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Media Contact: Matt Ankenbrandt

Sports Information Director | Small College Basketball

616.780.1335

www.smallcollegebasketball.com

Zevi Samet Named 2026 Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award Winner

Fort Meyers, FL – Small College Basketball is extremely excited to announce Zevi Samet as the 2026 Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award winner. Samet recently completed his highly decorated career at Yeshiva University. The Ryan Turell Character & Inspiration Award is sponsored by the Kraft Family Foundation. Ryan Turell had this to say about Zevi Samet.

"I am incredibly excited about Zevi receiving this award, as he truly embodies what it means to inspire both on and off the court," mentioned Turell. "A First Team All American athlete, Zevi lives by his motto, 'Bigger than basketball,' bringing his love for God and his Jewish faith into everything that he does. His pregame speeches uplift and unite his teammates, reminding everyone that there is purpose beyond the game. He is truly a role model that so many look up to, and I know he will continue to inspire well beyond his time at YU."

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.

A native of Monsey, NY, Samet made an instant impact at Yeshiva University in his freshman season. Samet finished number one in NCAA Division III in three-point field goals made per game at 3.96. He finished the season with 558 points and was selected as the Region 3 Rookie of the Year and D3hoops.com All Region third team. Samet also finished the season as the Skyline Rookie of the Year and All-Skyline First Team. In his sophomore season, Samet started in all 28 games, averaging 22.7 points and 4.1 rebounds. He was named Skyline First - Team All-Conference, NABC 2023-24 Honors Court and All-MBWA First – Team. Samet also reached 1,000 points during his sophomore campaign, being the fastest in Yeshiva history. Samet has this to say about being named the Ryan Turell Inspiration Award Winner:

"It's an honor to be receiving this award," exclaimed Samet. "I want to thank God for giving me everything I have in my life, and allowing me to have the career that I had. This couldn't have happened without my family, my teammates, and ultimately my coaches for believing in me throughout my four years at Yeshiva. To be receiving an award named after a former alum of Yeshiva is so special. It's awesome that Ryan put Yeshiva on the map and used it as a platform to inspire others. I thank him for creating that national platform so that when I came in right after he left, I was able to keep building on that platform and be able to play ball on the highest level, but also more importantly, to be able to use that platform to inspire the world! You never know what impact you can make by just doing the right thing. Never forget that!"

In his junior campaign, Samet continued to reach new heights for the Yeshiva program. Samet once again started in all 28 games, finishing the year averaging 22.6 points per game and 4.1 rebounds. He continued to garner national and conference accolades, being named to the NABC DIII All-American Second Team. Samet was named the Skyline Player of the Year, First-Team All-Conference, and NABC First Team All-District. Furthermore, Samet was named the D3hoops.com Region 3 Most Outstanding

Player. In his final season at Yeshiva, Samet continued to rewrite the Yeshiva record books. Finishing the year, averaging 23.8 points per game, 4.1 rebounds, and 2.3 assists. He finished the season with 737 points, fourth in the NCAA. Samet finished his career sixth all time in three-pointers in NCAA history at 403 and 2,564 points, first overall in Yeshiva history. The 2,564 points ranks 13th in NCAA history. Samet set a new single-game record with 52 points against USMMA. He was named NABC First Team All American and D3hoops.com Second Team All American. Samet also received Skyline Player of the Year and First Team All – Skyline. Yeshiva Head Coach Elliot Steinmetz spoke about the extraordinary career on and off the court for Samet:

"What an absolutely deserved honor for Zevi," stated Steinmetz. "We've been blessed to have such high character student-athletes in our program over the years. Ryan and his teammates set the standard for excellence on and off the court, and Zevi, along with Max and his teammates, have taken it to the next level. We are lucky to have such amazing people to continue raising our program and culture to new levels while setting a stage for the future as well."

For all of the on-court success, Samet has made an even larger impact off the court. Samet started the initiative Beyond the Court that brought this year's team closer than ever. The initiative facilitated everything from communal Shabbatons to group outings, all in an effort to get the team closer to both Hashem and each other. Through the diligence and passion of Samet, Beyond the Court has also established a sizeable social media presence. Through these platforms, Samet uses basketball skills as a way to spread the message of Hashem and Judaism at large. Samet also finds time to give back to the community at large, hosting youth basketball clinics to mentor the next generation of basketball players. In his own words "I want to use my platform to inspire. It's exciting to see kids come and work hard, especially at a young age. It shows that they want to get better, that they want to improve, and I believe that I help them do that."

2026 marks the second season that the Ryan Turell 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.

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