

Section 1

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

Name of Nominee: Marissa Kae Walker

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: David Sousa, Athletic Director Waterford High School

Phone: 860-389-7901

Email: dsousa@waterfordschools.org

Street Address: 20 Rope Ferry Rd

City, State, Zip Code: Waterford, CT 06385

Date: January 5, 2018

State Association Endorsements:

Name: David Sousa

Title: Athletic Director Waterford High School

Signature: *David Sousa*

Name: Dr. Karissa Niehoff

Title: Executive Director

Signature: *Dr. Karissa E. Niehoff*

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

X Student

Name of Nominee: Marissa Kae Walker

**Current Address: 2 White Oak Lane
Quaker Hill, CT 06375**

Phone: (H) 860-437-3122 (C) 860-857-4763

E-mail: Marissakw7@gmail.com

School: Waterford High School

City: Waterford

State: Connecticut

Parents: Peter and Kari Walker

Address: 2 White Oak Lane, Quaker Hill CT 06375

Phone: (Home: 860-437-3122; Peter Cell: 719-963-7666; Kari cell: 860-833-7666)

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award".

Andrew Walker, Head Softball Coach Waterford High School

(The following is the nomination letter submitted to the state of Connecticut this past fall)

It is with great pleasure and pride that I nominate Marissa Walker, a senior at Waterford High School, (Waterford, Connecticut) for the NFHS Spirit of Sport Award. I am certain there are many nominations throughout the country of very worthy recipients for this incredible honor...but I cannot think of anyone I have come across in 25 years of coaching, at all levels of sport, that is more deserving to be recognized for her spirit and courage in sport, than this young lady. She inspires me and everyone that comes in contact with her on a daily basis.

Marissa is a *cancer conqueror*. She was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma at age 9, on February 2, 2009. At the time of the diagnosis, Marissa excelled at sports...all sports...and ran faster than any student at Quaker Hill Elementary School. She was a natural talent, with a future in athletics as bright as her smile. Whether it was softball, basketball, or soccer, she was a stand out.

The diagnosis was devastating...she had a massive tumor in her knee that had to be removed. Ten weeks of chemotherapy preceded "limb salvage" surgery at University Hospital in New Jersey, where they removed her knee and 70% of her femur. Despite endless days in the hospital and an additional 18 weeks of chemotherapy which ended on November 8, 2009, she remained upbeat, and certain that she would continue to play the sports she loved. Soccer and basketball were no longer options for her to participate in; however, pitching a softball was something she still could do. And that she did, pitching her Waterford North Little League softball team to the District championship game less than 2 years after her diagnosis. The expandable prosthetic joint and femur that was designed and placed in Marissa's leg had to be "adjusted" as she grew...every 2-3 months...twenty-three times! After each "lengthening" she had weeks of PT that followed. Grueling hard work...but she was driven....never giving up...and determined to play. Her surgeon, Dr. Benevenia, knew her love of sport and wanted to help Marissa continue participating, and told her if the prosthetic piece broke, that he would make her a new one...which it did when in 6th grade, where another major surgery ensued. Again in the hospital, more PT followed. While in 8th grade, again the expandable joint broke, another major surgery followed, placing a permanent titanium rod in its place. Any other person would probably have decided at this point that maybe sports were not a safe or viable option anymore, when considering the pain and frustration of the constant battle physically and mentally...but not Marissa...the fire and determination to compete grew stronger. Despite three additional surgeries during her high school career: a customized piece for her hip (sophomore year); Knee cap scraping (Junior year); Nerve burning and Patella scraping (August of this year)...and now awaiting a major surgery in January for a total knee replacement.

Marissa fights on, determined to be on the field at some point during her senior year despite the odds. Again, she will live in physical therapy.

Marissa is the Captain of the 2018 Waterford HS Softball team. Despite the long list of surgeries, lengthenings, thousands of hours of physical therapy...she is expecting to pitch this spring and contribute in a very strong program and conference. It is amazing to see her "spirit of sport" ...to witness what she has endured since 2009...the pain, the disappointments, and frustrations, yet she perseveres with a smile. Oh, and there have been incredible moments of success for her on the field. Yes, she earned a varsity win pitching as a freshman, and every year following, but the true victory is Marissa stepping into the circle and competing...where she belongs...where she always wanted to be...with her teammates...and the ball in her hand.

Since 2010, Waterford and Stonington High School (a division rival), have joined to compete in an annual softball game known as "The Play For A Cure Game", an event that grows in attendance and fundraising every year. Marissa has been a part of this game since its beginning...from throwing out the first pitch in 2010 to being the game's winning pitcher in 2015. A miracle, no...just a young lady that would not be denied...her will to compete is beyond measure. Marissa's "spirit of sport" represents the true essence of why we play, and we are reminded of how far she has come, and what she endured, and still endures every time this "Play For A Cure" game is played on an annual basis. For Marissa and her family, the reminder is a daily one. She inspires us all to be the best we can be, evidenced by a scar that runs the full length of her leg, while exhibiting an attitude that there is nothing she can't overcome.

Academically, Marissa has been a high honor student since middle school, earning the Rotary Student of The Year in 2012, and the Waterford Board of Education Student of the Year Award in 2013. She was selected to the National Honor Society as a junior, elected to Class Council all four years, and is the Key Club secretary. Marissa is looking to pursue a medical career in Pediatric Oncology, a career she knows too well and grew up observing as a patient, and now wants to help others that will face the same struggles that she has. She has received early acceptance into the University of Miami to continue her education.

As the Head Coach of the Waterford High School Softball team, and also Marissa's uncle, I have a very unique view of this remarkable young lady. I remember how incredibly gifted she was and the athletic potential she possessed...any sport she wanted to play she could have made her own and excelled. I have witnessed her struggle up close...the tears, the heartache, the pain, the disappointment, the frustration...gutting out bullpen sessions fighting through the pain, but she never let anyone see it. Marissa did not want pity, and still doesn't. Her inner strength and resilient spirit is what makes her so special...her love of competition...her love for her teammates... and her love of the game. Every pitch she throws is special, whether it is inside or outside the strike zone. She takes nothing for granted. She would truly give anything to run a warm up lap before practice with her teammates...to sprint out of the batter's box to first base after hitting a line drive base hit...or to chase down a fly ball in the gap. Cancer may have taken her ability to run like the wind as she did in 3rd grade, but it couldn't touch her soul...her spirit...or her heart. In fact, it has only magnified character traits that existed prior to

her diagnosis...courage beyond her years, and a quiet intensity that always results with her conquering the next obstacle or challenge in her life. Marissa Walker is a winner even if she never steps on the field of play again...because her "spirit of sport" can never be taken away; it is a permanent part of her. She is the true definition of a "Warrior Athlete"...Marissa is fearless...and her will to succeed and meet any of life's challenges, is a living lesson for all that come in contact with her.

2. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Elizabeth Cano, Marissa's Spanish Teacher for 3 years

It is my pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for the Spirit of Sport Award on behalf of Marissa Walker. I first met Marissa as a sophomore in my Spanish 3 Advanced class, and I have had the honor to be her teacher for an additional two years. Her coach has written about her athletic ability, which I know little about except for the videos and newspaper articles that I have hanging on my wall. However, what I can attest to is her drive to do the best that she can despite her surgeries and her daily struggles with pain. She does not want you to feel badly for her or to pity her because of her condition; therefore, she does not talk about the really hard days. I can see the pain in her face or she will lie down on the floor, none the less she rarely gives in. If there is a day that she is unable to manage, she always stops by to see me or she sends an email to be sure that the work she is missing can be made up at another time. I have never met a student that is as mature, responsible, and strong willed as Marissa.

Another characteristic that stands out about Marissa is her kindness to others and her leadership in a classroom. She will never question what group she is placed in or what she is asked to do. Her honesty and candidness are also shining spots in her personality. Last year my colleague and I asked volunteers from Spanish 4 Advanced to talk to other students in 3 Advanced about continuing to take Spanish and why they felt it was important. Marissa was the first to volunteer. I knew that she would talk to them from her heart and that there was no need to prepare her in any way. She went to all 3 advanced classes and told them that she really did not want to continue in Spanish, but in the end she was happy that she had and she explained to the students how she came to her decision. She was honest and comical which definitely helped kids decide to continue. She has held an A- all three of the years that she has been with me in Spanish. Marissa makes me laugh on a regular basis as she has a beautiful sense of humor and a sparkle in her eye despite all of the things that she has endured. I cannot imagine that there is a better candidate for the Spirit of Sport award as Marissa has the most amazing spirit for everything that she does. I truly believe that any other student would have given up sports, but for Marissa it just is not an option. I look forward to seeing her play at the Cure for Cancer event in the spring.

Stephanie Hartell, AP English Language and Composition Teacher for Marissa

I had the privilege of teaching Marissa Walker last year in our AP English Language and Composition course. She has been a delight to teach and is a deserving recipient for the Spirit

of Sport award. I'm sure Marissa's application has multiple references to her struggles with cancer and her motivation to exceed in sports. What may not yet be conveyed is the resolve Marissa has to not use her illness as an excuse. Marissa never missed an assignment, never failed to participate. Sometimes in class, I could see by her ashen expression or fidgeting that she was in intense pain, but she never once asked to leave class. On days when her leg was at its worst, she would stand against the wall, fully participating in class. Marissa is serious about research and advancement in cancer treatment. For her semester long research paper and presentation last year, she focused on the inequities in cancer funding for juvenile cancers. She interviewed doctors, reviewed years of federal funding, and explained her findings and answered questions about her cancer for our class. Taking it beyond the academics, Marissa met with administrators this fall and organized a hat day, a basketball game, and a bracelet sale to raise funds for juvenile cancers. She also wants to study medicine in college. She has not let cancer limit her, but she has used her experiences to educate and create change. Marissa is loved at Waterford High School. She is a positive force that has enhanced our school and is deserving of recognition for her drive and dedication.

Brett Arnold, Social Studies Teacher. Head Swimming Coach

It is without reservation that I nominate Marissa Walker for the NFHS "Spirit of Sport Award". I have known Marissa for four years, during her time at Waterford High School. She has been a student in class, a member of the swim team that I coach, and has been a member of the Waterford Young Leaders Program that is run by the teachers of Waterford High School. During the course of the 20 years I have been teaching and coaching, Marissa is certainly one of the finest people I have encountered. I believe she would be a great ambassador of the "Spirit of Sport Award" if selected. I first met Marissa during a chance encounter when she was a child practicing swimming with her father. Before I even learned of her illness I saw a person with potential in the water. As she grew older I learned of the seriousness of her illness. I knew we could help offer her an outlet to help relieve the pressure within her body. As she continued to grow and got ready to enter her freshman year she contacted me about joining the swim team. I thought to myself, her time is here. I could see she wanted to "bust it out of the gates", but also realized the seriousness of what she has endured. It was difficult to corral that energy, but we kept saying let's try to see the big picture here. By the end of her first season she was competing with the varsity athletes, and swimming with girls who would go on to swim in NCAA Division I and II programs. She helped foster a great team environment and contributed in quite a few races. She had all the promise and ability you could ask for. By the time we were ready to start our next season, Marissa was not physically able to be with us. The cancer in her leg had caused too many issues, and she was walking on crutches. This might have kept back others, but not our Marissa. She did all she could to return to sports, and by the spring she was back on the mound playing softball. Although we were sad that she could not compete with our swim team, we could not have been prouder of the strength and perseverance she showed in making it back not just to sports, but to life. During the winter of her sophomore year she was selected by the teachers and administrators to be one of 15 students from her class that would participate in the Waterford Young Leaders Program. This program selects students from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes that have been identified as potential leaders on their sports teams, class council, drama, band, etc. This program is run by Waterford High

School teachers who teach students about the styles of leadership and how to work with others. Sometimes I left activities that Marissa had participated in, and thought to myself that she has taught me something new, not vice versa. She is a remarkable young lady with a vision that you do not see from many 18 year old high school seniors. Marissa is a young lady that has battled cancer for over half her life. It is a part of her, but it is not what defines her. She could run towards any career she wants to. Marissa is a smart, compassionate, athletic, caring and funny individual. She wants to pursue a career in helping pediatric cancer patients. She can be the beacon that they can look to as they battle their cancer diagnosis. She is a person that understands her role in our community, and has all the promise to do all the right things for the people who need it the most.

Yuan-Yuan Chen, Marissa's Guidance Counselor

Marissa has played varsity softball since her freshman year; Marissa earned an 11th place finish in the State 50 freestyle sprint during her freshman year; Marissa Walker was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma when she was nine and has had five major surgeries on her knee and a femur replacement. The worst part of this up-hill journey was that the progress which she gained after each operation always evaporated, over and over again. She is absolutely optimistic; she goes to physical therapy and the gym religiously with hope she could be back on the softball field in time; she patiently sits on the bench waiting for the possibility to play; she turns the locker room into a study lounge and humorously titles herself a "D4 athletic scholar". Her spirit follows her into every classroom and into all of her endeavors. Because of the lingering pain, continuous surgeries, unexpected length of recovery time, and the constant influence of the pain medication, Marissa has no choice but to make every second count. Teachers frequently remark on her willingness to accept instruction and participate in all classroom activities. Marissa impresses every teacher with her "readiness", and her grades attest that she is superb at managing her time and setting priorities. Like many outstanding students, Marissa recognizes her goal, develops a step-by-step plan, and patiently takes action. She was very upset when she could not convince me to approve her in taking as many science classes as she planned to. I have never told a student that they cannot challenge themselves, but I had to put her health first. Marissa was also very frustrated by her standardized test scores; I recognized that she physically could not handle the length of the test. In conclusion, I have every reason to believe that she will generate the same academic enthusiasm, level of interest and consistent effort in any college she chooses. Despite all the events that are out of her control, Marissa wants to be active in her community. She was not a stranger to the junior prom fundraising events; she often sells hot dogs behind the concession stand and wraps Christmas presents at her local church. She transfers her passion for softball to help organize the game and practices. Marissa is a survivor; Marissa is a fighter. I strongly encourage you to give Marissa Walker every consideration for this prestigious award.

Marissa Walker – nomination information from you

Part 1:

Activities – list memberships in clubs, community service, etc. Provide hours per week and years of participation and any leadership roles held. (If using an acronym like GASP, LIFE, etc. please describe the organization).

Marissa is involved in Class Council, as a class officer for 2018, Key Club Member of 3 years, and helps to raise awareness towards childhood cancer research. She organized a Hat Day for Childhood Cancer, which became a schoolwide event and managed to raise over \$900.00, with just a week's notice for classmates to participate. In addition she is currently organizing a Go Gold Basketball Game for childhood cancer research, where children who passed away from cancer will be honored, as well as children who survived will be recognized. All the proceeds from the game will go to a foundation for cancer research. She takes pride in this, and her goal is to take time to raise awareness in her town about this issue.

Academic Achievements and Awards – example – National Honor Society, etc. note the years awarded.

Marissa was inducted into the National Honor Society her junior year and is a High Honor/Honor student throughout all her four years at Waterford High School. She has taken a total of 5 advanced placement courses her sophomore and junior year and is currently taking 3 advanced placement courses her senior year.

Musical/Theatrical Activities Achievements – list grade(s) of participation, instruments, played, leadership roles, awards, etc.

Marissa was too distracted with academics, athletics, and her personal struggles to try to endure more theatrical roles in the school, although she did help with choreography for the Waterford High School's dance team her sophomore year, even though she was not able to participate herself because she was waiting for a major surgery at the time.

Artistic Activities and Achievements – list grade(s) of participation, leadership roles, awards achieved, (i.e. your AP art class and other art classes/architecture classes taken)

Marissa is currently enrolled in an Art 1 class, and took a Photography class and Digital Art and Design class her sophomore year.

Athletic Activities and Achievements – list grade(s) of participation, team, JV or V, note years etc. (include youth)

- ECC qualifier for 50 Freestyle Sprint - Freshman year, was unable to continue swimming due to her multiple leg surgeries after freshman year.
- CIAC Spirit of Sport Award (State of CT)
- Play 4 The Cure Advocate for Softball, raised money for childhood cancer through her athletics

- 4 year varsity letter winner for softball - starting pitcher and pitched many varsity wins, even pushing through leg pain and recovering from surgeries that occurred prior to the season. Captain, senior year.

Part 2:

Discuss your academic experiences at WHS – What classes have you most enjoyed? Why? About which subject area do you feel most enthusiastic?

My favorite classes throughout my high school career would have to be AP English from my junior year, my Anatomy class from junior year, and my ECE Biology class I am enrolled in this year. They have been some of the most demanding classes, but most enjoyable for me. I loved the way my English class led me to want to learn to do more research on topics that I am personally inspired about, for example, pediatric cancer treatment research. I also loved my anatomy class and my biology class because of how in depth we go learning about cells, tissue, movement of the body and information within DNA. I do not think I would ever know about these topics if it were not for these classes.

Describe the academic programs that you plan to explore in college – your selected major field of study? Why is this field of interest to you?

I plan to explore more classes related to psychology and biology, but I am planning to major in nursing, as I have been selected to be in the nursing program at the University of Miami. This field interests me because of everything I have had to endure at such a young age. I met some amazing people in the medical field who actually were sick when they were younger as well, so it was always inspiring to see how successful and healthy they became. I think I would excel in this field because I know what it is like to be the patient and I learned what type of nurse I would want to be based on the people I have met.

Explain your involvement in extra-curricular activities including community service. What are your favorite activities? Why? How has your participation in clubs, organizations, and community service activities been of benefit to your group and other individuals? Would you continue to participate in one or more of these activities in college?

I am involved in Class Council, Key Club, and a part of the Varsity Softball team at my school. My favorite activities would be participating in softball. I grew up surrounded by sports as a kid, and even when I got sick, softball was the one thing I was able to continue to do, even after my countless surgeries. I would definitely consider joining different clubs and intramurals when I go to college, especially if they have a softball one. I also want to continue my community service in raising money for pediatric cancer research, and maybe even try and organize my own club for these efforts at University of Miami.

Discuss any special talents that may impact your college search such as art, music, theater, and/or athletics.

I wanted to have a school that held a great fan base for sports, along with a variety of different sports to cheer on. Miami has everything I could have hoped for, and even though I once dreamed of playing a sport in college before I was sick, I am still going to be a part of a great

experience. I am always going to be an athlete, just one that now has a better perspective on what is truly important.

Discuss any special circumstances that have contributed to your high school performance, either positively or negatively. Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to, experiences with a favorite teacher or coach, academic and/or personal challenges, learning differences.

I know some people may not see it this way, but I am extremely blessed to have the privilege to play a varsity sport. After witnessing harsh experiences and going through surgeries that I have gone through, I am blessed to be able to even walk down my hallway. Most teenage athletes think it should be a right to play on the varsity squad, but I see it as a complete privilege to even be stepping on a field, court, or swimming pool.

Parent Brag Sheet – Answers supplied by Marissa’s father, Pete Walker

Describe any outstanding accomplishments of Marissa’s and why?

Despite enduring numerous surgeries, non-stop rehab protocols and mental hurdles Marissa has found a way to participate in varsity swimming and varsity softball. She is presently the captain of the softball team and has earned victories in each season. Anytime she sets foot on the field is a major accomplishment in itself.

Most development and growth while in high school.

Marissa’s experiences have given her a very advanced perspective on life. In high school this perspective shines daily. She is mature beyond her years because of the circumstances of her life and the special people she has been “fortunate” enough to come in contact with.

Personality traits – describe Marissa’s approach to life, attitude and other notables.

I’ve been in professional baseball for 27 years as a player and a coach and I have never been around someone as “tough” as Marissa. Her perseverance through extreme adversity and determination to fight while still maintaining a tremendous sense of humor is unmatched.

What five adjectives would you use to describe Marissa?

Witty, Determined, Tough, Laid Back and a “tad” cynical....Don’t complain around her!!

Unusual personal circumstances which have affected Marissa

Undergoing chemotherapy and numerous surgeries over the years have made it difficult to maintain her high standard for education, but she has done it! Having to play catch up and study in pain would have been reason enough to succumb to lesser grades, but Marissa found a way to maintain a high level of learning. If not for all these hurdles she would certainly be competing for valedictorian and a division I athletic scholarship in whatever sport she chose. She is that talented!!

- **Supplemental Videos and Articles on Marissa Walker:**

1. Video/article about Marissa Walker and the “Play for a Cure Game”

<http://www.theday.com/article/20150504/SPORT03/150509668>

2. Article about Marissa Walker Swimming for WHS Varsity as a Freshman

<http://www.theday.com/article/20141102/SPORT03/311029926>

3. Article about Marissa Walker Spirit Of Sport Award for Connecticut

<http://www.theday.com/article/20171206/SPORT03/171209553>

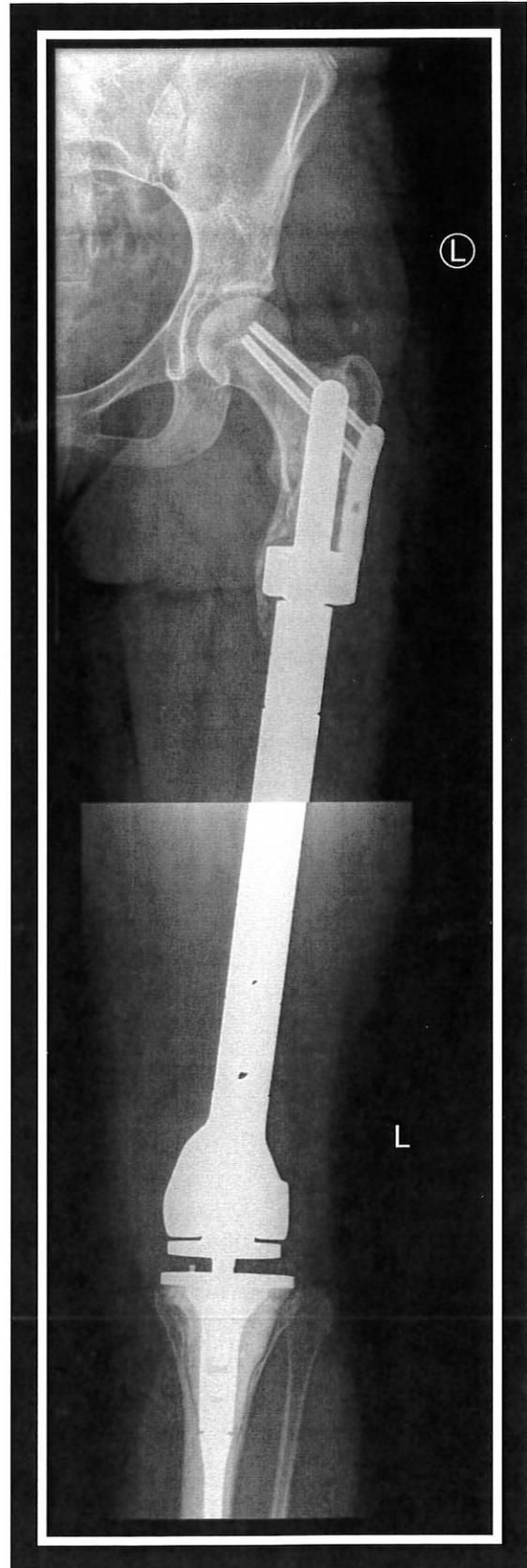
4. Video about Marissa and “Play for the Cure Game”:

<https://peterhuoppi.com/2017/04/22/wiredzone-waterford-stonington-play-for-the-cure-softball/>

Marissa's Left Leg:

The photo to the right is an X-Ray of Marissa's left leg.

The object seen in the photo is **the permanent titanium rod** that runs from her hip through her Tibia.





NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

The deadline for returning the completed nomination
to the MIAA Office is Friday, January 19, 2018.

Name of Nominee: Kate Labisser
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Peter Boucher (Coachs Tim Walsh, TS DOLLIVER & Tammy Webber)
Phone: 508-962-6855
E-mail: Pboucher@Milfordma.com
Street Address: 31 West. Fountain St.
City, State, Zip Code: Milford, MA 01757
Date: 1/9/18

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Peter Smith
Title: Associate Director
Signature: P. Smith

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

The deadline for returning the completed nomination
to the MIAA Office is Friday, January 19, 2018.

- Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer
 Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Kate Lobisser
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 31 Whitewood Rd.
(street address)
Milford, MA 01757
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 508-294-3177

E-mail: Leslie.Lobisser@gmail.com

School (if any): Milford High School

City: Milford State: MA

NOMINATION FORM

The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the MIAA Office is Friday, January 19, 2018.

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Please see attached

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Please see attached

National High School Spirit of Sport Award > Kate Lobisser

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Kate Lobisser is one of the most involved students at Milford High School. She is member of the varsity volleyball and basketball teams, Best Buddies, C.A.R.E., Peer Mentoring, and National Honor Society, and volunteers with the school's Unified Basketball team. She also volunteers at Milford Hospital in her "spare time" when she isn't working on her academics, athletics, and school activities. To the best of my knowledge, she has not received any awards or honors thus far, but there is not a single student that I/we have ever encountered who is more deserving of an award than Kate Lobisser. She volunteers for these community service hours because she wants to help others and make a difference in her peers and her community (she has mentioned this to us multiple times.) And Kate volunteers to help anywhere and everywhere that the school or Athletic Department in general deem worthy to endeavor our students and efforts. If we want to get something moving, you can bet that Kate Lobisser will help with her time, energy, enthusiasm, and she'll do it with a big infectious smile!

Kate Lobisser is highly involved in many of Milford High School's extracurricular activities. Athletically, she is a member of the varsity volleyball and basketball teams. Off the court, she is an active member of C.A.R.E., Best Buddies, Peer Mentoring, and volunteers for the Unified Basketball Team. Academically, she is a strong student, who is a member of the National Honor Society. Due to her selflessness and commitment, she was unanimously voted by her volleyball teammates as the Best Sportswoman this past season.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Basketball Coaches Submission (Tim Walsh and TJ Dolliver)

I have never encountered a student like Kate Lobisser and doubt very much I will encounter another student like her anytime soon. To begin, Kate is the ultimate leader. Of course, she is vocal, but always in an encouraging manner, which motivates her peers. More importantly, Kate always does the right thing in the classroom and on the court/field to show her peers how to behave. Kate is not the fastest player, but she routinely beats her faster teammates in sprints because just works harder than they do. There are numerous examples of Kate outworking more skilled players, which forces her teammates to work harder. I can think of no better quality in a leader than one who leads by example. To continue, Kate is one of the most selfless individuals at Milford High School. While most of her friends made the varsity basketball team as sophomores and juniors, Kate had to play on the junior varsity team. Kate never complained or even showed a bit of dissatisfaction because, whether she agreed or not with the decision, Kate did what was best for the team. She worked hard at practice, and always maintained a positive attitude. She was always the most vocal player encouraging her teammates to get better. Kate was never concerned with individual performance, but would rather the team

succeed above all else. Serving as both a varsity basketball and softball assistant coach, I can say that this quality is incredibly rare in high school athletes in the 21st Century. I can recount numerous other athletes that would be pouting after games we won if they did not perform well individually. I can honestly say that Kate was never upset after a win, regardless of her individual contributions. As I stated, Kate was a junior varsity player during her junior year, and she was one of the strongest players on the team. Although Kate was never concerned with her individual performance, she was crucial to the JV team's success. During the final few weeks of the season, Kate was experiencing severe discomfort in her foot, but she refused to go to the doctor and continued to play because her team needed her to play well to finish the season. After the season ended, Kate finally went to the doctor and she found out she had a BROKEN FOOT! Please let that sink in... Kate played basketball for weeks on a broken foot because she did not want to let her JV teammates down. I am still shocked by her selfless act. Finally, I would just like to note Kate's concern for others. She is always looking out for her friends and fellow MHS classmates. She routinely volunteered for my Unified Basketball team even though she had dozens of other tasks to complete. She always found time for my athletes because she truly loves improving the lives of others. Most incredibly, to my knowledge, Kate has never received any awards or ever been named a captain, but I can not think another athlete more deserving of an award than Kate Lobisser. Despite never being rewarded for her actions, she continues to lead, to act selflessly, and to improve the lives of others. It's finally time to acknowledge Kate's actions with an award, the National High School Spirit of Sport Award seems perfect and beyond fitting for her to be recognized.

Volleyball Coach Submission (Tamara Webber)

Although, I have only had the privilege of coaching Kate Lobisser directly for one half of a varsity volleyball season, it has definitely been enough time to get to know the type of person she is. Since my first interaction with Kate was as a bystander, I quickly learned many things about her character. She was a senior who was thrown into a position of "bench player", and even with hard work, skill, and dedication, she was unable to get herself on the court. I watched to see if her demeanor would change toward the negative. Instead,, she became the ultimate team player, supporting the younger players who she knew she was better than. She was the first to congratulate or console her teammates, remaining upbeat through her adversity. When I was given the opportunity to take over the team midseason, I knew she belonged on the court. She brings a positive, upbeat attitude that defines a "team player". There were several reasons the team began winning again, but her presence on the court played a significant role. She was not the leader in any statistical category, but she could be counted on to play consistently and make huge plays when needed.

Moreover, Kate was the first to volunteer for anything that was needed for the team and program. She spearheaded the "Coaches versus Cancer" game ensuring we had everything we needed to have a successful night, raising over \$1,300.00.

When speaking to the varsity coach from last season, she told me a "Kate story"...Kate was a starter last year who did not get upset during the senior night game. She was the only player that did not get back on the court, because of a coaching oversight. Kate did not say anything except, "the seniors should get their time, it's ok".

As previously stated, this year's team unanimously voted Kate as our Best Sportswoman, and I could not agree anymore. I have coached for three decades, and a student-athlete like Kate is very rare these days. Through my playing days and early years coaching, it was not uncommon to have juniors and seniors sitting on the bench. They accepted

their roles and continued to practice and play at a high level. They wanted the experience of being part of the team in any capacity. The team first mentality clearly defines Kate; she was happy whether she was playing or standing on the sidelines, happy to compete and to be part of the team. They do not make many student-athletes like Kate and that is why she would be a worthy recipient of this award.

Director of Athletics (Peter Boucher) Additional Information:

As an addition, I (AD Peter Boucher) would like to add that you can encapsulate Kate Lobisser in this scenario that I witnessed on the basketball court a few days ago. Kate is relatively tall (5'10" or so) and athletically inclined, that is to that she "looks" very athletic when you see her. During a very competitive game with a rival league basketball team and in a game we needed to win to stay competitive in our division she had a sportsmanlike act of ambassadorship that truly defines who she is and what she demonstrates daily at Milford High School. She and a few teammates went up for a defensive rebound and only 1 opposing player was under the boards rivaling for the rebound. All the gals went up for it and Kate and another Milford player really "pancaked" the opposing girl, not on purpose, simply by the inertia of their movement and their jump towards the ball...the girl was in between them. The opposing player was fouled very hard by Kate and her teammate and she consequently fell to the floor hard, you could hear the thud as she hit the floor. The gym went quiet to see how the girls would react...this is the type of moment every AD quietly fears as it could get verbal or physical in an instant in the heat of the competition. Most of that girl's teammates had run up the court as they thought she had rebounded the ball so there was no one to help her up. The opposing player was struggling to slowly get up and Kate stepped right over and extended her hand to help her to her feet > this doesn't happen a lot in sports these days as it is considered "taboo" to help the opposition up these days for some reason. Kate did not hesitate or even think twice, she knew instinctively it was the right thing to do...and the two quickly hugged after such a hard play and crowds from BOTH schools ERUPTED in unison supporting the hard play and the sportsmanship that was demonstrated. It was a galvanizing moment for the game and a typical defining public moment for Kate Lobisser, this is who she is all the time. This was an awesome sportsman moment created by Kate Lobisser and this type of behavior is normal for her, we see these types of displays in many different ways and forms from her... Her work with Best Buddies and Unified Basketball alone would be a substantiating factor for her nomination, but she is so much more than that to us and our surrounding community. 😊

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Nick Zahos
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Mike Raymond

Phone: 908-284-7175

E-mail: mraymond@hcrhs.org

Street Address: 84 Route 31

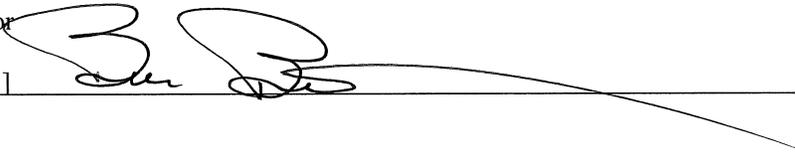
City, State, Zip Code: Flemington, New Jersey 08822

Date: November 12, 2017

State Association Endorsement:

Name: NJSIAA

Title: Assistant Director

Signature: [Bill Bruno] 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: **Nick Zahos**
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: **14 Menlo Dr Whitehouse Station NJ 08889**
(street address)

Phone: **732- 433-6880**

E-mail: **tomzahos@aol.com**

School (if any): **Hunterdon Central Regional High School**

City: **Flemington** State: **New Jersey**

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Nick Zahos is a 2 year starting linebacker on the varsity football team at Hunterdon Central High School. In addition, Nick also participates on the varsity lacrosse team. This past football season, Nick was selected as team captain by his peers and helped lead them to a successful year. Nick hopes to compete in football on the college level.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Nick suffered cardiac arrest a couple days following the 2016 season. Nick's brother performed CPR immediately and saved his life. Doctors were not sure if Nick would ever be able to compete in sports again. But, after consultation with some of the best heart specialists in the country Nick and his family decided to have a procedure done so he could attempt to play again. Doctors planted a device underneath his rib cage to monitor his heart and detect any possible threats. Nick immediately began working himself back to shape in order to prepare himself to play football in his senior season. On July 4th, 2017 he was fully cleared to participate in full contact sports and never looked back. He went on to be named captain and starting linebacker for the 2017 season. His story, perseverance and determination is an inspiration to all.

Here is an article that was on nj.com and in the Star Ledger regarding Nick Zahos.

<http://s.nj.com/alurdAY>

Here is the video that goes along with the article.

<https://youtu.be/GszD8FMhmww>

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Molly Louise Pullen and Claire Sophia Pullen
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Mr. Warren Kinsey, Assistant High School Principal, Penn Yan Academy

Phone: (315) 536-4408

E-mail: wkinsey@pycsd.org

Street Address: 305 Court Street

City, State, Zip Code: Penn Yan, New York 14527

Date: January 8, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Kristen Jadin

Title: Director of Special Programs

Signature: 

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Please find attached a resume for both Molly Pullen and her twin sister, Claire Pullen. The Pullen twins are fourteen years old and are currently in 9th grade at Penn Yan Academy, Penn Yan, New York. They are both OUTSTANDING student-athletes and a wonderful representation of Penn Yan Academy on and off the court!

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

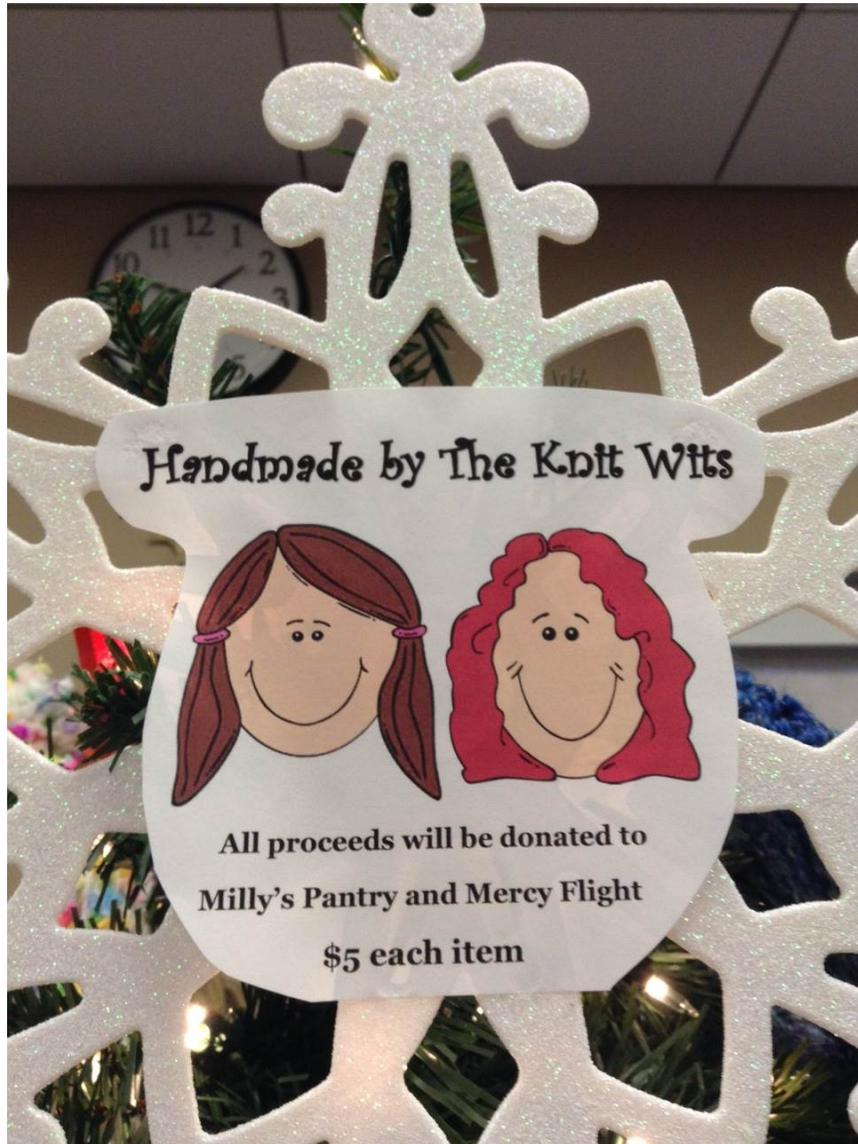
It is with great pride and pleasure that I nominate Molly Pullen and Claire Pullen for the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award." Molly and Claire are fraternal twins. As their resume will reflect, as freshman and their first year on our Girls' Varsity Tennis team, they earned the title of 2017-2018 Section V Class B Doubles Tennis Champions! Off the court, they refer to themselves as "The Knit Wits"! They have been knitting and donating hats, mittens, scarves and blankets since 2013 to various organizations in our community and throughout the Finger Lakes region. They have truly made a difference in the lives of many people who cannot afford a warm hat/mittens/scarves/blanket or someone who has undergone chemotherapy and needs a hat for warmth or just to feel special. During our very cold football season, Molly and Claire can be seen throwing orange and blue (our school colors) hats into the crowd! They have donated numerous items to different classes/school organizations to be sold as fundraisers ... never asking for anything in return.

We live in an area where many families struggle to make ends meet. Our winters are very cold and windy and require protection to our heads and hands. 50+% of the students in our school district are living in poverty and many families in the Finger Lakes region have been touched by some form of cancer and their knitted creations have brought many smiles to many people. They make their creations for people of all ages ... from babies to grandparents! They have knitted many, many hats for local cancer organizations (Thrive to Survive, Finger Lakes Oncology, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation). Recently, their creations have become so popular that people have been asking to purchase them. They created and displayed a "Knit Wit Giving Tree" in the main office at our high school last year. They decorated a Christmas tree full of their creations! (Please see attached picture). They sold their items for \$5 each. In less than one week, they raised \$500! They took 100% of the proceeds, split it in half, and their parents allowed each of them to choose one worthy cause to donate the money to. Claire chose Milly's Pantry (our local food pantry) because she witnesses the importance of the critical assistance that is provided to the students who attend our school. She has seen her fellow classmates having difficulty concentrating in classes because they are both cold and hungry. Claire hopes to become an elementary school teacher in the future. Molly chose Mercy Flight because of her desire to enter the medical field one day and understands the importance of urgent medical attention. Mercy Flight provides emergency medical care/transportation to those in need in our area. This year Molly and Claire made a monetary donation from the proceeds of their hats to the Keuka Comfort Care Home located in Penn Yan, New York. The KCC is a hospice home. Molly and Claire refer to it as "God's waiting room."

It is so refreshing to see the joy they get from walking down the street or seeing someone in our local grocery store and they spot them wearing one of their special creations! They have never sought out recognition... ever. They have told me numerous times that their parents have always taught them to "give without remembering and take without forgetting." After this many years of helping so many people, I think it is time they deserve some accolades! I truly believe that Molly and Claire Pullen are the epitome of the "National High School Spirit Sport Award." Please bestow upon them this most deserving honor.



The Pullen Sisters



The Knit Whit Tree Topper



The Knit Whit Tree

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominees: Madeline Potts (Chariho) and Gianna Cirella (Toll Gate)
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Robert E. Littlefield

Phone: 401-734-3020

E-mail: robert.littlefield@warwickschools.org

Street Address: 69 Draper Avenue

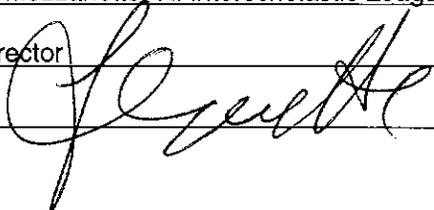
City, State, Zip Code: Warwick, RI 02886

Date: January 25, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Thomas A. Mezzanotte, RI Interscholastic League

Title: Executive Director

Signature:  _____

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

X 2 **Students** Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Madeline Potts, athlete (girls soccer)
(first, middle, last)

School/Address: Chariho Regional High School, 453 Switch Road
(street address)

Wood River Junction, RI 02894
(city, state, zip)

Name of Nominee: Gianna Cirella, athlete (girls soccer)
(first, middle, last)

School/Address: Toll Gate High School, 575 Centerville Road
(street address)

Warwick, RI 02886
(city, state, zip)

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe the nominees' current involvement in high school and, if applicable, list any accomplishments or honors attained.

This nomination is presented as an unusual one as it asks for a posthumously-awarded recognition for two remarkable young women who shared a love of the sport of soccer and whose lives were cut all too short by unrelated, sudden and tragic illnesses. While they made considerable contributions to their teams, their sport, and their school communities during their short lives, their impact on the scholastic athletic community of Rhode Island was nothing short of astounding.

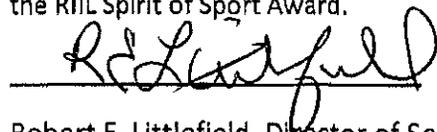
On the evening of September 23, 2018 Madeline Potts, a senior at Chariho High School in Wood River Junction was competing on the soccer field when she collapsed. Tragically, she passed away at the hospital several hours later of what was discovered to be a brain aneurism. Maddie was a team captain, a talented artist, and an outstanding role model for all students at Chariho. Her passing sent shock waves through her team, her school, and the Rhode Island Interscholastic League.

Before the reality of Maddie's passing had a chance to settle in, yet another shocking death would rock the girls' soccer world. Gianna Cirella, a junior goalie for the Toll Gate Titans reported feeling ill after soccer practice on October 13. Her condition worsened quickly, resulting in a devastating infection that caused many of her organs to shut down. Despite a valiant fight, she succumbed to her illness and dies on November 1, less than six weeks after Maddie Potts.

2. Please list nominees' actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Both young women were respected members of their teams and their school communities during their all-too-brief lives. But their impact on the RI athletic community after their passing was nothing short of remarkable. From Bristol to Westerly the fall sports season saw team after team, not only in soccer but in other sports, display acts of tribute, respect, and solidarity with Chariho and Toll Gate. Not a day went by during the fall season and into the winter season that evidence popped up on Facebook and Twitter of a team's gesture of sportsmanship in the name of Maddie and/or Gianna accompanied by the hashtags #Forever11 and #CirellaStrong. It took the passing of these two women to get an entire sport community to rise above the competition and the scores and realize that interscholastic athletics in more than just a game, that we are trying to reinforce sportsmanship, respect, and dignity. In all corners of Rhode Island there were coaches and captains speaking about the factors in life that are truly important. Through their displays of wearing special colors, joining arm in arm for moments of silence, and other tributes, teams gave the RIIL reason to be proud of our athletes and our coaches promoting the true core values of our League.

For this reason, I submit the names of Gianna Cirella and Maddie Potts as posthumous candidates for the RIIL Spirit of Sport Award.



Robert E. Littlefield, Director of Secondary Schools

Maddie Potts



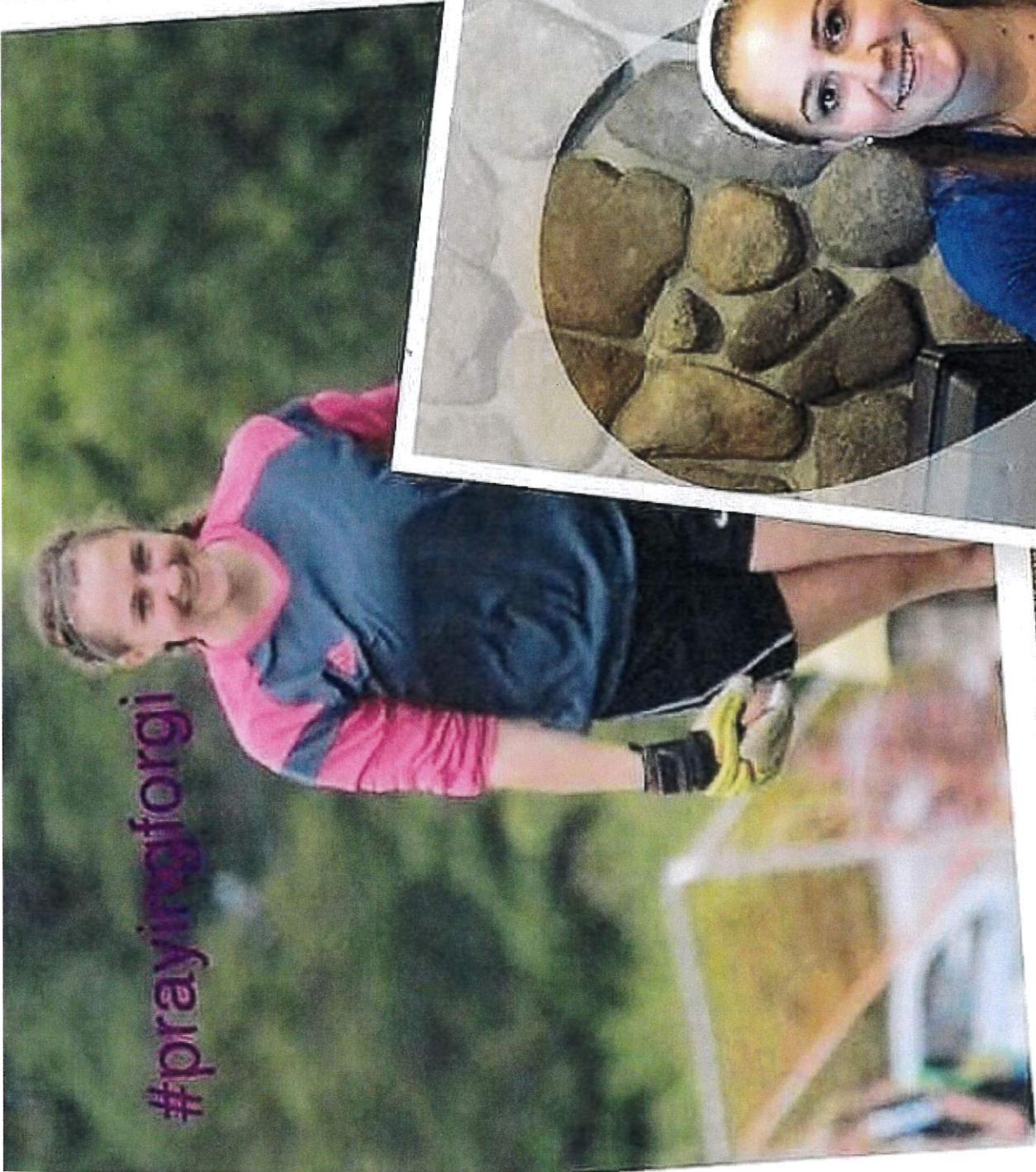
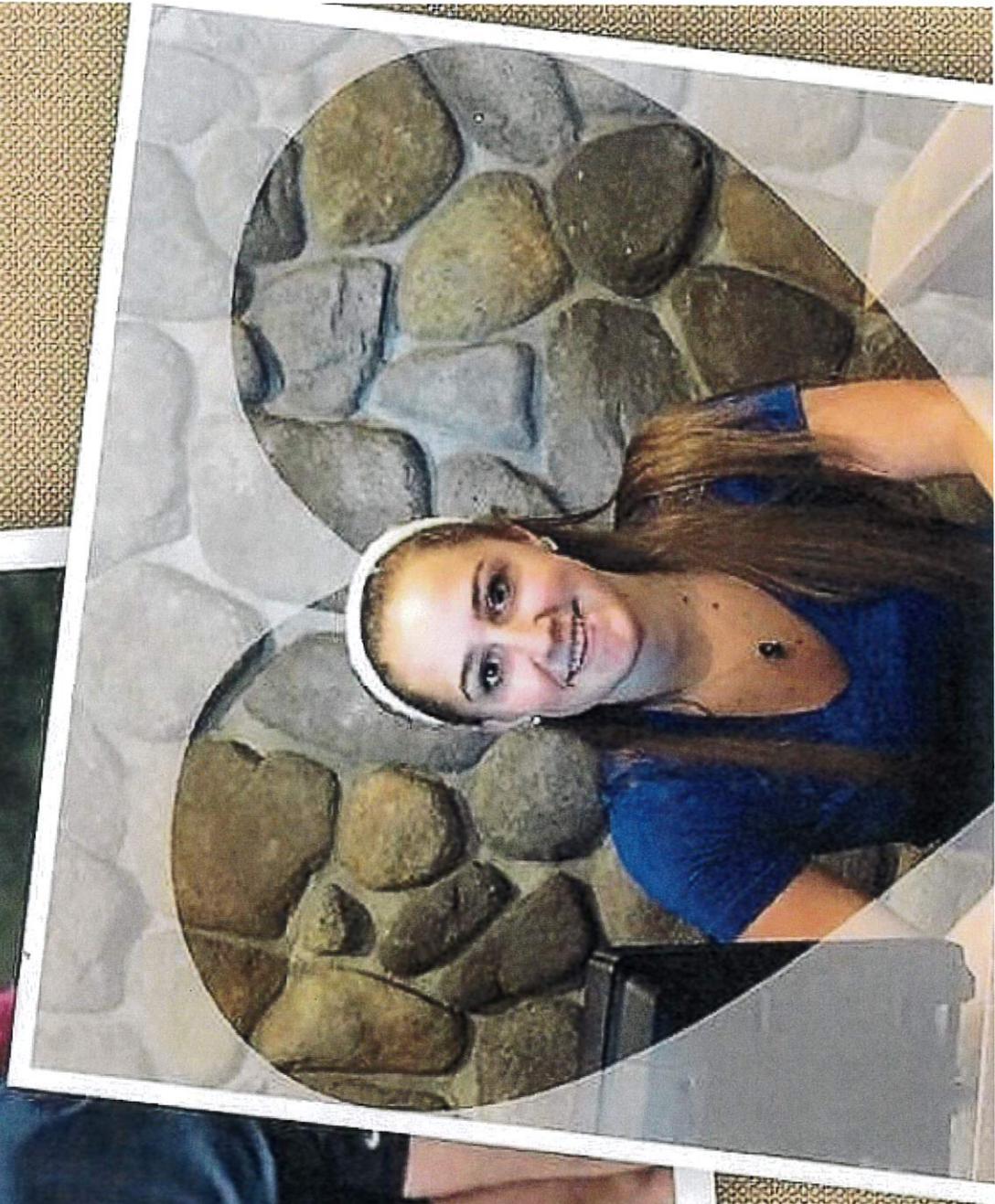
#forever11



Madeline “Maddie” Potts

April 11, 2000 — September 23, 2017

Sianna
Civetta



#prayingforgi

Section 2

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: MOT Charter High School Cross Country Team
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Jean Ramos and Alycia Jefferson

Phone: 302-696-2000

E-mail: jean.ramos@mot.k12.de.us Alycia.jefferson@mot.k12.de.us

Street Address: 1275 Cedar Lane Road

City, State, Zip Code: Middletown, DE 19709

Date: 12/1/17

State Association Endorsement:

Name: DIAA

Title: Executive Director

Signature: /s/ Thomas E. Neubauer, CMAA

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other **Cross Country Team**

Name of Nominee: MOT Charter High School Cross Country Team
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 1275 Cedar Lane Road
Middletown, De 19709

(street address)

Phone: 302-696-2000

E-mail: jean.ramos@mot.k12.de.us Alycia.jefferson@mot.k12.de.us

School (if any): MOT Charter High School

City: Middletown

State: Delaware

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

The MOT Charter High School Cross Country Teams participated in a full season this year adding participation in both the County and Conference Championships to our schedule for the first time. Our Cross Country Team was made up of runners of all abilities and experience and grade levels. We were the only team in the school to participate at the Varsity Level at the State Tournament Level for the past two years. Our runners represent all grade levels in the school and truly embody what it means to be a Mustang.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

This year, our MOT Charter High School Cross Country Team truly represented the quote "run as one, train as a team and finish as a family." In Cross Country, runner faces the start and the course alone, but on this team, no one faced the finish alone. In August of 2017, when we first came together, we had several new runners- many of whom had never participated in a sport before in high school. To choose to join a cross country team made up of experienced runners who had been together for nearly four years can be quite intimidating; however, this was never the case for our new Mustangs. From the very beginning of the season, our runners started every practice together and without hesitation or discussion, our faster runners would finish their workouts and then return to help push their teammates to finish.

Their Mustang spirit came through on so many occasions, but none so much as the day of our meet at Banning Park in Wilmington, Delaware. One of our newest runners, a senior who started the season not being able to run more than ten strides without stopping, was running her first meet. De'Aja was new, but she had been working at every practice since August and was ready to run a 5k. Her goal was to finish; her team's goal was to be there with her every step of the way and to make sure she met that goal. Runners who could not participate in the meet due to injury had strategized to go to places throughout the course so she would not be alone and would have a cheering squad.

When the girl's race started, I touched base with the Coaches from the other school. I explained she had never run before and we were not sure what her time would be, but that it was most important to us that she be able to finish no matter how long it took. After all of my other runners had come through at the last quarter mile, I headed back towards the start/finish line area to wait for De'Aja and to gather the team. As I came down the hill, I was approached by the entire team including those that had just finished seconds before and had barely had a chance to catch their breath.

They were headed out to the final quarter mile and knew that after almost an hour that De'Aja would be hurting. They said she needed them and they asked if I could see if they could run her in. I quickly found the other coach and confirmed that it was okay; we both agreed this was a great opportunity for her and in the Spirit of the Sport, I texted the captains and told them. The parents of our runners gathered at the finish line and waited with me.

After about another ten minutes, we looked at the top of the hill and not only could we see them, but we could hear them. They were coaching her in one step and one stride at time- running behind her, beside her and with her they reminded her that she had made it all the way and that the finish was within her reach. When she crossed the line the team quickly gathered around her and congratulated her. We have the video and will be sending it with this nomination.

For this team, it was never about winning or losing the meet; it was about their teammate finishing. It was about her success and that no one finishes alone. No one asked me for their times or whether they made a PR. No one was wondering about the win or the loss. No one wanted to know how soon we could get on the bus and go home and eat. They wanted what was best for her. They wanted her to experience a finish like everyone else had- with a cheering section.

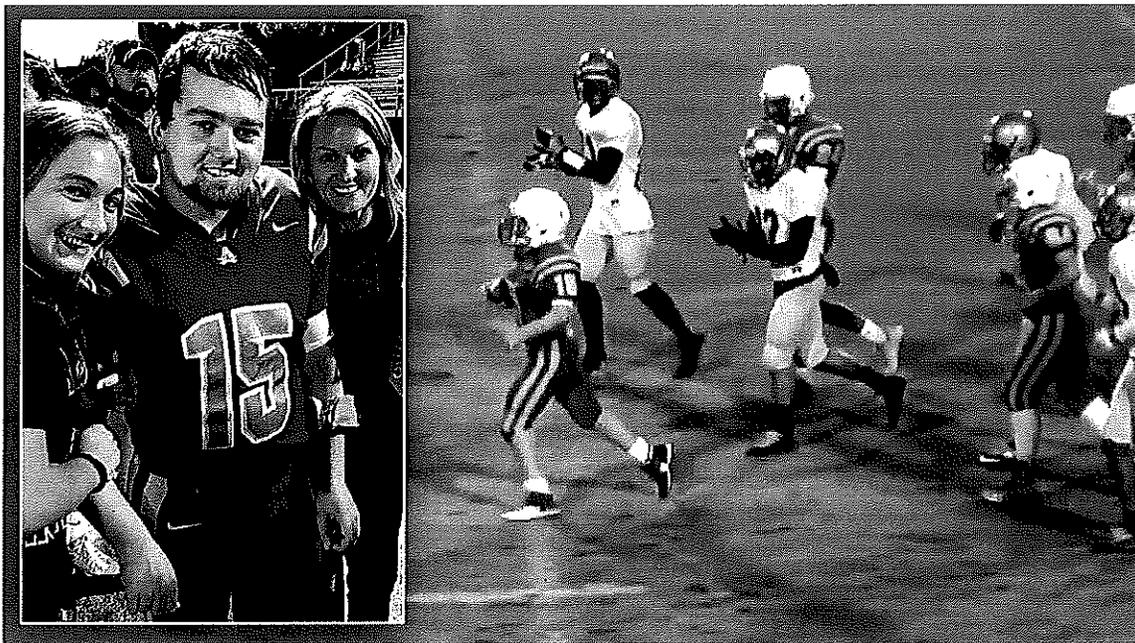
The next day at practice, the team came together and told her that the rest of the season was about bringing that time down and that they would help her. Our faster runners took the time to work with her each practice on her final kick in the finish; our girls took the time to work with her on breathing and each day, she got a little faster and a little stronger.

Our story did not end there. You see, it didn't matter to this team whether the last runner was De'Aja, another Mustang or a member of another team, their response was always the same: No one finishes alone. At every event, they made sure they were at the final turn and they cheered every student athlete in from every school.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Joseph "Sepp" Edmonson Shirey
(first, middle, last)



Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Ryan Molloy

Phone: 804-723-2128

E-mail: rmolloy@hcps.us

Street Address: 9414 Atlee Station Road

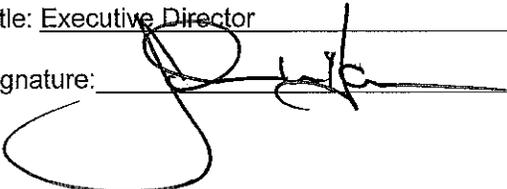
City, State, Zip Code: Mechanicsville, VA 23116

Date: January 30, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: John W. "Billy Haun

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Joseph "Sepp" Edmonson Shirey
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 9064 Cottleston Cir
(street address)

Mechanicsville, VA 23116
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 804-550-0511

E-mail: hunter-s@comcast.net

School (if any): Atlee High School

City: Mechanicsville State: Virginia

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

4 Year Football Player (Varsity 2 Years, JV 2 Years)
Counselor at Camp Hope
DECA Member
DECA Competitions (District, State, National Level)
RVASports Network Intern
3.6667 GPA

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Sepp is a wonderful human being. Sepp has Cerebral Palsy. Cerebral Palsy has not hindered anything that Sepp has wanted to do in his life.

Sepp has been a 4 year member of the Atlee High School Football team...2 years as a JV player, and the last 2 years as a Varsity player. Sepp's hard work, determination, and never give up attitude came to fruition during our football season when he took a hand-off, and proceeded to take it 80 yards for a touchdown.

The thing with the run, was this...Sepp needs crutches to get through his daily activities.. When Sepp is able to get into any games, he does not use his crutches. Usually, when Sepp is able to enter a game and get a carry, the opposing team "two hand" touches him to the ground. Nothing is ever planned, nothing is ever agreed upon...depending on the flow of the game and how the game is going, our coaches will do what they can to get Sepp into a game.

On October 27th, 2017, in our last home game of the season...senior night (Sepp's Senior Night)...the fourth quarter came around and the game was pretty much in doubt (Varina High School was getting the better of us that evening). Coach Matt Gray gave the call to get Sepp into the game. Sepp took the hand-off from Senior QB, TC Nance, and tripped up, and stumbled for a one yard game. In the true spirit of Sepp Shirey, that would not be the last carry for that evening. He picked himself back up (with the help of his teammates), got back in the huddle, and was ready for another shot. This time, he did not fall...again, without the use of his crutches, he took the ball and took it 80 yards for a touchdown. This run, was by far, the farthest Sepp had ever gone without the use of his crutches. The Varina team and his Atlee teammates followed him the entire run, encouraging him throughout. The score, the game, the outcome no longer mattered...all that mattered was getting Sepp into the end zone. As Sepp crossed the goal line, he collapsed from exhaustion into the arms of a waiting teammate.

The run captured the hearts, emotions, and spirit of everyone in the stadium that night. It was what athletics should stand for at the high school level...grit, determination, selflessness, spirit, passion.

The run spread through social media like a wildfire and the spirit of the run spread throughout our community and the nation. The school received countless calls and emails from all walks of life expressing their appreciation for the sportsmanship shown by both teams. Inside Edition aired it, the Today Show showed the clip, celebrities across the world reached out via twitter...it truly inspired a nation.

The most rewarding part for our community, here at Atlee, is that the run helped a community a heel in a time of grief. That same night, midway through the first period, we (Atlee administration) found out that a member of our student body passed away unexpectedly earlier in the day. This

student was also a member of our marching band. The marching band found out during the game and began their grief period. The news of the loss spread throughout the stadium... the football players and coaching staff were the only ones that were unaware of the tragedy. Once Sepp made his run, the healing process began immediately. In a time of sorrow, we were able to revel in the spirit of sports.

Sepp defines high school athletics. He defines a never give up mentality in everything he does. Sepp has a quote that is painted in our Head Football Coach's office... it reads "Sometimes You'll Make Enough Progress Where You Can Really Find the Courage To Keep Pressing On". We firmly believe he exemplifies the Spirit of Sport Award.

Below are several links with further information on Sepp Shirey and all the events that unfolded in "the run" – If you can't access them, simply google Sepp Shirey, and you'll see everything you need © In addition below, I have included a letter of recommendation from an English teach of Sepp's... that should allow more insight into the man Sepp is.

<http://wtvr.com/2017/11/02/the-story-behind-sepp-shireys-inspirational-touchdown-run/>

<http://wtvr.com/2017/10/28/atlee-senior-sepp-shirley-scores-the-years-best-touchdown/>

<http://wtvr.com/2017/11/05/sepp-shirey-grandmother-drops-off-cake-varina-high-school/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHKtpn6IMsc>

http://www.richmond.com/sports/high-school/football/atlee-football-player-with-cerebral-palsy-gets-a-thrill-/article_8f9cc730-bc0e-11e7-ae24-4311760be383.html

October 25, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter might be the most difficult letter of recommendation I have written in nineteen years. It's not because I have nothing good to say about Sepp Shirey. Actually, it's quite the opposite. Sepp is one of those students who passed through the door of my classroom and could never go unnoticed. I taught Sepp as a freshman in pre-baccalaureate English and then as a junior in IB English. He is an exceptional public speaker, a compassionate young man, and a student who can collaborate with anyone. Yet, these attributes pale in comparison to Sepp's perseverance. Allow me to explain.

Sepp is unlike most students I have taught. He has cerebral palsy. Yet, this has never diminished his ability to work in my classroom as well as outside of the classroom. Sepp doesn't let a disability limit him. A lot of my class involves movement. I don't like students to sit too long in their seats, and I also like them to engage with many students in the class. Sepp never let the fact that he uses arm crutches to walk to stop him. In fact, I distinctly remember him holding a foam sword and his book while re-enacting *Romeo and Juliet* during his freshman year. I also remember him never afraid to walk up to the board to write his thoughts in a silent Socratic seminar we were doing during his junior year. He even is a captain on the Varsity football team. No, he doesn't just help on the sidelines; he practices and plays with the team. I actually have known Sepp for many years, as he lives in my neighborhood. He has always been this way-- someone who never gives up no matter what the obstacle.

As a student, Sepp transfers this perseverance to everything he does. One of the formal assessments for IB English is an individual oral presentation, where students are required to give a literary presentation for ten to fifteen minutes. Sepp's was one of the more dynamic presentations I have seen in my years of teaching IB English. He has a presence and passion that have been with him from the first Socratic seminars we did in class during his freshman year. Likewise, he is an excellent writer. As a teacher, I have the advantage to really see growth because I taught him both in ninth and eleventh grade English. Sepp is a true communicator, and his writing truly demonstrates this.

So why is this letter so difficult to write? He is the type of young man who I hope my own son grows up to emulate. Sepp Shirey has my highest recommendation. There is no one quite like Sepp; his determination and perseverance are inspiring. I am proud to know him and call him my student.

Sincerely,

Kelly Ann Pace

English Teacher, Atlee High School

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: **Jacob Hartman**

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: **William D. Gillispie, CMAA, CIC**

Phone: **304-485-5494**

E-mail: **bill.gillispie@wvssac.org**

Street Address: **2875 Staunton Turnpike**

City, State, Zip Code: **Parkersburg, West Virginia 26104**

Date: **January 29, 2018**

State Association Endorsement:

Name: **West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission**

Title: **Executive Director**

Signature: **Bernie Dolan**

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other

Name of Nominee: **Jacob Hartman**

Current Address: **12 Myrtle Ave., Petersburg WV 26847**

Phone: **Mother – Shannon Hartman 304-257-5259**

E-mail: **jakehartman1131@yahoo.com**

School (if any): **Petersburg High School**

City: **Petersburg** State: **West Virginia**

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

- Two-year starter at QB for coach Matt Altobello

Passing - 131/235 for 1,874 yards and 18 Touchdowns

Rushing - 178 Attempts for 883 yards. 15 Touchdowns, 5 yards/carry average

All Purpose Yards - 2757 yards, 275.7 yards/game

Coach Altobello *"Jacob is an outstanding athlete and an even better person, student, and leader! He exemplifies what every student-athlete should strive to do in their high school career when it comes to overcoming adversity, pushing others to be their best, and being a role model to the younger generation of student-athletes."*

- Three years of Baseball

- 1st year Wrestling – Recently finished 8th in the Prestigious WSAZ wrestling tournament as a 201 pound jr.....in the 285-pound heavy weight division.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Jacob Hartman is an outstanding three sport athlete at Petersburg High School, including starting quarterback on the football team. Jacob contracted spinal meningitis as an infant which caused his loss of hearing.

Below is an TV news story on Jacob

<http://www.whsv.com/content/sports/SIGNS-ON-THE-FIELD-Deaf-QB-makes-noise-at-Petersburg-457374723.html>



Section 3

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Mark Russell

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Ron Ingram

Phone: 334-263-6994

E-mail: ringram@ahsaa.com

Street Address: 7325 Halcyon Summit Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Montgomery, AL 36117

Date: Jan. 31, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Steve Savarese

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Mark Russell
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 425 Newman, Ave.
(street address)

Huntsville, AL 35801
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 256-603-0855

E-mail: mark.russell@huntsvilleal.gov

School (if any): [Tab here]

City: Huntsville State: AL

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Mark Russell, currently serving as president of the Huntsville City Council, was first elected to the council in 2002 and has been serving ever since. He has been elected by that council to serve as president 10 times. Huntsville is Alabama's third largest city with a population of 180,000 and a metro population of more than 480,000.

Growing up in Huntsville graduating from Huntsville High School, he has been active in the Huntsville community as a servant in many capacities including serving on the Board of Directors of AHSAA member school Randolph High School as its treasurer, vice chairman and chairman.

Since the mid-1990s he has served the community in a number of organizations including the Boys and Girls Clubs (chaired the board from 1999-2001) and chaired the Alabama Area Council. Under his leadership, the Boys and Girls Club expanded to seven clubs with a budget of more than \$1 million.

He is a graduate of Leadership Huntsville/Madison County, serves on its board and chairs the Youth Leadership Program. He has mentored students through the Rotary Strive Program, has participated in Big Brothers/Sisters, tutors children at local elementary schools and is a member of the Huntsville Sports Commission, which manages AHSAA state and/or regional championships in soccer, wrestling, softball and volleyball. He also serves on the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and was honored in 2017 by Red Cross for reaching the "10 gallon" milestone at the local Red Cross as a blood donor. He has worked in the electronics and defense industry and currently is Operations Manager of Defense Technologies, Inc., a locally owned government contractor.

He has been an Alabama High School Athletic Association and youth league football official for more than three decades and has been a member of the Northeast Football Officials Association for most of that time.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Mark Russell is a living witness of his life's pledge, "Live Ready," and his life pledge is exactly what the "Spirit of Sport" is all about.

The outstanding AHSAA football official has served as the Northeast Alabama Football Officials Association in many capacities as the head of its nominating committee, leader of the local football association's Fellowship of Christian Athletes group, mentor for young officials and has chaired the NEFBOA's benevolent committee projects. He has risen to the top in the AHSAA officiating serving as a statewide camp instructor for many years. Always ready to come to the rescue of others, he learned first-hand just how "ready" his brothers in officiating also were to come to his rescue.

Mark Russell has officiated several state championship games and most recently was a linesman in the 2017 AHSAA Class 7A football game (Hoover vs. McGill-Toolen) at the University of Alabama's Bryant-Denny Stadium.

Now for the rest of his story.

That assignment was nothing less than a miracle. Just three months earlier, on Aug. 25 in

the season opener, he was officiating a local high school game between Madison Academy and McCallie Academy, a Tennessee school, when he collapsed on the field with heart failure. A nurse, who also was working as the MA school photographer, was standing on the sidelines near him and quickly came to his aid performing CPR until he was revived. His heart had been stopped with no heartbeat for approximately eight minutes while he lay unconscious on the ground in front of the packed stadium of fans.

He was rushed by ambulance to Huntsville Hospital's emergency ward. His wife was in Washington D.C, visiting their daughter. He was all alone, or so he thought. Within two hours, doctors had stabilized him, implanted a stent and Mark was sitting up visiting with more than 40 of his fellow officials who had rushed to the hospital ICU to pray for him, support him and love him. Nurses informed him, "You have a bunch of officials out here waiting to see you and they aren't going home until they see you."

Mark Russell, who has served others his entire adult life, found himself being served by others – who literally saved his life. "I could feel their love and prayers all around me," he said. He also knew that without the help of others at the football game, he would be alive to tell about his journey since.

It didn't stop there. He immediately asked doctors when he could return to officiating. They suggested taking some extended time off. "Take it slow," doctors told him. That was not in his vocabulary, however. He returned in less than a month to present the coin toss at another Madison Academy game "to help the players who may have been traumatized by the events of that night to find some closure," he said. And within six weeks he was back on the field serving as a linesman.

He went back, he admits, as a changed man with a renewed zeal to serve.

"I had a lot of time to reflect, and I realized even though I was ready spiritually, I was not living ready," he said. "I had those who I needed to ask forgiveness from and those I needed to forgive. I had those I hadn't told I loved them often enough. I spent my time recuperating by writing a lot of letters, talking to a lot of people. All I could think of that night in the hospital was that I needed to "live ready."

His example in the next few months became an inspiration for thousands across the state and Southeast. His testimony, although strong before the incident, has since inspired students and adults alike.

His story has been featured in newspapers, magazines, website blogs and has been the subject of TV documentaries.

His return to officiating came rather quietly, however. He had already been back "in the saddle" for several games before the media and public even knew. The attention has humbled him and also embarrassed him.

"I don't want anything to be about me," he said. "Our lives should be about serving others. God gave me a second chance. One thing I have always loved about officiating is that the game is not about us. Officials are a major part of the game but for the most part we go unnoticed. When we are officiating a game, who we are outside the game doesn't matter.

"We are a band of brothers who do our best to do our jobs without any notice or fanfare. We share a bond with the players and coaches. It runs much deeper than the score on the scoreboard."

Please read the following stories that chronicling his last four months and we hope you agree his saga indeed signifies the "Spirit of Sport."



MARK RUSSELL

Official Suffers Heart Attack at Game

MADISON, Ala. - Officials with the Huntsville Mayor's office confirm that Huntsville City District 2 Councilman Mark Russell had a heart attack.

Sources say that Councilman Russell was officiating at the Madison Academy game Friday night when he collapsed on the field.

Emergency crews administered CPR at the scene, before transporting Russell to Huntsville Hospital for treatment. At last report, he was alert and talking to family at the hospital.

Witnesses at the game said that the councilman was responsive and moving when being transported.

Russell has served on the Huntsville City Council since 2002.



**Having a heart attack and living to tell
about it - Council Member Mark Russell**

Less than a week after crumbling to the turf while officiating a high school football game, **Huntsville City Council Member and veteran AHSAA football official Mark Russell** is resting – and more than a little restless – at home, eager to return to work.

“I fully expect to be back to normal next week,” Russell said.

Russell, 54, is a long-time high school sports official and was at his position as line judge in the second quarter of Madison Academy’s game with The McCallie School from Chattanooga. He suffered a heart attack and fell unconscious.

It was a surreal experience. I’m learning more and more every day (about what happened).”

Paulette Berryman, a cardiac care nurse, is Madison Academy’s football photographer; her husband Mark is a Mustangs assistant and their children previously attended the school. She was near Russell when he went down and immediately leaped into action.

As Russell said in a tweet, “God put Paulette next to me at the game.”

Medical personnel from both teams as well as HEMSI quickly joined Berryman and a defibrillator was applied.

It was a surreal experience,” Russell said. “I’m learning more and more every day (about what happened). I’m so thankful for all the people who helped me, complete strangers who helped me and fought for my life. I’ll be forever grateful to Paulette.”

Russell was whisked to Huntsville Hospital, where surgeons inserted a stent. Within less than three hours, "I felt fine. I was ready to go home then," he said.

He praised "the great care at Huntsville Hospital. They really do have a wonderful ER and trauma center. I got to see it first-hand. I'm glad we have a community hospital like this in our town."

Russell then laughed, "I would like to *not* experience it first-hand again."

He has been diligent in his exercise, walking twice a day and assuring he was in shape for football season. But his father passed away at an early age from a heart attack, so doctors suspect there could be some hereditary heart disease.

To fight that, Russell and his wife April, who was visiting the couple's daughter in Washington, D.C., when the incident happened, have met with nutritionists. Said April, "I am in charge. We've been working on (a new diet)."

"Thanks for bringing that up," the council member joked to an interviewer.

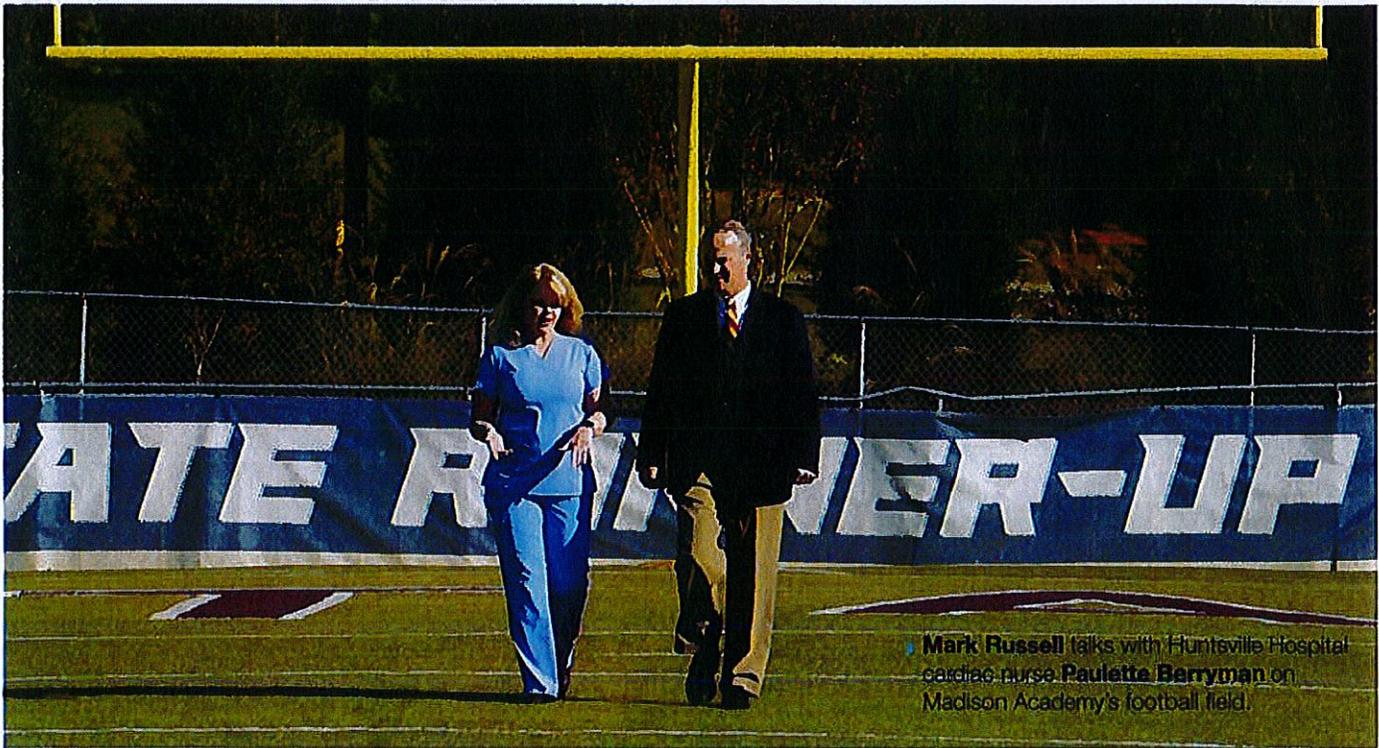
His physicians have "told me to take it easy, and I'm not a take-it-easy person," he said.

Russell, who officiated a state championship game last year, said he hopes to return to the field this year, though it might have to be in a different capacity. And he's eager to return to the business of the City. **NOTE: HE RETURNED TO OFFICIATE THE AHSAA 2017 CLASS 7A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME AT THE SUPER 7 CHAMPIONSHIPS HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA'S BRYANT-DENNY STADIUM.**

"The doctors advised me not to do any work (this week)," he said. "Obviously that's almost impossible in this day and age. I've been able to log on and do some work.

"On an average day, I get lots of complaints and concerns about what goes on in the City. Some of those people who were complaining have written nice apology letters. People are being respectful. People are really compassionate and they know I'm going through a problem."

*Russell, who has donated more than 10 gallons of blood to the Red Cross in the past quarter-century, does not know how the heart attack will impact that going forward. However, he encourages all who are able to donate now to the **Red Cross**, whether blood or financially, to assist the victims of Hurricane Harvey.*



Mark Russell talks with Huntsville Hospital cardiac nurse Paulette Berryman on Madison Academy's football field.

FRIDAY NIGHT LIFESAVER

In her 31 years as a registered nurse, **Paulette Berryman** has been called on many times to help revive people in distress.

But a recent life-or-death situation involving a Huntsville City Council member may have been the most dramatic.

On Aug. 25, **Mark Russell**, who moonlights as a high school referee, collapsed on the field of an apparent heart attack during a Madison Academy football game.

Fortunately, Berryman, a cardiac nurse educator in Huntsville Hospital's Cath Lab, was on the sidelines taking pictures just a few feet away. Her husband is an assistant football coach at Madison Academy.

As Berryman rushed onto the field and started chest compressions, the stunned crowd fell silent.

"It's what I do for a living, so it was just kind of an automatic response," she said. "There are millions of health care workers who know CPR, and any of them would have reacted the same way."

Other medical professionals at the game also came to the councilman's aid, including urologist **James Flatt, MD**, HEMSI employees **Jill Schultz, Dion Schultz** and **Aaron Hunt**, Madison Academy trainer **Shane Harris** and school nurse **Kristi Smith**.

After being transported to Huntsville Hospital by ambulance, Russell had an emergency angioplasty procedure to re-open a blocked coronary artery.

He was back at Huntsville City Hall about two weeks later and resumed his football referee duties in early October. Russell said he has made a number of heart-healthy lifestyle changes to help prevent another heart attack including cutting back on sodium, red meat, butter, fried foods and processed foods.

"I actually feel really good," said Russell, 54. "They attribute my recovery to the fact that Paulette, HEMSI and the other medical people started CPR so quickly. It humbles you that people you've never met would step in to save your life."

"Take a CPR class," she said, "so you can know what to do in that situation."

WANT TO LEARN CPR?

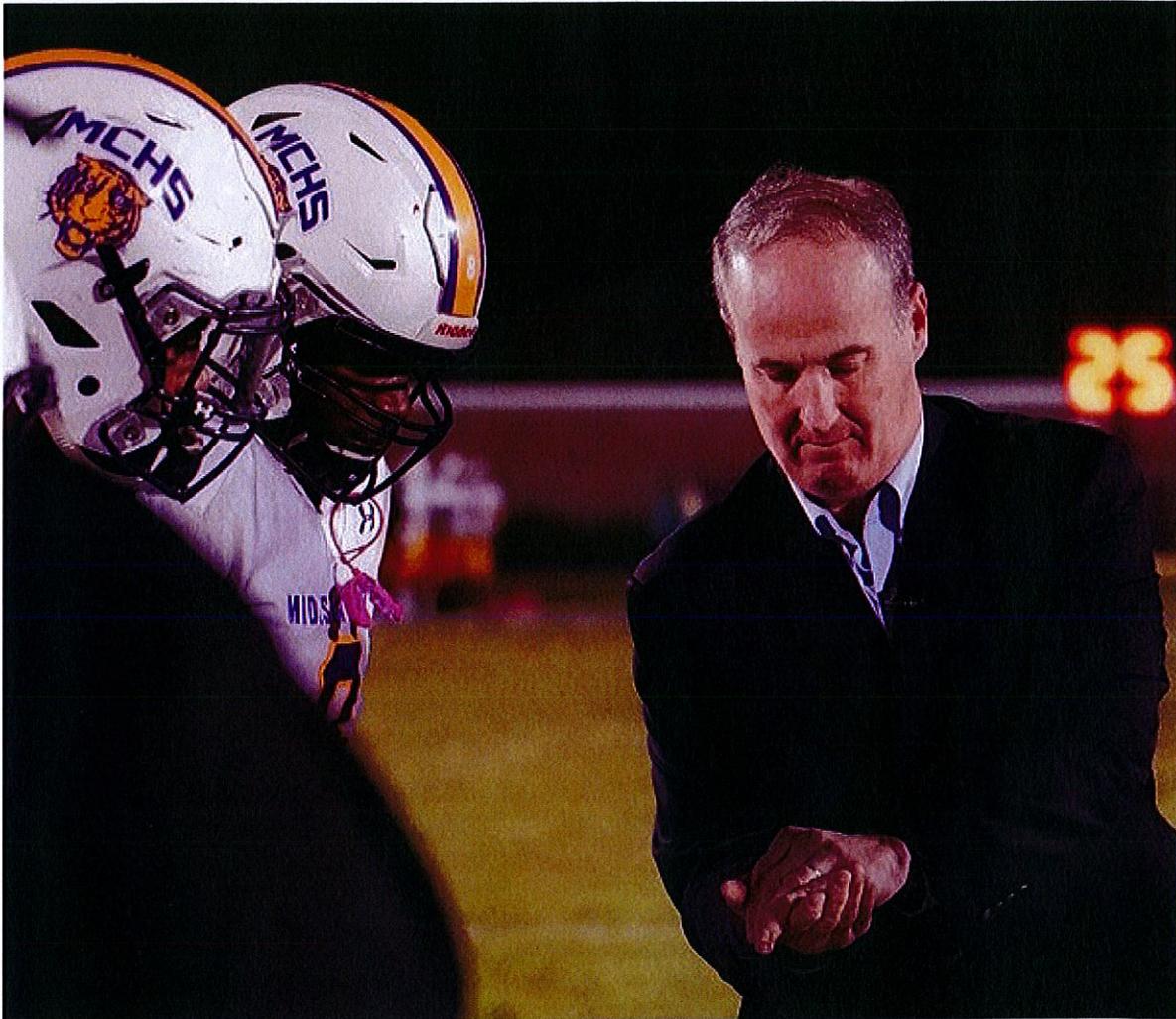
The American Heart Association Training Center at Huntsville Hospital's Corporate University offers a full range of CPR courses for the community. Here's the class schedule through the end of 2018. To register, please call **(256) 265-8025**.

Basic Life Support (CPR)

Nov. 25, 2017, Jan. 13, May 12, Nov. 3 and Dec. 15, 2018
Meets from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Corporate University Room 112
Cost: \$55 for students,
\$60 for non-students

Basic Life Support (CPR) renewal course

Nov. 30, 2017, Jan. 4, May 3 and Nov. 29, 2018
Meets from 6 - 10 p.m.
Corporate University Room 112
Cost: \$35 for students,
\$40 for non-students



RUSSELL RETURNS TO SCHOOL TO FLIP COIN AND GIVE CLOSURE

By PAUL GATTIS

www.al.com

Published Oct. 20, 2017

HUNTSVILLE – Longtime Huntsville city councilman Mark Russell, who suffered a heart attack while officiating a high school football game in August, announced Friday he will not seek re-election next year.

Russell has represented District 2 on the council since 2002. Last week, he was elected president of the city council for the 2018 fiscal year.

"It has been a high honor to serve the Huntsville community for so many years, and I have enjoyed the opportunity to help citizens with their needs," Russell said in a statement released by the city of Huntsville. "I'm proud of my record and of the work we accomplished. It's simply time for me to step in a new direction."

Russell made no mention of his health in the announcement. He said he grudgingly stayed away from work for about a week after collapsing on the football field at Madison Academy on Aug. 25.

He has been elected council president by his fellow council members 10 times.

"Mark has been an exceptional leader for the City of Huntsville, one who put the public good before politics," Mayor Tommy Battle said in the announcement. "He's worked tirelessly for constituents and he took the time to understand all sides of an issue. I will greatly miss his dedication and selflessness."

Beyond officiating high school and youth league football games, Russell has kept active in the community.

He's a past board chair of Boys and Girls Club of North Alabama and Randolph School, served on the board of Leadership Huntsville/Madison County and oversaw its Youth Leadership Program. Russell also tutors students at area schools.

"Huntsville is in a great place and it's the best of times for our city," Russell said. "I've been fortunate to be a part of this success, and I believe it's time for me to step down and allow someone else to have the opportunity to make Huntsville an even bigger and better city."

Delay of game: City Council Member Mark Russell caps 'interesting' season as football official



By Mark McCarter; December 28, 2017

Speeding toward the emergency room at Huntsville Hospital on Aug. 25, it would have been almost inconceivable to imagine how Mark Russell would end his football season.

Yet there he was, whistle at the ready, poised along the sideline at the 20-yard line at Bryant-Denny Stadium on Wednesday, Dec. 6, butterflies doing their typical pregame flight patterns inside his stomach as he awaited the opening kickoff.

After that first game, there were a lot of changes in my life.”

Russell, who serves as District Two’s representative on the Huntsville City Council and is currently serving as Council president, was for the sixth time in his officiating career working a state championship game. In this case, it was the **Class 7A Alabama High School Athletic Association** title game between Hoover and McGill-Toolen.

But it was the first time Russell had worked a state championship game as a heart attack victim, an eye-opening, pivotal event for a man of 54.

“It was definitely an interesting season for me,” says Russell, sitting in his seventh-floor City Hall office. “It started off in a really hard way. And after that first game, there were a lot of changes in my life.”

Heart attack in season opener

His heart episode, which took place during the season-opening game between Madison Academy and The McCallie School of Chattanooga, could have been devastating. But Paulette Berryman, a cardiac care nurse, was on the sidelines. She is Madison Academy’s (MA) football photographer and her husband Mark is an MA assistant coach. When she saw Russell fall to the ground, she responded immediately.

As Russell would later tweet, “God put Paulette next to me at the game.”

(Berryman was invited to be guest speaker for the **North Alabama Football Officials Association** annual banquet and was presented “honorary official” recognition.)

A HEMSI crew and trainers from both teams gathered to help. Russell was rushed to the hospital and a stent was placed in his chest.

Doctors told him to take two weeks off; his wife April suggested he should take two more off. So after missing two games, he was back in his stripes, working as electric clock operator for two weeks. Then, a month after his heart attack, he was back on the field as head linesman. (That's the officiating position on the line of scrimmage, working on the sideline where the line-to-gain chain and down marker are located. And, not incidentally, in closest earshot to the home team's head coach. After a brush with death, suddenly a constantly chirping coach is a piece of cake.)

With April's encouragement, Russell improved his diet and has dropped 20 pounds. He was never terribly out of shape and had been training during the summer to be ready for the season, but doctors told him his heart problem was likely more hereditary than anything else.

Things were kept light-hearted

Every time he took the field, he was aware of what happened but reminded himself that being a little out of breath had more to do with chasing somebody's 40-yard run around the end than it did a heart problem.

Mostly things were, well, light-hearted.

An official who has had paramedic training was assigned to his crew for several weeks, "so that was kind of a running joke," Russell says. At each game site, he'd introduce himself to the HEMSI crew. Many of the team trainers already knew him and "they'd say they weren't going to give me mouth-to-mouth if I went down. The other trainer would have to do that."

Then came "the honor and the thrill" of another selection to a championship game.

"It was just a good feeling being out there," he says. "Being in a large stadium like Bryant-Denny is neat, to be on a field where you've seen so many college games. Standing on the field, looking up at the video board, then seeing all the seats and how often I sat there was really fun."

Even though it was his sixth championship game, and even though the officials aim to stay out of the limelight and have things focused on the players, Russell couldn't help feel a little extra satisfaction this time.

"This year, it was really special to me," he says. "It capped the season in the right way after it started out really bad for me."

What I Learned the Day I Died: **Thoughts from Mark Russell**

By May Patterson

His heart just stopped.

There was no warning.

No time to yell out for help. Suddenly, everything went black.

Mark Russell—one of the football game officials, a city councilman, and my dear friend—**crumpled over, lifeless, on the sideline of the football field in the Madison Academy-McCallie game, August 25th.**

I sat in the stands, watching in horror, as someone I've known since childhood received CPR. Paulette Berryman, a cardiac care nurse, happened to be standing nearby. Immediately, she started resuscitating him. Glen Laird, who was working in the press box, prayed for Mark over the loud speaker.

Players, coaches and the other referees hit their knees. An eerie silence fell over the crowd as we watched the EMT techs and Paulette work feverishly to restart Mark's heart.

After two tremendous, body-wrenching shocks with a defibrillator, Mark suddenly gasped, drawing in a deep, life-saving breath as his heart began to beat again. It was as if he came back to life. The crowd cheered. People began to hug each other. Sighs of relief, coupled with tears, echoed through the stands.

Later that night, a blockage was removed from Mark's artery at Huntsville Hospital. I went to see him the next morning. He was feeling good and pretty amazed at what had happened. **"Had there not been a nurse and a defibrillator within a few feet of me, I probably wouldn't have made it,"** Mark said.

Now, Mark is feeling great. Recently, I met him in a coffee shop to talk about his experience. I feared that my questions might make Mark uncomfortable, but he was refreshingly open and honest. Gratitude for life and for the help he received radiated from his face. **"I don't mind sharing about what happened to me,"** Mark said. **"I want to use it for good."**

His positive attitude gave me the courage to ask him something I really needed to know.

What did you learn the day you died?

Mark thought about it for a few minutes as the busy coffee shop hummed. The cappuccino machine gurgled with steam. A baby started to cry. I began to fidget awkwardly, thinking, *maybe that question was a little too personal.*

Finally he smiled and said, **“I learned to live ready.”**

“You mean to live ready to meet your Maker? Right?” I asked.

“No.” Mark said. “I’ve been right with my Maker for years and my faith in Him is strong. I meant that I want to live ready with people.”

“The day I dropped dead, I wasn’t ready. There were some things I needed to make right, and a few apologies to give, but mostly, I needed to say thank you to a lot of people who have contributed to my life. Living ready means telling friends and family how much I appreciate what they do and how they have blessed me. It means telling people how much I admire them. It means cheering others on. I hadn’t expressed these things enough.”

“If I were to drop dead today—and believe me, we aren’t even guaranteed today—I’m ready.”

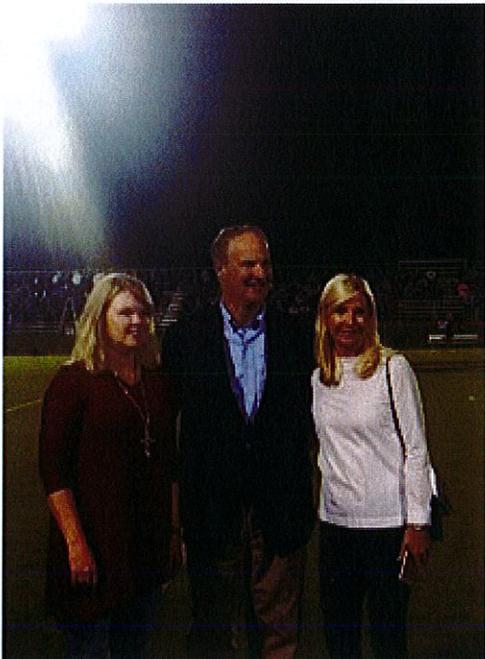
I sat there, totally in awe of his message, realizing that it was just what I needed to hear—to live ready.

As Thanksgiving approaches, it’s a good reminder for us all to first, live ready with our Maker and also, to live ready with people:

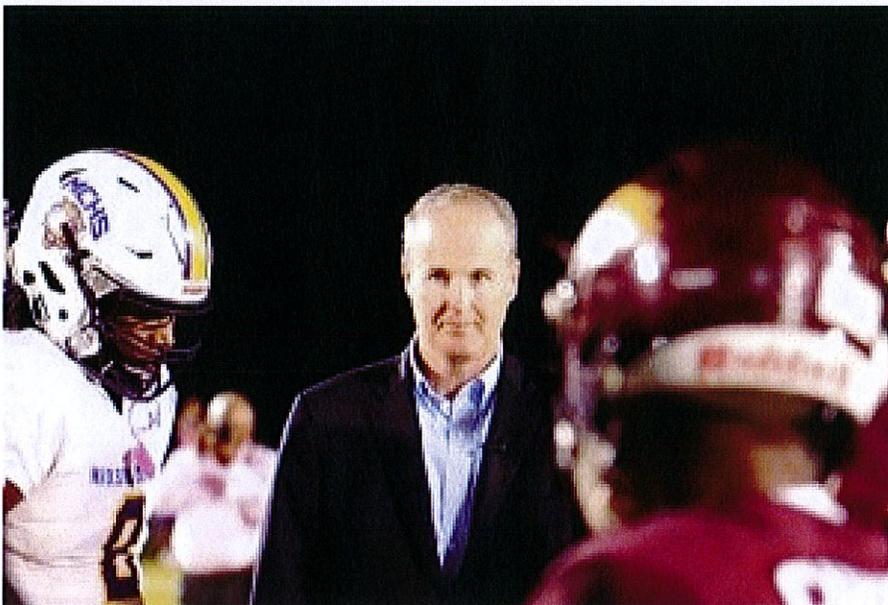
- We do things wrong everyday. Let’s be quick to apologize.
- Lonely people are everywhere. Write a letter; make a visit or a call.
- People are really struggling. Let’s help them carry their load.
- We’ve all been offended recently. Let’s forgive and move on.
- Family and friends contribute to our lives everyday. Let’s thank each one.
- Many people are in need. Let’s respond generously with open hands.
- There are so many to love. Say, “I love you,” often.

As I walked away from the coffee shop that day, I had a spring in my step and a full heart. Mark reminded me how precious this life is—and *how brief*. He taught me how important it is to live ready. **Possibly, today could be my (and your) last opportunity to do so.**

“The holidays are a great time to start living ready.” Mark said, **“You don’t have to drop dead to learn this lesson. Start today.”**



Mark Russell is shown above with his wife April (at right) and Paulette Berry, the nurse who applied CPR the the night the AHSAA football official dropped lifeless on the football turf at Madison Academy. These two women he admits, are two he just couldn't live without!



Six weeks after his near-fatal heart attack, AHSAA football official returned to Madison Academy to administer the coin toss versus Madison County. He said he returned to help the players who witnessed his collapse and rescue have closure with what had certainly been a dramatic even traumatic experience for all in attendance. His message – Live to be ready!!!

Mission Keeper

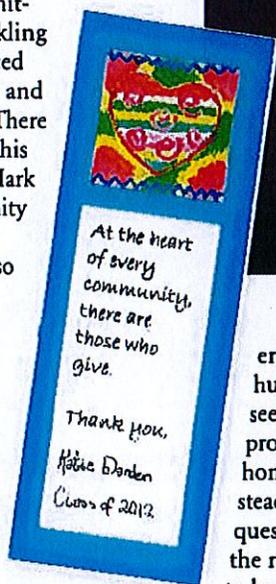
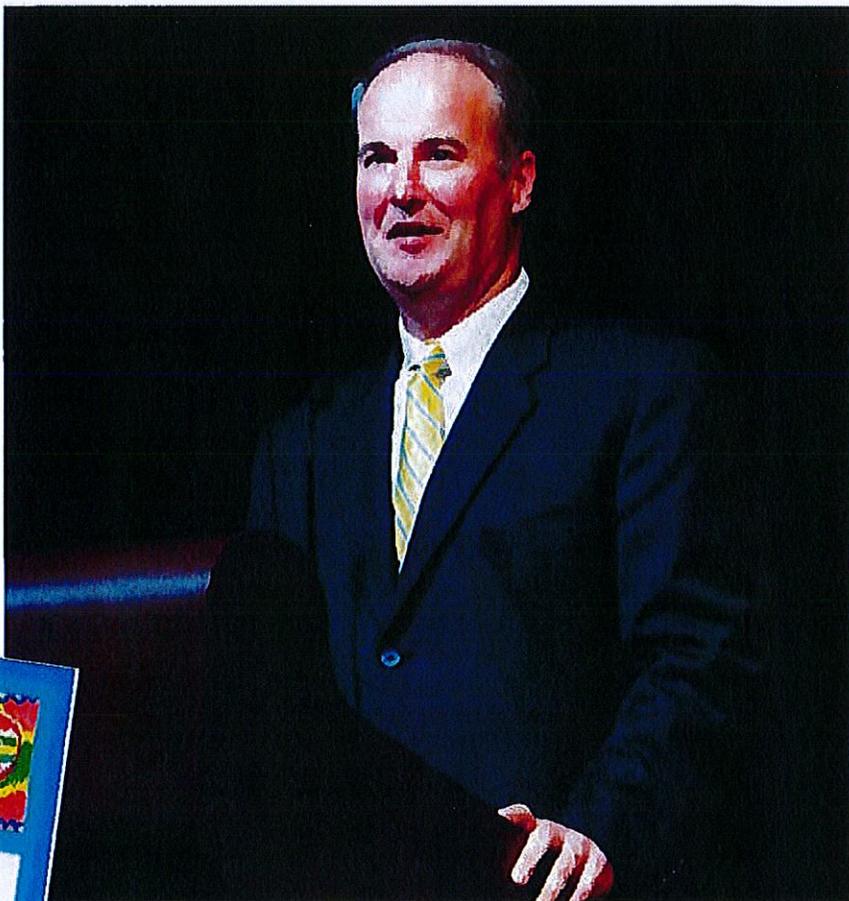
Mark Russell: A Heart for Community

By Linda Bryant

When I reflect on all that Huntsville and Randolph have accomplished in the last decade, I recognize how incredibly fortunate we are to have had Mark Russell's leadership for more than a decade. When you think of Mark, you cannot help but acknowledge his gift of service to our community. Clearly he has a heart dedicated to giving back.

Together, we have probably spent hundreds of hours in board meetings over the years. Mark served Randolph as a trustee from 2000-12. He was a member of the Head of School search committee in 2005 and, in the following year, chaired the Mission Statement Committee. He has also been treasurer and chair of the Finance Committee, vice-chair, and Chair, 2008-10. His integrity and work ethic provided the leadership our School needed to tackle the greatest challenges we would ever face. Mark's commitment and diligence tackling complex issues is balanced with his sense of humor and compassion for others. There is truly a sense of joy in his service. You could tell Mark delights in the opportunity to give.

Many others have also benefited from Mark's leadership. First elected in 2002, Mark is serving his third term as a City Council representative. He has given significant time to the Boys and Girls Clubs and numerous other community agencies. He is a member of the Huntsville Sports Commission and, in his spare time, Mark referees high school and youth football games. He has been selected several times to work State Championship and All-Star games. Professionally, Mark has held several positions in the electronics and defense industries and currently works for Defense Technology, Inc.



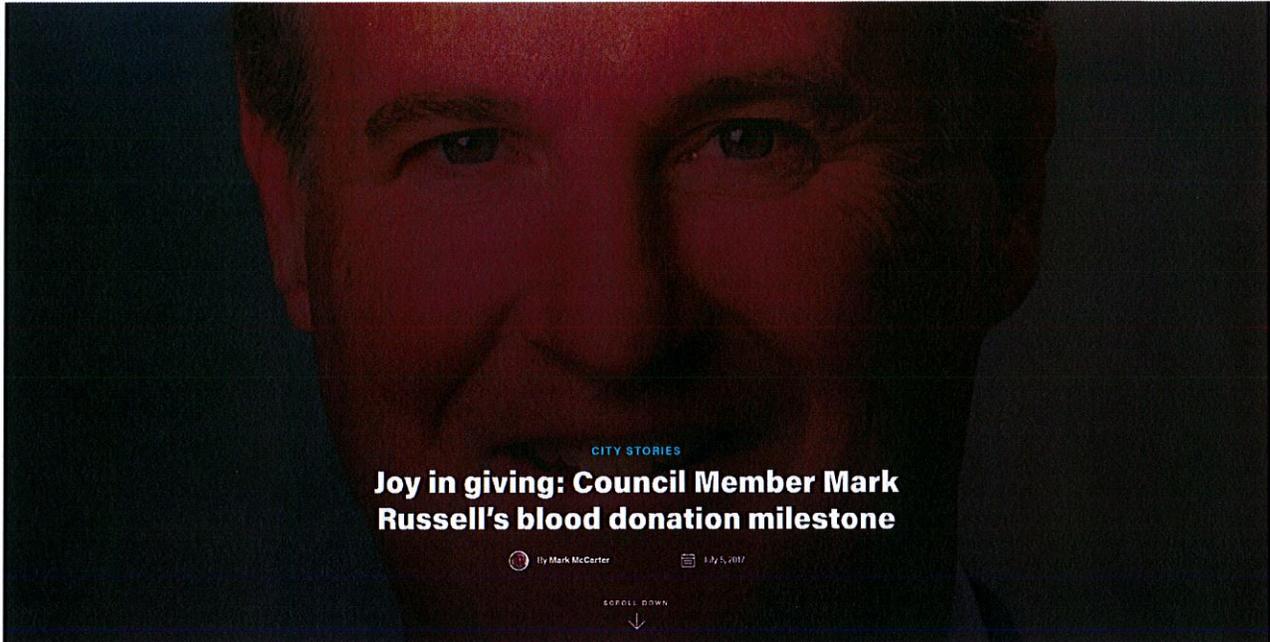
It would be easy to take his leadership for granted because Mark humbly accomplishes so much with seemingly little effort and tremendous professionalism. He always does his homework, is conscientious, efficient, steady and calm. Mark asks the tough questions that lead the discussion in the right direction. He always seems to be thinking two steps ahead of everyone else, but he does it in a way that is not obvious or overbearing.

Mark has a commitment to being fair and always doing the right thing. His service mindset never switches off. Mark considers every decision in a way that will better others and the community. Mark does not show favoritism and offers assis-

tance to everyone. His passion for this work is evident in every aspect.

Mark and his wife, April, are the parents of Mary Allen '10, a junior at the University of Alabama. His daughter Bailey, also a former Randolph student, is a freshman at Washington and Lee University.

Recently I came across a bookmark given to me by Katie Darden '12, stating, "At the heart of every community, there are those who give." Mark Russell epitomizes the heart of our community. Randolph and Huntsville are both in a better place due to his generous gift of service and leadership. Mark provides an excellent example for every student, parent, teacher and citizen to follow, giving with joy.



CITY STORIES

Joy in giving: Council Member Mark Russell's blood donation milestone

By Mark McCarter

July 5, 2017

SCROLL DOWN



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He's the first to admit that the first time wasn't necessarily out of benevolence. He and his Sigma Nu fraternity brothers at Auburn University were on a quest for "spirit points" to earn better seating at the football games.

Now, 10-plus gallons later, [Huntsville City Council Member Mark Russell](#) eagerly and considerably more nobly is still donating units of his O-Positive blood.

Russell was recently presented his "10 Gallon Pin" by the American Red Cross for his donation; he's well over that total when donations to other organizations in the past are factored in.

"As an adult, I've gone into it with all good intentions," says Russell, who represents the City's District 2. "It's neat to help somebody you don't know. It's interesting to think you might help somebody. It's a small act on my part, but it might be a big deal for them and their family."

The [Red Cross](#) and other organizations in that realm are always in need of donors. According to the Red Cross, every two seconds someone in the U.S. needs blood. The organization says that 38 percent of the U.S. population is eligible to donate, but less than 10 percent of that population does so on a regular basis.



Helping someone you don't know, there's great joy in that."

In the Huntsville area, available donors are more scarce than other cities. There are greater restrictions on eligibility than in the past, and they include disqualification to donate for certain periods of time depending upon overseas travel and military service. That eliminates a sizeable chunk of the population in a city with a military presence and an international economy.

"That makes it more important that those of who can give do so," Russell says.

As you'd expect, he has no fear of needles, though Russell confesses the worst part is being pricked in the finger for the initial testing.

"It's the anticipation, I guess. It kills me," he says. "Once I get that done, I'm fine."

Russell is a long-time high school football official and one of his colleagues is Rev. Travis Collins, at First Baptist Church. They've had some discussions about benevolence and giving.

"This is being a modern-day Good Samaritan," Russell says. "Helping someone you don't know, there's great joy in that."

"As Travis says, 'God has wired us such that there is great joy in crossing the road when someone is hurting on the other side.'"

Fortunately, neither Russell nor anyone in his family has been in need of blood.

"So, it hasn't been self-serving at all," he says. "Except for those football tickets."



CITY COUNCIL

Having a heart attack and living to tell about it - Council Member Mark Russell



By Mark McCarter



September 1, 2017

SCROLL DOWN



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Jesuit High School Boys Soccer Team

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Pete Young

Phone: (813) 877-5344 ext. 705

E-mail: PYoung@jesuittampa.org

Street Address: 4701 N. Himes Ave.

City, State, Zip Code: Tampa, FL 33614

Date: Jan. 19, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Kyle Niblett

Title: PR Specialist

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle Niblett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

- Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer
 Athletic Administrator Other (Specify BOYS VARSITY SOCCER TEAM)

Name of Nominee: Jesuit High School Boys Varsity Soccer Team
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 4701 N. Himes Ave.
(street address)

Tampa, FL 33614
(city, state, zip)

Phone: (813) 877-5344

E-mail: trupp@jesuittampa.org

School (if any): Jesuit High School

City: Tampa State: FL

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

The 2017-18 Jesuit soccer team is currently 18-1 and ranked eighth in the state (41st nationally).

Jesuit soccer has a storied history, capturing six State titles - the most of any Jesuit sports program - since its founding as a club sport in the mid-1970s. By the mid-'80s, the Tigers were a force, winning State titles in 1987, '95, '97, '98, '99, and '01. The final five championships came under head coach Bob Bauman, and the 2001 team also was honored as National Champions. Eric Sims '95, who starred on the '95 champs, was named head coach in 2013. Last season, 2016-17, Jesuit went 20-7-1 against a rugged schedule while capturing the District title for the 31st time in the past 33 seasons and battling cross-state rival Merritt Island for the Region title for the fourth straight season

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

The motto for the Jesuit High School boys varsity soccer team is "Men for Others." This past fall, they fulfilled their motto.

On Sept. 20, 2017, Category 4 storm Hurricane Maria destroyed Puerto Rico, creating an "apocalyptic" scene at San Ignacio High School. The soccer field was destroyed. The soccer goals had been strewn 200 yards up onto a hill. One was even bent around a tree. To make matters worse, the school did not get electricity back until Jan. 18, 2018.

David Richtberg, the AD at San Ignacio, reached out to Belen Jesuit, since they too were a fellow Jesuit institution and Richtberg had coached baseball and football at Gaither and Alonso High School in Tampa previously. The Puerto Rican school played only five games at home starting in November as a result of the storm.

Knowing that soccer was an escape for their fellow soccer players, the Tampa Jesuit team led the school and its community to help raise \$25,000 for the school. As part of this, Jesuit helped the San Ignacio team make the trip to Tampa to take part in the inaugural three-day Jesuit Soccer Tournament. Jesuit had not only helped a school in Puerto Rico get on the road to recovery, but used education-based athletics as a way to help fellow high school student-athletes mentally escape from their hardships.

Here are some quotes from those involved:

"At the end of the day, we're all kids, and we're all the same, we just live in different parts of the world," he said. "They were thanking us, but really it was just out of our hearts." – Jesuit defender Andres Cartaya

"They suffered a lot and they're still suffering. Their school's been decimated. ... Some of these kids still don't have power," said Father Richard C. Hermes, president of Jesuit. "For our boys to say, 'Hey, they're still going on with their lives, they're playing soccer, doing things they love.' I think it's means a lot to them.

"We matter to them," San Ignacio senior Humberto Roura said. "So that's pretty cool."

"It's definitely an escape," said David Richtberg, the school's athletic director. "Win, lose or draw, they're going to be out here playing soccer against some great teams. Another Jesuit school. Brothers — they don't know it — but they're brothers."

 URL: http://www.tampabay.com/sports/soccer/preps/Jesuit-High-aids-soccer-brothers-from-hurricane-ravaged-Puerto-Rico_164225989

Jesuit High aids soccer ‘brothers’ from hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico

By Kelly Parsons, Times Staff Writer



LOREN ELLIOTT | Times San Ignacio's boys soccer team, visiting from Puerto Rico, huddles before playing Jesuit at Ed Radice Park in Tampa on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2018.

TAMPA — Moments before Thursday's soccer game began, players from Jesuit and Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola met at midfield. The boys looked on as a referee flipped a coin, then they shook hands, and, together, said a prayer — some in English, some in Spanish.

The matchup marked the end of the first day of the inaugural Jesuit Soccer Tournament, in which eight schools, including four local and four from out of town, would participate in three days of competition.

More than 1,000 miles and a different native language separated the squads. But below the surface, there was a shared connection.

San Ignacio is an all-boys Catholic school in San Juan, Puerto Rico, a country that was decimated by Hurricane Maria when it barreled through the Caribbean last September. It's been more than 100 days since the United States territory got the brunt of the storm, but still, roughly half the people and many buildings on the island still don't have power.

That includes Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola.

So for San Ignacio in particular, the weekend tournament was about more than just soccer.

"It's definitely an escape," said David Richtberg, the school's athletic director. "Win, lose or draw, they're going to be out here playing soccer against some great teams. Another Jesuit school. Brothers — they don't know it — but they're brothers."

It's a fact that's become all the more clear since Maria's arrival.

In the days following the storm, Jesuit students had a two-day collection for San Ignacio during the school day. Later in the week, the fundraiser was expanded to include Jesuit parents and alumni. In no time, \$30,000 was raised — \$25,000 going to San Ignacio, and \$5,000 for a separate project in San Juan.

"We matter to them," San Ignacio senior Humberto Roura said. "So that's pretty cool."

• • •

In the early morning hours of Sept. 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm, the strongest to hit the island territory in nearly 100 years. In his home, San Ignacio senior Nicolas Ballester huddled with his family, until the waters rose so high they had to escape to the roof.

Fortunately, Richtberg said, most of the San Ignacio families made it through the storm safely, but many faculty members lost everything.

Students returned to school two weeks after the storm hit, but there was no electricity. When he walked out onto the soccer field, Richtberg found the goals strewn 200 yards away up a hill. One was wrapped around a tree.

"At the beginning it was really hard because we didn't have a generator," Ballester said. "We were taking class in the grass and in hallways, anywhere we could find where we could talk a little."

Richtberg, who has been athletic director at San Ignacio for four years, played baseball at USF, and coached baseball and football at Gaither and Alonso high schools before moving to Puerto Rico in 2012. The moment students returned to school, he did everything he could to get them back on the fields. The boys needed a sense of normalcy, he said. And also, he knew the soccer team had a big opportunity coming up.

Long before Maria came through, San Ignacio had plans to take part in the Jesuit Soccer Tournament, something that came about through conversations between Richtberg and Jesuit coach Eric Sims; they knew each other from their time at Gaither. After the storm, Richtberg met with team parents to determine if the trip to Tampa was still feasible.

"That night the parents decided, 'No, we need to do this. For the boys, for the school. For Puerto Rico. For everybody,'" Richtberg said. "There was really a very short moment of uncertainty."

The San Ignacio soccer team didn't start playing again until November, and by that time, most of its season was already gone. The school's maintenance staff managed to fix the goals, and without lights, Ballester said, the team took advantage of whatever daylight was left after school ended to practice.

San Ignacio got to play just six local games during its shortened season, so the team was especially grateful, Ballester said, for the chance to play three more in the Jesuit tournament.

For the Tigers, it was also a chance to come face-to-face with resiliency.

"They suffered a lot and they're still suffering. Their school's been decimated. ... Some of these kids still don't have power," said Father Richard C. Hermes, president of Jesuit. "For our boys to say, 'Hey, they're still going on with their lives, they're playing soccer, doing things they love.' I think it's means a lot to them."

• • •

The game Thursday was scoreless at halftime, but after the break, Jesuit forwards Connar Stuart and Zachary Board notched goals in the 43rd and 48th minutes, respectively, to give the Tigers a 2-0 victory.

For San Ignacio, the outcome wasn't what they'd hoped it would be. Still, throughout the match, players came up to the Tigers on the field to express their appreciation for Jesuit's generosity.

Jesuit defender Andres Cartaya, who has family members still living in Puerto Rico without power, just shrugged it off.

"At the end of the day, we're all kids, and we're all the same, we just live in different parts of the world," he said. "They were thanking us, but really it was just out of our hearts."

Men for Others at Work



When Hurricane Maria destroyed Puerto Rico, the Jesuit Tigers were quick to help out their sister-school San Ignacio.

By [Katherine Smith](#), Spectrum Sports

Last Updated: Tuesday, January 09, 2018, 2:44 PM EST

0

TAMPA, Fla. -- Soccer means everything to Humberto Roura. It has since he was four years old. Looking for something to occupy his time, Humberto's mother signed him up. It wasn't exactly love at first sight.

"The first day, I started crying and just went off at practice," Roura said.

"My mom got angry, then my father, for the second practice, went there with us and we actually practiced."

Practice made perfect and Humberto developed into a talented player for his Puerto Rico San Ignacio High soccer team. Heading into his senior season, Humberto looked forward to creating lasting memories. And then Mother Nature delivered a devastating blow.

Hurricane Maria decimated Puerto Rico when the Category 4 storm ripped through the country on Sept. 20th, destroying nearly everything in its path. That included San Ignacio.

"Nothing, nothing can compare to what we saw there," San Ignacio Athletic Director David Richtberg said. "I've never seen anything remotely like that."

On the San Ignacio campus, windows blown out...trees torn down...power gone. The Lions needed help.

Men For Others. It's not just Jesuit High School's motto, it's a way of life.

"Anytime anybody goes through a difficult time, Jesuit people are always willing to help," Jesuit soccer coach Eric Sims said. "I think it's what we're here for, to help each other."

Men For Others happens to be San Ignacio's school motto too. So it seemed fitting the two teams joined together at Jesuit's inaugural soccer tournament.

VIDEO STORIES

[Men for Others at Work](#)

Soon after Hurricane Maria ripped through Puerto Rico, Jesuit officials received a letter from the president of San Ignacio, a fellow Jesuit institution. He described the situation in Puerto Rico as apocalyptic. Jesuit raised \$30,000 for relief efforts. \$25,000 was earmarked for San Ignacio. Most important to the Lions players, Jesuit provided an outlet that allowed them to just be kids.

Playing under the bright lights, a luxury. Half their country is still without power, including their own school and some players homes. Because of Hurricane Maria, San Ignacio got to play only five games on their schedule this season. This Jesuit tournament, a luxury.

"When I step onto the field, it's like a relief cause I step out of everything and I just have fun and enjoy," Roura said. "It's like a break for me"

Sports has a way of healing wounds, repairing the broken and helping move things forward. Soccer is doing just that for the San Ignacio Lions.

"Just with the start of the season, you could see like life coming back to the kids," Richtberg said. "I get choked up. That's what we're here for."

Click on the following link for the FHSAA's video submission for the Spirit of Sport Award nomination:

[this video](#)







NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is January 15, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Austin LaChance

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Doug Hassol

Phone: 912-557-4374

E-mail: dhassol@tattnall.k12.ga.us

Street Address: Tattnall Co. High School

#1 Battle Creek Warrior Blvd.

Reidsville, Ga. 30421

Date: 1/8/18

State Association Endorsement:

Name: [Tab here]

Title: [Tab here]

Signature: [Tab here]

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Austin is a student

Name of Nominee: Austin LaChance

Current Address: 119 Earnest Mobley Rd.
Collins, Ga. 30421

Phone: 912-326-1193

E-mail: 05atl07@gmail.com

School (if any): Tattnall Co. High School

City: Reidsville State: Ga.

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Austin is a well-rounded athlete as can be seen in the fact that he plays some kind of sport year round. He is a member of the Warrior Football team in the fall playing linebacker. Once football is over, he begins his second sport, playing basketball where he plays guard. As Spring rolls around, Austin plays baseball in right field and he plans to add in soccer this year as well. He has played ball since he was a young boy. Austin is a straight A student. He works on our campus through the Work Based Learning Program. Austin exhibits a great work ethic and is very conscientious in everything he does.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

I have been coaching for 31 years and have never come across a student/athlete as conscientious, cooperative, and enthusiastic as Austin. When he first stepped on campus the summer before his freshman year, he was helping other athletes make it through conditioning runs, even the upperclassmen. He does his work, and then helps others finish theirs, always. When he doesn't have football practice, he runs with the cross country team. He does this just to get in better shape, but mostly, to help the runners get through their work. He is not the most athletically talented individual in the world, but no one anywhere gets more out of their innate ability than Austin.

Austin has many reasons that others would use to back down or give less than their best. He's not a very big fellow, not the quickest, nor strongest, nor most coordinated. He and his family are not financially gifted. You will never catch Austin letting any of that, or anything else, cause him to give less than his very best at all times, in the classroom, the gym, or field of competition.

Austin is active in his community, not in the ways that folks use to pad their resumes, but in ways that matter to the people whose lives he comes in contact with. He volunteers to help neighbors, and his church by helping with cleaning chores, yardwork, and the like. He sees a need, and through small and large acts of kindness, tries to fill the need. It's just who he is and how he operates.

Austin personifies the high school spirit of sport. It would be appropriate if this award bore his name.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Molly Skaggs

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Commissioner Julian Tackett

Phone: 859-299-5472

E-mail: jtackett@khsaa.org

Street Address: 2280 Executive Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Lexington, KY 40505

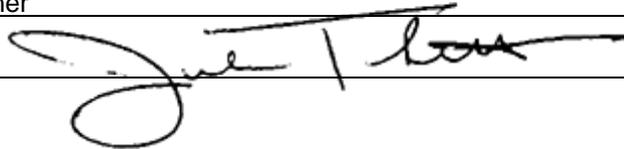
Date: 1/30/18

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Kentucky High School Athletic Association – Julian Tackett

Title: Commissioner

Signature: _____



NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Molly Skaggs is a four-year varsity letter winner in the sport of volleyball at Elliott County High School in Kentucky. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and competes on the school's academic team. While being a high school student-athlete, Molly still finds time to be involved in numerous activities including BETA Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Future Business Leaders of America, and Family Careers and Community Leaders of America. In addition to being the volleyball team captain and her involvement in numerous school activities, Molly also finds time to do volunteer tutoring at an elementary school in her spare time throughout the year.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Imagine playing your favorite sport or activity knowing that you would have to constantly leave the game to make sure you could stand up. Born without feet, Molly Skaggs does just that every game and practice to ensure her prosthetic legs are secure. Molly was born with one leg ending just below the knee and the other just above the ankle, and her prosthetic devices have become a normal part of her life. Molly has never let her prosthetic feet be an excuse to slow her down. Growing up, she participated in multiple sports which in turn led to her passion for volleyball. As an 8th grader, Molly knew that the high school she was going to attend did not field a team. With her passion as her fuel, she and her mother approached the school about starting to field a volleyball team. Fast forward five years and she is now "one of the originals" who started the program. Closing out her career, she was the starting setter for the varsity team and leaves Elliott County High School in Sandy Hook, KY a five-year varsity letter winner.

From a young age, she began honing her leadership skills. As the youngest of five siblings, she was always wanting to keep up with her older brothers and that very competitive nature has spilled over onto the court. Molly has had to fight through adversity and just wanted the opportunity to participate, just as her siblings and classmates do. So naturally, she was a team captain for her high school team and helped her high school get its first program wins during her senior season. Wearing three layers of knee-high socks over her prostheses, she typically started a game in the front row in order to sub out after she has served so she can wipe down the sweat that's accumulated inside her silicone liners. In-game maintenance was frequently required for this young athlete, but she has a natural resilience that hasn't let it hold her back in sports.

No feet does not define this athlete and she exemplifies the spirit of sport. Around her hometown, she wasn't seen as a volleyball player with prosthetic limbs, she was just seen as Molly, a kid playing her favorite sport alongside her teammates. Molly discovered that overcoming a disability can inspire others to do the same, therefore she continues to push through the challenges of prosthetics in order to participate in athletics. Not only was Molly an "original" within her school in jumpstarting a volleyball program, but she continues to be an outstanding student who maintains a 4.0 GPA and is involved in many clubs and activities while also finding time to volunteer. Molly's

story is one of inspiration and courage that illustrates how the love of the game and participating in high school sports can get you through anything.



Kentucky High School Athletic Association
2280 Executive Drive ° Lexington, KY 40505 www.khsaa.org ° (859)299-5472 (859)293-5999 (fax)

January 30, 2018

John Gillis
Associate Director of Publications and Communications
National Federation of High Schools
PO Box 690
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206

Dear Mr. Gillis,

It is with pleasure and pride that I submit this information to you for consideration of the NFHS Spirit of Sport Award. Please consider this as a supplement to Question 2 on the application, which states: "Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award." In addition to the nomination form and supplemental information attached, I would also call the committee's attention to the link at <https://youtu.be/6dc171HQfJI>, which contains a brief interview of the nominee.

This young lady epitomizes what the NFHS envisioned when the Spirit of Sport Award was created. Triumphant over adversity, a victory of the human spirit, each of these things could describe what people have said about this tremendous student.

I wholeheartedly ask on behalf of the KHSAA that you and your committee review this material, and give this young lady the utmost consideration for both the section and state awards in this great program. She truly represents the very best that education-based athletics has to offer and what we strive to see as the outcome of our daily work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julian Tackett", written in a cursive style.

Julian Tackett
Commissioner



http://www.dailyindependent.com/news/no-feet-doesn-t-mean-defeat-for-elliott-county-athlete/article_0c9e444e-361a-11e4-989c-001a4bcf887a.html

FEATURED

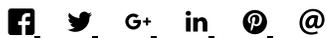
No feet doesn't mean defeat for Elliott County athlete

By MIKE JAMES The Independent Sep 6, 2014



Elliott County volleyball player Molly Skaggs returns a volley during a match against East Carter.

KEVIN GOLDY / THE INDEPENDENT



SANDY HOOK Growing up with two older brothers,

Molly Skaggs had to hold her own even though she was born with no feet.

Her mother remembers looking in the rear-view mirror and seeing toddler Molly in her car seat, reaching with her prosthetic leg to whack her siblings.

"Then I'd have to take it away from her," Judy Skaggs said.

That sibling rivalry, together with a naturally competitive nature, helps explain why Molly, 14, has always played sports, from Little League years on, and why she is a central player on Elliott County High School's volleyball team.

"Whatever her older brothers did, she wants to do," Skaggs said one afternoon last week while Molly was warming up for a game against East Carter.

"And now people say, Molly can do it. Most people that know her are impressed."

Skaggs is a co-coach of the team.

People that don't know her, like her opponents on the volleyball court, might not be impressed, but that could be because they have no idea the girl on the other side of the net has prosthetic feet. All they see is another player in maroon swatting the ball.

Molly wears three layers of tight knee-high socks over the prostheses, mainly for support and to protect their bindings. But during practice and game play, she takes her turns in serving, passing and setting the ball, then high-fiving teammates when Elliott County scores.

She has been wearing prostheses since she started walking at about 13 months. Born with one leg ending just below the knee and the other just above the ankle, the devices have become as normal a part of her life as glasses to the nearsighted.

From kindergarten on she has pursued sports, including basketball, soccer and Little League, never letting her prosthetic feet be an excuse to slow her down. "I think I tried everything," she said.

Her mother remembers from time to time Molly would get so wrapped up in playing the game that "she would just run right out of them."

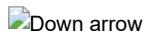
"I don't think some of the others knew. But we wanted them to treat her the same," Skaggs said.

"Volleyball is by far my favorite sport," Molly said. "I can't jump as high to spike and I can't dive as well, but volleyball is more about teamwork," she said.

Until recently, she hasn't been self-conscious about her feet. Now that she is a teenager, however, it's more of an issue, she said.

But Molly has a natural resilience and hasn't let it hold her back from sports, her mother said. In fact, when she saw paralympic snowboarder and double amputee Amy Purdy on the reality show "Dancing With the Stars," Molly discovered that overcoming a disability can inspire others to do the same.

1 comment



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Michael Sammons Sep 7, 2014
 She is definitely an inspiration to others. And she truly is a great kid.

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Daily Independent Events

- FEB 10** **Chris Young Losing Sleep 2018 Wo...**
Big Sandy Supersto... | Huntington, WV
- FRI 26** **Murder and Merriment presents " ...**
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- SAT 27** **Heartsaver CPR Class**
Bellefonte Centre | Ashland, KY
- SUN 28** **Weekly services**
Kellogg Independen... | Huntington, WV



	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED
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Volleyball player never gives up while performing on two prosthetic legs. 1:16

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

‘One of the originals.’ She was born without feet. That hasn’t stopped her on the court.

BY JOSH MOORE
jmoore@herald-leader.com

October 16, 2017 02:21 PM
Updated October 16, 2017 10:25 PM

Could you play your favorite sport if you knew you’d have to leave four to five times a game just to make sure you could stand up? Molly Skaggs does it every time she suits up for Elliott County’s volleyball team.

Skaggs, a setter, was born without complete legs. Her left leg ends about where her ankle should be. Her right ends about 4 inches past her knee; if it’d been 8 inches, “life would be a whole lot easier,” she says.

Molly wears prosthetic limbs on both legs, but it’s that right one that rubs against her skin, often leaving it bruised and raw after practices and games. On Thursday, Skaggs was the focus of a pregame ceremony as Elliott County celebrated its only senior volleyball player; on Friday, she stayed home from school because the pain in the aftermath of a three-game match was too much to take into the classroom.

ADVERTISING

In all likelihood, that was the next-to-last time Skaggs will have to suffer for her love of the game. Elliott County, the host of this week's 62nd District Tournament, is 3-10, and 0-6 against district competition. The Lions open the tournament Tuesday against East Carter, a team expected to reach the 16th Region championship game, if not win it.

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It could be the Sandy Hook community's last opportunity to see Skaggs, too.

"You can't hardly watch her without feeling some emotion," said Paul Lewis, a fan in the area. " ... I'm gonna do my best to be out there, myself, Tuesday night. I just want to see her play one more time."



Elliott County setter Molly Skaggs huddled with her team.

John Flavell

'No stopping her'

Jady Skaggs didn't know Molly was going to come into the world with parts of her legs missing. The ultrasounds of her womb didn't reveal anything out of the ordinary.

"It was a little bit of a shock when she was born at first," said Jady, who coaches the team along with her cousin, Angie Lewis. "... But afterwards, that's all right, she's gonna be just like everybody else."

Molly underwent surgery to remove an exposed bone when she was about 11 months old. Two months later she donned her first pair of prosthetic limbs and was starting to walk — the same time most babies start stomping around.

The youngest of five (three brothers, one sister), Molly figured out at an early age how to get the attention of her siblings when they weren't focused on her.

“

SHE WAS A REALLY, REALLY TOUGH BABY. IF THEY WOULDN'T PLAY WITH HER, SHE WOULD HIT 'EM WITH HER LEG. SHE WOULD TAKE HER LEGS OFF IN THE CAR WHEN SHE WAS IN THE CAR SEAT AND SHE WOULD FLIP 'EM TO THE SIDES AND HIT HER BROTHER WITH 'EM.

Jady Skaggs, Molly's mom and coach

"She was a really, really tough baby," Jady said. "If they wouldn't play with her, she would hit 'em with her leg. She would take her legs off in the car when she was in the car seat and she would flip 'em to the sides and hit her brother with 'em."

Molly took an interest in sports early, trying just about everything involving a ball. Elliott County's team captain started honing her leadership skills at a young age, too.

"I had her in elementary P.E.," said Greg Adkins, now Elliott County's athletics director. "From the time she was in first or second grade she could pretty well conduct the class without me even in there. The kids would mind her. She's got a great personality and energy about her."

If Molly had been born with complete legs, "there'd be no stopping her," Jady says.

"She moves better than some of 'em that have two legs that operate just fine," she said with laugh. "She's real determined and doesn't give up unless she's in so much pain that she can't take it."





Elliott County setter Molly Skaggs reached out for a volley as Jaci Blair (12) looks on during last Thursday's match against Morgan County.

John Flavell

Bumps and zits

Molly has never shied away from making light of her circumstances. Before she started grade school she'd crawl around without her prosthetics because she was allowing other kids to play with them. During vacations to the beach, a family friend would bury one of her legs with the foot propped out to try to frighten passersby.

"I could care less telling (people) about it," Molly said. "Everyone knows that I don't care if people joke about it, so they'll joke about it. It's never bothered me."

Molly met more envy than menace when she was young.

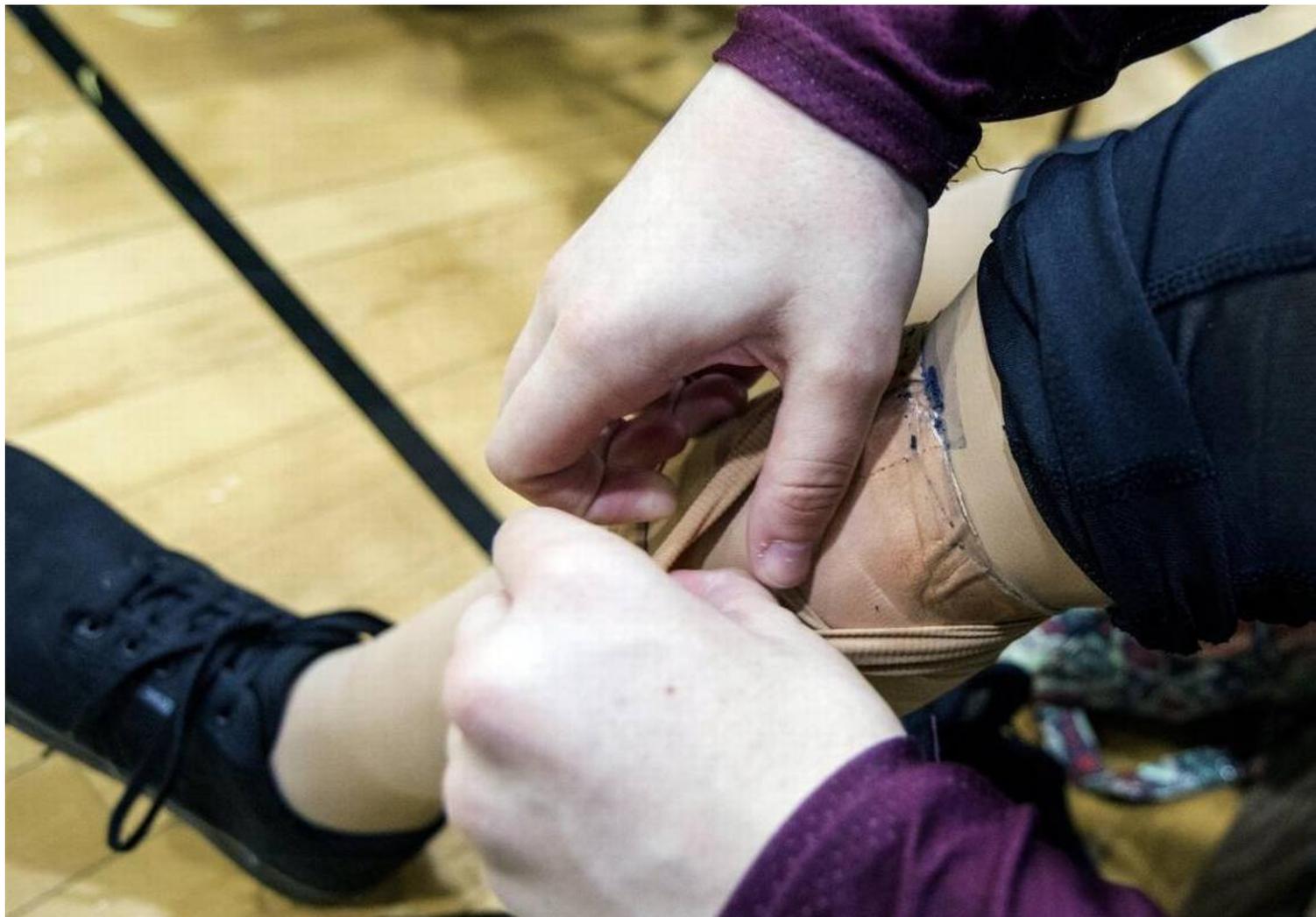
"Little kids in preschool and kindergarten would be upset because they didn't have a purple leg like Molly," Jady said. "They wanted one."

Today she isn't as prone to show off her prosthetics, or prosthetic-less legs, to curious parties.

"It's a teenager thing," Jady said. "You get a bump or a zit and you're tore up. Well that's her bump and zit now, her legs."

Part of it, too, is the labor necessary to displace her prosthetics isn't worthwhile. Because the residual limb of her right leg isn't long enough to hold a prosthetic on its own, she must wear a suspension sleeve that goes up to her thigh. When she's on the court, she dons spandex shorts that go down to her knees and long socks that come up to them to support and protect the binding.

Even with all that support, in-game maintenance is frequently required. Molly will often start on the front row and sub out after she's served so she can wipe down sweat that's accumulated between her right knee and its prosthetic; it doesn't take long for the silicone to start getting slippery.



Elliott County setter Molly Skaggs peeled back some of the material that makes up one of her prosthetic legs after Thursday's match against Morgan County.
John Flavell

'One of the originals'

Senior Night was more emotional than Molly anticipated.

"I thought it would be all laughing and everything, but then the girls got all teary-eyed on me when they were talking to me and started hugging me and made me really sad," Molly said.

She's not just Elliott County's only senior, but its first to have started playing as a freshman and played four years of varsity volleyball. The Lions didn't have a program until 2014, when Jady — who played at Rowan County — and Angie Lewis had daughters who wanted to play and were able to spark enough interest to get a team going.

Elliott County's three wins this season? Those are the program's only three wins, period.

"Everybody, even in our district, has 15-to-20-some years on us," Jady said. "Even though Molly has four years, seniors like that we played (on Thursday), they've usually got seven or eight years. It makes it a little bit rougher."

How does Molly feel about being one of Elliott County volleyball's foundational pillars?

"I never really thought much about it until people started saying, 'Oh, you're one of the originals,'" Molly said. "It sounds pretty cool to me, though."

Among the originals, she is the most original. Every time she takes the floor, fans unfamiliar with her background start whispering in the stands, trying to figure out why she's dressed differently and going to the bench so frequently.

Then they realize why. "Man, she is so inspirational," Jady said. "As a coach I couldn't be any more proud of her."

Around Sandy Hook, people don't see Molly Skaggs, a volleyball player with prosthetic limbs. They see Molly Skaggs, a kid playing her favorite sport, just like the five others with her on the court.

"It's always been Molly," Adkins said, "and that's how everybody's looked at her."



Elliott County senior Molly Skaggs (7) was the center of attention for last Thursday's Senior Night match against Morgan County in Sandy Hook, Ky.

John Flavell

Josh Moore: 859-231-1307, @HLpreps

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To Whom it may concern;

I am writing this letter in support of the nomination of Elliott County High School senior volleyball player Molly Skaggs for the NFHS Spirit of Sport award. As a local supervisor of high school officials and leader in our youth ministry in my church, I find Molly to be very interested in community, intellectual, athletic and spiritual endeavors. Watching her develop into such a fine young lady has been a reminder of how a family can work together to make the school year productive and enjoyable.

Molly has been involved in community efforts such as serving in the (FBLA) Future Business Leaders of America and also serving in the (FCC) Future Community Careers organizations. Molly is active in her church, The Stark United Methodist Church, and enjoys working with younger kids. At Elliott County High School, Molly has been active in several programs including volleyball, FBLA, Beta Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Educational Talent Search and the Academic team. While carrying such a large load of extracurricular activities, Molly also has maintained a 4.0 grade point average and continues to show a willingness to learn.

When other students are getting out of bed to get dressed for school, she is getting out of bed to put on her legs and feet. She never complains and doesn't let her slow down. Molly has an enthusiasm for life that is well recognized by her peers, coaches, teachers and even opponents from other schools. She is always willing to go the extra distance in practice, school or whatever she is doing in order to be successful. Molly is currently in the process of joining a senior training program for upcoming graduates to begin training to become volleyball officials. This is a beautiful way for Molly to give back to a sport that she has fallen in love with.

As you can tell, I have become very fond of Molly Skaggs. I know that wherever life leads her she will become an excellent student and citizen as well as an outstanding leader in her community. Her family has been very supportive of every stage of this young lady's life and I believe that this particular Kentucky High School student athlete will make an excellent recipient of your outstanding award.

Thanks for your consideration to Molly - a true spirit who has been a blessing to so many in our little immediate area.

Sincerely,

Paul B. Lewis
Supervisor of Officials 16th Region -- VB / SB
606-831-1643
paulump10@aol.com

Teenager born without feet is vital part of school's volleyball team

By: Brandon Smith

Updated: Sep 24, 2014 04:51 PM EDT



A smiling Molly Skaggs looks like any other player on the Elliott County High School volleyball team. "I love spiking, I love serving, I love bumping, I love everything about volleyball," said Molly Skaggs.

It's that second, third, and maybe even fourth glance that her family knows all too well.

"It was a shock when she was born, but God doesn't make mistakes," said her mother Jady Skaggs.

Molly was born without feet, but now has prosthetic legs. She got the legs shortly after her first birthday. Her prosthetics have become so much a part of her life.

"I never thought I would be an inspiration to anyone. When I started volleyball, I did it just for fun because I really wanted to do a sport. I always wanted to play volleyball, but when people started recognizing it I felt really good about myself," said Molly Skaggs.

"She's always been determined and has never let it bother her. If she wants to do it, she'll do it," said her mother.

And because of her condition Molly feels like it's made her the person she is today.

"I feel like I would be snobby. I think I wouldn't be the person I would be today if I did have two feet. I have to go through a lot more challenges with prosthetics, but I'm blessed," said Molly Skaggs.

Around The Web

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: David Mayfield Bennett

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Matt Warren

Phone: 803-821-1229

E-mail: mwarren@lexington1.net

Street Address: 100 Tarrar Springs Road

City, State, Zip Code: Lexington, SC 29072

Date: 01/24/2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Tammie Newman

Title: SCHSL Communications and Public Relations Director

Signature:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tammie L. Newman".

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: David Mayfield Bennett

Current Address: 100 Tarrar Springs Road
Lexington, SC 29072

Phone: 803-821-5608

E-mail: dbennett@lexington1.net

School (if any): Lexington One Schools

Cities: Lexington / Gilbert / Pelion State: South Carolina

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Coach Bennett currently serves as District Director of Athletics for Lexington County School District One. Coach Bennett's career focus has been athletic administration and coaching. He is a passionate, energetic, and dedicated leader, mentor and coach committed to motivating student-athletes to excel in character, education and competition. His enthusiastic to remain actively involved in cultivating tomorrow's leaders is contagious.

Career Coaching Highlights: 2016 5AAAA Region Athletic Director of the Year 2004, 2010 Big South Coach of the Year 1999, 2000, 2001 Division II National Playoffs 2004 FCS Regional Coach of the Year 2001 Division II National Semifinalists 2006 Sport-Tex National Coach of the Year 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001 SAC Coach of the Year 2006, 2010 FCS National Playoffs 1995, 1996, 2000 Regional Coach of the Year 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010 Big South Champions 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001 SAC Champions Overall record, 148-67 1995, 1996 SAC Golf Champions/Coach of the Year

Experience: Lexington School District 1/River Bluff High School – Lexington, SC District Director of Athletics – July 2016-present Athletic Director/Head Football Coach – April 2013-June 2016 Overall Record 22-11, Upset #1 seed in 1st round of State Playoffs, 2014 Horry County Schools/Socastee High School – Myrtle Beach, SC Athletic Director– July 2012 - April 2013 Coastal Carolina University - Conway, SC 29526 Head Football Coach/ January 2002-December 2011

Coach Bennett was responsible for establishing an FCS level football program from birth through the first decade of existence. Overall record, 63-39 Catawba College – West Innes Street, Salisbury, NC 28144 Head Football Coach, Assistant AD, Teacher, Head Golf Coach/ January 1990-December 2001 Overall record, 63-17 in 7 seasons as the Head Coach Newberry College - Newberry, SC

Assistant Football Coach, Dean of Men, Women's Softball Coach/ August 1988-December 1989 Goose Creek High School, Goose Creek, SC Assistant Football Coach, Guidance Counselor/ August 1987-June 1988

Education: Clemson University, MEd/Guidance and Counseling, 1986 Presbyterian College, BS History/Social Studies, 1984

Career Awards/Honors: 2016 Dal Shealy FCA Coach of the Year Big South All Decade Team Head Coach 2011 FCA Ring of Honor Inductee 2011 Phil Clark Lifetime Achievement Award 2010 Catawba College Hall of Fame Inductee 2008-2011 FCS Board Member 2011 FCS Board President Coached 10 NFL Players

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Coach Bennett transitioned to the role of District Director of Athletics in July of 2016. Since that time he has worked to improve the culture within the overall athletic department through four main initiatives.

First, Coach Bennett created the Lexington One Coaches Academy aimed at providing support and leadership development for all Lexington One coaches under the age of 30. This program pairs every coach under 30 with a mentor charged with providing guidance and counsel during this critical time of development. Coach Bennett has used his resources to elicit the support and counsel of numerous college and veteran high school coaches. The Coaches Academy also requires every young coach attend one 90-minute class with a focus on coaching the heart of each student-athlete.

Also, Coach Bennett has made a concerted effort to get our high school athletes more involved in their feeder elementary schools. His Lex1ROARS (Reaching Out with Attitude, Respect, and Sportsmanship) program has placed high school athletes into elementary schools and allowed them to become role models for our younger students. The Lex1ROARS program has become very popular as elementary school principals are consistently reaching out to Coach Bennett to schedule a visit.

Another emphasis for Coach Bennett involves his work with the Unified Champion Schools Program. The Unified Champions Schools program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a strategy to activate youth, engage educators, and promote school communities of acceptance and inclusion where all young people are agents of change. Coach Bennett was a driving force in the decision to present athletic letters to all Special Olympic Unified Sports participants. On February 7, 2017, 45 Special Olympics Unified Sports participants were awarded letters and Lexington High School's National Unified Champion school banner was unveiled during a ceremony in the school gymnasium. ESPN host Kevin Negandhi took part in the event which culminated in a pep rally attended by more than 1,000 students from Lexington, River Bluff and White Knoll high schools.

Finally, Coach Bennett has been a major advocate for increasing coaching supplements across the board in Lexington One. His 5-year plan will accomplish the supplement increase for all teacher-coaches by the 2022-2023 school year. Coach Bennett spend a great deal of time this Fall reaching out to other athletic departments in South Carolina to gain a better understanding of where we need to be supplement wise as a district. His goal with this plan is to reward the efforts of teacher-coaches as well as be able to retain and recruit quality teacher-coaches.

Culture is a word that Coach Bennett uses on a daily basis. He understands the value in an athletic department that truly cares about the development of the whole child. His presence in our schools and the effort he puts into providing support to our Athletic Directors and coaches shows he understands not only what a strong culture is, but how it is cultivated.

Lexington One feels Coach Bennett's efforts to create a culture of strong leadership and caring within our athletic department makes him worthy of the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. His efforts, though only for a short period of time, have already made a difference in Lexington One Athletics. We look forward to seeing how far his servant leadership can take us.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Cane Ridge High School Football Team
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Matthew Gillespie

Phone: 615-889-6740

E-mail: mgillespie@tssaa.org

Street Address: 3333 Lebanon Road

City, State, Zip Code: Hermitage, TN, 37076

Date: January 8, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Bernard Childress

Title: Executive Director

Signature: _____

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student X Coach X Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator x Other (School Football Team)

Name of Nominee: James Reese, III (Athletic Director)
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 12848 Old Hickory Blvd.
(street address)

Antioch, TN, 37013
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 615-405-9554 (mobile); 615-687-4008 (school number)

E-mail: james.reese@mnps.org

School (if any): Cane Ridge High School

City: Antioch State: TN

Name of Nominee: Eddie Woods (Head Football Coch)
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 12848 Old Hickory Blvd.
(street address)

Antioch, TN, 37013
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 901-331-7167 (mobile); 615-687-4000 (school number)

E-mail: ewoods06@yahoo.com

School (if any): Cane Ridge High School

City: Antioch State: TN

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Cane Ridge High School is a large public school located in south Nashville with a diverse student population of over 1,600. The school opened in 2008.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

On December 1, 2017, Cane Ridge High School played in the TSSAA Class 6A (largest class) football championship game against Maryville High School. It was the school's first time to make it to the championship game. They faced a Maryville Rebels team that had won 15 state football titles and had only lost 10 times in their last 264 games. It was obvious that Maryville was expected by most to win the game, and they did. Maryville defeated Cane Ridge 42-7 to win the 2017 Class 6A Championship.

For TSSAA, like so many other state associations, sportsmanship is an extremely important issue that the association puts an emphasis on. Schools are given awards and special recognition annually for good sportsmanship. At the conclusion of that championship game, Cane Ridge displayed the most outstanding sportsmanship in defeat that anyone on our staff has ever seen. It was the epitome of what is an example of sportsmanship that all schools and participants should follow.

After being awarded the runner-up trophy, instead of taking the trophy and walking to their sideline with heads hung and frowns on their faces (like we've all seen so many times from a team that lost), the coaches and numerous players from Cane Ridge thanked the Maryville team just for the opportunity to play and congratulated them on their win. It was more than just the standard hand shake and "good game, good game." It was such an extraordinary display of sportsmanship, the television play-by-play commentator, Mike Keith (radio broadcaster for the Tennessee Titans), made numerous mentions of it during the broadcast. Bernard Childress, the TSSAA Executive Director, was so impressed by this team and what they did, he asked the coach of Cane Ridge if he could speak directly to them on the field. The team took a knee and Mr. Childress congratulated them on their season, but more importantly how they carried themselves in defeat.

Those reviewing this nomination can watch the three-plus minute clip of the broadcast which has been submitted with this nomination.

Section 4

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Damari Dejure Hendrix
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Craig Anderson

Phone: 309-663-6377

E-mail: canderson@ihsa.org

Street Address: 2715 McGraw Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Bloomington, Illinois, 61704

Date: January 31, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Illinois High School Association

Title: Executive Director

Signature: Craig Anderson

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Damari Hendrix is currently a junior at Foreman College and Career Academy high school in Chicago. He participated in basketball as a freshman, participating on the JV and varsity teams.

Due to his recovery, he was home-schooled as a sophomore and did not participate in any extracurricular activities.

He currently participates in basketball at Foreman.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Brian Rose will never forget the first time he met Damari Hendrix. It followed a meeting in April 2016 introducing Rose as the new boys' basketball at Foreman High School in Chicago. Talking with his future players, Hendrix flashed the wry sense of humor and trademark smile that have endeared him to his coach ever since.

"He sort of hangs in the back of the room and then comes up to me at the end, shakes my hand and tells me his name is 'Kobe'," laughs Rose.

Kobe as in Bryant. As in a player who is among the top one percent of basketball players in NBA history.

Just months after making that great first impression on his new coach, Damari would find himself in a very different one percent.

Labor Day weekend marks the end of summer in Chicago, with Chicago Public Schools returning to session after the holiday. That Saturday had been a good day for Damari and his friends. A group that included his younger brother, as well as Foreman teammate Bobby Hughes, made their way to La Follette Park, where they had grown up playing, in the late afternoon. Seniority rules on the single court at La Follette, so Damari and company waited patiently for the games featuring older players to finish, and after getting on the court, played until just after sunset.

"It can be a tough area and park," said Hughes. "We keep an eye out. When we see someone we don't know or that might be up to no good, we move to another part of the park or get out of there."

Two men across the park that fit that description, prompting the group to disperse from the park bench they were talking and laughing on following their game. Damari urged Hughes to get his brother out of the park as the group began to scatter, while he tried to double back to grab some cloths and a ball that had been left behind.

That's when the gunshots started.

The group fled in multiple directions, with Hughes and Damari's brother sprinting behind the elementary school across the street. There they began calling Damari's cell phone. With no answer on the phone and sirens getting closer, they felt safe to return to the park. That is where they found Damari laying on the ground, his white t-shirt soaked in blood. His dreadlocks

obscured the bullet entry point, initially flummoxing his friends and arriving paramedics on where he had been hit.

"I didn't feel it. I didn't know I was hit until my body shutdown as I was running," said Damari. "Everyone was trying to keep me awake."

It was at the hospital where Damari's mother, Jorie Hendrix, was given those chilling odds regarding Damari's chance of making it through surgery alive.

One percent.

"I just knew he would be ok," Jorie Hendrix said. "He is my fighter."

Three surgeries and a four-day medically induced coma followed, while the thrill of beating the odds weighed against the stark reality of the unknowns about his long-term recovery.

Damari was unable to talk for about two months, while feeling and movement were limited in other parts of his body. A 3.5 GPA student as a freshman, he would have to be homeschooled as a sophomore, losing his daily interaction with teachers and friends, not to mention the game of basketball.

The game remained an important part of his recovery, as his therapists instituted basketball-related drills into his sessions, which were often three times per day. When friends came to visit at the hospital, they'd ultimately make their way to the rooftop basketball court to shoot around.

"I wanted to snap back fast, but it took time," said Damari. "Week-to-week I'd pick out a little thing, a small goal like trying to move my fingers a little quicker. Each time I progressed, I kept thinking 'I can't wait to get back to hoops with my friends.'"

That came faster than anyone anticipated, as Damari was back in school and attending open gyms when school began in September. It took time to round into form, and as his story became national news, the media glare didn't make his return to the court in the season-opener in November any easier.

"ESPN and all these media outlets are covering the game, so to ease him in, we brought him off the bench," said Rose. "He took one dribble and pulled up and made his first shot. I pulled him out with about a minute left. It was emotional watching him walk off the court. I told him 'that's over, the hardest part is over. Now it's just basketball.'"

Always a leader in a group where many of the players have played together since middle school, Rose recognized the important role his teammates played in Damari's return.

"In his first game back he got knocked down and all four teammates ran over to pick him up. That says a lot to me," said Rose. "When Damari came back to the team, his teammates understood that his body couldn't always do things as fast as his mind wanted. They picked him up the same way he used to for them. They wouldn't let him give into frustration or quit on himself."

Of the shared experiences on the Foreman team, not all are positive, as nearly every member has been personally impacted by gun violence prior to Damari being shot.

When asked about that daily reality, Damari gets more serious than a 16-year old should have to be. His posture turns stern, a surge of anger and confusion in his eyes. He appears ready to lash out, but ultimately collects himself and is measured in his response.

"It's crazy that kids can't grow up and just have fun," said Damari. "Go to a park or wherever they want to go. Sometimes you feel caged in, limited in everything you do. Innocent people die every day. It's crazy."

Basketball remains a safehaven for Damari.

"When I am playing basketball, I don't think about anything. I just hoop," he says.

Rose sees it the same.

"The way I look at it is, any time I can have them in the gym, they aren't somewhere else," said Rose. "We have a good group of kids, so it's not that I worry so much about them making bad choices. It's the people that are around them making a bad decision, or someone they don't even know. That is what concerns me."

The coach also points out that Damari and his teammates have overcome adversity that simply doesn't exist for most schools.

"6:15 PM is the latest we ever practice," said Rose. "Most of our kids have to take public transportation home and I don't want to send them home when it's late, so we practice with all of our levels together at once. When I started, our kids had to hang the backboards in the gym, and for a while, our JV team and varsity shared uniforms, handing them off after the JV game ended. They have overcome so much and I am proud of them. They are resilient whether they know it or not."

From a basketball sense, Damari estimates he was at 80 percent in December. About 20 pounds shy of his freshman year weight and still regaining strength in his legs.

When asked what 100 percent Damari looks like, he leans forward and a smile breaks across his face.

"Dunking over people. Breaking ankles. That's me at 100 percent," he says as the smile grows bigger.

Rose thinks that assessment isn't that far off. He glowingly recalls an up-and-under dunk that Damari threw down in a summer league game just weeks before the shooting.

"I think he is a (NCAA) Division II caliber talent right now," said Rose. "As he continues to improve, there is no reason that he can't be a Division I prospect by the end of his senior season."

From a one percent chance to live, to playing college basketball?

"Every day I thank God that I'm alive," said Damari. "I got a second chance. I can walk and talk, I could be stuck in a wheelchair or worse. I just want to hoop and keep my grades up to try and earn a scholarship. That's where my focus is. Anything is possible with hard work and dedication."

Who wants to bet against Damari Hendrix?



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Robby Muse-Myers

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Kerrie Schludecker

Phone: 317-617-1876

E-mail: kschludecker@ihsaa.org

Street Address: 9150 North Meridian Street

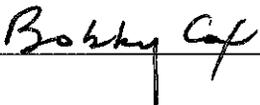
City, State, Zip Code: Indianapolis, Indiana 46240

Date: 10/27/2017

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Bobby Cox

Title: Commissioner

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Robby Muse-Myers
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 1876 E 600
(street address)

Lebanon IN 46052
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 317-459-4122

E-mail: robert.muse.myers6@gmail.com

School (if any): Lebanon High School

City: Lebanon State: Indiana

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Robby has faced adversity and life challenges with an extremely positive attitude. He has used these situations as motivation to succeed in life and school. He has taken the opportunity to get involved in many clubs, organizations, and athletic programs. In addition, despite not having much in his life, he has spent time helping others and the Lebanon Community. At Lebanon High School Robby participates in DECA (student business organization), Cross Country, Track and Field, and Basketball. He was voted by his peers as the freshmen and sophomore Class President, and he has held a Class Council position for 4 years. In addition, he was a member of the Boone County Kiwanis Youth Global Leadership Academy and instrumental in the Lebanon Community by having a position on the Lebanon Mayor's Youth Council.

Robby has received several awards and acknowledgements for his tremendous efforts and outstanding achievements. He is an extremely humble person and appreciates everyone recognizing how hard he works; however, he truly hopes his story will inspire others who face adversity to stand tall, work hard, and understand that it is possible for them to achieve success.

While participating at Lebanon High School on the Cross Country and Track and Field teams, Robby has been named by his teammates as Captain of these teams all 4 years of his high school career. In his sophomore year, he was named Athlete of the Year and achieved Academic All-State Honorable Mention. In Cross Country, Robby has been named three times by the Sagamore Conference to the All-Second Team, and in his senior year, he was named to the First Team All Sagamore Conference. In Track and Field, Robby was Conference Champion in the 800 meters which awarded him First Team All-Sagamore Conference honors, and he was named by his peers at Lebanon as Most Valuable Track Athlete. He also achieved the highest GPA for a track athlete and as a result received the Scholar Athlete Award. In addition Robby has received the Lebanon Sportsmanship Award for Cross Country twice and the Sportsmanship Award for Track and Field once. Robby is a two time Regional qualifier in Cross Country and a two time Regional qualifier in Track and Field events, 4 X 800 and 4 X 400. This past season, Robby helped lead his team win the Sagamore Conference Track & Field Championship Title for the first time in 12 years. Lebanon has a 3.3 B+ Scholar Athlete Award, "Student Athletes Achieving Excellence in Academics and Athletics," that is awarded to athletes who maintain a 3.3 B+ or higher GPA while participating in a sport during that particular season. Robby has achieved this honor eight times, every time he has participated in a sport season. Robby did participate in winter basketball his freshman year, and during this season, he was awarded the Highest GPA Award for his team and the Sportsmanship Award.

Robby has also been recognized by his peers and teachers for some outstanding honors outside of the athletic arena. Robby's peers selected him as the Winter Frost Fest Prince and in the spring as Prom King. He received the Spanish III Academic of Excellence Award from the Foreign Language Department Teachers at Lebanon High School. Robby has participated in all these athletic programs and organizations, and at the same time been taking care of himself and maintaining a GPA of 3.7 or higher. He is ranked 36 out of 235 students in his class which is in the top 15%.

Robby is truly an amazing individual and a role model for not just student athletes but all individuals.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Robby truly exemplifies the ideals of positive spirit of sport that represents the core mission of education-based athletics. As the author of the story written about Robby in the Indianapolis Star on October 12th of 2017, Greg Doyle so eloquently wrote that Robby has used High School Sports in a positive way to help him deal with and overcome the many challenges and adversity he was forced to face in his life. Robby turned to high school sports, his community, friends, teachers, administrators and coaches for support and as a result was able to motivate himself to achieve success. When you lose both your parents and your 21 year old sister is supposed to take care of you without any experience, you are forced into making adult decisions and choices you thought you would never have to make until later in life. As a result, you can choose two pathways: one of destruction or one of wanting to achieve success. Although Robby struggled at times, his positive outlook on life and his positive character traits would not let him go down the wrong path. He used sports to help him stay positive. His dedication, commitment and motivation to achieving success in the athletic arena carried over to his academics. His positive characteristics and his ability to communicate well with others created an environment where others wanted to reach out and help. His classmates and teammates viewed him as a leader and as a result voted for him to hold several leadership positions, not because they felt sorry for Robby, but because they truly believed he would value their opinions and work hard to help them achieve success. Robby has always supported all of his teammates and his opponents. You can always find him before a race encouraging others and wishing them good luck and after a race congratulating all the runners. He was extremely motivated to win but deep down he was just so happy to be able to participate. Without Robby participating in High School Sports and the support of others, I am not sure Robby would have made it. Participating in High School Sports provides and teaches you positive character traits (commitment, dedication, leadership, time management skills, how to overcome adversity, deal with failure etc...) to be successful in your future endeavors that you may not learn in a classroom or receive at home. And in Robby's situation, he had no home or true parents in which to obtain these attributes. He received these from his participation in sports and from the support of others. I truly believe he should be honored and recognized for what he has achieved by overcoming his adversity and his story should be told so others can follow his example. Again, he is a true role model for others.



ADMINISTRATION CENTER
Diane Scott
Director of Curriculum

November 2, 2017

National Federation of State High School Associations
PO Box 690
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Dear Kerrie Schludecker,

It is with great pleasure that I submit this letter of support for Robert Muse-Myers as a nominee for the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. I have followed Robby's story for the past several years. As a public school educator since 1981 I have encountered many students with a variety of "stories" over the years. When I reflect on what I have known about Robby during his middle school and high school years in Lebanon, I must say that his story is one that will stand out in my mind for many years to come.

Robby and his family have been faced with a variety of challenges. What is amazing to me is how Robby has chosen to respond to the challenges. Rather than allowing himself to be overcome by grief, loss and hardship, Robby has pulled himself up by his boot straps and stay on a positive path. He has intentionally elected to make excellent life choices. He has exemplified the meaning behind the well-known phrase, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going". This is exemplified by how Robby tackles academic responsibilities by enrolling and excelling in some of the most accelerated courses offered by Lebanon High School, Robby's dedication and accomplishment as a member of the LHS Cross Country Team and LHS Track Team, and the way Robby serves as a leader and excellent role model among his peers.

Simply stated, Robby has an excellent work ethic, he is extremely responsible, and his actions indicate that he has a strong moral compass. Peers and adults seem to gravitate to Robby because of who he is. He is a natural leader with the best of intentions to "do well". I look forward to hearing more of Robby's life stories after graduation.

Sincerely,

Diane Scott
Director of Curriculum
Lebanon Community School Corporation

Robby Muse-Meyer's Supporting Documentation

Video From Indianapolis Star: <http://indy.st/2xyZqy5>

Newspaper Article: <http://usatodayhss.com/2017/ind-runner-loses-one-parent-then-the-other-%e2%80%95-and-finds-two-moms>

Lebanon High School

510 Essex Drive
Lebanon, IN 46052
Tel: (765) 482-0400 Fax: (765) 483-3094
CEEB CODE: 152-025
Date Printed: 11/03/17
Counselor: L HENEGAR

Overall Summary
Cumulative Un-weighted GPA: 3.434
Cumulative Weighted GPA: 3.700
Student Ranking: 36 of 235
Diploma Track: C40/Acd & Tech Hrs(GQE)
Graduation Date: 06/01/2018

Personal Info
Student Name: Robert Nelson Muse-Myers
STN: 056506022 Birth Date: 09/25/1999
Grade: 12 Gender: MALE Grad Year: 2018
Entered: 08/07/2014 Withdraw:
Parent/Guardian: Julie Campbell-Tooole
Jeff Tooole
1876 E 600 S
Lebanon, IN 46052
Phone: (317) 459-4122

Course	Grade	S1	S2	Cr Emd	Wgtd Courses	Not In Rank
2014						
2520 ALG I A	08	C		1.000		
2520 ALG I B	08		C	1.000		
5056 INT AGFNR	08	B		1.000		
5056 INT AGFNR	08		B	1.000		

Course	Grade	S1	S2	Cr Emd	Wgtd Courses	Not In Rank
2015						
1002 PRE-AP ENG 9	09	B		1.000	*	
1002 PRE-AP ENG 9	09		B	1.000	*	
2120 SPAN I	09	B+		1.000		
2120 SPAN I	09		A	1.000		
2532 GEOM-A	09	B-		1.000		
2532 GEOM-B	09		B-	1.000		
3024 BIOT (F)	09	B		1.000	*	
3024 BIOT (F)	09		A-	1.000	*	
1548 PREAPWLDHST	09	B		1.000	*	
1548 PREAPWLDHST	09		A-	1.000	*	
5394 PRECCS	09	A-		1.000	*	
3505 HLTH&WELL	09		A	1.000		
3542 PHYS ED	09	A		1.000		
3542 PHYS ED II	09		A+	1.000		
2016						
1004 PRE-AP ENG10	10	A		1.000	*	
1004 PRE-AP ENG10	10		A	1.000	*	
1076 SPEECH	10	A-		1.000		
2122 SPAN II	10	B+		1.000		
2122 SPAN II	10		B+	1.000		
2522 ALG II A	10	B+		1.000		
2522 ALG II B	10		B	1.000		
3064 PREAPCHEM I	10	C+		1.000	*	
3064 PREAPCHEM I	10		C	1.000	*	
4792 INT CONST	10	A		1.000		
4792 INT CONST	10		A+	1.000		
4206 MUS HIST	10	A		1.000		
4204 PIANO KEY	10		A	1.000		
5438 INTGUL HOS	10	A		1.000		
5438 INTGUL HOS	10		A-	1.000		

Course	Grade	S1	S2	Cr Emd	Wgtd Courses	Not In Rank
1124 ADV ENG CC	12			0.000	>	
1124 ADV ENG CC	12			0.000	>	
2126 SPAN IV	12			0.000		
2126 SPAN IV	12			0.000		
2562 CALC AB AP	12			0.000	>	
2562 CALC AB AP	12			0.000	>	
1532 PSYCH	12			0.000		
1580 US GOVT AP	12			0.000	>	
1514 ECON (H)	12			0.000	*	
4540 PRSPINRSP	12			0.000		
3966 ENT VENT	12			0.000	*	
5966 ENT VENT	12			0.000	*	
5914 PRN MKRT	12			0.000	*	
5914 PRN MKRT	12			0.000	*	
ASSISTANT	12			0.000	*	
STUDY HALL	12			0.000		

PSAT Test Scores	
Description	Gr Date Taken
AP Eng Lit/Comp	11 06/03/2017

ACT Test Scores			
Eng	Math	Read	Sci
25	20	22	24
Comp 23	Wrig 0		

ECA Test Scores			
Course	Scale	Cut	Status
Alg I	615	564/655	P
Biology	553	509/646	P
Eng 10	484	360/589	P

Immunizations				
Date 1	Date 2	Date 3	Date 4	Date 5
DTaP 12/01/1999	02/04/2000	04/06/2000	01/23/2001	11/17/2003
IPV 12/01/1999	02/04/2000	01/23/2001	11/17/2003	
MMR 10/24/2000	11/17/2003			
MMR 10/24/2000	11/17/2003			
HepB 02/04/2000	04/06/2000	10/24/2000		
VAR 10/24/2000	05/01/2008			
MCV4 03/18/2011	04/28/2017			
Tdap 03/18/2011				

Transcript is unofficial unless it is embossed with the school seal.



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD

Official Nomination Form - 2018

IOWA

SEYMOUR HIGH SCHOOL & COMMUNITY



National Federation of State High School Associations
PO Box 690 | Indianapolis, Indiana 46206
Phone: 317-972-6900 | Fax: 317.822.5700

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Seymour Community School District, Seymour, Iowa
(first, middle, last)

Individuals Submitting Nomination:

Name: Bud Legg & Chris Cuellar

Phone: 515-432-2011

E-mail: blegg@iahsaa.org; ccuellar@iahsaa.org

Street Address: PO Box 10

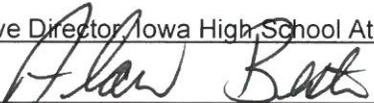
City, State, Zip Code: Boone, IA 50036-0010

Date: 11/22/2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Alan Beste

Title: Executive Director, Iowa High School Athletic Association

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer **School & Community**
of Seymour, IA Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Seymour Community Schools (Mark Kruzich, Activities Director)
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 100 South Park Ave.
(street address)
Seymour, IA 52590
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 641-898-2291

E-mail: brad.breon@seymorcsd.org

School (if any): above

City: Seymour State: IA

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

The community of Seymour, population 700, and the students who attend the school have been coping with the effects of a devastating F-2 tornado that struck the community March 6, 2017. Houses were shattered and the elementary and secondary school sustained considerable damage.

In small Iowa communities, the school is not only the educational hub but also the cultural and entertainment center. When the auditorium and school's two gymnasiums sustained considerable damage, the lives of students were dramatically altered. For nearly three weeks, the town picked up and cleaned up the ruins so the school could re-open.

"The day after the tornado I was at the school by 7 a.m. and there were already hundreds of people here, ready to help clear debris," Seymour activities director Mark Kruzich recalled. "I don't think we knew for sure how extensive the damage was. We started out like, 'Oh, we'll get this cleaned up and be back to classes in a couple days. Obviously, that didn't happen, but the community really pulled together.

"Now, I can laugh to myself about all this because the kids have handled everything better than some of the adults."

Graduation ceremonies were held outside and went off without a problem. To further complicate matters, the community had passed a bond issue to address improvements, but no contracts had been issued. Insurance benefits eased some of the monetary issues of moving forward, and everyone made it work.

"Our main gym was built in the 1930s during the Depression era," Kruzich said. "The 1947 girls' basketball championship team played in that gym. The community took it hard when they lost it, but the kids have really rebounded."

Beyond the X's and O's and wins and losses that are a part of educational activities, there is a love of the game. Amidst this tragedy, that fortunately did not result in the loss of lives, the values of the Spirit of Sport Award emerged and were celebrated.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

When the 2017-18 school year began, the rebuilding of the high school gymnasium was underway but will not be completed until the fall of 2018. Where to practice and play was a critical decision for coaches and players of the boys' and girls' teams, who carry the tradition of a successful southern Iowa program.

An 80-foot by 80-foot construction building on the edge of town was empty and arrangements were made to convert it with a weight training area, volleyball, and basketball practice areas.

"It's an old Morton building," Kruzich said, "so we laid down a plastic tile court with a couple of playground hoops. The kids have renovated, painted, and helped move supplies.

"It's amazing. We used to have all kinds of turmoil and conflict over trivial things here. With some of the things that have happened, we don't really have to worry about that stuff anymore."

While not being able to have their own court, the Warriors and Warriorettes played varsity home games at nearby Centerville, where athletic director Rich Parker is a Seymour grad. Seymour's junior high and junior varsity volleyball and basketball seasons were played entirely on the road. The girls' basketball team was undefeated (15-0) as of this writing.

"We thought there was no way we could use Centerville as a facility, but we ended up having just three date conflicts, so those were easy fixes," Kruzich said. "We appreciate everything everyone has done for us in Centerville. They've been awesome to work with."

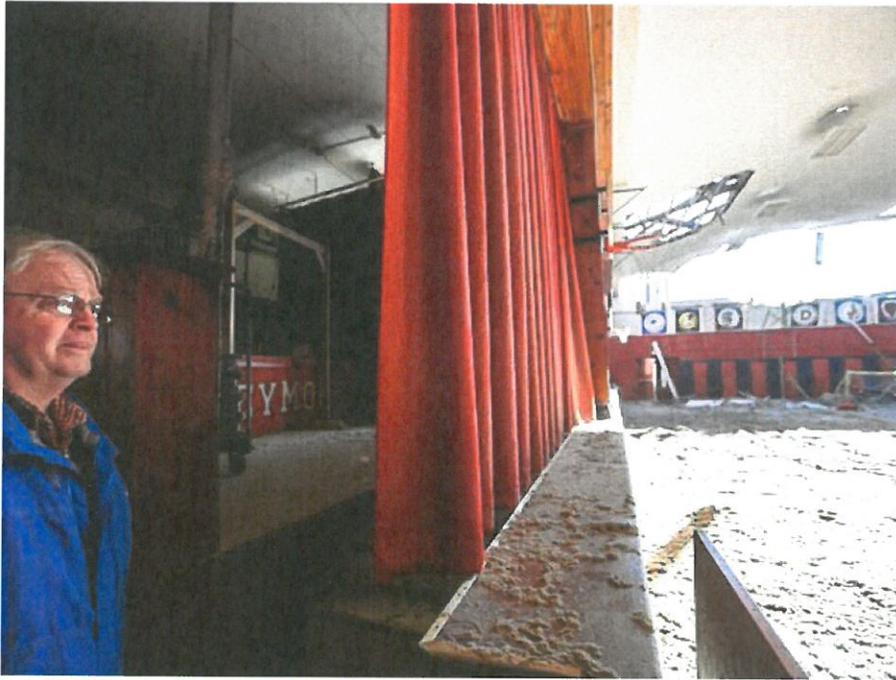
Seymour's other activities have had to overcome facilities issues as well. The high school's football field was vandalized and torn up by a truck in early September for the second straight year.

"When it happened in 2016, it wasn't too bad so we just reseeded and got it close to where we wanted it to be," Kruzich said. "We couldn't believe somebody would do it again. We thought we'd have to move our home games to Wayne (a fellow 8-player program 20 minutes away), but at the

last minute our school board president insisted we fix it and play on. We still don't know who did it or why."

Seymour's music and drama programs moved practices and concerts into local church basements or Centerville theaters, as necessary. The complete campus isn't expected to be completed with two gyms and an auditorium until 2019.

So, simply by playing, the students and community won. Setting aside the score, the games were larger than the competition. They were teachable moments and ones that coaches, students and fans embraced. The values of hard work, togetherness, perseverance, being a worthy sportsmanlike opponent emerged in a manner that made eyes misty and brought thoughtful smiles to many faces that even Mother Nature's powerful weather system could not deter.



Seymour Superintendent of Schools Brad Breon reviewed the damage done the high school gymnasium/auditorium, the sports and entertainment center of the community.



NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee Bryce Edward Ladwig

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Stephanie Hauser

Phone: 715-344-8580

E-mail: shauser@wiaawi.org

Street Address: 5516 Vern Holmes Drive

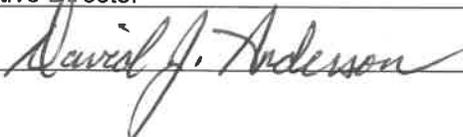
City, State, Zip Code: Stevens Point, WI 54482

Date: January 8, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA)

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Bryce Edward Ladwig
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: N4931 Silver Spring Lane
(street address)

Plymouth, WI 53073
(city, state, zip)

Phone: (920) 988-6908

E-mail: BRYEVA2@AOL.COM

School (if any): Plymouth High School

City: Plymouth State: WI

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Football – team member for 4 years, but was only able to play during his junior and senior years due to cancer treatment/health issues (see attached photos)

Notable Accomplishments:

Starting Nose Tackle

WIAA Level 2 Playoff Qualifier

Future Farmers of America – active participant for 4 years (see attached photos)

Notable Accomplishments:

Greenhand Award winner

Livestock Judging Team

Meats Judging Team

Meals for Ronald McDonald House – Milwaukee

Shown Beef Cattle state-wide

Passion for agriculture has led to his own farm (Everhope Show Cattle)

2-year term as Youth Representative of Livestock Committee for Sheboygan County

Trap Shooting Team – team member for 4 years

Notable Accomplishments:

2nd Place shooter in Sheboygan County High School Trap

Top 15 finisher at State Trap Shoot - 2016

Project Angel Hugs – volunteer work for 4 years

Notable Accomplishments:

Fundraising

Donation of time

GPA: 3.11/4.00

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

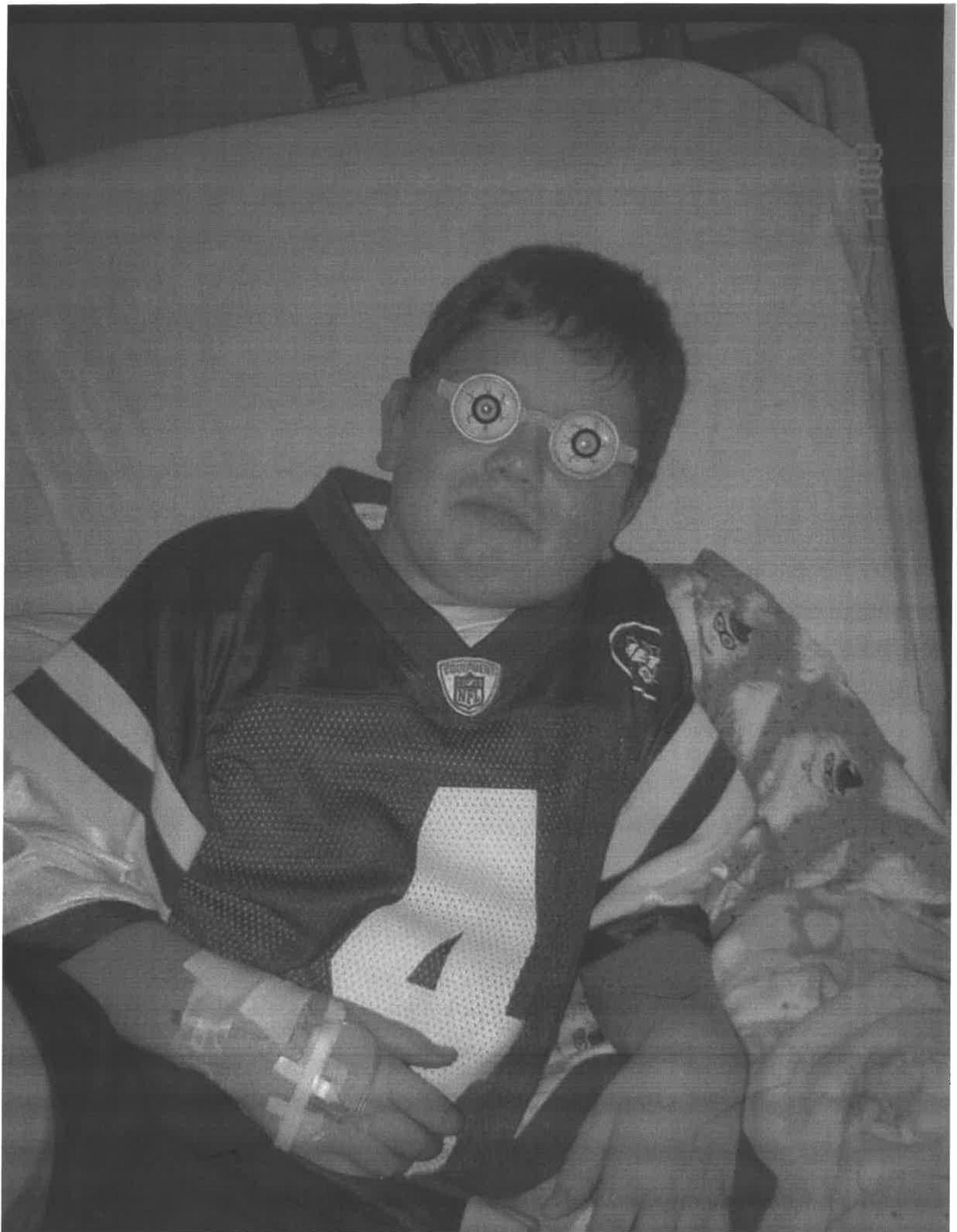
This past football season, Bryce Ladwig was a Senior starting defensive lineman for the Plymouth Panthers, a team that finished with a 7-4 record, reaching the Level 2 WIAA playoffs. The things that this young man has had to overcome to accomplish this feat is remarkable!

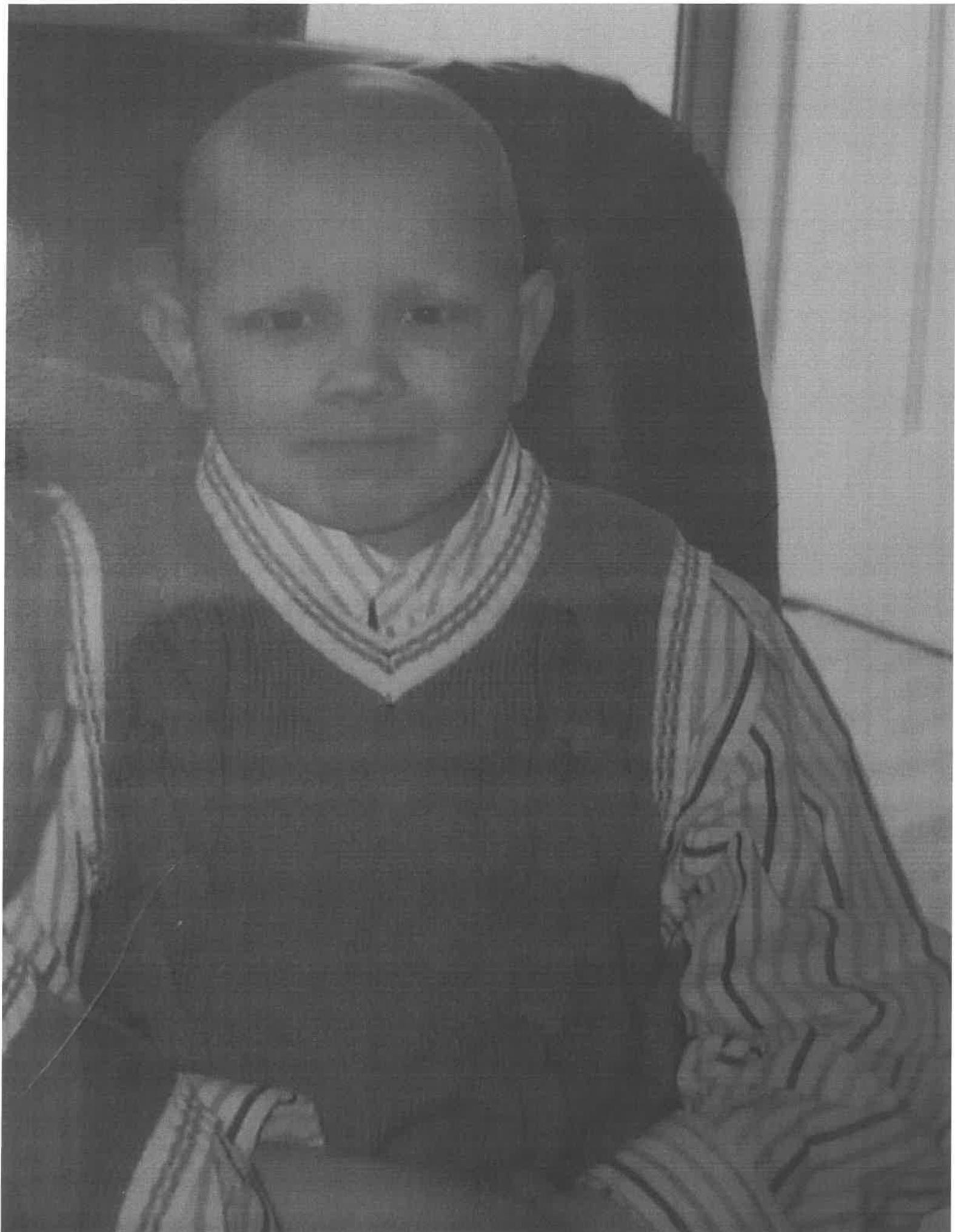
Bryce was diagnosed with bone cancer at the age of six. For the next 14 months of his young life, he underwent multiple treatments and surgeries at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee. His leg did not heal correctly, and further surgeries were needed. By the time that Bryce reached the age of ten, he had 23 screws in his leg, along with a cadaver bone and rod. A few months later, another scare occurred as a spot on his lung was located, resulting in more therapy, treatment and check-ups. The next few years went okay but his leg was still not healing properly. In August 2014, right before his freshman year of high school (and the start of his high school football career), Bryce was told that he had a rare adolescent disease which was causing the bone in his leg to curve. He had to have surgery to break his leg in two places. This also meant

months in a wheelchair, and no football. Due to this development, he was also forced to miss his sophomore football season as he had to re-train his leg for walking.

Bryce was cleared to play football for his junior year, though he walked and ran with a very noticeable limp. He endured all the running and conditioning in practice and made it through the season. For his senior year, he had his sights set on earning a starting spot at Nose Tackle. From this position, he could push off hard on his leg, but didn't have to run very far on each play. His play in training camp earned him the starting spot, which he maintained for all 11 games of the season. His coaches and teammates were so proud of all the hard work Bryce put in to earn that spot! At some point, he will have to have his ankle broken so that his foot, which points outward, can heal properly.

Along the way, as others were helping him, Bryce has reached out to help others as well. He had an early connection to the founder of "Project Angel Hugs," an organization in Sheboygan County that helps those who are less fortunate than others. He has volunteered for this organization throughout the years. When the founder of this organization was killed in an accident, Bryce wanted to do more to help out. He donated the proceeds from the sale of his steer at the Sheboygan Country Fair (\$4000) to Project Angel Hugs, in honor of her memory. This is the type of young man he is. He is always looking to help others, even though he has had to overcome so many things in his young life.











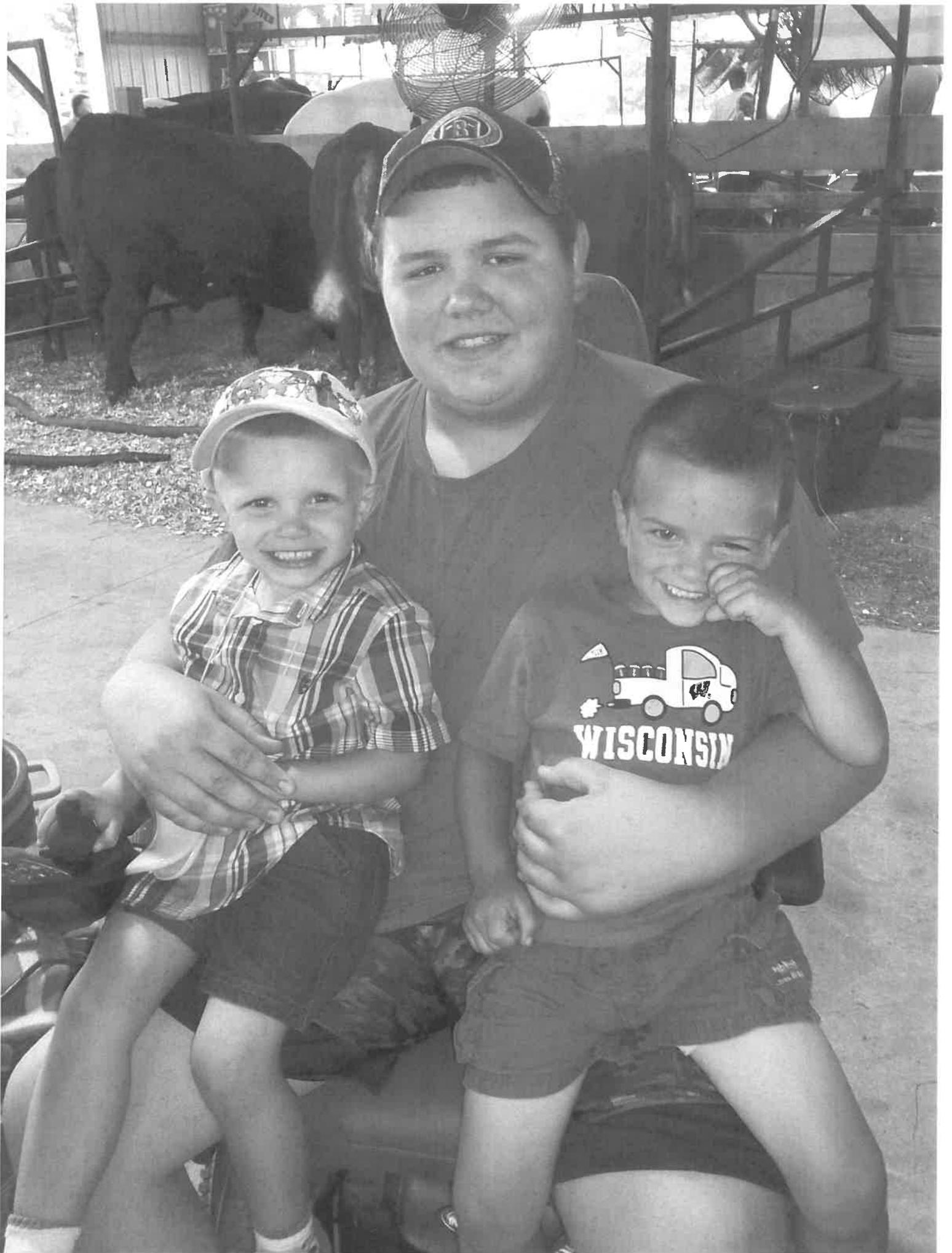
RAH | SHARE THE JOY!

Project Angel Mugs

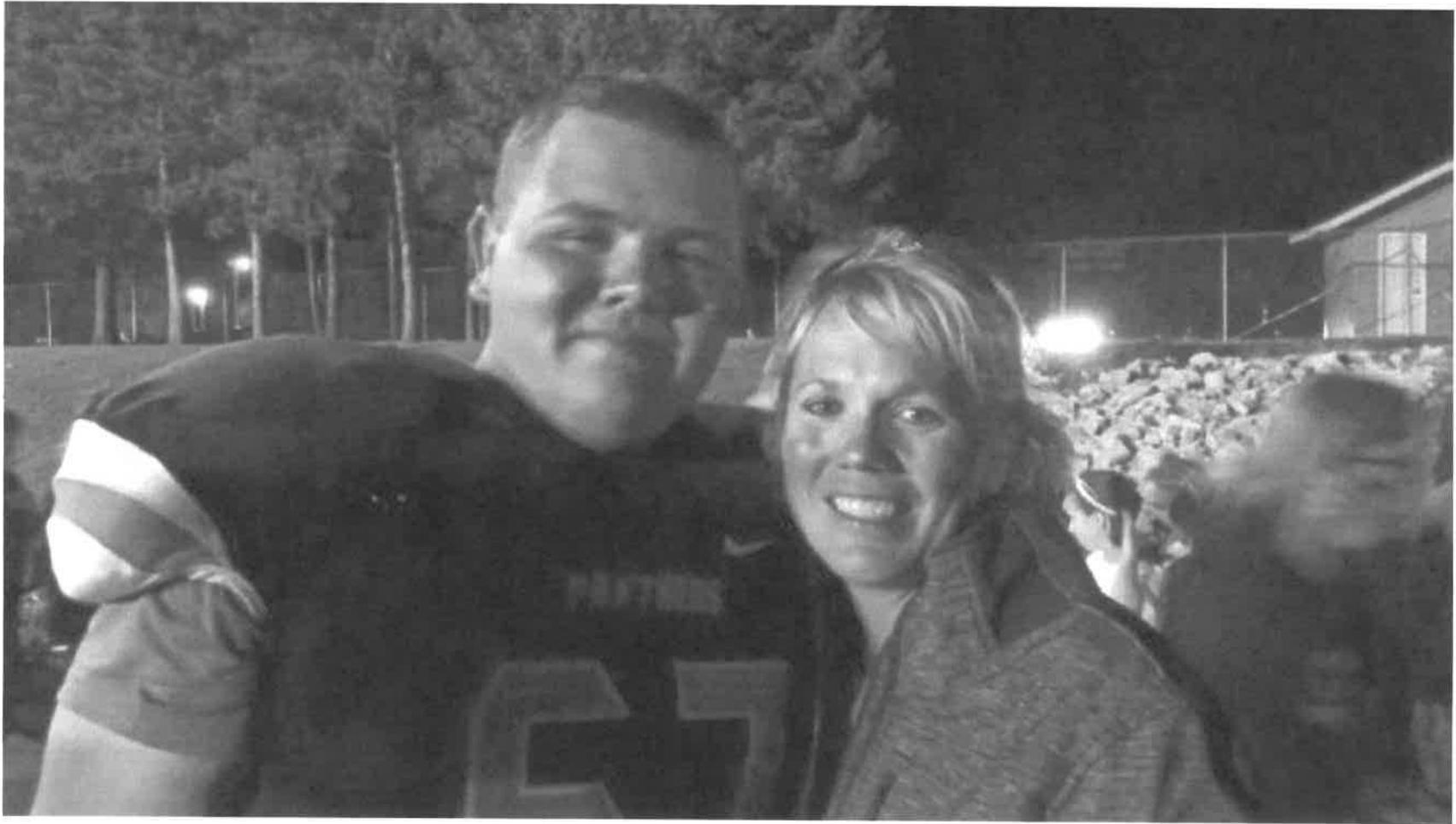
Project Angel Mugs

Project Angel Mugs



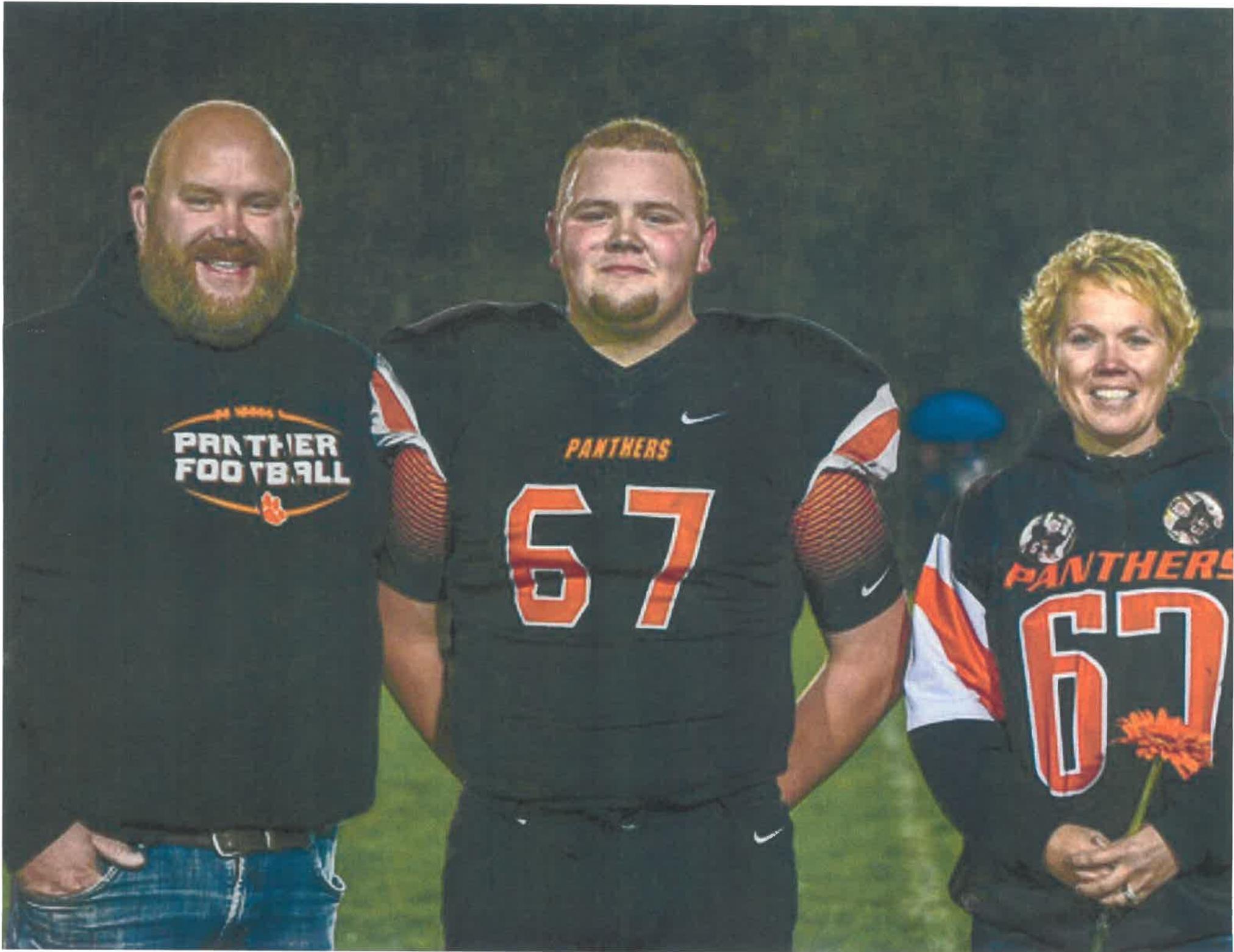








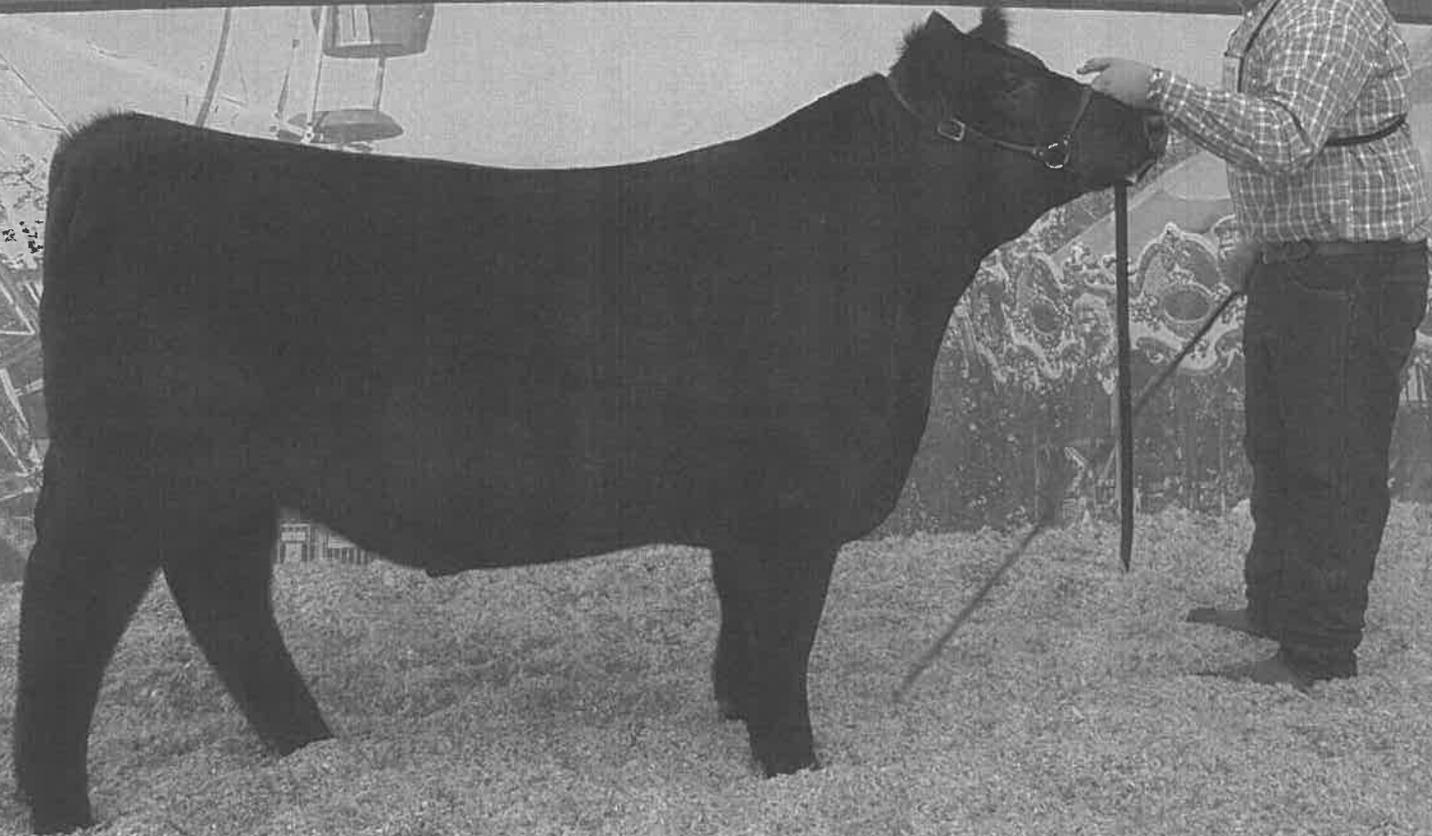






2017
WISCONSIN STATE FAIR

Presented By  U.S. Cellular



Section 5

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Administration & Marysville High School Student Body
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Sheri Harmer, Principal Sabetha High School

Phone: (785) 284-2155

E-mail: harmers@usd113.org

Street Address: 1011 Bluejay Blvd.

City, State, Zip Code: Sabetha, KS 66534

Date: 1/19/18

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Gary Musselman

Title: KSHSAA Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Mr. Schroeder is the Principal at Marysville High School.

Mr. Minneman is the Assistant Principal/AD at Marysville High School.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Marysville and Sabetha, 2 schools 50 miles apart, played each other at the Class 3A Kansas State Championship Football game in Hutchison on November 25, 2017. There are many connections between Marysville and Sabetha that made this day extra special. Unfortunately, on the way home, two of our football players lost their mother, sister, and uncle in a tragic car accident. Our school was deeply touched by the caring condolences and many acts of kindness that we received from our league schools, close surroundings, and schools across the state.

Marysville was one of our first scheduled basketball games the very next week after state, and after they learned about the tragedy, they wanted to do something to support not only the boys on the football team but the community. Before the game, they created a t-shirt that said, "Faith - Family - Together" with We Support Sabetha on it to raise money for the memorial. Marysville took the lead and declared the game against Sabetha as a "blue out" night to show unity and support for our community.

The MHS art students made a sign that said, We Support Sabetha. They also took a special collection for the family at the door. In addition, their cheer squad reached out to ours by making them bows and inviting them to join together during the national anthem and halftime.

Both MHS girls and boys basketball teams gave our players t-shirts to show their support.

The most touching moment of the night was after the moment of silence, their band played the Sabetha School Fight Song and the whole gym joined together by clapping in rhythm to the fight song.

Marysville reached out with many acts of kindness and wrapped their arms around our school in support of the Ukele family and Sabetha community.

@MarysvilleKsUSD thanks for your support to our Bluejay family. You've touched our hearts and we won't forget it. #faithfamilytogether



1. [Doug Minneman @MHSAthletics364 29 Nov 2017](#)

Sabetha Strong - Home. Blue Out Friday to support Sabetha and the Ukele family. Purchase shirts at Isntiteez for the game. Proceeds will be donated to the family. [#BulldogPride](#)

[https://stores.inksoft.com/sabethastrong/shop/home ...](https://stores.inksoft.com/sabethastrong/shop/home...)

2. [MarysvilleKs USD 364](#) Retweeted



[MarysvilleBulldog FB @MHSBulldogsFB 30 Nov 2017](#)

More

Friends & Family of Bulldog Football - in addition to the events of tomorrow evening's basketball game, we will also be making a contribution to the Tanner and Carson Educational Fund on behalf of the MHS Football team. If you would like to contribute please contact Coach Heuer.



Kansas State High School Activities Association Spirit of Sport Award – 2017

School: Marysville High School

Category: Athletic Administrator

Name of Nominee:

Doug Minneman
Marysville High School
1011 Walnut Street
Marysville, KS 66508
(785) 562-5594
dminneman@usd364.org

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Sheri Harmer
Sabetha HS
1011 Bluejay Blvd.
Sabetha, KS 66534-0000
harmers@usd113.org

- 1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.**

Mr. Minneman is the Assistant Principal/AD at Marysville High School.

- 2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "Kansas State High School Activities Association Spirit of Sport Award."**

Marysville and Sabetha, 2 schools 50 miles apart, played each other at the Class 3A State Championship Football game in Hutchison on November 25. There are many connections between Marysville and Sabetha that made this day extra special. Unfortunately, on the way home, two of our football players lost their mother, sister, and uncle in a tragic car accident. Our school was deeply touched by the caring condolences and many acts of kindness that we received from our league schools, close surroundings, and schools across the state. Marysville was one of our first scheduled basketball games the very next week after state, and after they learned about the tragedy, they wanted to do something to support not only the boys on the football team but the community. Before the game, they created a t-shirt that said, "Faith - Family - Together" with We Support Sabetha on it to raise money for the memorial. Marysville took the lead and declared the game against Sabetha as a "blue out" night to show unity and support for our community. The MHS art students made a sign that said, We Support Sabetha. They also took a special collection for the family at the door. In addition, their cheer squad reached out to ours by making them bows and inviting them to join together during the national anthem and halftime. Both MHS girls and boys basketball teams gave our players t-shirts to show their support. The most touching moment of the night was after the moment of silence, their band played the Sabetha School Fight Song and the whole gym joined together by clapping in rhythm to the fight song. Marysville reached out with many acts of kindness and wrapped their arms around our school in support of the Ukele family and Sabetha community.

Marysville goes blue to support Sabetha after tragedy

By *Jonathan Deutsch* |

MARYSVILLE, Kan. (WIBW) - A packed gym in Marysville stood silent, the normally red-clad home crowd bathed in blue to support the opponent with whom they're now linked in tragedy.



A week ago, Sabetha and Marysville met in the class 3A state football championship game. Hours after celebrating the Bluejays victory over the Bulldogs, the Sabetha community was rocked when a head-on collision on Hwy. 75 killed the mother, sister and uncle of the two Ukele brothers who played on the team. Their father was seriously injured.

Friday night, the teams met on the basketball court. But both sides knew this was game was about much more than the final score that would follow the moment of silence that preceded the game.

"We went from being devastated over a football game to completely forgetting about a football game," Dustin Heuer, Marysville Football Coach, said of how his team and the entire community reacted when they learned of Saturday's tragedy.

Doug Minneman, Marysville Athletic Director, agreed.

"When we found out Saturday after we had played in the state championship game for football, we started thinking what can we do to show our support to the family and the community of Sabetha," he said.

The result was a "blue out" for Friday's basketball game. Marysville sold blue t-shirts emblazoned with "Faith. Family. Together." Proceeds from those sales are all being donated to the Ukele family. Donations also were accepted at the game.

"It (was) a lot different seeing everybody in our gym in blue, but, I think it's really cool and really unique what we're doing," said Marysville H.S. senior Bryson Meinhardt.

While everyone involved has been affected in one way or another, this definitely hits closer to home for one staff member. Sabetha Principal Sheri Harmer used to be the principal at Marysville.

"It was an amazing opportunity to have two schools, 50 miles apart, that I had the honor and privilege of working in, both of them, in addition to all of the families in both Sabetha and Marysville made it a special day," Harmer said.

School officials said more than 700 shirts were sold. In all, they expected Friday's events to raise more than \$4000 for the Ukele family.

Holton, Osage City and Perry Lecompton are among other schools that have organized efforts to assist the family.

One week after losing to Sabetha in the 3A state football championship game, Marysville held a Blue Out in support of a Sabetha family that lost three family members in a collision following the football game. The schools met again Friday night on the basketball court. **Sarah Kessinger** Courtesy photo



Rivals rally to support Sabetha family hit by tragedy

BY STAN FINGER

sfinger@wichitaeagle.com

December 02, 2017 05:59 PM

Updated December 02, 2017 06:09 PM

Marysville's school colors are red and black, but on Friday night the players — and pretty much everyone in the packed gym — wore the dark blue of their opponents.

The Sabetha Blue Jays had defeated Marysville 7-6 in the Class 3A state championship football game just days before, dashing Marysville hopes with an interception in the end zone in the final minute.

But delight soon turned to devastation: On the drive home from the game on the last Saturday in November, three members of Sabetha players Tanner and Carson Ukele's family [were killed](#) in a collision on U.S. 75 in Jackson County.

"You can only imagine the kind of high that the whole town was on earlier Saturday and the kind of low that hit later," Sabetha resident Sheli Shockley said. "It was just horrible."

Tanner and Carson's mother, Carmen, 42, their 11-year-old sister, Marlee, and their uncle Stephen, 62, were killed in the collision. Their father, Lee, was taken to KU Medical Center in Kansas City.

The crash occurred shortly after 8 p.m. Nov. 25, when an SUV attempted to pass another vehicle as it was driving south on U.S. 75, according to a [report](#) from the Kansas Highway Patrol.

Carmen Ukele was driving north on U.S. 75. Both vehicles swerved to the shoulder to avoid hitting each other and hit head-on. Updates on the condition of Lee Ukele and the two women who were in the SUV were not available Saturday afternoon.

To show support for the Ukele family, Marysville basketball players on Friday wore dark blue T-shirts during pregame warmups that said Faith Family Together and sported the mascots of both schools. Students and residents joined in on what was dubbed a Blue Out.

Proceeds from the sale of the shirts will go to help the Ukele family. The idea was hatched at the school, said Megan Urban, who owns a T-shirt business in Marysville.

She printed 100 of the special shirts, but that turned out to be not nearly enough.

“Once it hit Facebook, it went pretty viral,” Urban said.

She estimates she had sold more than 800 T-shirts as of Saturday morning.

Other schools picked up on the idea: Nearby Holton also wore blue for Sabetha in its season-opening basketball game.

Osage City High School and the Perry Lecompton school district both [collected donations](#) last week for the Ukele family, KSNT reported.

“I’ve never seen anything like that happen before,” Shockley said of the regional response. “I’m shocked at all the support.”

It’s probably because those communities can relate to what Sabetha is going through, she said. They’re all small, closely knit towns where everyone knows everyone else.

“Everybody’s pretty somber right now” in Sabetha, Shockley said. “I think everybody was at first in shock, and now it’s just starting to sink in.”

The funeral for Stephen Ukele was held Saturday in Sabetha. The funerals for Carmen and Marlee will be Monday morning.

Stan Finger: [316-268-6437](tel:316-268-6437), [@StanFinger](https://www.instagram.com/StanFinger)

Using strengths and interests, to build skills for tomorrow!

By Jason Menard, Douglass High School Athletic Director

How many middle school basketball games, and JV Basketball games have their own personal DJ in the gym playing music during time outs and in between quarters? For anyone who has been to Douglass Middle School and Douglass High School games, the sub varsity contests have a distinct atmosphere about them created by DHS Junior Austin Althouse.

Isn't the Kansas Vision for Education that we lead the world in success of each student? We are constantly striving to make sure our students are prepared physically and mentally for life after graduation. So how do we tie this vision into our everyday athletics contests that we host? Involve students by utilizing their interests and strengths. Austin is a junior at Douglass High School who is diagnosed with Autism. His passion? Music and sound. Knowing that he has a future in the sound industry, why not put his interests and strengths to use now? Every middle school game, and sub varsity game, you will find Austin in the gym, with his laptop, iPad and his portable system playing the most recent hits to drown out the JV coach yelling in the awkward silence of the gym.

His whole interest started when he used to come to the high school baseball practices and play music on a portable system that the baseball coach owned. Then moving to the baseball games, playing walk up music for the batters, and in between innings. The more experience he got, the more comfortable he was at the varsity setting. What started with baseball, then trickled basketball and now even Friday night Varsity Football games. Although he would love to do all my varsity contests, he fully understands that we have a Pep Band that also takes pride in coming to play at the games. But when the third quarter hits, and the band is taking their break, it is Austin's time to shine. To him, doing Varsity contests is like scoring the buzzer beater at the end of the game. It is his passion. It is his craft. And he is good at it.



Austin has progressed so much in the past few years, he now does the entire sound for our school musical every year, and every music concert that we have in the district, and you can bet you can look to the sound booth to find Austin working the board. He now is leaving his mark, on all activities at Douglass High School. And the things he does for us, in some ways, will benefit him greater than sitting in a classroom for an hour because he is getting real, tangible experience in a field of interest for him.

I challenge you to find the Austin of your school. Find a student, whose interest and strengths can be used and pushed to better prepare them for post-graduation.

For a video on Austin and his involvement at Douglass High, please go to this link:

<https://www.ksdetasn.org/resources/1580>

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: The Blake School 2017-18 Girls Hockey Team
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Amy Doherty, MSHSL

Phone: 763-569-0495

E-mail: adoherty@mshsl.org

Street Address: 2100 Freeway Blvd.

City, State, Zip Code: Brooklyn Center, MN 55430

Date: January 26, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Dave Stead

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____ Team _____)

Name of Nominee: Blake Girls Hockey Team, c/o Activities Director Nick Rathmann
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 110 Blake Road S.
(street address)

Hopkins, MN 55343
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 952-988-3802

E-mail: nrathmann@blakeschool.org

School (if any): The Blake School

City: Hopkins State: MN

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Class A State Champions: 2003, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017 (state record for number of titles)

Class A State Runners-Up: 2015

The team has a number of State and Individual State Tournament Records including Fewest Goals Against (1), 2016; and Most Shots by One Team in a Regulation Game (60), 2016.

Despite the school enrollment, the school opted for their 2017-18 team to compete in the large-school class. The team is currently ranked 2nd in the state. In order to advance to the State Tournament, the team will have to beat the currently ranked #1 team and defending Class AA champion, Edina.

Current season record: 21-1-1

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

The Blake Bears girls' hockey team has made a statewide impact on the ice, winning four of the last five Class A State Championships. What the team is doing OFF the ice however, is generating new attention.

State associations nationwide no doubt celebrate their teams' desires to get behind charity causes. Much recognition is given to breast cancer awareness, raising funds for a local families, heart health promotions, and more. The Blake Bears may be among the first teams – if not the only – to put their energy toward combating sex trafficking.

Spearheaded by four players, Grace Vojta, C.C. Wallin, Olivia Bizal and Maddie Tix, the team has fundraised more than \$100,000 for the cause, and spread awareness by reaching out to other local high school teams. The players' initial plan was to have their efforts coincide with Super Bowl 52, hosted in Minnesota in February 2018. They learned that Minneapolis is one of the top 15 cities in the country for sex trafficking, and the Super Bowl is often known as an event that draws sex traffickers. The team is now hoping their efforts will last long beyond the final whistle of Super Bowl 52.

As their kick-off led by Grace, C.C., Olivia and Maddie, the group challenged local corporations to join the fight by inviting them to a brunch. At the brunch, they provided potential donors information about sex trafficking, and opportunities to connect with local outreach groups. The first \$100,000 from their fundraising efforts has been ear-marked to go to the Hennepin County District Attorney's office to hire a private investigator to fight sex trafficking. Additional funds will go to the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, which is leading a "Minnesota Girls Are Not For Sale" campaign.

Knowing that youth who are the same ages as themselves, the team has also worked on increasing awareness about sex trafficking, particularly to other high school hockey teams. They created a Youtube video titled "MN Stop Traffick," have challenged other teams on Twitter, created helmet stickers that say "Stop Traffick," and have passed out bracelets.

As the No. 2-ranked team in the state, the Blake Bears knew their game against the No. 1-ranked team in the state, Edina, would receive much attention. They used that opportunity to generate off-ice awareness about sex trafficking. All proceeds from the game went to their cause. There were various events including a raffle, a bake sale, and a "chuck a puck" challenge. They got the Edina team on board and the players from both teams wore red sock tape and hair ribbons. Other local teams also wore red hair ribbons and tape for their much-publicized Hockey Day MN games.

Maddie Tix summarizes the team's feelings to Let's Play Hockey, "Sex trafficking goes beyond the Super Bowl. While it does spike with the Super Bowl, it is an easy way to get people involved right now right here. It goes way beyond the Super Bowl and it's happening every day. That statistic that 45 girls are being sold every night is just not OK."

It appears evident that the team's off-the-ice outreach will last much, much beyond their hockey season and the Super Bowl.

StateofHockey.com / Let's Play Hockey

BIG GAME, BIG DIFFERENCE

The Blake Bears girls' hockey team works off the ice to impact sex trafficking

01/18/2018, 2:45pm CST

By Pete Waggoner



Blake hockey players Grace Vojta, Maddie Tix, Olivia Bizal and CC Wallin have spearheaded an effort this season to combat sex trafficking in Minnesota.

As the top-ranked Blake Bears prepare to face the third-ranked Edina Hornets in a Hockey Day Minnesota match-up this Saturday at 4 p.m., Blake Ice Arena will have all eyes on it as the game itself provides plenty of intrigue.

The Bears are the defending Class A champion the last two years and have captured four of the last five state championships. They have not lost a game since Dec. 22, 2016, to Eden Prairie and have moved up to the Class AA without missing a beat. They have held the top ranking much of the season in the Let's Play Hockey poll. Edina is the defending state Class AA champion and opened the season ranked No. 1.

The game represents more than a top 10 match-up and potential Section 6AA final preview that can be seen live on StateOfHockey.com. Along with this game comes an incredible effort off the ice by the Bears' team, who along with the opposing Hornets, are generating awareness to the issue of combating sex trafficking.

The effort began with last year's Blake team and has carried on to impressive levels this year as they have raised an astounding \$112,000.

"We have a class at Blake called Global Local and they have the job of picking an issue," junior Grace Vojta said. "With that, our friends picked sex trafficking and they wanted to increase awareness around the real problem that there is in the state of Minnesota."

Led by senior CC Wallin and juniors Olivia Bizal, Maddie Tix and Vojta, the Bears began intensifying their efforts to both create awareness and raise funds. Their goal was to work around the time of the Super Bowl being held at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis this year, as sex trafficking spikes during events such as that.

"There was a group of four seniors last year and they showed the movie 'I Am Jane Doe,'" Bizal said. "All of us who were there realized how big of a problem it was. One of our teammates was in that group and we talked to her about taking it over after she graduated."

"Living in Minnesota, we think nothing bad happens, that it's a pleasant state, we have hockey rivalries, but that's the largest bit of contention," Vojta said. "I would say what really shocked us was that Minneapolis was in the top 15 cities in the nation for sex trafficking and we just wanted to take a stand against that issue."

Globally 4.5 million people are forced into sexual exploitation each year, and in the United States, 100,000 children are exploited in prostitution each year. The Twin Cities ranks 13th among U.S. cities with a high rate of child prostitution occurring. Girls are victimized through abduction, through parents or through parent sex-trafficker agreements.

Fundraising and awareness are essential to the effort with Blake's endeavor beginning with the creation of a [GoFundMe page](#), followed by a key brunch that was held at Vojta's home. Vojta explained that the group began challenging corporations with an email outlining the issue and suggested that if they are interested in attacking the issue, they were invited to attend the brunch to learn more about the issue. It was at the brunch where the group had one-on-one opportunities to work with potential donors and the group asked them to make contributions with members of Hennepin County and the Women's Foundation in attendance.

Representatives from the Benilde-St. Margaret's, Breck, Edina, Orono and Wayzata girls' hockey teams also attended the brunch with amplification being key to efforts such as this. Wallin noted that it is beginning to spread beyond just girls' teams.

"We have raised a lot of money," Wallin said. "I think what is really cool is that we are getting other hockey teams to be involved. Not just girls, we had our boys' team, who we sent out a tweet and made a video about how we Minnesota girls are not for sale. They are starting to respond to that, too, and I think that is really great."

Tix added that they communicated their goals at the brunch with the stated goal being prevention and targeting of perpetrators.

"We did a bunch of fundraisers and had a brunch at Grace's house," she said. "We had a presentation on what we learned. We talked about what we were doing, what we were each doing individually, and what our bigger goal is, especially around the Super Bowl."

Wallin wants to see the effort continue after she graduates with more boys' teams being involved.

“One thing we want to reiterate was yes, our project was to raise money for the Super Bowl, but we want to extend past that,” she said. “We want the awareness to continue.”

Funds raised are planned to make a direct impact. “The two major sides of our issue will be the fundraising and the issue of awareness,” Vojta said. “From the fundraising side, you can see the tangible improvements right away, so 100,000 of those dollars are going to the DA of Hennepin County so that they can hire a private investigator to directly combat the issue of sex trafficking. As far as the awareness goes, the more teams, the more people we get involved, even if it keeps one person out of the life of sex trafficking, we will consider that a win.”

According to Tix, anything raised beyond \$100,000 will be donated to the Women’s Foundation that is supporting the victims of sex trafficking as they are raising awareness. The Blake team’s efforts are not done and continue during the game with Edina.

“Our game on Saturday, all the proceeds will be going to the Women’s Foundation and that includes ticket revenue, bake sale, chuck-a-puck, raffle and a donation box,” Tix said.

Each team will wear red laces, use red sock tape and wear red hair ribbons to continue bringing awareness to the issue on one of the State of Hockey’s biggest days.

“We have wristbands that we will be handing out to everyone at the game or sports teams can get stickers from us,” Bizal said. “I have worn this wristband and at school people have asked me what it’s for, and that starts more dialogue. It’s just little things; it doesn’t need to be a big letter or something. The Women’s Foundation has more beds for victims and there has been more awareness with their big campaign: ‘Minnesota girls are not for sale.’”

When asked how people reading this article can help, Tix said, “Just spreading the word about what we are doing. It’s a really unknown kind of subject. It sometimes can make people uncomfortable and it’s really easy to get confused with other major issues in our community. By spreading the word, if it is just like what we are doing or just the whole idea that sex trafficking is happening in our community. Yes, money is great, but spreading the word about what is happening is the most important thing that all of us agree that is what we are going for.

“Sex trafficking goes beyond the Super Bowl. While it does spike with the Super Bowl, it is an easy way to get people involved right now right here. It goes way beyond the Super Bowl and it’s happening every day. That statistic that 45 girls are being sold every night is just not OK.”

COME SUPPORT

STOP TRAFFICK

AND **BGH**

SATURDAY

4:00 pm **JAN 20**
@ HOME

in our efforts
to **RAISE**
AWARENESS
about **SEX**
TRAFFICKING

in our own
Minnesota
Community

Prmy



SAST
St. Anthony's Assistance Trust

Date 1/20/2018

Pay to the Order of WF of MN & Hennepin Co. \$112,740

One Hundred and Twelve Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty ⁰⁰/₁₀₀ Dollars

Memo MN Girls Are Not For Sale STOP TRAFFICK

⑆ 234 56 789 ⑆ ⑆ 234 56 7890 ⑆ ⑆ 0 ⑆

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Alexander Timothy Schellpeper
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: David Cunningham

Phone: (402)439-2250

E-mail: dcunningham@esu8.org

Street Address: 1007 Kingwood

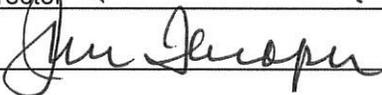
City, State, Zip Code: Stanton, NE 68779

Date: October 20, 2017

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Jim Tenopir

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Alexander Timothy Schellpeper
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 83555 571 Ave
(street address)

Stanton, NE 68779
(city, state, zip)

Phone: (402)439-2762

E-mail: [Tab here]

School (if any): Stanton Community Schools

City: Stanton State: NE

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Alex is a 2017 graduate of Stanton Community Schools and graduated with honors. He now attends the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Alex participated and was actively involved in numerous activities such as; Football (2 years), Track (2 years), Choir (2 years), and Future Farmers of America (2 years). Alex earned varsity letters in football, track and choir. He also was chosen to participate in honor choirs such as the East Husker Conference and Wayne State College. Alex spent every semester of his 2 years in Stanton High School on the honor roll.

President's Education Awards 2016 – Outstanding Academic Excellence

George Eastman Young Leaders Award – 2016

Qualification for State FFA Convention 2016 – Agronomy and Welding

Northeast Community College - Certificate of Merit Scholastic Contest 2016

Participated in Quiz Bowl Contests

Accepted and attended Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute - 2016

Northeast Community College – 1st Place Welding Exam – Scholastic Contest 2017

Northeast Community College – 2nd Place Am. History Exam Scholastic Contest 2017

Participated in Quiz Bowl Contests

Qualification for State FFA Convention – Agronomy, Ag Communications and Welding

State FFA Convention 2nd overall in Video Production for Ag Communications

State FFA Convention 3rd overall in Ag Communications

Tri-M Music Honor Society 2016-2017

Chapter FFA Officer

Accepted and attended Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute - 2017

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

In the summer of 2015 Alex Schellpeper was a rising 11th grader who transferred into Stanton Community Schools from the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. On Alex's first day in town he met with the football coach and the track coach. In his meeting with the track coach, Dave Ernesti, Alex said he thought track was his best sport. Then Alex asked Coach Dave Stoddard, about joining the football team. However, in the meeting Alex had to explain to Coach Stoddard that he'd never played football before since his school in Virginia only had a soccer team. Coach Stoddard invited Alex to join the football team for weight lifting the next morning. This began Alex's on-boarding to Stanton Community Schools.

Six months later, in January of 2016 Alex noticed a small lump growing on his chest. After a few doctor visits and a biopsy Alex was diagnosed with stage 2 Hodgkin Lymphoma. Tests would later show the tumor was actually growing below his breastbone and was the size of the doctor's fist. Alex would go on to undergo months of chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Through-out his treatment plan, Alex found himself feeling tired and run down, so much so that he missed out on his junior prom, spending weekends with friends, honor choirs and more because he was either in the hospital or forced to stay in isolation due to his white blood cell count being too low. Although cancer at times had the upper hand and held him back, he continued to love and enjoy the life that he had. Alex even maintained his great sense of humor.

Although, Alex had not lived in Stanton long and attended school, Alex's personality allowed him to make friends easily. The Stanton students took Alex in and he became a leader in the school and among his classmates. When news broke of Alex being diagnosed with cancer, students were eager to help and even organized different fundraising events in Alex's honor.

During Alex's treatments he also competed on the Stanton Track team. Having the support from his coaches and teammates helped him get through some of the difficult days. The chemo zapped some of his stamina so he was not able to compete in running events but he was able to compete in the triple jump.

By August of 2016 Alex was cleared by his doctors to have his chemo-port removed from his chest. This allowed Alex to once again begin competing in contact football. But radiation weakens bones where it is directed; hence Alex had to be concerned about his breastbone. His family doctor said to Alex, "bones will heal, enjoy football with your teammates." The football season went well and the team qualified for the first round of the State Playoffs.

Over the winter months Alex trained for the upcoming track season by lifting weights and running. When the track season began Alex was healthy, in condition to compete and had developed a much stronger competitive spirit. Each meet he continued to improve his form and jump further. But, when it mattered the most, which was at the District Track Meet, Alex jumped a personal best of 44 feet 1.75 inches. This jump made him an automatic qualifier for state. To reflect on what he had endured, the support he had received and the positive attitude that he maintained made that moment a truly special moment for him, his family and our community.



STANTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

1007 KINGWOOD P.O. BOX 749 STANTON, NE 68779
402-439-2250 FAX 402-439-2270

January 8, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in regard to Alex Schellpeper and his qualifications for the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. Alex was very passionate in both his role as a Stanton FFA member as well as a student at Stanton High School. While at Stanton, Alex served as an FFA member and as Parliamentarian of the Stanton FFA Chapter and did a great job as a leader. He spent countless hours tending to his diversified crop production and welding projects, which he used as his Supervised Agricultural Experiences. He qualified for State FFA Convention in Welding, Ag Communications and Agronomy.

Alex was a very active member of FFA. He was always one of the first members to sign up for events and made the preparation for them a top priority. He was also very reliable and took charge of organizing many of the community service projects we had completed. He attended every FFA event and was an influential role model to other members. Alex continues to be very zealous about agriculture. His goal in college is to further his career in agriculture at the University of Nebraska Lincoln in Ag Engineering.

Alex is a very caring individual who has a bright future. He took both his school work and his involvement in FFA very seriously. Even when he was diagnosed with cancer he still maintained to keep his positive attitude and zest for life. His dedication and commitment to his activities and school is why I am highly recommending him for this National High School Spirit of Sport Award.

Sincerely,

Morgan Schwartz
Agriculture Teacher/FFA Advisor
Stanton Community Schools

“The Stanton Community Schools exist to provide an environment in which all students can learn and grow.”



STANTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

1007 KINGWOOD P.O. BOX 749 STANTON, NE 68779
402-439-2250 FAX 402-439-2270

January 8, 2017

Dear High School Spirit of Sport Award Committee:

It is my sincere pleasure to recommend Stanton Community School alumni, Alex Schellpeper, for the High School Spirit of Sport award. Alex moved to Stanton, Ne from Virginia the summer before his junior year. He wasted no time getting involved in the summer weights/conditioning program and FFA before the school year even started. He quickly made friends, as Alex is kind, friendly, and always willing to help. He was excited and eager to play football that fall. That season, he competed at the varsity and JV level and served as the team's placekicker. It wasn't until after the season that he entered his most challenging season of his life. A bump on his chest resulted in him being diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. After hearing of his diagnosis, I remember meeting with his parents and they assured me that he did not want to be treated different; he was going to take the challenge head on, beat cancer, be optimistic, and go about every day as a normal student-athlete.

Throughout his journey through treatment, Alex acted in accordance with his plan on staying positive. The students, staff, and community supported Alex through purchasing bands that said "No one Stands Alone". Hundreds were sold in support of Alex. When the money from the fund raiser was presented to Alex and his family, he did not want to accept it for himself. In yet another selfless act, he donated all proceeds to the Faith Regional Hospital clinic in Stanton.

Alex's story is one of victory and perseverance. With the cancer in remission, Alex participated in football, FFA, choir, and track his senior year. He continued to work to achieve his goals. He was part of a playoff qualifying football team and qualified for state track in the triple jump. I hold Alex in the highest regards, as he has proven himself in so many facets of life at such a young age.

Sincerely,

David Stoddard
Activities Director
Reading Specialist
Head Football Coach

Alex Schellpeper

Spirit of Sport Award

Alex Schellpeper, has been a model student and a game competitor. I have had the pleasure of having Alex in Class (Calculus) and on the field of competition (Track and Field). What really makes Alex's story compelling though is that he always participated and never complained all the while he was fighting cancer. There were many days that he would have to miss school for treatments and the sickness that would come with such work. As it goes, he would also have to miss practices as well, but he did not try to just coast along with respect to both school and sport, he would do his best to make up the work that his teammates were doing. If he missed school work he found a way to do it and stay caught up as best as he could, the same would be true of his respect for sports. Specifically, in track he would often have to miss practice during the week when he didn't feel good after treatment. Instead of just missing that bit of work, when the weather would allow he would just try to accomplish the work on the weekend when he felt a little better. In the practices he did participate in, it was made clear that he did not have to push things and that he could stop whenever he felt the need to do so. He never took such an out, often, he would just elect to extend his rest time a little but still wishing to do everything that everyone else was doing.

Alex, was not only able to keep up with both his school work and practice schedules, but he was also involved in FFA and Choir and the subsequent practices and competitions that go with those events. The amazing and inspirational part of the Alex's story is the fact he was largely able to keep up with a demanding pace of life all the while fighting cancer at the same time. He had every opportunity to take the "easy way" out and each time he chose to do things the right way or he would find a way to do the same things his peers were doing. Alex, doesn't make excuses, he isn't afraid of work, and he is not going to let something like cancer keep him from doing the things in life that he wants to do.

David Ernesti

Stanton Community schools



Alex Schellpeper is pictured above with Nancy Trimble of FRHS Physician Services.

Stanton Community Schools lives up to its name; demonstrating support and building community through giving

While Alex Schellpeper was a very frequent visitor to Stanton in the summer and weekends to visit family, he never attended Stanton Community Schools until August of 2015, the beginning of his junior year of high school. Just six months after moving to Stanton, in January of 2016, Alex was diagnosed with Hodgkins Lymphoma. The outpouring of support that he received from the school and community was absolutely terrific and, in his father Tim's opinion, aided greatly in his recovery.

Dave Stoddard, teachers, and administrators are credited by the Schellpepers for being great to work with and for looking after the young man that they had known for such a short time. Last spring, Coach Stoddard took the lead to sell purple wristbands to raise funds for Alex. However, "after watching ev-

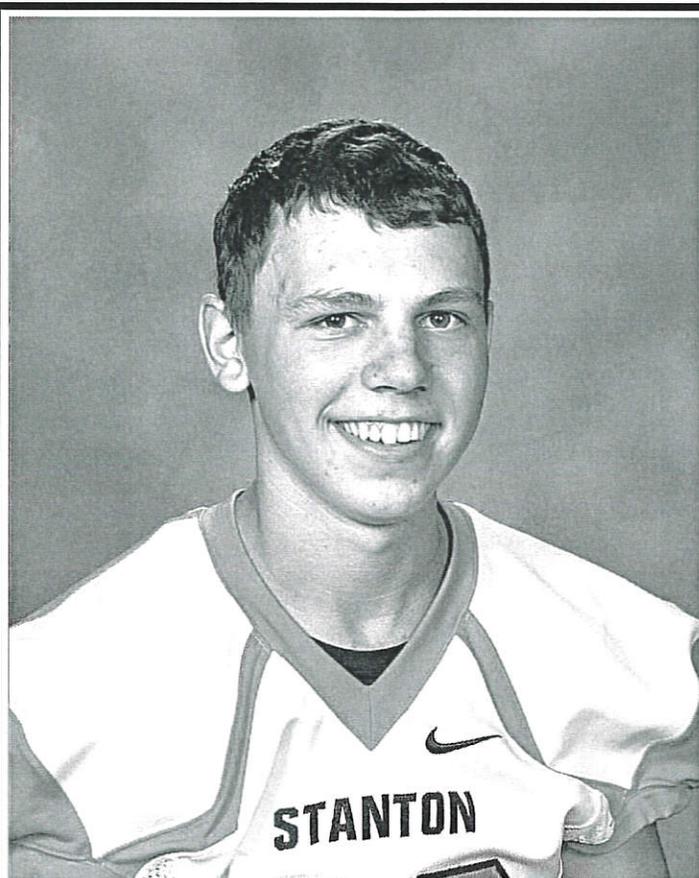
erything the community did for Alex, he wanted to do something for the community," said Tim Schellpeper. Additionally, an anonymous donor matched the money raised by the purple bracelet sales.

The athletic program at Stanton Schools is one of the areas that received some of the proceeds. "Sometimes our athletic trainers and therapists must be creative to accomplish an exercise or goal without the ideal pieces of equipment. This donation provided our staff at Stanton High School with a couple key items that made their jobs easier and ultimately assisted in the care provided to injured athletes at Stanton. The number of people this gift will affect is countless," said Sheri Sheriff, Outpatient Therapy Manager at Faith Regional Health Services.

Another area where this com-

munity generosity can be seen is at Faith Regional Physician Services Stanton Family Medicine. The pediatric waiting area in the clinic received a facelift. As farming and children are passions of Alex, in his honor, a farm-themed pediatric area was created; complete with new wall activities, book storage, play table, and chairs. "The pediatric area brings a new perspective of the clinic to patients. Approximately 20-25 children are seen in the clinic per month. The activities in the area make for a better experience for the children and parents."

As of today, Alex is doing great. He was released and able to play football for Coach Stoddard last fall. He will graduate from high school this May and will then be off to the University of Nebraska Lincoln to study Ag Engineering.



Alex Schellpeper

By Sally Brechbill

Alex Schellpeper is a prime example of “it takes a village to raise a child.” Even though he was born in Williamsburg, Virginia, and has only been a part of Stanton Community Schools for two years, he said that no matter where he goes in life he’ll have the town of Stanton to support him.

Alex said that it was “an easy transition and I fit in right away” when he started lifting with the football team the summer he moved here. Being involved with his activities also allowed him to gain friends right away and help him make memories, such as his favorite, going to the state volleyball game his junior year and doing the “everywhere we go” chant to the crowd. Alex said that leading the crowd gave him a rush that he had never experienced before.

Alex plans on attending The University of Nebraska-Lincoln next fall, just like his mom and dad, and to study agricultural engineering so he can take over his family farm some day. Alex has been through challenges in his life, such as battling cancer his junior year and missing school. But he never felt like he was alone and it taught him that no matter how low it gets in life, it’ll always get better.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: JonNikolai Charles (JC) Byer
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Brian Moser, Athletic Director, Pierre TF Riggs High School

Phone: 605.773.7350

E-mail: brian.moser@k12.sd.us

Street Address: 1010 East Broadway Avenue

City, State, Zip Code: Pierre, South Dakota, 57501

Date: January 31, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: John Krogstrand

Title: Assistant Executive Director

Signature: /JK – Signed Electronically

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

(It becomes somewhat difficult to separate these two questions, so we feel it best perhaps addressed in a single response)

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

"You should be proud of your abilities, and find ways to use things you're good at to great effect, and don't focus on the things that you can't, or struggle to do." – JC Byer

"This has been huge for our family. Coach Steele will always have a special place in our heart for seeing something in JC. You know, it's challenging to have a child with special needs, and when you can find those things that are going to make him successful...that's huge!" – Janette Byer(JC's mom)

We are privileged to nominate JonNikolai Byer, or "JC" for short, for this year's NFHS Spirit of Sport Award. Without question, the story of inclusion of this special young man by our football team in Pierre demonstrates the penultimate blend of how athletics within our interscholastic settings across the country can be rewarding to any-and-all comers. The work by the Pierre TF Riggs High School Football Staff & Team to include this special young man and fellow student certainly portrays the best of high school sports, and surely is an exemplary display of the positive spirit of sport that represent the core mission of education-based athletics!

JC came to Pierre TF Riggs high school as a Freshman in 2015, severely isolated from his student peer group, attributed in large part to the challenges of being autistic. JC regularly identified to his case worker his desire to go into "turtle mode" during the school day, trying to make himself as small as possible, hiding in his shell, for fear of bothering, upsetting or otherwise interacting inappropriately with other students. JC would refuse to do homework for fear of putting down an incorrect answer, and his anxiety, associated with his place on the autistic scale, prevented him from participating in many regular classroom activities. Additionally, despite a strong desire to be part of his school community or groups of friends, JC's anxiety, autism and acute sensitivity prevented him from even attending extracurricular events, let alone participating in normal childhood activities. In some instances, he was essentially mute – not communicating with others in any fashion during the school day. Certainly as a result, JC's grades suffered through much of his Freshman and Sophomore years.

Enter TF Riggs High School Head Football Coach Steve Steele.

"I first encountered JC as a Sophomore student in my 4th period Biology class. I attended a meeting prior to school starting to discuss some different accommodations to best suit JC's learning style. It was at this point that I learned that he had Level 1, High Functioning Autism as well as SPD (Sensory Procession Disorder), and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. It didn't take long to see that JC was an exceptional auditory learner, but also that loud noise or discussion really caused anxiety on his part. I agreed to not call on him for answers in discussion and to allow him to sit in the back. He also had a set of dice that he was allowed to roll as a calming mechanism in times where he felt especially anxious. He was very hesitant to work in groups and to interact with other students or even myself. He didn't start out great at handing in assignments, although his intelligence allowed him to do well on assessments. As the year went on, he definitely made some improvements, although he left me still very shy and anxious, nervous to work or interact with others, and very much hoping to move around like a shadow on the wall.

As the school year came to a close, I talked to Keith (JC's dad) about meeting with them to discuss JC being a part of the football team and helping do some math for the coaching staff. JC reluctantly agreed to the meeting and met with myself and his parents after school. I gave him and his parents a

once-over on how to run the analytics and described how we use them as a coaching staff. Before I was finished with that, JC chuckled and pointed out that I had made 4 mistakes on the analytic that I was showing them. Of course, he was right and at that moment I knew he was in. He really began to enjoy checking some practice ones I gave him over the summer, and found joy in correcting my mistakes he found easily. As time came for the season, I still remember approaching JC with some football clothing that I give all the players, and him not wanting to take it saying he wasn't really on the team. I also remember showing him the program of the first game with his name on the roster as our Statistician and seeing his face light up. He agreed to take the clothes, and wore them to every game afterwards. But it wasn't until he was officially recognized that I really saw some changes in him.

In October, I nominated JC for athlete of the week, which is a local award voted on by the Pierre Athletic Coaches Association. He unanimously won the award. In telling him he won the award, he had a huge smile and was extremely excited to get his Tee Shirt for winning, and having his picture in the paper. A couple weeks prior our team discovered and realized the importance of JC's work. At that time they made it their goal to get to the DakotaDome so he could experience a football trip with the guys to the grand-stage of the State Championship. Using his analytics, our team performed and made that happen. In talking to his parents, everyone shared excitement and also concern about JC traveling with the team, as it breaks routine, and would be in a loud, noisy atmosphere. However, the coolest moment of the entire season was watching JC run out from the sideline with a big smile on his face and give me a high five after we won the game and seeing the rest of the team really embrace him in that moment. The welcome home ceremony only made things better. As his name was announced he received a standing ovation and then bowed for the crowd and pumped his fist in the air. So many things he has done are amazing to me thinking back to the shy kid who sat in the back of class with his head down rolling his dice when the class got too loud. Today I see him in the hallway, walking tall with his eyes up, often saying hello to people as he roams the halls. His demeanor demonstrates a confidence only known to his math skills just a few months ago.

So many people were so excited for his participation and wanted to see him experience the success with the team, that I think it is extremely overlooked how much he did for the team as well. The Midco segment captured perfectly how crucial he was to the team, and how proud this whole community was of his decision to step outside his comfort zone, use his talents, and to help our Pierre Football team do something that had only be done once before in the school's history. While we had players doing things many people can't do on the field, JC was doing something many people can't do behind the scenes. He was such an integral part of the team this season, and I want to make sure it is understood that as much growth as he has shown over the past 6 months from being a part of our football family, he also did so much to grow our football family into Champions.

While winning the State Championship was a great accomplishment and a very proud moment, nothing compares to the pride I feel in seeing JC today. Seeing his newfound confidence as a person, and not just a math-student is amazing. Watching the Midco segment still brings tears to my eyes in seeing that shy kid who not a year ago was too scared to ask a question out loud in biology or answer a question in class; answer a full interview of questions from someone who he doesn't even know. That alone demonstrates the growth JC experienced this year. JC's story is one that everyone should see, and something that can inspire many more JC's in the future. JC said it best in his Midco segment... "You should probably be proud of your ability, and find ways to use the things you're good at to great effect, and don't focus on things you struggle to do."

Also, from TF Riggs Athletic Director Brian Moser:

"When T.F. Riggs football coach Steve Steele came to me with the idea to bring JC, an Autistic student, on as a student manager, I had no idea the impact it would have not only on the football team, but the entire Pierre football family. Throughout the season, Coach Steele would come to my office and tell me how JC has helped him put strategic game plans together by watching video and analyzing information from the game stats. This information JC provided the coaching staff gave them valuable insight on what plays the opposing team would run in certain situations.

To be honest, initially I just went along with things and didn't really think much about it. One day, Coach Steele came to my office with a goal. He said his goal was for the team to make it to the Dakota Dome, so JC could go along and be a part of the success the team was having. It was at this point I really started to pay attention to the work JC was doing. He was able to accomplish the collection of data needed by coaches in much less time than our coaches could, and he was able to

get it done every week. Not only was it done, but it was often more accurate than previous years that were done by coaches. This relationship continued to grow, and JC became more comfortable with the team. He was not only a student manager, but a noticeable part of the team and recognized by the players and their families. JC became more social with them and they became more interactive with JC.

When the Pierre Governors made it to the Dakota Dome to play in the state championship game, Coach Steele once again came to my office with a plan of how to get JC not only to ride the bus for the first time, but to get him to stand on the sideline, with the team, during the game. This was something JC had refused to do during the regular season. Again, the players and coaching staff encouraged JC and let him know how valuable he was to not be at the game. They needed and wanted him to be a part of it. JC did just that. He sat in his seat on the charter bus, with a big smile on his face the entire trip. Come game time, JC was on the field with the players, supporting them in every way.

You can probably see how this plays out. The Pierre Governors would win the State Championship and as the fans rushed the field, you saw player after player thanking JC and telling him how great of a job he had done. For me, this was when the story started to become real. I realized that at the start of this season, we all wanted to give JC something to be a part of. To give him the opportunity to be a part of a team and the community of football. During the welcome home celebration, I once again realized I was wrong. When Coach Steele spoke to the audience about his coaches and players, he spent a significant amount of time talking about JC and how he helped the team and what he did each week. The entire team, their family and the fans gave him a standing ovation. It was at this point I realized the team needed JC just as much as JC needed them!"

Additional awards have been bestowed upon JC and the Pierre Riggs Football program, including JC's unanimous selection as "Athlete of the Week" this past October by the Pierre Area Coaches Association. Additionally, JC's story of overcoming so many obstacles was recently featured on "Midco Magazine," a locally syndicated Regional Sports Network Show. We would strongly encourage you to also view this short, seven-minute segment that allows you to view JC's story in his own words! We would strongly encourage you to view that segment here:

<https://youtu.be/e9xJ2c-mjOs?t=15m11s>

Further, It must be stated that JC's parents, case worker, teachers, and the school community as a whole have witnessed such a stark change in JC's personality ever since Coach Steele's actions to ensure JC was a valued part of the TF Riggs Football program. Each have remarked on changes in his attitude, appearance, and perhaps most importantly, self-confidence. Throughout the process of gathering information for this nomination, we were presented with great stories about JC, including:

- JC previously struggled with, and therefore would not complete, his homework, so much that he would not complete any beyond the little he was able to do during classroom time. In the past few months, this has certainly changed, as he is now nearing the honor roll. In his math wizardry, JC had been maintaining a perfect average in his advanced math class, until one exam where he missed a question. The teach was so concerned that she had made a mistake when creating the question, she called in two of her cohorts to ensure that JC had, in fact, got the question wrong! All this from a kid who literally a few months ago, would barely complete any work;
- JC's case worker and family have certainly noticed a wonderful uptick in his social interactions with his peers as well. Most notably, JC would secure a place in the back of every class he attended, and would not answer any questions out loud for fear of failure, especially heightened by his autism and sensory disorder. After the involvement with this year's football team, JC is actively seeking out opportunities to interact with his new-found friends both inside and outside of school – including shocking his mother by inviting friends to a movie recently. JC's condition seemed to all but debilitate him from going to the movies in the past, but now, given his new self-confidence, he is actively seeking out opportunities to be involved!

- JC has been involved with band, although, again due to his autism and sensory disorder, has remained reluctant to play. This all changed recently, following the season with the football crew, as described by his mother here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqy5RxaqXkY>

JC has become more involved in school activities as well, and has maintained positive progress in his coursework, now assuredly on course to graduate in the Spring of 2019 with his cohort group – again, an amazing accomplishment, given this being a young man hesitant to participate in any coursework just a few short months ago.

JC's story is certainly one of inclusion and positivity as it comes to mental health. Our community has dealt with significant issues of suicide in the past few years, and mental health continues to be a major issue in our community. To help not just a single young man begin to overcome his own issues with the conditions, but to also defeat the stigmas associated with mental health challenges among an entire community remains an amazing feat, and truly an indication of what the principles of inclusion surrounding interscholastic athletics ask us all to portray. In all reality, our story of inclusion with JC and the awareness that is so needed on mental health issues, we submit that this story extends beyond sport, and truly encapsulates our human condition, and one small evidentiary piece of how loving one another can improve all of our lives.

We thank you for your consideration of JC Byer as this year's nominee!

JC Byer video links
South Dakota SOS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9xJ2c-mjOs&feature=youtu.be&t=15m11s>

<https://youtu.be/rqy5RxagXkY>

Thank you!



Section 6

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Alexis Nicole Castillow

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Jennifer Golden

Phone: 479-996-4141

E-mail: Jennifer.golden@greenwoodk12.com

Street Address: 501 Bulldog Loop

City, State, Zip Code: Greenwood, AR 72936

Date: 11/7/17

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Annette Savage

Title: Asst. Executive Director

Signature: Annette Savage

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

** Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Alexis Nicole Castillow
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 3400 Been Ridge Rd.
(street address)

Greenwood, Arkansas 72936
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 479-790-7610

E-mail: alexis.castillow18@greenwoodk12.com

School (if any): Greenwood High School

City: Greenwood State: Arkansas

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Lexie was a 3 year starter on the high school varsity volleyball team. Lexie's achievements include:

Volleyball

2015, 2016, 2017 Letter

2017 6A State Champs

All – State 2016, 2017

All – Conference 2015, 2016

River Valley Prep Banquet – Lionheart Award – June 2017

Southwest Times Record Athlete of the Week 10/30/17

All-Arkansas Prep Freshman/Sophomore team

2016 All – Star River Valley Preps 1st Team

2017 6A All-State Tournament Team

2017 River Valley Volleyball MVP

Featured in Volleyball USA Magazine – Summer 2016, Vol. 44 No. 2

Softball

2015 6A State Champs

2015, 2016 6A Conference Champs

2015, 2016, 2018 Letter

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

When Lexie Castillow was 12 years old, she lost her right patella due to cancer.

At 10 years old, Lexie was a very involved in competitive softball. During one practice, she came across home plate and fell to the ground crying due to excruciating pain. After a doctor visit, Lexie was diagnosed with a giant cell tumor of the bone in her right patella. Doctors performed surgery and bone grafted 90% of a new kneecap. However, two years later, Lexie went in for a

clean-up surgery and the tumor had recurred destroying her kneecap. At this point, Lexie's doctor's performed another surgery and completely removed her right patella leaving her with no kneecap at all. Doctors told Lexie that her sports career was over. However, Lexie was a very determined young lady. She was not going to let this news define her and with lots of rehabilitation, hard work, determination and the help of an ACL brace, she got back out on the volleyball court and softball field, playing at a very high level.

Lexie was told that there was a 2% chance the tumors would travel to her lungs and they did. At the age of 13, she had $\frac{1}{3}$ of her right lower lobe and an upper mass on her left lung removed due to tumors. Little tumors all over her lungs remained causing Lexie to take a newly approved chemo medicine called Xgeva once a month.

Lexie is now 17 years old now and has only been recently been taken off of chemo. The hope is that the little tumors all over her lungs are calcified. Hove for sports has allowed her to defy the odds, especially in volleyball. Lexie has verbally committed and plans to play DII volleyball at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith, while pursuing an excellence in her education. Lexie will be graduating from Greenwood High School with honors while carrying a 3.88 GPA. Lexie's experiences have shaped her aspirations of one day hoping to coach the sport of volleyball and write and publish an autobiography. She also hopes to be an adult FCA leader and a motivational speaker for athletes in her future.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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Name of Nominee: Alexis Nicole Castillow

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Jennifer Golden

Phone: 479-996-4141

E-mail: Jennifer.golden@greenwoodk12.com

Street Address: 501 Bulldog Loop

City, State, Zip Code: Greenwood, AR 72936

Date: 11/7/17

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Arkansas Activities Association

Title:

Executive Director

Signature:

Lance W. Tyl

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Lexie was a 3 year starter on the high school varsity volleyball team. Lexie's achievements include:

Volleyball

2015, 2016, 2017 Letter

2017 6A State Champs

All – State 2016, 2017

All – Conference 2015, 2016

River Valley Prep Banquet – Lionheart Award – June 2017

Southwest Times Record Athlete of the Week 10/30/17

All-Arkansas Prep Freshman/Sophomore team

2016 All – Star River Valley Preps 1st Team

2017 6A All-State Tournament Team

2017 River Valley Volleyball MVP

Featured in Volleyball USA Magazine – Summer 2016, Vol. 44 No. 2

Softball

2015 6A State Champs

2015, 2016 6A Conference Champs

2015, 2016, 2018 Letter

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clean-up surgery and the tumor had recurred destroying her kneecap. At this point, Lexie's doctor's performed another surgery and completely removed her right patella leaving her with no kneecap at all. Doctors told Lexie that her sports career was over. However, Lexie was a very determined young lady. She was not going to let this news define her and with lots of rehabilitation, hard work, determination and the help of an ACL brace, she got back out on the volleyball court and softball field, playing at a very high level.

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NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Austin Denton
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Dusty Young – NMAA Associate Director

Phone: 505-923-3268

E-mail: dusty@nmact.org

Street Address: 6600 Palomas Ave NE

City, State, Zip Code: Albuquerque, NM 98710

Date: January 2, 2017

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Sally Marquez

Title: Executive Director

Signature: *Sally Marquez*

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify - Student Broadcaster, PA Announcer)

Name of Nominee: Austin Denton
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 7809 Merissa Ln NE
(street address)

Albuquerque, NM 87122
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 505-850-4185

E-mail: austin@1017theteam.com

School (if any): La Cueva High School

City: Albuquerque State: NM

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Austin Denton is currently a Junior at La Cueva High School in Albuquerque, NM. He is a member of the school's Football Social Media Team, participates in DECA & Scholastic Publications (School Newspaper), serves as the PA Announcer for Basketball and Baseball, and is involved with the school Athletes' Reading Program. He has a total of four school letters; three for his participation in Football, DECA, and Scholastic Publications and one for his success in Academics where he carries a 3.6 GPA.

In addition to his participation in school activities as listed above, Austin is very active with high school sports as a broadcaster for a local radio station and for ProView Networks, a company that produces events for local TV and the NFHS Network.

Austin has been an avid sport fan for as long as he can remember. He was diagnosed with a rare form of spinal cord cancer at age 2, however, and has been limited physically because of this. Instead of pursuing a hobby/career in sports as an athlete, he has instead dedicated his high school years to the communications/journalism and public service side of athletics. He accomplishes this at La Cueva HS through his social media work for the Bears' football program, his work covering all sports for the school newspaper, and by working all home basketball and baseball games as the PA Announcer. This is expanded to high school athletics in general through his work as a broadcaster for ESPN Radio 101.7 The Team and ProView Networks. Not only does he handle the play by play for many contests, but he is also responsible for halftime shows/interviews and post-game coach interviews.

Austin has been involved with both La Cueva's athletic/activity programs and the local media outlets since the start of his high school career. His "workload/service" has increased each year, however, and it is because of this that the NMAA felt it was time to nominate Austin not only for the Section's Spirit of Sport Award, but also for the National Spirit of Sport Award.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Albuquerque Journal sports reporter, James Yodice once wrote, "Albuquerque's newest media darling is a fiercely independent, articulate, sports-crazy fireball. He is 14 years old, stands a shade over 4 feet tall, weighs about 60 pounds and is often confined to a wheelchair. He is not an athlete. Austin Denton is a broadcaster." Brandon Back, the head football coach from Austin's school (La Cueva) went on to say, "Out of anybody at our school, Austin has the ability to work for an NFL team." Both comments show a small sample of the impact Austin Denton has had within the high school athletic community here in Albuquerque/New Mexico.

Austin's passion for sports is through the roof. He gives back to interscholastic athletics in so many ways outside of what you would typically expect from a high school student. He can't physically help his school's teams as an athlete, so he does this through his work as a sports reporter, broadcaster, and public address announcer. Since he was diagnosed with a rare spinal cord tumor at the age of 2, he has had to spend most of his life in a wheelchair. He is a patient at the St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis, TN, where he has received both radiation and chemotherapy treatments. The radiation in particular stunted the growth of his spinal cord and he developed scoliosis because of the many surgeries he endured to remove bones to get at the tumor. Austin is a cancer survivor and has been in remission for ten years. Austin does not bemoan his physical limitations, however. In fact, he's eager to share how it is possible to overcome such a hurdle and still remain fixated on a dream. Both his father Brian, and his

mother Tracy have echoed this and marveled at their son's courage and determination, stating that he has never once complained or had a "down" day.

In addition to school letters and accolades, Austin has been recognized by several other organizations for his hard work and determination. He received the People's Caring Award/Trailblazer Award from People Living with Cancer, the Mathu Barry Award-Outstanding Camper at wheelchair camp, and the Simpatico Award from KANW 89.1 FM for his contributions to the Albuquerque community. He is also proud to be a former speaker at the state's annual Coaches vs. Cancer gala. His most memorable accomplishments, however, have probably come at the national level as a guest reporter for the NFL Network and CBS. In the winter of 2016, Austin was invited to Media Day for the Super Bowl where he was given the opportunity to interview Denver Broncos quarterback, Peyton Manning. Then in September of 2016, CBS invited him to take part in their NFL Today pregame show set in New York. Prior to the show, he conducted an interview with then Broncos' head coach, Gary Kubiak.

Austin also spends some of his time volunteering for other organizations including but not limited to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Give Thanks Walk, Festival of Trees, and Special Olympics. After all of this, he still somehow has the time to cover sports outside of the high school realm through his blog - <https://sportsanytimeblog.wordpress.com/>

Austin is truly an inspiration to the high school community in our state and is the perfect candidate for the NFHS Spirit of Sport Award. He has been battling adversity throughout the majority of his life, and he continues to work through it as a successful broadcaster, reporter, student, and human being. He is an amazing individual who works just as hard (if not harder) than the student-athletes at his school and prides himself in highlighting others through his work and service to interscholastic athletics.

It is difficult to do justice to the type of individual Austin is through words alone, so the following weblinks have been included which provide videos, articles, and other information about this amazing student.

https://www.stjude.org/about-st-jude/stories/meet-our-patients/meet-austin/austin-living-dream.html?sc_cid=smd11750&sc_spid=730003150&linkId=32428338

<https://www.abqjournal.com/646981/many-feel-that-dentons-future-is-sportscasting.html>

<https://www.abqjournal.com/716559/la-cuevas-denton-shines-at-media-night.html>

<https://www.abqjournal.com/852730/la-cueva-teen-has-segment-on-cbs-nfl-show.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/NFLonCBS/videos/1177704978982431/>

<https://www.facebook.com/brian.denton.372/videos/10209641406209763/>

<https://www.facebook.com/brian.denton.372/videos/10210793801298920/>



50

34

40

58

12

20

3

Player in wheelchair

24

6

20

44

5

8

36

90

5

4

4





NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Refugio Football Team
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Logan Lawrence

Phone: 512-232-4940

E-mail: LLawrence@uiltexas.org

Street Address: 1701 Manor Road

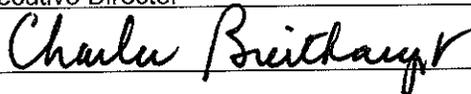
City, State, Zip Code: Austin, TX 78722

Date: January 29, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Charles Breithaupt

Title: UIL Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

In August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey (a Category-4 storm) ripped through the Gulf Coast of Texas, causing destruction to many towns along the coast, including Refugio.

Refugio High School competes in Conference 2A, which is the smallest classification of 11-man football in Texas. The Bobcat football team has a rich tradition of success with four state titles and nine trips to the state championship game. Refugio also owns the fifth-most all-time state playoff appearances (49) in any classification. In 2017, against all odds, Refugio appeared in its third-consecutive state title game.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

In late August, Hurricane Harvey pounded the town of Refugio, demolishing local homes and businesses, and leaving many without shelter. The storm tore trailer homes apart, ripped off the roof of the local First Baptist Church and blew down the scoreboard at the football stadium. Forty-one percent of homes in town were severely damaged and 12 percent of students were left homeless. In all, there was \$15 million in structural damage to the school district's infrastructure. Families were displaced across Texas and the town was without power for almost two weeks. The damage to the high school was so bad that classes were delayed for three weeks.

Trying to recover from the destruction, the town looked to football to help provide a sense of normalcy and hope.

Like most Texas towns, football in Refugio helps define the community. Football games on Friday night are a gathering place where townspeople connect and stand side-by-side rooting for their home team. The pride shown for their town is on display each week at the sold-out 7,000-seat Bobcat Stadium, which is more than double the town's population.

Through the first few weeks of the season, players split their time between football and cleanup efforts around town. They volunteered unloading donations, installing air conditioners, repairing roofs, and clearing debris. One of the few buildings unaffected by the storm, the Refugio High School field house became a hub for relief efforts. The athletic department helped store and distribute donated food, water, money and supplies. The weight room was converted into a living space for displaced players who slept on cots overnight.

For most teams, dealing with the aftermath of a hurricane would be daunting but Refugio's trials continued. During the second game of the season, Refugio junior wide receiver Casey Henderson fractured two vertebrae and lost the use of his legs. The team lost its next game but did not lose sight of its goal of making it back to the state championship.

With the entire town rallying behind them, the Bobcats won their next 11 games to make it to the state championship. Each victory gave the team confidence that their goal was attainable. It also lifted the spirits of a community dealing with so much suffering.

Refugio Superintendent Melissa Gonzales said, "Everything else seems to be in turmoil, but football is still there, and still keeps us going. It's the one constant we've had in our lives this year."

The improbable run also inspired Henderson to do what others thought was next to impossible. At a Sunday church service just before the state championship game, he stood for the first time since the injury.

Even though the title game did not turn out in Refugio's favor, the team provided its community with something even more valuable; a chance to come together for 15 weeks of hope, and a road to recovery.

Accompanying Articles:

AFTER HURRICANE HARVEY, DEVASTATED TEXAS TOWN'S FOOTBALL TEAM CONTINUES 'FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS' TRADITION

BY [JOSH SAUL](#) ON 9/8/17 AT 8:36 AM (NEWSWEEK)



The weight room at Refugio High School, in southern Texas, is crowded with Red Cross cots for football players who lost their homes to Hurricane Harvey. One of them is for a senior running back named Daryon Ramirez. He fled to Dallas with his family before the storm, which caved in the ceilings of their house; his family is now staying in another small town, about 90 miles north. When Ramirez heard that practice was restarting this week in preparation for the team's season opener Friday night, he headed south and moved into the weight room.

"I had to come back for my team. We need to come back. The town really needs us," Ramirez tells *Newsweek* by phone Thursday from his local Dairy Queen, where he and his teammates and coach are eating chili cheese fries bought with donated money. "Us coming back will bring folks back." The Refugio Bobcats won their fourth Texas state championship last year and were gearing up for another run when the Category 4 storm hit the town of 2,900. Harvey was the strongest hurricane to strike the U.S. since 2004, and experts say it could be the costliest natural disaster in the country's history. The damage in Refugio (pronounced "Ra-fury-o") was extreme. The storm tore trailer homes apart, ripped off the roof of the First Baptist Church and blew down the scoreboard at the 7,000-seat Bobcat Stadium.

Refugio residents live by the *Friday Night Lights* tradition, with each game played that night marking the most important community gathering of the week. The stadium capacity is more than double the town's population, but there's rarely an empty seat. Adults ask the players if they're ready for Friday, and fans shout their time-honored chant: "G-A-T-A!," which stands for "Get after their ass!". Herring says the first game, against rival Goliad High School, will give the town something to rally around. "We're not playing for me. We're not playing for winning or losing," says Herring over the phone from the Dairy Queen in Refugio. "We're playing for one reason, and that's hope. We're playing to give our kids hope and one sliver of normalcy."

Refugio team captain Jamel LaFond agreed that football helps him forget the storm and his damaged home, where the living room ceiling collapsed on him and his stepfather the night of the hurricane. "It

helps us get our mind off what's going on with our community right now," says LaFond, eating his own order of chili cheese fries. "When we're playing football, we're not thinking about the hurricane." Asked about his goals for the season, LaFond answers, "Just try to win and help our community get through this tragic incident that happened."

"Even pre-hurricane, life is pretty tough for our kids," says Herring, who calls men "Hoss" and built the school's girls' volleyball team a makeshift court in the field house after their gym was ruined in the storm. Many of his players had to ride out the storm in Refugio because their families didn't have the resources to get out of town. Herring adds that when he offers players a free Dairy Queen lunch or their pick of \$20,000 worth of brand-new clothes donated from a tony Houston suburb, they always make a spartan selection and thank him politely. "They're fighters, they're strugglers. They've never had anything."

The Refugio players will need that toughness as they head into a long season with fewer practices and less weight-training than they've normally had. Harvey made the team miss two weeks of practices, their second scrimmage and their first game. With the season opener Friday night in Goliad, the coach doesn't want to wear out his players this week with grueling practices or endless weight-training sessions, fearing they won't have time to recover before the game.

The town of Refugio faces its own long road to recovery. Refugio High School, which had just finished a \$20 million renovation, was damaged so badly during Harvey that classes aren't expected to begin for a month.

Refugio resident Noal Shaw still can't live in his house because of damage from the storm, but that won't stop him from cheering on the Bobcats Friday night. "We got to stay together, we got to keep driving. We can't let this get us down," says Shaw, an oil-and-gas worker who played football for Refugio in the early 1980s. "The stands will still be full in Goliad. You can bet that."

In Hurricane Harvey's wake, football and Refugio play on

Refugio takes refuge in state title contender after Hurricane Harvey's destruction

By Hunter Atkins, Houston Chronicle



REFUGIO - Nearly four months after fearing they or the ones they love would not survive Hurricane Harvey, the Refugio High School football players board two yellow buses for a seven-hour ride north.

They pass enduring dilapidation and destruction. Cardboard, duct tape, garbage bags, plywood and tarps substitute for windows and roofs. The emblem of an abandoned Burger King dangles upside down. The remains of a Shell station tangle in a metal nest.

The ongoing recovery is slow in this drive-through-and-gas-up town of 2,876 some 30 miles from the Gulf Coast in the South Texas flatlands.

In the county, 12 percent of the students are homeless and 41 percent of the homes are severely damaged. Those numbers are higher around the two-mile main drag.

The school district is sorting through the red tape of getting insurance to cover damages that necessitated gutting or condemning significant spaces in the high school. Toxic mold took over the recently renovated auditorium. Rainwater buckled a basketball court so significantly that it resembles the crest of a wooden wave.

Meanwhile, displaced residents without renter's insurance cling to federal assistance.

Refugio, which at around 200 students competes in the smallest classification of 11-man football in the state, is accustomed to winning football and hardship. But against the Mart Panthers (14-1) at AT&T Stadium in Arlington on Wednesday night, the Bobcats (13-1) have a chance to win their most improbable state championship.

Harvey displaced half of the roster, but the team came together. Then, Casey Henderson, the fastest player, suffered paralysis in a game. At homecoming weeks later, he stood up from a wheelchair and walked in front of a crowd that shouted about miracles.

After the Bobcats won their Class 2A Division I semifinal game last week, Refugio coach Jason Herring broke from a postgame huddle, raised a finger to his eye and wicked away a tear. He spotted Henderson standing on the sideline.

"I'm reminded of Casey, and then I think about the hurricane, and all the crap these kids have gone through," Herring said. "It's unheard of, what's happened to these kids and happened to us. There's no way that we should be playing for state. Absolutely no way."

In a 12-hour span that started Aug. 25, residents who could not afford to evacuate Refugio turned from expecting the storm would blow over to praying it would spare them.

Some Refugio players fled with family and then monitored the vicious edge of the storm system that would cut electrical wires, topple cellphone towers, sever branches, strip shingles, spew debris, cleave roofs, flip trailers and batter homes to smithereens.

Most of the players were trapped in darkness without communication to the outside world. They heard, watched and felt their shelters crack under pressure of 140 mph winds.

A rush of sodden sheet rock and insulation crashed down from the ceiling on senior defensive back Jamel LaFond.

Armonie Brown, Trevor Ross and Kaleb Wright were among 19 people squeezed together for several hours into a hallway. They had read Bible passages to calm down. The walls quivered against their backs. Unrelenting gusts roared like a train. The young men imagined being crushed by the home or sucked up into the sky.

'An innocence about Refugio'

Clutter and rubble blanketed the landscape by the placid morning. Harvey did not leave any casualties, but with so many business and homes made uninhabitable, locals began comparing Refugio with a war zone.

Nearly one-fifth of the county lives below the poverty line. Those who were most vulnerable before the hurricane became more helpless after it tore through.

The crisis immediately galvanized self-reliance and ethnocentricity shared by Refugio residents.

"There's an innocence about Refugio," Herring said. "Nobody has anything. Nobody's better than anything."

Families throughout the town took in homeless neighbors. The coaching staff set up cots from the Red Cross in the weight room and took turns sleeping there along with players in need. The indoor practice facility, one of the few structures that withstood the hurricane, became a way station for donated items.

When a dozen 18-wheelers rolled in with too many goods for football and churches to store, a plea on social media for more space reached the owner of a shuttered bowling alley.

Players leapt at chances to help. They unloaded donations, installed air conditioners, joined a roofing effort, cleared yards of debris and bonded more tightly.

"There has been a fundamental shift across most people in this community," said Melissa Gonzales, the district superintendent. "We all realize how much we depend on each other and an awareness about how much we are able to accomplish when we all work together."

There was no electricity or water for as long as two weeks and damage to the high school delayed classes for three weeks. But football picked up with a practice 10 days after Harvey.

"The community needed something to look forward to," Herring said.

The Bobcats won their first game. Henderson, a junior wide receiver whose home crumbled in the storm, reached for a catch and gain of 42 yards.

In the second game, Henderson attempted a tackle and collided headfirst with the opposing running back's knee. He fractured two vertebrae in his neck.

He could not move his legs. His right arm had limited mobility. He had an 8 percent chance of making a full recovery, according to his family.

Herring wept and toiled in guilt over seeing Henderson immobilized. The coach raised money so that the team could rebuild the Hendersons' home.

Henderson showed more motivation than anyone that he could restore his abilities. While rehabbing, he watched the Bobcats continue to win on a Facebook live stream. He strove to walk again by the playoffs and wound up lifting from his wheelchair sooner.

After Harvey peeled off the roof of First Baptist Church, the congregation relocated to the elementary school cafeteria. Henderson stood and smiled during the Sunday service before the state championship.

"My nerves, they get shaky," Henderson said. "It gets in the way of me walking and stuff."

His right hand has not regained full mobility. He said he would not take the field again if he does not have his full strength, but he has started thinking about August two-a-days.

Privately, adults in Henderson's life say the truth is he will not run again, but they would not tell him that. His self-belief may be responsible for his unexpected comeback.

"There's a pretty high chance I'll play again," he said. "Hopefully."

Popcorn instead of turkey

Mixed in with the Bobcats' inspiring run, limited job and housing options continue to steal from the football escape.

When the team's water boy asked a teacher about her Thanksgiving, he distressed her when she returned the question.

"I didn't get to have turkey," the student said. "We had popcorn."

Christmas will mark exactly four months since Harvey.

Several players on the team remain scattered from their families. Daryon Ramirez plays linebacker. His family lost their rental and did not have insurance. His parents sought funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to stay in a hotel 30 minutes away, but it made more sense logistically for Ramirez and his two younger siblings to stay wherever in Refugio they could find takers.

During the week, the three Ramirez children live apart from one another and their parents, who are saving up to purchase a trailer. Their FEMA money runs out Jan. 16.

"It really is a nightmare," said Shutterra Ramirez, Daryon's mother. "You don't want them to be like, 'So, we're going to be homeless?'"

LaFond stays with a teammate. He prefers not to think about how long it will be until he lives with his parents again.

The hit to public housing, which was evacuated and is where many Bobcats had lived, concerns Herring. One complex is under repair. The other has not been touched.

"I'm afraid that we're going to get to the point when the money runs out that there's many families looking, and there's nowhere to go," Herring said.

Freshman Allen Perez grew up in both complexes. Separating from family did not hurt so much as when he lost his sense of home.

When Harvey moved on, Perez returned to his apartment. He was comforted to find his mom's room unharmed. At 14, he appreciates the stress she managed for years raising him and his brothers alone, and he regrets however much of it he caused her.

Then he reached his room. The ceiling had collapsed. Buried in the rubble were irreplaceable mementos that connected him to his mom. A baseball trophy from a time he saw her smiling in the stands. Baby photos of himself that she had given him.

Perez sobbed recalling the sight.

"My childhood wasn't, like, perfect or nothing, so all of those meant something to me," he said, blotting his tears with his T-shirt. "These are innocent times in between a lot of rough times."

Football sustains spirits

Herring and parents around the program insist that the bond of tackling Harvey, pain and all, led to the latest championship run. Players recognized there is more at stake.

"Our town has supported us the whole way; even though some people didn't have nowhere to stay and their homes got destroyed, we can give them something with this," senior lineman Trey Upton said. "You can't go a day without somebody asking you about the game."

Despite the remarkable achievement of getting to the state finals given the turmoil, the expectation of winning the title may be the only thing in Refugio that Harvey did not change.

This season has kept up a spirit here. And the fans do not think about losing. They think about next season.

HAYWARD: What a story the Refugio football team will have to tell in the future

[Len Hayward](#), Corpus Christi Caller-Times Published 8:15 p.m. CT Dec. 21, 2017



ARLINGTON — It is hard to put into a few words what the 2017 football season was like for Refugio.

Words such as resilient and dominating come to mind. The Bobcats showed resiliency in continuing to play hard and win after Hurricane Harvey and when teammate Casey Henderson was injured.

Refugio was dominating throughout much of the regular season and the playoffs on their way to a ninth state title game appearance. Disappointment was apparent for the Bobcats on Wednesday night after a 34-21 loss to Mart in the Class 2A Division I state championship game.

But the standing ovation from some fans while they waited on their runner-up medals also showed they appreciated the team's efforts this season.

Wednesday night, the Bobcats ran into a Mart team that was just as talented and seasoned in big-time competition. The Panthers, who now own six state championships, went down 14 points, scored 21 of their own and then held off the Bobcats' best efforts.

The runner-up trophy for any state championship is a consolation prize and one that is hard to accept, especially for programs that have experienced a state title. Bobcat coach Jason Herring said expectations are high in Refugio and a loss in the state title game is tough to swallow because the season-long goal is to win it.



This season, though, that runner-up trophy will have a story to it unlike any other.

For some, the story will have a bittersweet ending but it will be a story worth telling.

“It’s like a movie,” said sophomore running back Ysidro Mascorro after the game. “It would’ve been better if we would’ve won. But being able to play with these seniors I got to play with, fighting the way they did. It was something truly special.”

Legendary teams are attached to Refugio lore for the last 70-plus years and this team will have a high place in it.

Wednesday, Mart matched Refugio’s speed, intensity and resiliency, which is expected in a state championship game. But the Bobcats’ confidence never left them even while they faced a deficit.

“In the locker room everybody was confident,” said senior wide receiver/defensive back Trent Ross. “We were confident through the end of the game and I wanted to finish out my best and give my team the best.”

There were tears and hugs Wednesday night on the turf at AT&T Stadium. There was also a realization that after four months of facing just about everything a football program could face it was over.

As hours, days, months and years pass, the sting of the loss will subside but what will not likely leave is knowing the players and coaches had a hand in putting together a special season.

“We had a great season,” said senior Trent Ross, “probably the best season I’ve had at Refugio High School.”

As Refugio Football Season Ends, Town's Game Plan Turns Back To Harvey Cleanup

By [JIMMY MAAS](#) • DEC 25, 2017



Refugio head football Coach Jason Herring spent all summer planning for this week, the Texas Class 2A State Championship game. He would have no idea how far he would have to veer from that plan to get to this point.

“A hurricane would wipe out almost any football team in the world, but our kids have been hit in the mouth since they were that little by life,” he says. “So, the hurricane was just a little bump in the road. Does that make sense? Our kids are so resilient because they’ve had to be their whole life.”

The team has had to overcome months of storm cleanup and a life-changing injury to one of its players. Herring has had both the necessity and the distraction of raising tens of thousands of dollars for storm relief.

Now, just shy of four months after Hurricane Harvey, his team is on the precipice of a second-straight state championship. And for one more time – the 13th out of 15 games – the team, the band, the town loads up buses and heads out on the road. This time, they head to AT&T Stadium in Arlington, a venue that could hold the population of Refugio 35 times over.

And even though this would be the team’s third championship game in a row, this one would be different.

"To win a state championship this year," Refugio High School Principal Brandon Duncan said, "after, you know, we had kids sleeping in the field house, we had damage to our school, we couldn't play any home games, all of our 'home' games were out of town – except for two – I think it would mean a great deal more this year just given the hurdles that have been placed in front of these kids, and coaches, and the staff, and the town."

Championship week for Duncan begins at the First Baptist Church in Refugio. Since August, churchgoers have been meeting at the elementary school because of storm damage. The Rev. T. Wayne Price says his church is still waiting to clear up some things before renovations begin next month.

School Superintendent Melissa Gonzales points to repairs just outside the school as a sign the town is getting past Harvey. But there are still a number of roadblocks to fully repairing and renovating the schools.

"There are a number of agencies that we're dealing with, and I think that sometimes slows the wheels down," she says. "And just keeping it straight in your mind is a challenge. But it's a blessing that so many people want to help us. And I just have to keep that at the front of my mind. And I just have to keep the ultimate end goal in sight and that's to rebuild our school."

Standing in the back of the room is Casey Henderson.

In September, during the second game of the season, Casey broke two of his vertebrae; he couldn't feel or move his lower extremities. After two months of rehab at University Hospital in San Antonio, he's walking now and talking about the future. He hopes somehow it includes football. He also knows how fortunate he is.

"It feels pretty good to know that many people aren't supposed to be walking from my injury, and I'm one of those that are walking away from my injury," he says.

The Hendersons gathered in their newly rebuilt home, which had been deemed unlivable after the storm tore it apart.

Casey's mother, Nichole Henderson, is thankful.

"Casey's walking," she says. "We have our family together. We have this gorgeous house, thanks to Coach Herring and Brian Miller. I'm just, I'm happy. I'm happy we're all together. I'm just – there's really no words to describe it. I'm just in awe, I guess."

"Just to be back home, back in our house, I got all my family back together," Casey's father, Charlie Henderson, adds. "Casey and her are not halfway across the state. I'm feeling good. I'm feeling real blessed. Thank the Lord that he really helped us get back together and everything."



But it's not all good news for the Hendersons. Nichole was let go from her nursing job. With physical or occupational therapy visits five days a week, she says, taking care of Casey has been full time.

And Casey still misses being out on the field with his teammates.

"You know, scoring touchdowns, being out there every Friday practicing with them, all of that," he says.

One person not in church is Coach Herring. To say he's been busy with work would be an understatement. He is the type – as many coaches are – to throw himself into the sport.

"Let me give you a perfect example, you ready?" he says. "And I'm ashamed to say this: The 15th was our 20th anniversary, [and I did] nothing more than [say], 'Hi, baby, happy anniversary.' That's it! I mean, I was here at 6:30 [a.m.] and I got home at 9 [p.m.]."



He and his staff have been deep in preparation for the last game of the season, the state championship against the Mart Panthers.

The game starts as most Bobcat games do: Two quick touchdowns put Refugio up 14-0 in less than four minutes.

But then, Mart finds its bearings in the second quarter and takes control of the game. Mart scores 28 unanswered points, before finally winning the game 34-21.

As time ticked down, the people of Refugio began to look toward what's next.

"You know, we made it to state and I'm proud of those boys," says Refugio County Sheriff Raul "Pinky" Gonzales, who is married to the school superintendent. "I really, really am. They really shouldn't be here, with all that they've gone through with the hurricane and being homeless and stuff, I'm very proud of them."



“After this game, I’m sure a lot of them will be working and concentrating on getting people back in their homes and trying to get with their life,” he says. “Including myself.”

Pinky and Melissa Gonzales have been living in an RV behind their storm-damaged home all fall. She says roughly 13 percent of Refugio students are still technically homeless. That may not include folks staying with family or friends.

All the public housing in Refugio is closed indefinitely. Most of those residents have had to commute from the town of Beeville, about a half hour away.

As for the Rev. Price, the team’s unofficial chaplain, members of First Baptist Church are meeting with an architect and contractor Jan. 3

“So, we look forward really getting started and possibly in four or five months getting back in the building,” he says. “That’s our hope.”

The end of the season also means Herring can tend to his own house.

“Our house still has a lot to be done to it after the hurricane,” his wife, Lisa Herring, says. “And then hopefully he can settle down a little bit and just relax. I know he’s been working really hard, through football season, of course, but also through the aftermath of Harvey. So hopefully, we can some R&R.”

The Herrings, much like the rest of Refugio, are ready to let Harvey go.

“That’s the truth,” Lisa Herring says. “Ready for it to be over! But it’s been a beautiful season and we’re proud.”

After the game, Herring finds his wife in the crowd.

“Son of a bitch, we didn’t play well,” he says.

“I thought y’all had it when you came out,” she replies.

“I know,” he says. “I think that bit us in the butt, because we came out so on fire –”

“And then you were just flat afterward,” she says.

“– and then we were flat the rest of the time,” he echoes.

Their 10-year-old son gets their attention.

“Oh, you gotta go pee?” Herring asks.



And just like that, the biggest loss of the football season seems to wash away, for now.

They know, in the end, it’s just football. But for this small Texas town, the game has been so much more this season.



“The longer your football team goes, the better your school year goes,” says Principal Duncan. “Less discipline, you have better attendance, kids keeping their grades, the town, there’s a lot playing into football than just wins.”

“It’s the one constant we’ve had in our lives this year,” Superintendent Gonzales says. “Everything else seems to be in turmoil, but football is still there and still keeping us going.”

“Football has not only been medicine for this community and these kids, but it’s been medicine for me,” Herring says. “When it’s over, it’s like depression sets in, good or bad. But I’m always sad when football ends.”

But, like so many other Refugians, he’ll have some projects at home to keep him busy.

In wake of Hurricane Harvey, Texas football team's season more than wins and losses

By: **Len Hayward, Corpus Christi Caller-Times** | January 28, 2018

REFUGIO, Texas — Jack Sportsman Bobcat Stadium sits dark in early January.

It's well maintained but the stadium's concrete is weathered and the paint on some spots has begun to wear off. The home of the famed Refugio Bobcats has endured and seen plenty since it was constructed in 1954.

It has survived the region's biggest hurricanes: Carla in 1961, Beulah in 1967 and Celia in 1970, along with other tropical storms.

In August, the stadium weathered yet another storm. But this one delivered a blow that has left Refugio still trying to recover.

The town is healing — slowly — five months after Hurricane Harvey hit.

Amid the destruction, Refugio's pride and joy, its football team, helped to give it hope.

While residents struggled through the uncertainty of whether their homes would be replaced or repaired, suffered disappointment of learning FEMA or insurance carriers may not cover costs, and wondered whether they still had jobs or enough food, there was a three-hour respite from it all.

The Bobcats.



Refugio High School roof is destroyed by Hurricane Harvey in late August. The roof's damage was part of more than \$15 million in structural damage to the school district's infrastructure. (Photo: Gabe Hernandez/Caller-Times)

A few blocks from the stadium, Misty Upton's modest-three bedroom home provided shelter for Refugio football players for several days after them and their parents were displaced by the storm.

The house took nearly \$30,000 in damage during the hurricane. Though now it has a new roof, the recent repairs have done little to put away memories of Harvey's landfall.

Power lines downed. Houses so damaged they were demolished. Public housing projects fenced up, with no word on when they will reopen. Townspeople unknowing of what's next, their lives and homes destroyed in less than 12 hours.

"I cried," Misty said. "It was devastating, even thinking about it now."

The team is one of the state's best small-school programs, winning four state championships and 120 playoff games in the last seven decades, and on Dec. 21 the Bobcats played in their ninth state championship game. They lost 34-21 to another state power, Mart.

The expectations are always high in Refugio and so is the pressure on players and coaches. But this past season, the nearly 50 players in Refugio's program became a symbol of the town's resilience and its rebirth.

"(In town) it was just talking about the storm and then saying our football team had to help us out," said senior Jacobe Avery. "We wanted to put Refugio back on the map and bring us back together."



Uprooted trees surround homes after Hurricane Harvey made landfall on Tuesday, Aug. 29, 2017, in Refugio (Photo: Gabe Hernandez/Caller-Times)

'IT DIDN'T FEEL LIKE HOME ANYMORE'

Debris piles are still present around town as some of the streets off US 77, the town's main artery, have large piles next to homes that are still boarded up.

Power and water has been restored.

Homes that once had blue tarps are now being repaired and the sounds of compressors and nail guns show progress is being made. Other buildings and structures, though, still stand damaged and boarded.

The school district's administration offices are now in what used to be its seventh- and eighth-grade campus. Superintendent Melissa Gonzales' office once was a classroom. The room's long whiteboard is filled with names of the school's insurers and federal and state officials, and from the school's insurance company.

The school's administration building has been gutted, waiting for repair. It's part of more than \$15 million in of damage to the district's facilities.

More than 15 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau per data from the US Census Bureau's website. As of this week, Gonzales said 15-20 percent of the student population are considered homeless, adding that there are "many more with damaged homes."



Frankie Solis, his nine-year-old son Frankie Solis Jr. and nine-year-old Zander Wills eat their meals on the hood of their car in the Refugio HEB after getting them from the HEB disaster response team on Wednesdays, Sept. 6, 2017. US Highway 77 was lined with cookers and grills as people came from all over Texas to help with hot meals in Refugio after Hurricane Harvey. (Photo: Courtney Sacco/Caller-Times)

Armonie Brown, a star junior lineman for the Bobcats spent several weeks living with the Uptons as his family picked up the pieces. He now lives with his mother for the first time in many years.

Brown was like a lot of players on the team who that did not have the chance or the means to leave.

Brown stayed with in teammate Kaleb Wright's in his house with 19 other people, not knowing the full intensity of Harvey. They ended up in a hallway with mattresses covering them as the storm raged outside. A picture of them appeared in the story about the team on HBO Real Sports, a picture that revealed the sense of what it was like in the teeth of Harvey.

The day after the storm, Brown said he walked outside to see his hometown torn to shreds.

"It didn't feel like home anymore," said Brown, a junior defensive tackle and All-South Texas Defensive Player of the Year. "I didn't even know what Refugio looked like. It was crazy."

When head football coach Jason Herring returned to town a few days after the storm, he felt tremendous amounts of guilt for having evacuated.

There was little to no communication — cell phone towers were downed all over the county. He had no way of knowing how to find out if his players were even alive.

Some of the his assistant coaches who evacuated to different parts of the state that had service began to check on players with texts. Each time they received positive word on players they simply entered that player's name in a group text, which let the coaches know a player's status.

"As we found out we just made a list and would just type the name of any kid that you know of ours that's OK," Herring said. "We didn't say anything else."



Refugio head coach Jason Herring is interviewed by a reporter during their media day Monday, Dec. 18, 2017, in Refugio. The football program was under the spotlight after the storm as HBO's Real Sports, Sports Illustrated, Bleacher Report, Christian Science Monitor and other publications came to town to tell the Bobcats' story. (Photo: Casey Jackson/Caller-Times)

Misty Upton sent a message to Herring that players who needed a place to stay could stay at their house.

Herring, meanwhile, had more than \$60,000 in damages to his house. But it was livable and players gathered there as well.

At one time, Herring said he had 10 players staying in a house with a generator, and said it became too much for him and his wife. Upton stepped in and at one time there were 12 — Herring took six and Upton took six.

“We knew a lot of people were displaced seeking shelter in hotels,” Upton said. “We didn’t have water, electricity. But we had a roof over our head. And we lived right across the street from the stadium and we were in a situation where we could take them in. Honestly, you do what you need to do to help people out in a situation like that.”

Herring estimates that 50 percent of his players were displaced by the storm. Many of the player’s parents are still living in other towns or cities even now.



Refugio fans and cheerleaders stand for the national anthem before their game against Kenedy on Friday, Oct. 27, 2017 at Jack Sportsman Bobcat Stadium. The game was the first home game for the Bobcats since Hurricane Harvey hit in late August. (Photo: Casey Jackson/Caller-Times)

'SOMETHING POSITIVE IN THEIR LIVES'

As soon as the school's field house and indoor facility was deemed safe they received cots from the Red Cross and displaced players stayed in the field house. Coaches took shifts spending the night with the players. When power was restored about two weeks later, they hooked up an Xbox in the coach's office to keep players entertained.

Plus, it was the first indication that practices could resume for the football team and volleyball team.

About 10 days after the storm, the football team had its first meeting in a football facility that had no power.

It was a first step.

"(Herring) and I were just both resolved that they needed their school and they needed each other and they needed something positive in their lives," Gonzales said. "There were desperate days and there were very discouraging days."

For some players, the field house offered a home with a place to shower and a place to sleep in air conditioning.

All around the players and the program, they were seeing the desperation to just live.

"It was painful for some of our family members because we knew some of our family members that were really affected by (the storm)," Avery said. "Looking back on it, it kind of hurt but we knew we had to stay strong."

Herring, meanwhile, had turned into a de facto relief organizer. There were constant phone calls from individuals and relief organizations about where to take supplies. During the regular season, his focus on football waned and he turned over more coaching to his assistants, which he has not done in the past.

Herring still ran the program and was its chief spokesman but the experience changed him.

"It's a shame there's not a manual on how to survive the hurricane after the hurricane," Herring said. "The hurricane itself was terrible but after it there's no procedures, there's no rules."



Refugio players stand for their school song after winning the Class 2A D-I State Semifinal game against San Augustine on Dec. 14 in Cypress. (Photo: Courtney Sacco/Caller-Times)

‘A PUNCH IN THE GUT’

After a week of practice and the Bobcats’ season opener against Hebronville canceled, Refugio opened the season with a thrilling 35-28 victory against state-ranked Goliad on the road.

But two weeks later — nearly a month after the storm — the Bobcats and their town were devastated.

Casey Henderson, a junior wide receiver and defensive back, was making a tackle and after the tackle he lay on the ground motionless. He was transported to a San Antonio hospital where he had surgery on two broken vertebrae.

“A punch in the gut,” Gonzales said. “Humbling to just the most basic of levels ... it felt like we had hit the bottom.”

Henderson is walking now and was a mainstay on the Refugio sidelines during the playoffs, walking out of the team’s entrance at the playoff opener against Ben Bolt.

But his injury and the town’s plight galvanized the team. After a loss to Class 4A Navarro 21-17, the Bobcats won its next 13 games. And most were blowouts.

The week leading up to the team’s first home game in late October provided another opportunity to show the town, the state and the country that Refugio was coming back.



Refugio Seniors throw torches to ignite the homecoming bonfire on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017 in Refugio. (Photo: Casey Jackson/Caller-Times)

The team hosted its annual homecoming parade passing houses with tarps and some still boarded up, while fans, young and old, lined the streets of the route to the community center, the site of the traditional bonfire. It was all done with HBO cameras following them, an indication that Refugio's story had reached outside of South Texas.

"Football is like a glue for this town," said Daniel Beltran, a former Refugio football player who now works for the sheriff's office, in October. "Having the game here means a lot for everybody in the town of Refugio. It's always football and always has been football. We are thankful we are still here to enjoy these games."



Refugio players stand for their school song after winning the Class 2A D-I State Semifinal game against San Augustine on Dec. 14 in Cypress. (Photo: Courtney Sacco/Caller-Times)

A GLARING RESILIENCY

Two months later, the state championship game against Mart started as if the Bobcats were a team of destiny. They were up 14-0 in less than five minutes of the first quarter.

But as the game progressed, Mart's speed and big-game experience matched that of Refugio's as the Panthers pulled away in the second half for their sixth state championship.

Avery sat on the bench in the later stages knowing the outcome was decided with at times his head in his hands. After the game, Brown, with his helmet on, was crying as teammates, coaches and fans came up to him.

"It was a tough loss to swallow but I want to say I am proud of my team for getting us as far as we did," Brown said. "It's still a tough loss."

Herring hugged his son and talked to media about the disappointment and how the season was a "failure" because of Refugio's expectations of winning a state title. Even after a Category 4 hurricane battered the town, the expectations of winning were still present.



Refugio's Donavon Bailey and Jamel LaFond comfort each other after falling to Mart in the Class 2A Division I state championship game Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2017, at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington. (Photo: Casey Jackson/Caller-Times)

Upton was like a lot of parents and fans, though, who said the season was far from a failure: Herring and his staff kept the team focused and his efforts to help the town was appreciated.

"I don't know that he's changed but man, I tell you what we are so thankful for him," Upton said. "He stepped up and did so much for our kids and for our community. I sent him a text after the game telling him how much we appreciated everything."

Herring said what he saw most was the team's continued resiliency.

"It was like the Rocky movies," Herring said. "Life for our kids is hard. The hurricane punched them three times in the gut and two weeks later our best player gets paralyzed but they kept playing and kept winning. In my mind that had to create a tremendous amount of hope for everybody."



Refugio's Casey Henderson comforts Armonie Brown after losing to Mart in the Class 2A Division I state championship game Wednesday, Dec. 220, 2017, at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington. (Photo: Casey Jackson/Caller-Times)

Gonzales describes the recovery as “hour by hour” five months later instead of minute by minute. FEMA inspections were completed last week, which will help the rebuilding process move quicker for the school.

She added Dick’s Sporting Goods’ foundation has given the school a \$75,000 grant for work on the school’s softball field, baseball field and tennis courts so contests can be played there.

Herring said the phone calls have died down for relief but the white board in his office has a hodge podge of things he needs to do from paying his daughter’s tuition to Texas A&M to making sure to file University Interscholastic League paperwork to a list of where donated mattresses need to be taken.

He jokingly calls the white board “his life” because he does not keep another type of planner.

Above the white board are all the gold football trophies from the 2017 playoffs, representing each playoff round win. And they represent more than just wins in 2017.

“It’s the greatest season in my memory just because it’s been more meaningful,” Gonzales said. “We’ve learned so much, we’ve experienced so much. I see our community more tolerant of each other and much more focused on the things we have in common than our differences.”

JACK SPORTSMAN
BOBCAT STADIUM
REFUGIO BOBCATS



27 6 27 29 50 51 55 66 70 75
18 19 20 21 24 48 51 28 30 31 50 52
1 16 17 14



Section 7

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Luis Fernandez
(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Rebecca Brutlag

Phone: 916-239-4477

E-mail: rbrutlag@cifstate.org

Street Address: 4658 Duckhorn Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Sacramento, CA 95834

Date: January 19, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Roger Blake

Title: CIF Executive Director

Signature: 

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Luis Fernandez
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 49-920 Avenida Cortez
(street address)

Coachella, CA 92236
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 760-609-9981

E-mail: Fleal@yahoo.com

School (if any): Shadow Hills High School

City: Indio State: CA

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

-Recipient of the Desi Strong for Courage Award (Cross Country), given to the athlete who has shown incredible courage despite obstacle's that the common person might not succeed with.

-Recipient of the No Guts, No Glory Award (Cross Country), given to the athlete who was not the team MVP, but was typically the next best on the team who displayed the most will to win, the best work ethic, and the biggest heart.

-Luis holds over a 3.5 GPA the past two seasons as a member of the cross country and track teams.

-Luis finished the 2017 season with the 3rd fastest boys' cross country time (15:50) in Shadow Hills High School history. He was the #2 runner on the CIF Southern Section Championship-qualifying boys team that finished two spots away from advancing to CIF State Championships.

-Luis was a two-time member of the Shadow Hills Cross Country team that qualified for CIF Southern Section Championships (2016, 2017) and also qualified for the CIF Southern Section Track Championships (2017) as part of the 4x400m relay team.

-Luis's success has helped others in the deaf community find the courage to try a sport. There are currently three deaf athletes on the Shadow Hills HS track team who would not have come out for the team without Luis pushing them to.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Fernandez is an elite distance runner, who is deaf, and hopes he can use his disability to inspire younger runners with the same dreams he had growing up. Eventually he would like to become a cross country coach and help out kids who are just like him.

Fernandez pursued baseball, soccer and football, but eventually his distance running talents won out. But that doesn't mean Fernandez felt at ease right away. His hearing is at a level where he can somewhat hear someone's raised voice if they're close to him. Making eye contact so that he can read the speaker's lips helps tremendously. But though he can hear the roar of a crowd, it's tough for Fernandez to make sense of any of it.

At cross country meets with the runners sometimes tracing an entire school complex, Fernandez's family and Coach Richie DeTamble have worked out a plan to stage people throughout the course to communicate with Luis, see how he's feeling and remind him where to start picking up the pace toward the end.

Off the course, though, Fernandez has eased into just one of the guys. DeTamble doesn't ever hesitate to goad his runners, whether it's about checking on their grades or the weekend's fantasy football developments. And Luis gets the same attention from him and the rest of his teammates.

The senior does still speak audibly – not all deaf people do – and though it is difficult to understand in first meeting him, his coaches and teammates have no trouble at all. It's a

testament to how much they care about making him feel right at home and the effort they've put in.

The relationships Fernandez has been able to build, both on the team and around the school, may be what his mother is most proud of. She's frequently on the Shadow Hills High School campus for meetings with her son's teachers or to watch him compete, and she said she's amazed at the kindness her son is given, despite his disability.

This season, Fernandez became the third male Knights runner to ever break the 16-minute mark in a five-kilometer meet, trailing his teammate Gonzalez, who set the school record at 15:21. Fernandez's time of 15:51 that he ran at the Beaumont Invitational to kick off the season was his personal best, improving upon his junior year personal record of 16:24. That mark from Beaumont is also the seventh-fastest time anyone in the DVL has run in any meet for the 2017 season.

In hopes of continuing his running career, his mother said Fernandez plans on attending College of the Desert next school year, a situation that would be the best of both worlds and allow him to continue living at home while going to school and running on the Roadrunners' cross country team. DeTamble said he's received inquiries from bigger college programs about Fernandez's interest, too, but noted leaving home would mean he would need extra support.

Deaf runner found family, confidence on cross country team

By: Nathan Brown, The Desert Sun | November 5, 2017

<https://www.desertsun.com/videos/sports/2017/10/31/deaf-runner-found-family-confidence-shadow-hills-team/107213466/>

As Xavier Prep cross country coach Aron Lyons stands in front of 49 of the valley's fastest male runners before the second Desert Valley League cross country meet of the year, Shadow Hills (Calif.) senior Luis Fernandez looks off to the side.

Lyons preps the varsity runners on the course, instructs them to take two giant steps back from the line and sends out a shrill "BEEP" that will be used as the race's starting signal.

With every other runner looking ahead with a focused stare or giving one last check of their shoes, Fernandez has his eyes locked on a member of his extended "team."

Because when Lyons shrieks and the race officially begins, Fernandez will already be a fraction of a second behind the rest of the field until someone can sign to him from the sidelines and signal that the race has begun.

For just a moment, the elite distance runner, who is deaf, falls a half-step behind and is engulfed by the sea of runners. But it doesn't take the senior long to catch back up and blend in with the rest of the pack.

If you missed that small moment, you wouldn't recognize Fernandez as anything more than a talented runner with college aspirations and an outside chance to win the league's championship meet Wednesday afternoon at Demuth Park in Palm Springs. In a way, the senior loves that inclusion as being one of the guys on the Knights' squad, but in the future, he hopes he can use his disability to inspire younger runners with the same dreams he had growing up.

"He wants to eventually be a cross country coach," Fernandez's mother, Fabiola, said. "He wants to enjoy running in college, but hopefully become a coach to help out kids who are just like him and say 'If I did it, you can do it too.'"

Fernandez needed mentors in his own life to help him and his parents to finally realize the talent he'd been hiding. Fabiola remembers even in elementary school when her son's gym teacher remarked at how fast he could run the mile.

But even heading into high school, Fernandez pursued baseball, soccer and football, although his running background still popped up from time-to-time. Shadow Hills track and cross country coach Richie DeTamble remembers during the spring of Fernandez's freshman year when Luis came out for the track team, but didn't last long.

"There was something in him. He had a lot of strength, and he was good, but the practices were too much for him at the time," he said.

Instead, Fernandez went out for baseball that freshman spring. But a year later, he was back at DeTamble's opening season workouts, thinking he was going to be a sprinter. Eventually, his distance runner talents shone through.

But that doesn't mean Fernandez felt at ease right away. His hearing is at a level where he can somewhat hear someone's raised voice if they're close to him. Making eye contact so that he can read the speaker's lips helps tremendously. But though he can hear the roar of a crowd, it's tough for Fernandez to make sense of any of it.

As DeTamble explains, to Fernandez, the home stretch at a track meet or the throng of people around the finish line of a cross country meet sound like indistinct mumbling – imagine how your ears feel at high elevations before they've normalized, but much worse.

Luis Fernandez talks with his coach and teammate Isaiah

Luis Fernandez talks with his coach and teammate Isaiah Gonzalez at practice. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

That means that sometimes, at least early on, Fernandez would go into races, especially in track and field, uncertain of what he was actually doing. DeTamble remembers multiples instances when he'd see his star distance runner start to pick up the pace on the third lap of the mile – a four-lap race – and by the time his coach could sprint across the field and grab Fernandez's attention by waving his arms and motioning him to slow down, he was already gassed, still with one lap remaining.

At cross country meets with the runners sometimes tracing an entire school complex, Fernandez's family and DeTamble have worked out a plan to stage people throughout the course to communicate with Luis, see how he's feeling and remind him where to start picking up the pace toward the end.

“I can yell to anyone else from across the stadium, and they can hear me,” the coach said. “Luis can’t. I either have to wait for him to come around or go run over.

“At the cross country meets, when he has 800 meters to go, it’s not just a simple ‘Come on, Luis!’ I’ve got to waive my arms in a big circle and exaggerate. He knows if I’m doing this, it’s go time.”

Off the course, though, Fernandez has eased into just one of the guys. DeTamble doesn’t ever hesitate to goad his runners, whether it’s about checking on their grades or the weekend’s fantasy football developments. And Luis gets the same attention from him and the rest of his teammates.

The senior does still speak audibly – not all deaf people do – and though it is difficult to understand in first meeting him, his coaches and teammates have no trouble at all. It’s a testament to how much they care about making him feel right at home and the effort they’ve put in.

Luis Fernandez talks with friends during practice at

Luis Fernandez talks with friends during practice at Shadow Hills High School, October 12, 2017. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

When the team arrives at the track after school, Luis receives a variety of remarks – “Hey, Luis”, “What’s up, Luis?” as well as high-fives. Fernandez is particularly good friends with fellow speedy senior Isaiah Gonzalez, who won the second DVL meet of the season after Fernandez took second place in the opener.

“I like running with Isaiah because we can both pass the other team,” he signs.

The relationships Fernandez has been able to build, both on the team and around the school, may be what his mother is most proud of. She’s frequently on the Shadow Hills High School campus for meetings with her son’s teachers or to watch him compete, and she said she’s amazed at the kindness her son is given, despite his disability.

“The kids and the teachers, they respect each other. Since Luis has gone there, I haven’t seen anyone making fun of him or ignoring him because they can’t understand him or anything,” his mother said.

“Sometimes when I have meetings, I go and see him, and he’s got lots of friends, and that makes me very happy.

“No one seems to say ‘Let’s not talk to him because he’s deaf.’ ”

Luis Fernandez practices with the Shadow Hills Cross

Luis Fernandez practices with the Shadow Hills Cross Country team, Thursday, October 12, 2017. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

This season, Fernandez became the third male Knights runner to ever break the 16-minute mark in a five-kilometer meet, trailing Gonzalez, who set the school record at 15:21. Fernandez’s time of 15:51 that he ran at the Beaumont Invitational to kick off this season is his personal best, improving upon his junior year personal record of 16:24. That mark from Beaumont is also the seventh-fastest time anyone in the DVL has run in any meet this season.

In hopes of continuing his running career, his mother said Fernandez plans on attending College of the Desert next school year, a situation that would be the best of both worlds and allow him to continue living at home while going to school and running on the Roadrunners’ cross country team. DeTamble said he’s gotten inquiries from bigger college programs about Fernandez’s interest, too, but noted leaving home would mean he would need extra support.

Luis Fernandez stretches with teammates at Shadow Hills

Luis Fernandez stretches with teammates at Shadow Hills High School, Thursday, October 12, 2017. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

Wherever he ends up during his college years, his mother hopes her son pursues his dream of becoming a coach. She said she thinks his determination he’s shown growing up could do nothing but help out other teenage kids who may, like a young Luis, need some help breaking out of their shell.

“Nothing really bothers him, to tell you the truth,” she said. “He does what he puts his mind to and puts a lot of heart into it, even though it’s hard. Nothing stands in his way or holds him back. He’ll go for it and do whatever he has to.”







NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Blake Scott Freeland)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Brad Tingey

Phone: 801-567-8581

E-mail: brad.tingey@jordandistrict.org

Street Address: 11917 S 6000 W

City, State, Zip Code: Herriman, Utah 84096

Date: 1/10/17

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Jan Whittaker

Title: Utah High School Activities Association Assistant Director

Signature: Jan H. Whittaker

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify _____)

Name of Nominee: Blake Scott Freeland
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 12038 S. Overland Park Rd
(street address)

Riverton, Utah 84065
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 801-558-4897

E-mail: Therealblake@icloud.com

School (if any): Herriman High school

City: Herriman State: Utah

Blake Scott Freeland

12038 S. Overland Park Rd.
Riverton, UT. 84096
801.558.4897

Therealblake@icloud.com

Herriman High School
Class of 2019
Herriman, UT.

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Blake is currently a Junior at Herriman High School. During his time at Herriman, Blake has maintained a 3.8 Grade Point Average. He achieved a 4.0 in his classes while starting at QB and being enrolled in Honors classes. Blake was chosen to be a participant in the Unified Police Department: Distracted Driving "Mock Crash". The group of students that were involved worked diligently on surveys, marketing and developing the "day of" events including a mock distracted driving scene, detailed obituaries and a production that was used on KSL Channel 5 and the Unified Police Department's website.

Blake was a Varsity contributor on the Football team his Freshman year at QB. Herriman High School won the 5A State Championship that year by beating Lone Peak. Blake also played basketball and competed in Track and Field. His sophomore year Blake started at Quarterback for Herriman as a sophomore, picking up mid-season, leading Herriman to a play-in game against American Fork. Blake started more than half of the games at Center for Herriman during his Sophomore season. During the Spring season, Blake went on to place 3rd in State in both the shotput and javelin.

As a Junior, Blake started all 12 games at QB helping the Mustangs to the 6A Semi-final game. Blake has also started at Center for the Mustangs basketball team in all of their 2017-2018 games. He plans on throwing again in the Spring for the Mustang Track and Field Team. He will be the top returning Javelin thrower in 6A the number one ranked Junior Shot putter in 2018. Blake was selected to be a Captain of the Football team the last two seasons and he is currently a captain on the basketball team. Blake's football coaches state that, "...the real value of a kid like Blake is his selflessness. He will play whatever we need him too and have no worries that he will pick it up quickly." Blake has been offered a full athletic scholarship to Brigham Young University and has committed to play football in the Fall of 2019.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Blake is the only son in his family with 4 sisters, who are also very accomplished. He is a kind and caring brother and son. He supports his sister's hobby's by coaching, attending and practicing with the girls. He had the opportunity to compete with his oldest sister in track and field. They had the unique opportunity to compete together at the state level in the throws. Blake is one of the top shot putters and javelin throwers in the state of Utah. He takes opportunities to coach his youngest sister's 10 yr. old basketball team. His patience, kindness and the ability to change his demeanor and candor based on his audience sets Blake apart from most teen volunteers.

Blake is in the midst of starting a nonprofit foundation focused on underprivileged athletes being able to participate in the entire process of becoming a student-athlete. The idea behind the foundation is to support student-athletes in becoming scholarship athletes by providing information and funds for camps, classes, test fees, timelines and scholarships for visits and communications with schools. Blake's is passionate about these students who are left behind or who may not have equitable opportunities of those with higher socioeconomic means.

The idea for his foundation stemmed from Blake playing with athletes that would outshine other athletes in the recruiting world, but weren't allowed or afforded the stage due to some hardships that were no fault of their own. One student athlete in particular, a young man from the Sudan, is an incredible basketball player and person. Some common hurdles he faces are English as a second language, limited financial means, lack of transportation and limited connections to post-secondary opportunities. Some evenings you will see this young man's high school coach taking him to other high school games or club practices. Play Your Way Out Foundation would alleviate some of the burden on the coach and the player. Blake's passion for helping people is only surpassed by his loyalty for his friends.

Blake serves in his church as a youth leader and organizes activities for the youth in his church neighborhood to take part in. His most recent calendar of events included a Pickleball tournament, a co-ed youth dinner and a variety of service opportunities.

Section 8

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD

Official Nomination Form – 2018

SHEY LOPEZ
OREGON / SECTION 8



National Federation of State High School Associations
PO Box 690 | Indianapolis, Indiana 46206
Phone: 317-972-6900 | Fax: 317.822.5700

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

Name of Nominee: **Shey Paul Lopez**

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Steve Crane, Head Football Coach, Chemawa Indian School

Phone: 503 949 0776

E-mail: steven.crane@bie.edu

Street Address: 2091 Pikes Pass CT

City, State, Zip Code: Salem, OR 97306

Date: Jan 16, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Cindy Simmons

Title: Assistant Executive Director, Oregon School Activities Association

Signature:



NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

X Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other

Name of Nominee: Shey Paul Lopez

Current Address: 3700 Chemawa Rd, Salem, OR 97305

Phone: 520 279 1032

E-mail: sheyplop@gmail.com

School (if any): Chemawa Indian School

City: Salem State: OR

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Shey Lopez is a senior at Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon. Chemawa is a boarding school for Native American students from west of the Mississippi River. Shey's home state is Arizona. Shey has played football and baseball all four years at Chemawa and he is on track to graduate this spring. In football, Shey started as a freshman and has played linebacker and running back. His sophomore year he received all-league honorable mention as a linebacker and as a junior he made second team all-league as a linebacker. His sophomore year he lead the team to a victory vs Gervais high school which broke a 20 plus year league losing streak.

Going into his senior year we made the tough choice of leaving our league and playing a JV schedule. Shey knew he would not be able to qualify for all league honors and yet he chose to come and play his final year. As his coach, I have nothing but good things to say about him and his play on the field and as his math teacher he has done a good job for me in the classroom.

Though it is early I fully expect him to be named our senior male athlete of the year at the graduation ceremony.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Playing football at Chemawa can be an exceptional challenge for the athletes. Most teams in the state, and across the country, have summer work outs and daily doubles to prepare for the season. At Chemawa, a boarding school, the players don't fly in until Labor Day weekend. Two Friday's later, we play our first game. Most of our team completes their tenth practice, making them eligible to compete in games, on the Thursday before the first game. In those two weeks, players from different reservations across the country meet each other, learn each other's names, and the basics of an offense and defense. The results are predictable as Chemawa Football has traditionally struggled regarding wins and losses. In reality, Chemawa has less practices for the season than any other team has before their first game. Despite all this, Shey has returned to play all four years. We do not talk about winning and losing in our program, we focus on controlling what we can control, which is our attitude and effort, and Shey has always given us everything he has. He has never missed a practice and shows up ready to work every day.

Last season was an especially rough season. In addition to not winning any games, we did not score any points. After the season, NFL Films contacted us and asked if after that last season we were going to stop playing football. When we told them that we would continue to play no matter what they asked if they could come spend a week with us filming a segment for their "For the Love of the Game" series. We agreed and so during the last week of our season, NFL Films came to our school. The piece ended up focused on Shey and speaks to his spirit and heart for sports.

Here is the link to view it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=005c4S66ToA>

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Rochelle Getzinger

(first, middle, last)

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: Jennifer Robertson

Phone: 509-953-9237

E-mail: jrobertson@mlca.us

Street Address: 1475 Nelson Road NE Suite A

City, State, Zip Code: Moses Lake WA 98837

Date: February 1, 2018

State Association Endorsement:

Name: [Tab here]

Title: [Tab here]

Signature: [Tab here]

NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Student Coach Administrator Official Trainer

Athletic Administrator Other (Specify ____ Volunteer
Parent _____)

Name of Nominee: Rochelle Getzinger
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 967 Road S Northeast
(street address)

Moses Lake WA 98837
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 509-361-9070

E-mail: Jgetzinger32@hotmail.com

School (if any): [Tab here]

City: [Tab here] State: [Tab here]

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Rochelle is extremely involved in all areas of our school. She is a substitute teacher when we need her, she volunteers in our lunch room, and field trips. She is most active on our annual Athletic fundraiser which takes months to plan. It is an Auction/Dinner Crab Feed. The event has raised over \$80,000 for numerous years in a row, with over 700 community members in attendance for our Athletic dept. Her time and dedication to our Athletic dept. is so appreciated.

2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

I became the Athletic Director just this year. So with not much experience and a lot excitement I took on a big role and we also decided to do a combine with another school to increase our Athletic program. Rochelle jumped on board with this vision and created a program for our younger students from both schools to come and support our high school student athletes. She created a "Mini Cheer" group. This was for anyone associated with our schools ages preschool to 6th grade. Rochelle designed the clothes, came up with cheers, met after school twice a week with all these students. They didn't just cheer though, they would make travel bags for the athletes for away games, filled with healthy snacks and cards, and they decorated lockers and encouraged the younger kids to learn the names of the athletes. By creating this mini cheer group it increased our attendance at our games, it boosted morale of our players and school spirit has never been this high from preschool all the way to 12th grade. Rochelle has also encouraged other parent volunteers to get more involved in our school athletic program. When a positive program can be felt all through your school and your athletes love to have home games because it is such a positive experience whether they win or lose, you have to thank the people who have taken so much of her time, effort and love to make our athletic program the thing that makes even that kid who has never played a sport say, "maybe I should give that a try this year". Thank you for considering Rochelle, she is also married and an amazing mom of four beautifully talented children.

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2018)

Name of Nominee: Clayton Thomas Auzqui

Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: K. Mike Sauers

Phone: 307-758-4412 ext.118 (work) 307-620-0039(cell)

E-mail: msauers@shr3panthers.com

Street Address: 1600 Meade Ave

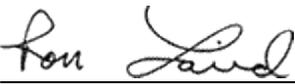
City, State, Zip Code: Clearmont, WY, 82835

Date: 1/23/18

State Association Endorsement:

Name: Ron Laird

Title: Commissioner

Signature: 

NOMINATION FORM

1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

Senior Year 2017-2018

- Football
 - Team Captain
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - Received 3A All-Conference Award
 - Received National Football Foundation Wyoming Chapter Perseverance Award
- Basketball
 - Team Captain
- Track
 - Athlete
 - Team Captain
- WHSAA
 - Attended the State Sportsmanship Summit
 - Attended the Northeast District Athletic Directors Meeting
- Clear Creek FFA
 - Wyoming State FFA participant
 - Participated in Highway clean-up
- Student Council
 - Student Body President
 - Wyoming Association of Student Councils' State participant
 - Wyoming Association of Student Councils' Summit participant
 - Wyoming Association of Student Councils' Hidden Hero Award recipient
 - Organized Make-A-Wish Fundraisers
 - Served at SCSD #3 Annual Legislative Dinner
- National Honor Society
 - President
 - Organized Christmas Canned Food Drive Academics
 - Selected as Rotary Club Student of the Quarter
- Other
 - Worked for Auzqui Ranch

Junior Year 2016-2017

- Football
 - Earned Varsity Letter
- Basketball
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - Received Northeast District All-Conference Honorable Mention
- Track
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - State Qualifier - Discus
 - Team Captain
- Clear Creek FFA
 - Cowboy Classic participant
 - Wyoming State FFA participant
 - High Scoring Individual on Mechanics Team
- Student Council
 - Student Body Vice-President
 - Wyoming Association of Student Councils' Summit participant
 - Organized Make-A-Wish Fundraisers
- National Honor Society

- Organized Christmas Canned Food Drive
- Organized Elementary Field Day
- Academics
 - Board of Trustees Honor Roll
 - American Government Academic Excellence Award
 - “We The People” participant
 - Outstanding Student in Weights & Fitness Class
 - Outstanding Achievement in Algebra II
- Volunteer Work
 - Assisted with community Easter Egg Hunt
- Organized 2017 Prom
- Organized 2017 High School Graduation
- Assisted with re-roofing the Clearmont Post Office
- Other
 - Worked for Auzqui Ranch

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Sophomore Year 2015-2016

- Football
 - Earned Varsity Letter
- Basketball
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - Received Northeast District All-Conference Honorable Mention
- Track
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - Earned True Grit Award
- Clear Creek FFA
 - F.I.R.E Conference participant
 - Wyoming State FFA participant
 - High Scoring Individual on Mechanics Team
 - Participated in Highway clean up
 - Assisted with re-landscaping the school lawns
- Student Council
 - Student Body Vice-President
 - Wyoming Association of Student Councils’ Summit participant
 - Organized Make-A-Wish Fundraisers
- National Honor Society
 - Inducted into the A/C chapter
 - Organized Christmas Canned Food Drive
 - Organized Elementary Field Day
- Academics
 - Board of Trustees Honor Roll
 - Rotary Club Student of the Quarter
 - Outstanding Performance in Soph. Math
 - Academic Excellence in U.S. History & Geography
- Volunteer Work
 - Assisted with community Easter Egg Hunt
- Other
 - Worked for Auzqui Ranch

Freshman Year 2014-2015

- Football
 - Earned JV Letter
- Basketball
 - Earned Varsity Letter
 - Received Most Improved Basketball Player Award
- Track
 - Earned Varsity Letter

- Received True Grit Award
 - Clear Creek FFA
 - F.I.R.E Conference participant
 - Wyoming State FFA participant
 - Creed Speaking Chapter Contest Co-Winner
 - Participated in highway clean up
 - Academics
 - Board of Trustees Honor Roll
 - Outstanding Student Algebra I
 - Outstanding Student Physical Science
 - Outstanding Student Freshman English
 - Other
 - Worked for Auzqui Ranch
2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Many of the students at Arvada-Clearmont High School and across Wyoming have extraordinary stories of long trips to and from the ranch to school. Many of the students are afforded numerous opportunities to participate in various types of activities. Some students take advantage of those opportunities but few students can say they take full advantage of ALL the opportunities that the school has to offer. Arvada-Clearmont High School is a part of Sheridan County School District #3 and is one of the smallest districts in the state of Wyoming but continues to provide programs and events that allow students to expand their interests and gain new experiences while in High School.

Clayton Auzqui, a senior at ACHS, can say that he has taken advantage of ALL that our school can provide. Clayton has also been a part of a small group of students that have embraced the opportunity to reach out to our neighboring Johnson County School District #1 and Sheridan College in order to take advantage of what they also offer students. Clayton's journey is best described and written about by Rob Hammond, his football coach from Buffalo High School in Johnson County.

"For those of us who are lucky enough to be called "coach," we all know how much our title means. It means that we're looked up to by young men and women as role models, motivators, and leaders. It's an important role for our youth – the guidance given by coaches is invaluable as we teach our student athletes the values of dedication, grit, sacrifice, and selflessness. I think all coaches embrace the fact that we have a lot to offer and teach to our athletes.

But every once in awhile, a coach is lucky enough to be blessed by a youngster who they themselves can learn from. During the past four years, I've been lucky enough to work with such an athlete. I was blessed to work with an athlete who taught me about bravery, integrity, and grit. And because of my interactions with this young man, I feel that the least I can do is to nominate Clayton Auzqui for the Wyoming Football Foundation's Courage Award. *(Clayton has been awarded this award and will be recognized in March 2018)*

When you meet Clayton for the first time, he comes off as a pretty normal kid. He is more than normal, however. On our football team, he was known as a leader and a really good football player. He comes off as a young man who's been raised the right way and has taken advantage of his God-given gifts. And all of this is true about Clayton. But when you really get to know Clayton and you learn about the challenges that he's overcome in his life, it's impossible not to be in awe not only of what he's overcome, but also the way he's carried himself on his difficult journey.

Clayton was born with a disease called Common Variable Immune Deficiency (CVID). CVID is a disorder that attacks the immune system and makes the individual very susceptible to infections. Most people with this disorder experience a gradual onset of symptoms and aren't officially diagnosed with CVID until adulthood. Clayton's specific type of CVID was so extreme that he was diagnosed at the age of five and his life expectancy without treatment was for only two years.

Clayton was lucky to receive the diagnosis at such an early age, but the treatments that he had to undergo to fight the disorder made life tough, to say the least. Until the age of 13, Clayton had to receive IVIG treatments (to replace his non-productive immune system) each month at the Cancer Center in Gillette, WY. These 8-hour treatments were so hard on his system that he was given a Pedi-port in his chest.

The complications from CVID and his treatments caused other health issues as well. Clayton also dealt with a lung biopsy, an enlarged spleen, GLILD (a lung disease that decreases the amount of air flow in the lungs – Clayton was measured at 60% capacity), C/T scans, PET scans, PF tests, three rounds of chemotherapy and an emergency surgery to replace his Pedi-port. ALL of this happened before he reached 8th grade.

It's easy to see that Clayton's health was his biggest fight and that the "normal" concerns of young adulthood – grades, sports, etc. paled in comparison. Most kids and their families would have been content with overcoming the odds of this disorder and to live a sheltered, protected, germ-free life. This type of life wasn't enough for Clayton and his following actions are what set him apart.

Clayton attacked his medical conditions the way that he tackles everything in life – head on and full of bravery. He fought CVID and built his body so it would be even better than normal – it would be strong enough to become our team captain and an All-Conference lineman. All the while continuing his weekly 3-hour Sub-Q treatments at home. Clayton NEVER used his condition as an excuse. He could have easily used his condition to miss practices, workouts, etc. He could have blamed his performance on the medical conditions that he lives with. Simply put, he could have hidden behind the CVID disorder and all of the complications that he lives with on a daily basis.

This isn't Clayton, however. Clayton always told us that he had big shoes to fill. His dad and his uncles were Buffalo Bison, and he was going to be a Bison, too. Clayton came to work every single day that I was around him. He was intense, he was physical, and he was a competitor. He had more to deal with than any other kid on our team but you would never know it. No one out worked Clayton and no one played harder than Clayton. Most kids have a hard time giving their best effort each day – Clayton just lives his life that way.

The best part is that Clayton doesn't let his conditions affect who he is. Clayton is on record as saying, "I am one of the lucky ones. People look at me and I look normal. I get the choice to tell you that there is something wrong with me. This is not who I am, it's just what I have."

I'm nominating Clayton for the Courage award because of how he's lived his life but also for the lessons that he's taught me as a coach. It's easy to make excuses as a coach. We can feel bad for ourselves when we lose, when we're tired, or when we're criticized. And it's easy to feel bad for some of our athletes as well. A lot of our kids come from difficult backgrounds and it's easy to want to cut them some slack.

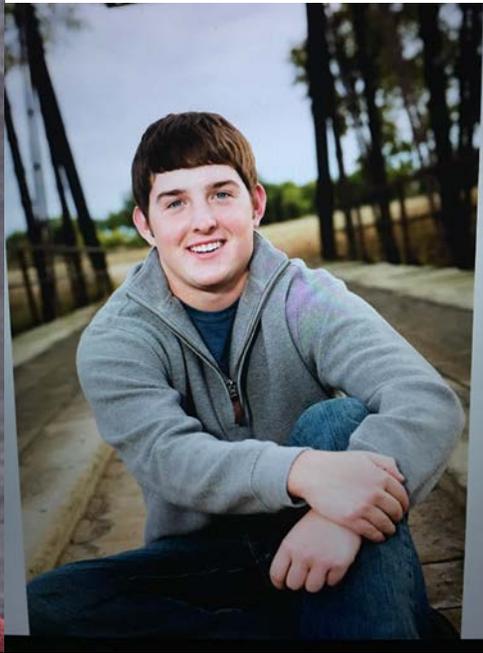
Clayton has reminded me that no one should feel sorry for themselves and no one should let their difficulties in life be used as an excuse. Clayton is by definition a person of grit, dedication, and integrity. He always does things the right way and he always holds himself to a higher standard, no matter what.

The thing about Clayton is how modest of a person that he is. Very, very few people know his story. Clayton doesn't want anyone to feel sorry for him, give him a "break" or to be in awe of what he's overcome. Clayton feels that everyone should live their life the way he does – with excellence. And this is exactly why I feel that Clayton deserves the Courage award. More people need to hear of people like Clayton. He's an inspiration to all of us." -- Rob Hammond (Buffalo High School Football Coach)

As Clayton's Athletic Director and Dean of Students, I see the same passion and values that Coach Hammond describes. Clayton puts forth a great deal of effort in all of the activities and classes that he is involved in. When walking the hall of Clearmont High School, Clayton is often one of the first students in the building, well before most of the other students, taking advantage of teachers who come in early to help students with assignments and getting extra one on one instruction. In the evenings, he is almost always the last to leave the building after basketball practice is over. He can be found spending time making sure he

puts extra work into his jump shot or foul shots in the gym. It's in these moments, when no one is around to see the work he is doing, that Clayton's true character is revealed.

Clayton's work ethic and determination to be successful is unmatched. On paper, he is the leader of various organizations and clubs at SCSD #3 but in reality, he is a strong and committed leader of our school. Clayton gives back to his school in many ways, but one of the most recognizable ways is during a 2 day per week student mentoring and tutoring program. Clayton works with the 5th and 6th grade math classes. Although it may seem he is helping to improve the math knowledge of the young students, as a role model, he is helping to develop the next group of hard working students at SCSD #3. He no doubt will be an inspiration to anyone that gets to know him throughout his life. I know that he has been an inspiration for the staff and students at Sheridan County School District #3, in Clearmont Wyoming and will continue to be as he touches more lives in the future.



Link to Clayton Auzqui article:

http://www.buffalobulletin.com/sports/article_49463fb1-1868-53bc-bfe9-d45ac6a08a7e.html#.WnHx33_kcnl.gmail.