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Gage Daye Chosen as 2026 Larry Smith Award Winner

Kansas City, MO – Small College Basketball is extremely excited to announce Gage Daye as the recipient of the 2026 Larry Smith Award. Gage Daye has built a career that spans professional basketball, collegiate coaching, entrepreneurship, real estate investment, authorship, nonprofit leadership, and community service. But the common thread connecting each chapter of his journey is not simply achievement - it is his commitment to turning achievement into opportunity for other people. This year's award will be presented on Friday November 6th at 7:00 pm EST inside the Polk Theatre in Lakeland, FL. Jim Nelson, Athletic Director Emeritus, Suffolk University, had this to say about Daye:

"Congratulations to Gage Daye as a most distinguished Larry Smith Award recipient," mentioned Nelson. "Gage's life journey mirrors that of Larry from their most humble and challenging youthful years to noted success as basketball stars at their colleges and on to professional careers in business and education that allowed them to give back to their communities that then shaped others' lives for success as role models for the next generation. Gage continues the Small College Basketball Larry Smith Award tradition of individuals who have recognized that the gifts blessed upon them are to be treasured in advancing their personal life and present opportunities to uplift others as similar future leaders to be praised and honored as we now celebrate Gage Daye."

The Larry Smith Award is presented annually to the person who has used their opportunity through basketball to ultimately change their life, has given back, and has made a difference in our world. Daye is the eighth recipient of the Larry Smith Award. The inaugural award in 2017 was given to George Tinsley Sr. In 2018, Charlie Titus was selected, followed by Cylk Cozart in 2019 and Dr. Ronn Johnson in 2022. Charlie Brock earned the 2023 award, followed by Gary Banz in 2024. Most recently in 2025, Ellis "Sonny" Lane received the award. Daye had this to say about being this year's award recipient:

"I am truly humbled and grateful to receive the Larry Smith Award," mentioned Daye. "Basketball has blessed me with opportunities that changed the course of my life, and as I've gotten older, I've learned that those blessings come with responsibility. I fully embrace the opportunity to be a vessel for others. Coming from a community where many young people are born into difficult circumstances with limited resources, I understand how important it is for them to see someone who comes from where they come from succeed—and reach back. Giving hope, exposing individuals to new possibilities, and inspiring them to dream beyond their circumstances mean more to me than any accomplishment on the court. To be recognized for using the game I love to serve and uplift others is truly an honor."

Raised in Newark, New Jersey, Daye knows the impact that exposure, mentorship, resources, and representation can have on a young person's future. His own path took him from Newark to Bloomfield College. Daye was a standout student-athlete for Bloomfield. A 2012 graduate of the school, Daye helped guide Bloomfield to the 2011 NCAA Division II East Region Championship and a spot in the Elite Eight in Springfield, Mass. Daye's playing career featured several notable highlights as he was a two-time

CACC Player of the Year and Met Writers Players of the Year (2010 & 2011). He was an all-American in 2011 and was tabbed the most valuable player of the 2011 East Region tournament. He graduated as the school's leading scorer with 2,518 points. He led Bloomfield to multiple conference titles. Gerald Holmes, Daye's college coach, had this to say about the legacy Daye has left:

"It is difficult to put into words what Gage has meant to the Bloomfield College basketball program and our entire community," expressed Holmes. "As the all-time leading scorer in both school and CACC history, he helped lead us to the 2011 East Region Championship and Elite Eight, but his impact since his playing days has been even greater. As a coach, mentor, alumni leader, business owner, and community advocate, Gage has dedicated himself to developing young people, creating opportunities, and giving back to a place that means so much to him. His impact on our program, our students, and our community is immeasurable, and if there is one word that defines what matters most to Gage, it is legacy."

Daye eventually moved into professional basketball, competing in the NBA G League and internationally in Europe and Australia. He later built businesses, entered real estate development and investment, accumulated more than a decade of NCAA collegiate coaching experience and 15 years of youth coaching experience, and became the author of two children's books.

Throughout that journey, Daye has remained focused on a larger question: how can the experiences and opportunities he received be used to create possibilities for the people coming behind him? That commitment is reflected through Academic Athletic Advancement (A3), his nonprofit organization. Through A3, Daye has supported young people and families with annual back-to-school drives, free haircut initiatives, food and essential-item distributions, charitable donations, mentorship, and other community-centered efforts designed to provide resources and reduce barriers.

Daye's commitment to nonprofit service also includes his role as a Board Member of the Campbell House, a nonprofit organization that serves girls from Newark, New Jersey. Through his involvement, Daye continues to support organizations focused on creating resources, guidance, mentorship, and opportunities for young people in the community that raised him. Education is another major part of that work. Daye established the Gage Daye Scholarship Fund to provide retention-based financial assistance to students from Newark, New Jersey who hope to attend Bloomfield College. Students can apply for support with various financial obligations that might otherwise make beginning or continuing their college education more difficult. The fund reflects his belief that talent and ambition are widespread, while access to resources and opportunity is not always equally available.

Basketball has also become one of Daye's most consistent vehicles for creating opportunity. Since 2011, he has operated Lab Development Basketball, providing young athletes with high-level instruction, competitive experience, mentorship, and exposure. Although Lab Development is a business, Daye has intentionally maintained an accessibility component within the organization, offering substantial discounts and, in certain circumstances, completely free opportunities to athletes whose financial situations might otherwise keep them from participating.

The impact of Lab Development extends beyond its players. Daye also uses the organization to employ coaches, trainers, referees, camp staff, and other young professionals. Those positions allow people to earn income while learning how to teach, lead, mentor, and develop professionally. In that sense, Lab Development is designed to create more than basketball players - it creates opportunities for people to gain experience and eventually become opportunity-creators themselves.

Daye's continued relationship with Bloomfield College provides another example of his approach to service. He currently contributes to the institution in two significant capacities, and both positions are volunteer roles. As Vice President of the Bloomfield College Alumni Network, Daye gives his time and leadership without compensation. His work includes supporting financial literacy conversations, encouraging alumni donations, helping develop internship opportunities, mentoring students, strengthening alumni engagement, and connecting students with alumni who work in career fields they hope to enter.

He also volunteers as a basketball coach at Bloomfield College. Although his background and experience could allow him to pursue compensated coaching opportunities, Daye has chosen to make this position another form of giving back. Drawing from more than a decade of NCAA collegiate coaching experience, 15 years of youth coaching experience, and his own career as a collegiate All-American and professional player, he is able to give student-athletes information that comes from having personally experienced many of the stages they are trying to reach. Bloomfield College Athletic Director Sheila Wooten had this to say about Daye:

"We are incredibly proud of Gage Daye and all that he represents," stated Wooten. "Gage's journey is a powerful example of how the game of basketball can provide opportunities that extend far beyond the court. He took the lessons, relationships and opportunities that came through basketball and used them to make a meaningful difference in his life and in the lives of others. To see a former Bloomfield student athlete recognized with the Larry Smith Award is truly special, and Gage is incredibly deserving of this honor."

That mentorship is not limited to basketball. Daye works with young players on academics, discipline, decision-making, networking, financial responsibility, professional preparation, and understanding life beyond athletics. His volunteer work demonstrates a belief that giving does not always have to take the form of money. Time, knowledge, relationships, experience, and access can be equally valuable resources.

Daye has carried that same philosophy into children's literature. He is the author of two children's books, *Grayson's Passion* and *Gigi's Birthday Balancing Act*, each inspired by and created in the likeness of his two children. The books provide another avenue for giving back by emphasizing representation, culture, motivation, possibility, family, confidence, ambition, and achievement.

Although his children provided the inspiration, the broader purpose reaches beyond his own family. Through positive stories and imagery, Daye wants children to be able to see themselves in narratives that encourage them to imagine more for their futures. His writing is another way of pushing culture and possibilities forward and reinforcing the idea that children can aspire toward what they are able to see and envision.

His approach to real estate through Kleos Ventures follows a similar pattern. Daye is an entrepreneur and real estate investor, but much of his investment and development activity has been intentionally concentrated in and around the same Newark-area communities where he was raised.

For Daye, investing in those neighborhoods carries meaning beyond financial return. Improving properties and developing real estate provides an opportunity to contribute to the physical and economic improvement of communities that helped shape him. It also creates a different kind of

example for young people growing up there. They can see someone from a background similar to theirs return to the community not only as a former athlete, but as an owner, investor, developer, employer, entrepreneur, and contributor to its future.

That visibility reinforces an important message within Daye's work: success does not necessarily mean leaving your community behind. Success can also provide the resources, knowledge, and ownership necessary to return, reinvest, improve neighborhoods, and create new opportunities within them. Across philanthropy, education, basketball, employment, children's literature, nonprofit board service, alumni leadership, coaching, entrepreneurship, and real estate, Daye's work ultimately centers on expanding access - access to education, athletics, employment, mentorship, financial knowledge, professional networks, representation, ownership, and opportunity.

His journey also offers young people a broader picture of what a life of possibility can look like. An athlete can become a coach. A coach can become an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur can become an investor. An investor can become a developer. A father can become an author. An alumnus can return as a mentor. And someone who once benefited from opportunity can grow into someone capable of creating opportunities for others.

For Daye, legacy is therefore about more than the championships, accolades, businesses, investments, or titles attached to his name. It is about using what he has learned and built to make the path wider for the people coming next - and showing young people from Newark and communities like it that where they begin does not have to determine where they can go.

For more information on the Larry Smith Award or Small College Basketball, please head to smallcollegebasketball.com.