

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



# Michigan State's Denzel Valentine wins 2016 Senior CLASS Award for men's basketball

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. (March 31, 2016) – AP Player of the Year Denzel Valentine of Michigan State University has been selected as the 2015-16 Senior CLASS Award® winner in NCAA® Division I men's basketball. The announcement was made tonight at the State Farm College Slam Dunk & 3-Point Championship, part of Final Four Weekend in Houston, Texas.

The award, chosen by a nationwide vote of Division I men's basketball coaches, national basketball media and fans, is given annually to the most outstanding senior student-athlete in Division I men's basketball. To be eligible for the award, a student-athlete must be classified as an NCAA Division I senior and have notable achievements in four areas of excellence: classroom, community, character and competition.

An acronym for *Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School*®, the Senior CLASS Award focuses on the total student-athlete and encourages students to use their platform in athletics to make a positive impact as leaders in their communities.

"It's an honor to be the Senior CLASS Award winner," said Valentine, who has earned first-team All-America honors by *Sporting News*, *USA TODAY Sports*, *Sports Illustrated* and the USBWA as well as being named a John R. Wooden Award All-American. "Being a leader is not easy. Everybody wants to be in a leadership position, but not everybody really wants to do the things necessary of being a leader. Once you are in that position, you have to be a role model, you have to set a good example, and most importantly you have to be willing to sacrifice for the good of the team and for your teammates. I believe that if you sacrifice for others, are humble, are good to people, and give back to the community, that good things will fall into place."

On the court, Valentine was a high-impact player for the Spartans all four years, guiding his team to the Elite Eight as a sophomore and an unexpected Final Four as a junior. He started his senior season on a high note, notching two triple-doubles early in the non-conference schedule, and he continued his success throughout the season, making or assisting on 50.9 percent of Michigan State's field goals during games in which he started. Valentine finished Big Ten play averaging 20.5 points and 7.8 assists

and led the Spartans to a conference tournament championship, being named the Big Ten Player of the Year following the regular season. So far, Valentine has earned national player of the year honors from multiple outlets including the AP, NABC, *USA Today*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Basketball Times*, and NBC Sports, with the potential for more to be added as the postseason continues.

“I was blessed with four great seniors this season, and Denzel Valentine was certainly at the top of that list,” said Michigan State Head Coach Tom Izzo, who has coached MSU to 18-straight NCAA Tournament appearances and one NCAA Title. “He embodies all the different aspects of the Senior CLASS Award. Obviously he’s received a great number of accolades for his on-court performance, and he’ll graduate this May. But what makes him truly special is his leadership and his service. He felt an obligation to his teammates, his basketball program, his university and even his community. And every day that he stepped in the gym, he worked to get better and accomplish great things for others. He became the face of this team, and he handled it with class.”

As committed to success off the court as he was on, Valentine will graduate this spring with a communications degree and will take with him a host of community outreach experiences. One of the most active volunteers on the Spartan basketball team, Valentine has worked with at-risk youth from the Lansing area, coordinated team visits to the Sparrow Hospital Pediatric Ward, participated in a Cinderella event to honor elementary students who raised money for Coaches vs. Cancer, and taken part in the National Walk to School event with Lansing Public Schools. He also arranged a meet and greet with a terminally ill patient whose lifetime wish was to meet the Michigan State men’s basketball team. As a lifelong resident of Lansing, Valentine remained connected to the local community throughout his career and actively looked for ways to be a positive role model for local children.

“We’re thrilled that Denzel was voted to be this year’s Senior CLASS Award winner,” said Erik Miner, executive director for the Senior CLASS Award. “This year’s college basketball season has been characterized by an abundance of talented seniors, which has become increasingly rare. For Denzel to stand out from such an impressive group is something for which he and the entire university can be very proud. Our sincere congratulations to him, his family and to Michigan State.”

For more information on all the finalists, visit [seniorCLASSaward.com](http://seniorCLASSaward.com).

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### **Senior CLASS Award First-Team All-Americans**

Ryan Arcidiacono, Villanova

Malcolm Brogdon, Virginia

Buddy Hield, Oklahoma

Justin Sears, Yale

Denzel Valentine, Michigan State

### **Senior CLASS Award Second-Team All-Americans**

Perry Ellis, Kansas

Georges Niang, Iowa State

Marcus Paige, North Carolina

Fred VanVleet, Wichita State

Kyle Wiltjer, Gonzaga

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### **ABOUT THE AWARD**

An acronym for *Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School*, the Senior CLASS Award honors the attributes of senior student-athletes in four areas: community, classroom, character and competition. The award program is designed exclusively for college seniors who are utilizing their complete athletic eligibility, remaining committed to their university and pursuing the many rewards a senior season can bring. Premier Sports Management manages the award.

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