyline First Team All-Conference, Bevo Francis Award Finalist and the Trevor Hudgins Award Finalist. What he has done off the court is just as impressive. Zevi started the Beyond the Court initiative which has facilitated everything from communal Shabbatons to group outings, all in an effort to get the team closer to both Hashem and each other. Thanks to his diligence and passion, Beyond the Court has also established a sizeable social media presence. Through these platforms, he uses basketball skills as a way to spread the message of Hashem and Judaism at large.

2026 marks the second season that the Ryan Turrell Character & Inspiration Award has been awarded. Jadin Booth of Florida Southern won the inaugural award in 2025.

Ryan Turell turned down multiple NCAA Division I offers to follow his faith and attend Yeshiva University in New York. During his four year career, Turell led the Maccabees on a historic 50-game win streak and helped the team become the #1 ranked team in all of NCAA Division III for the first time in school history. Turell broke the school's single game (51), season (786) and career (2,158) scoring records, while shooting 58% from the field and 44.9% from the 3-point line for his career.

In Turell's senior season he won the Travis Grant Award, given annually to the nation's leading collegiate scorer averaging 27.1 ppg. He was named as a First Team All – American for three straight years by D3Hoops, and was named as a 2022 NABC NCAA Division III National Player of the Year. He then became the first Orthodox Jew to be drafted and play in the NBA G League for the Motor City Cruise.

Beyond the remarkable playing career, Turell became a worldwide inspiration and role model in the Jewish community at large and a hero in the Orthodox community. His play garnered global attention, while his charisma, character, smile and kindness made him among the most celebrated and recognized small college players of all time. Turell has become a beacon of hope and inspiration to the Jewish community – and far beyond.

The winner of this year's Ryan Turrell Character and Inspiration Award will be announced on Monday April 6th at halftime of the NCAA Division I National Championship game. For more information on Small College Basketball, please head to smallcollegebasketball.com.