

Issace Grady Jr. is all about details.

From the balloons to the pictures to the baked goods, Grady Jr. wanted to make sure everything was perfect. Add in some prepared remarks and music to set the tone as well as the proper clothing coordination – even though it was disguised – and the New Hope High School senior boys basketball player was ready for a day he had been waiting for since the third grade.

Under the watchful eye of his mother, Ernestine Munson, whose picture graced a special place on the table to his right, Grady Jr. announced his decision Tuesday morning to play basketball at Pearl River Community College.

“My mom is my backbone,” said Grady Jr., whose mother passed away in 2017. “I started playing basketball and she helped me out through a lot of things and taught me a lot of stuff, so I had to put her first.”

Grady Jr. said in his prepared remarks that his mother “believed in him” dating back to elementary school. Following the signing ceremony, he referenced the conversation he had with his mother at his home and said his mother saw a vision that he would have a future in basketball.

“She told me I would be big one day and that I would sign with a school one day,” Grady Jr. said. “It was just a regular talk.”

Even though Grady Jr. had a vision a day like Tuesday would come for him, plenty of hard work went into realizing the dream. New Hope coach Drew McBrayer praised Grady Jr. for that hard work and said he matured from a “shy” young man who transferred to New Hope High from Caledonia High. McBrayer said Grady Jr. played a big role as a sophomore on a team that advanced to the Mississippi High School Activities Association Class 5A state title game.

From there, McBrayer said Grady Jr. blossomed from a “role player” into a team leader with a potent outside shooting game. This past season, Grady Jr. was the team’s second-leading scorer (15 points per game) and leading rebounder (8.5).

“With Caleb (Parr) leaving and L.J. (Hackman) leaving and Issace and T.J. (Warren) and the rest of the guys having to learn how to become that type of leader, that is what has taken his game to the next level,” McBrayer said. “The leadership quality, I wasn’t sure if he was ever going to get there because he is so shy, but it has changed inside him and brought out that, too. He is not that shy kid who came here as a sophomore. There was a lot of work along the way. Credit to him because he spends hours in the gym working by himself.”

McBrayer envisions Grady Jr. continuing to grow at Pearl River C.C. and moving on to play at a four-year school. He said Grady Jr.’s willingness to coach a pee wee basketball team this past season added to his maturation. McBrayer said Grady Jr.’s growing confidence blended with his maturation and will help him be a “Swiss Army knife” type who can guard any position on the floor at the next level.

“He is the epitome of a Mississippi junior college kid,” McBrayer said. “He is a kid who can do all kinds of things who wasn’t given an opportunity to go play right away in today’s climate, but he will eventually end up on the next level past that.”

Itawamba C.C., Northeast Mississippi C.C., Jones College and East Mississippi C.C. also were interested in Grady Jr., who verbally committed to Pearl River C.C. on Jan. 18, 2024, which is his birthday. He kept the decision a secret even though plenty of people hounded him to tell them which college he was going to select.

When the music stopped and the hat case was opened Tuesday morning, Grady Jr., his father and other family members could finally take a layer off and reveal their Pearl River C.C. clothes.

To say Ernestine Munson would have been proud is an understatement because, after all, she saw this day coming – and will have a special place by her son’s side for the next one, too.

“I feel like I have learned a lot from coach McBrayer and the coaching staff in the last three years,” said Grady Jr., who also credited former New Hope High assistant coach Jaylon Bardley for his help. “Coach McBrayer made me be more outgoing. I was a very shy person when I first got here, but I surrounded myself with people and started talking more and putting myself out there.

“This is just another step to work hard. First it was high school and next it will be college. When I get to college I am going to have to work even harder.”