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By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

Kyrie Irving of the Cleveland Cavaliers was named the 2012 Rookie of the Year, beating out another point guard Ricky Rubio of the Minnesota Timberwolves. The ascent has been rapid for the 19 year-old former New Jersey high school player from St. Patrick’s who last year, due to an injury, played just 11 games as a freshman at Duke.

The Cavs number 1 overall pick in last year's draft, was clearly the league's top first year player, leading all rookies. The 20-year-old is the secondCleveland player to win the award, joining LeBron James in 2004.Irving's award was expected. It wasn't a matter of if, but when, he would get it.

Irvingreceived 117 of 120 possible first-place votes from a nationwide media panel of 120 writers and broadcasters.Irvingfinished with 592 points, way ahead ofMinnesota's Ricky Rubio (170) andDenver's Kenneth Faried (129), who was third.

Faried,San Antonio's Kawhi Leonard andNew York's Iman Shumpert received the other first-place votes, denyingIrving's bid to become the fourth player to win the award unanimously.

However, it was the other elements of his game was known for his crossover dribble, a man who many times wanted to get to the basket and make things happen. Irving, who played only 11 games at Duke before turning pro, regularly took over games down the stretch for the Cavaliers. He kept them competitive and in the playoff race until mid-March when the team's front office decided to build for the future by trading his backup, guard Ramon Sessions, to the Los Angeles Lakers for a first-round draft pick.

OnceMinnesota's Ricky Rubio went down with a season-ending knee injury,Irvingbecame the runaway favorite to win rookie of the year honors. And beyond his impressive statistics,Irvingbrought hope to the Cavs and Cleveland fans, who have spent the past two seasons trying to move past James leaving as a free agent before he could bring them their first league title.

Irving, who had averages of 18.5 ppg, 5.4 apg and 3.7 rpg while shooting at a .469 clip would have likely won, but Rubio’s season-ending injury two-thirds through the compacted campaign may have cinched it for the number one overall selection of the most recent draft. His first-place finish also prevented a trend of having a player not selected in the preceding draft class win the award. Last season, Blake Griffin won after missing his entire first year due to a knee injury and then Spaniard Rubio, although drafted in 2009 played the previous two seasons in Europe.

All year Irvinghas played his very best each time he was on the floor. Irving appears to be the main man in the puzzle that the Cavs can build around, and they plan to get him some help next month with three of the top 34 picks in the NBA draft. The Cavs got lucky and won the draft lottery a year ago, paving the way for them to select Irving.

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At the Rising Stars game during All-Star Weekend in Orlando, Irving made all eight 3-pointers to win MVP honors. Posing for a photograph afterward, Irving lowered the crystal he was presented and told the photographer, "Make sure you get the Cleveland" on the front of his jersey.

“I can't wait to add some pieces this summer and see what happens next year with him,” said Cavs owner Dan Gilbert, who opened his downtown casino on Monday night. “He's great and the way he carries himself is really remarkable. He's 20 years old. That wasn't me at 20 - or 40. He can't have a drink legally or come into our casino but he can do everything else.”