

PRESS RELEASE

April 26, 2012

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HONOR THE 2012 GROUP II STATE CHAMPION MALCOLM X SHABAZZ H. S. GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM



The 2012 Group II State Champion Malcolm X Shabazz H. S. Girls Basketball Team was honored by the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders during its Wednesday, April 25, 2012, meeting held at the Hall of Records. Pictured above are members of the team and their coaches, as follows: (front row, l. to r.) Freeholder Carol Clark, Asst. Coach Toinette O'Neil, Aliyah Muhammad, Acestra Robinson, Asst. Coach Simone Baskerville, Head Coach Vanessa Watson and Aliyyah Handford; (second row, l. to r.) Aliliyah Butler, Naqaiyyah Teague, Doniyah Cliney, Ricshar Benjamin and Naquaisha Rattray; (third row, l. to r.) Syonah Williams, Zaire O'Neil, Hasanna Smith and DeAshia Jones; and Freeholder Rufus Johnson in the back. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

(Newark, NJ) – During its Wednesday, April 25^h, meeting held at the Hall of Records, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored the Malcolm X Shabazz High School Girls Basketball Team of Newark for winning the 2012 Group II State Championship.

The Malcolm X Shabazz High School Girls Basketball Team won the 2012 Group II State Championship with a 100-64 victory over Point Pleasant Boro High School on Sunday, March 11, 2012, at the Pine Belt Arena in Toms River, New Jersey. In the lead-up to the championship game, the team first won games against West Essex High School (70-23), Caldwell High School

(67-21), Hanover Park High School (66-35) and then Lincoln High School (72-32) to capture the North 2, Group II Sectional Championship on March 5th, before going on to defeat Pequannock High School (68-35) and then Point Pleasant Boro High School for the Group II State Championship Title.

The Lady Bulldogs finished their season with an outstanding record of 30 victories with only 2 losses, during which they also won the Super Essex Conference as its undefeated Champion (14-0), as well as their 4th straight Essex County Tournament Championship (15th overall and 10th in the last 11 years). The team, which has long-established the standard for excellence for girls basketball in New Jersey, previously won Group III State Championships in 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2009, before moving to Group II for the 2009-2010 season, where it has since won three consecutive State Championships in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Shabazz finished the season as the “Essex County Team of the Year” and ranked as the #3 girls basketball team in New Jersey by *The Star-Ledger*. The team was further recognized by honors bestowed upon three of its members: Senior Aliyyah Handford was named to the 1st Team All-Essex County for the 4th consecutive year, was named the “Essex County Player of the Year” for the 2nd consecutive year, and was named to the 1st Team All-State for the 4th consecutive year; Sophomore Zaire O’Neil was named to the 1st Team All-Essex County and 2nd Team All-State; and Sophomore De’Ashia Jones was named to the 1st Team All-Essex County.

The Malcolm X Shabazz High School Girls Basketball Team is comprised of the following members: **Seniors** Aliyyah Handford, Ricshar Benjamin, Hasanna Smith and Aliyah Muhammad; **Juniors** Naqaiyyah Teague, Maria Greene and Mayowa Olubakinde; **Sophomores** Doniyah Cliney, Syonah Williams, Zaire O’Neil, De’Ashia Jones, Altilyah Butler and Naquaisha Rattray; and **Freshmen** Acestra Robinson and Al-Quannisa Loyal. The Head Coach/Athletic Director was Vanessa Watson, and the Assistant Coaches were Simone Baskerville, Allen Watson and Toinette O’Neil. The team also received administrative support from State District Superintendent Cami Anderson and Principal Gemar Mill.

The Board’s Commendation was co-sponsored and presented to the team by Freeholder Carol Y. Clark of East Orange and Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson of Newark, former high school and college basketball players of note in their own right.

For Additional Information:
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