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## NAISMITH BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME ANNOUNCES THE PRESEASON WATCH LIST FOR THE 2026 MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CENTER OF THE YEAR AWARD

- Fan Voting Starts Today -

**SPRINGFIELD, MASS. (October 31, 2025)** — The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame announced the 20 watch-list candidates for the 2026 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award and, in partnership with the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA), the 20 watch-list candidates for the 2026 Lisa Leslie Award.

The annual Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award, named after the Class of 1995 Hall of Famer and three-time NCAA Champion, celebrates its 12th year by honoring the top centers in Division I men's college basketball.

The Lisa Leslie Award, now in its ninth year, recognizes the top centers in Division I women's college basketball. It is named after the three-time All-American, 1994 National Player of the Year, and Class of 2015 Hall of Famer.

### 2026 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award Candidates\*

|                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Malique Ewin       | Arkansas        |
| Moustapha Thiam    | Cincinnati      |
| Owen Freeman       | Creighton       |
| Patrick Ngongba II | Duke            |
| Alex Condon        | Florida         |
| Chris Cenac Jr.    | Houston         |
| Tomislav Ivišić    | Illinois        |
| Flory Bidunga      | Kansas          |
| Jayden Quaintance  | Kentucky        |
| Ernest Udeh Jr.    | Miami           |
| Aday Mara          | Michigan        |
| Rienk Mast         | Nebraska        |
| Henri Veesaar      | North Carolina  |
| Nate Bittle        | Oregon          |
| Oscar Cluff        | Purdue          |
| Robbie Avila       | Saint Louis     |
| Magoon Gwath       | San Diego State |
| Zuby Ejiofor       | St. John's      |
| Felix Okpara       | Tennessee       |
| Tarris Reed Jr.    | UConn           |

### 2026 Lisa Leslie Award Candidates\*

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Lara Rohkohl       | BYU                |
| Sakima Walker      | Cal                |
| Audi Crooks        | Iowa State         |
| Clara Strack       | Kentucky           |
| Laura Ziegler      | Louisville         |
| Kate Koval         | LSU                |
| Ra Shayla Kyle     | Miami              |
| Ashley Sofilkanich | Michigan           |
| Tilda Trygger      | NC State           |
| Megan Nestor       | North Texas        |
| Raegan Beers       | Oklahoma           |
| Gracie Merkle      | Penn State         |
| Madina Okot        | South Carolina     |
| Brooklyn Meyer     | South Dakota State |
| Kennedy Umeh       | Stanford           |
| Breya Cunningham   | Texas              |
| Lauren Ware        | Texas A&M          |
| Lauren Betts       | UCLA               |
| Serah Williams     | UConn              |
| Aalyah Del Rosario | Vanderbilt         |

*\*Players can play their way onto and off the list at any point in the 2025-26 season.*

Fans can support their favorite player by participating in Fan Voting starting today, Friday, October 31, via [hoophallawards.com](https://hoophallawards.com). In early February, the watch list of 20 players for the 2026 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Lisa Leslie Awards will be narrowed to 10, and then in early March, to just five. Later in March, the five finalists will be presented to Abdul-Jabbar, Leslie, and the Hall of Fame's selection committees, where winners will be selected. The Selection Committees for the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Lisa Leslie Awards are composed of top men's and women's college basketball personnel, including media members, head coaches, sports information directors, and Hall of Famers.

The winner of the 2026 Abdul-Jabbar and Leslie Awards will be presented on a to-be-determined date, along with the other four members of the Men's and Women's Starting Five. Additional awards being presented include the Bob Cousy and Nancy Lieberman Awards (Point Guard), Jerry West and Ann Meyers Drysdale Awards (Shooting Guard), Julius Erving and Cheryl Miller Awards (Small Forward), and the Karl Malone and Katrina McClain Awards (Power Forward).

Previous winners of the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award are **Ryan Kalkbrenner**, Creighton (2025), **Zach Edey**, Purdue (2023-24), **Oscar Tshiebwe**, Kentucky (2022), **Luka Garza**, Iowa (2020-21), **Ethan Happ**, Wisconsin (2019), **Angel Delgado**, Seton Hall (2018), **Przemek Karnowski**, Gonzaga (2017), **Jakob Poeltl**, Utah (2016), and **Frank Kaminsky**, Wisconsin (2015).

Previous winners of the Lisa Leslie Award are **Lauren Betts**, UCLA (2025), **Cameron Brink**, Stanford (2024), **Aliyah Boston**, South Carolina (2020-23), **Megan Gustafson**, Iowa (2019), and **A'ja Wilson**, South Carolina (2018).

For more information on the 2026 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Lisa Leslie Awards and the latest updates, visit [hoophallawards.com](https://hoophallawards.com) and follow **@hoophallu**, **#KareemAward**, and **#LeslieAward** on X and Instagram.

#### **About the WBCA:**

Founded in 1981, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association is the professional association for coaches of women's and girls' basketball at all levels of competition. The WBCA offers educational resources that coaches need to help make themselves better leaders, teachers, and mentors to their players; provides opportunities for coaches to connect with peers in the profession; serves as the unifying voice of a diverse community of coaches to those organizations that control the game; and celebrates those coaches, players, and other individuals who excel each year and contribute to the advancement of the sport. For more information, visit us online: [WBCA.org](https://WBCA.org), follow **@wbca1981**, or call 1-770-279-8027.

#### **About the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame**

Located in Springfield, Massachusetts, the city where basketball was born, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame is an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting, preserving, and celebrating the game of basketball at every level – men and women, amateur and professional players, coaches, and contributors, both domestically and internationally. The Hall of Fame museum is home to more than 475 inductees and over 40,000 square feet of basketball history. Nearly 200,000 people visit the Hall of Fame museum each year to learn about the game, experience the interactive exhibits and test their skills on the Jerry Colangelo "Court of Dreams." Best known for its annual marquee Enshrinement Ceremony honoring the game's elite, the Hall of Fame also operates over 150 high school and collegiate competitions annually throughout the country and abroad. For more information on the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame organization, its museum, and events, visit [hoophall.com](https://hoophall.com) and follow **@hoophallu**.

#### **Basketball Hall of Fame Media Contact**

Nicole Schuermann, Position Sports // [mediarelations@positionsports.com](mailto:mediarelations@positionsports.com)