

# Section 1

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Alana Bochanis  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Teg Cosgriff CMAA

Phone: (O) 860-399-7099; © 203-606-0779

E-mail: [tcosgriff@westbrookctschoools.org](mailto:tcosgriff@westbrookctschoools.org)

Street Address: Westbrook HS, 156 McVeagh Road

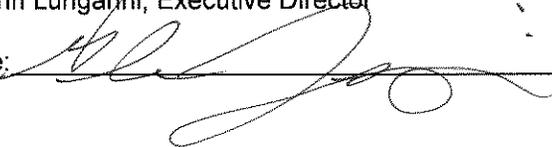
City, State, Zip Code: Westbrook, CT 06498

Date: December 13, 2018

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Association

Title: Glenn Lungarini, Executive Director

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  


# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Alana Bochanis  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 878 East Pond Meadow Road  
(street address)  
Westbrook, CT 06498  
(city, state, zip)

Phone: (860) 399 - 1199

E-mail: alana.bocha2@gmail.com

School (if any): Westbrook High School

City: Westbrook

State: CT

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Alana Bochanis, a senior at Westbrook High School, is highly active in Westbrook High School as a high honors student and National Honor Society member, a multi-sport student-athlete, a Unified Sports partner, the current senior class president, a peer counselor, a member of SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), as well as being an integral member of Westbrook High Schools' Teen Leadership School Climate Team, a school organization that not only impacts our school culture but also visits other schools for presentations and interaction.

**Tara Winch, Westbrook Principal** is amazed by Alana, stating, "Alana is a spirited and positive young lady who radiates joy with her smile. She is a pleasure to work with because of her "can do" attitude and her willingness to persevere despite the obstacles with which she is confronted. She is the Senior Class President, and an active participant in National Honor Society and our Teen Leadership program. She is an inspiration within our school community and has made all of us see every day as a special gift."

Alana's role as a leader in our community cannot be overstated as outlined by our **Westbrook Teen Leadership Advisor Chet Bialicki** who exclaims, "Alana has been an example to all students in Leadership positions. She leads with extreme positivity and finds good in everyone and everything she approaches. She has been an inspiration to others to overcome personal constraints and move forward with the things that must be done in life."

**Head Varsity Field Hockey Coach Janet Dickey**, who has had Alana for four seasons, praises her for the positive attitude that she brings to the Knights, as well as her skills as a member of Westbrook's defensive corps. "Alana is an amazing young lady. She brings energy and positivity to the field every day. She plays on a defensive line that has kept shots to a minimum this season. Alana is very vocal, encouraging, and helps her teammates, either from the sideline or in the backfield."

**Please see the enclosed listing (3 pages)** of Alana's academic, leadership, athletic, volunteer and work achievements and activities to understand how active and engaged this young woman is in our school and Westbrook community. Her perseverance and drive is greater than most healthy teenage high school students that you will ever encounter.

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 an honor to nominate Alana Bochanis, a senior at Westbrook High School for the **2019 NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award**. Alana is a true scholar-athlete and an exceptional leader in our Westbrook High School community.

Alana is a high honors student and currently serves as the senior class president. She carries a cumulative weighted GPA of 96.54 and is a multi-sport athlete for Westbrook High School, (4) years field hockey, (1) year basketball, (1) year indoor track and field and to date (3) years of softball within the intention of playing girls tennis this Spring.

Alana accomplishes this and more every day with grace, dignity and always with a beautiful smile, all the while battling a congenital heart disease (that she was born with) – a transposition of the great arteries in which the pulmonary and aortic valves and the arteries they're connected to are swapped over and connected to the wrong pumping chambers. This results in blood that's low in oxygen begin pumped throughout the body. This is known as Corrected Transposition of the Great Vessels with a single ventricle, known in medical circles as (VSD) Ventricle Septic Defect. This is also complicated with another condition known as (PLE) Protein Losing Entropathy. This has been a life threatening disease from the day she was born, and remains a serious health issue to this day. Her first heart surgery occurred at three months of age. Alana has a pacemaker and at some point as a young adult she will require a heart transplant.

However, despite undergoing nine surgeries in her lifetime, including four open heart surgeries, and while awaiting her next surgery, she attacks every day with a bright outlook and an underlying courage that is simply unexplainable. Her next surgery is an elective surgery. When she decided to go forward in the process to become a candidate, she would have been only the ninth teenager to every have this process done. This next scheduled surgery is a process that provides the opportunity for Alana to delay the need for the heart transplant surgery. As with all of these surgeries, they are high risk and potentially life altering. It was one risk Alana's father and mother did not want her to take. However, with much soul searching, education and discussion Alana persuaded her mother and father to grant her wish to move forward with this next surgery. This process is a testament to Alana's courage and determination, in terms of how she wishes to live her life and drive the decisions in her life that impact her.

"My doctors (when I was younger) thought things like running and swimming would be good to exercise my heart, which is a muscle, but I thought those weren't fun. I had to go through a process of convincing everyone that I would be able to play, and that I wanted to play," Alana says. "I have to be aware of how I'm feeling at points in practices or a game. I know my limits and push myself as much as I can. I do all the drills needed, and a big part of that is due to my family and friends supporting me."

While constantly monitoring her condition, Alana says that she's actually seen an increase in her stamina throughout the course of her career.

She is reminded daily of what she faces when she must take a total of nine pills to manage her condition, of which 2-3 pills are diuretics. Alana decides to take these at bedtime so that she does not need to deal with bathroom breaks during her school day. This means her sleep is disrupted nightly, so that she may give her classes her full focus and attention each day.

Through this she has also learned how to escape the confines of her mind during the heat of battle. "My endurance has gone up. I know how to block and play the game on defense," says Alana. "Mentally, I used to over-think the game, but I've overcome those things."

Head softball coach Caitlin Eichler praises Alana's fighting spirit by claiming, "Alana is a hard worker who never gives up. She is a positive member of any team and always motivates her teammates. Alana is a fighter on and off the field. No matter the situation, a smile is always plastered across her face and nothing but positive comments are shared between her peers and teammates.

Kelly Landino, Westbrook girls head basketball coach remembers Alana's freshman year with the program. "Alana always brought positive energy to the gym and worked hard, even when it was difficult. I remember being so impressed with her huge heart in that little frame!"

Alana Bochanis doesn't let anything stop her from performing her best on the field, court, track or classroom!

This past Fall season Alana played left defender for the Westbrook field hockey squad. She was a key member of a stout defensive unit that posted (12) shutouts and only allowed (6) goals, helping the Knights to a 14-2-2 record headed into the State Class S Tournament as the #4 seeded squad.

Alana is a selfless leader and whether on the sideline as a vocal supporter or in the game giving it everything she has, Alana is a senior leader who relishes the opportunity to shape the future of Westbrook field hockey by making an impression on the team's underclass athletes. "It's really important to set expectations for the younger girls, so they know what to do and know what is right and wrong," Alana says. "Our motto is – clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose. Team bonding is important. It makes us a family.

As Alana awaits her surgery, a highly specialized one that has been held back due to the ongoing red tape of insurance protocols, she shared how amazed the doctors who may be performing this surgery were at all that she does and has accomplished. “When I went to meet the doctors in Pennsylvania for the first consultation, they could not believe that I played sports!,” she exclaimed.

It means a lot to Alana that she’s overcome her condition to make an impact at Westbrook. She feels that the experience has strengthened her character and helped her mature as a young adult. “My condition can’t hold me back,” Alana says. “It only makes me grow as a person.

As far as life after high school, Alana is laser focused with hopes of pursuing her undergraduate degree program at either the University of Connecticut or the University of Pittsburg, and enrolling thereafter in one of their medical schools to pursue her dream career of becoming a cardiologist.

I strongly encourage your committee to give serious consideration to Alana Bochanis for the **2019 NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award**, not only for what she has accomplished with great passion, courage and perseverance in the face of a lifetime of adversity, but because through all this, Alana Bochanis makes everyone who she encounters each day feel better, but beyond that makes them a better person. As an athletic director and educator, I would not ask anymore or anything better from a student-athlete who gets it and impacts everyone she meets!

Thank you for your time and consideration of an inspirational young woman.

ATTACHMENT:

Alana Bochanis Achievements & Activities List v2018 (3 pages)

# Alana Bochanis

878 East Pond Meadow Road, Westbrook, CT 06498 \* (860) 510-1705 \* [Alana.bocha2@gmail.com](mailto:Alana.bocha2@gmail.com)

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## OBJECTIVE

To obtain a Medical Degree and to help improve the lives of others with Heart Disease

## EDUCATION

Westbrook High School

High School Diploma

Anticipated June 2019

GPA: 3.8 weighted

Class Rank: 15

## ACADEMIC AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2019 State of CT: CIAC Michael H. Savage Spirit of Sport Award Winner
- Senior Class President: 2018-2019
- National Honors Society 2017: Honor Roll all 4 years – High Honors Student
- Outstanding Effort in Biology 2015, Algebra 1 2015
- Outstanding Effort in Geometry 2016, Introduction to Psychology 2016
- Outstanding Effort in Anatomy and Physiology 2017, Law 2017
- Most Improved Teen Leadership School Climate 2018

## LEADERSHIP

Student Council

Westbrook High School, CT

*President of Senior Class*

August 2017 – Present

- Fundraise money for Senior Class activities
- Incorporate all students' ideas and concern in school environment
- Assess certain issues within the school district that affect students

Peer Counseling

Westbrook High School, CT

*Counselor*

August 2016 - Present

- Act as a role model to middle school students who are experiencing behavioral problems
- Connecticut with middle school students and peers
- Develop a close and inviting environment for middle school students

Teen Leadership School Climate Team

Westbrook High School, CT

*Member*

August 2015 – Present

- Connecticut with schools throughout the state to maintain a positive school climate
- Develop critical thinking and speaking skills in order to present in front of large crowds
- Present to schools around the nation to create a nationwide movement

SADD Chapter (Students Against Destructive Decisions)

Westbrook High School, CT

*Member*

August 2016 – Present

- Create fun and safe activities for high school students to attend
- Act as a leader to the younger members of the group
- Distribute ideas and new creative ways to enforce a safe environment inside and outside of school

# Alana Bochanis

878 East Pond Meadow Road, Westbrook, CT 06498 \* (860) 510-1705 \* [Alana.bocha2@gmail.com](mailto:Alana.bocha2@gmail.com)

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## ATHLETICS

Field Hockey:	Freshman (JV), Sophomore (JV), Junior & Senior year (Varsity)
Girls Basketball:	Freshman (JV)
Girls Indoor Track & Field:	Sophomore (JV)
Softball:	Freshman (JV), Sophomore & Junior Year (Varsity)
Girls Tennis:	Senior year anticipated
Unified Sports Partner:	Sophomore, Junior, Senior years

## ACTIVITIES

“A Part Of”  
*Member* Westbrook High School, CT  
August 2017 – Present

- Work with peers whose families have been affected by drugs
- Create a safe and inviting environment for the high school students
- Act as a leader to the younger members who have not yet acquired certain speaking skills

Middlesex Hospital Job Shadow  
*Participant* Westbrook, CT  
March 2018

- Shadow the workers throughout the hospital
- Learn about the skills necessary to work in a hospital setting
- Work in different stations to learn basic skills, such as stitching

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Westbrook Little League  
*Umpire* Westbrook, CT  
April 2015 – Present

- Act as a role model for young athletes aspiring to further their career in baseball
- Create a fair and safe environment for players
- Trained to follow specific rules in order to assess problems with upset parents, coaches and players

Gabrielle’s Heart Camp CT  
*Volunteer* Camp Awosting, CT  
August 2017 and 2018

- Act as leader and role model to all children with Congenital Heart Disease
- Learn about the anatomy of the heart and help teach it to children
- Watch and take care of young children throughout the day and night

Trick or Trot 5K  
*Volunteer* Daisy Ingraham Elementary School, CT  
October 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

- Invite children to get faces painted or paint pumpkins
- Distribute food and drinks to participants and families
- Award trophies and medals to children participants

Conquer Chiari Walk  
*Volunteer* Westbrook High School, CT  
September 2017 and 2018

- Work with disabled children and adults
- Sell shirts and raffle tickets, distribute food and water to walk participants

# Alana Bochanis

878 East Pond Meadow Road, Westbrook, CT 06498 \* (860) 510-1705 \* [Alana.bocha2@gmail.com](mailto:Alana.bocha2@gmail.com)

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Harvest Festival

Westbrook Middle School, CT

*Volunteer*

October 2016

- Mandate a bouncy house and make sure children are continuing through the course safely
- Sell baked goods to citizens and attendees from surrounding towns
- Mandate a basketball hoop and encourage children to succeed in the game

Harvest Festival

Westbrook Congregational Church, CT

*Volunteer*

October 2018

- Invite children and adults to get their faces painted
- Distribute food and drinks to attendees
- Act as a leader in creating scarecrows for a town display and competition

Whiffenpoofs Ticket Seller

Westbrook, CT

*Volunteer*

December 2016 and 2017

## **WORK EXPERIENCE**

Child Care

Westbrook, CT

*Babysitter*

April 2015 – Present

Shoprite of Clinton

Clinton, CT

*Cashier*

July 2016 – Present



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December 13, 2018

Dear National High School Spirit of Sport Award Committee,

Enclosed please find the complete NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Form for 2019 supporting our Connecticut State Michael H. Savage Spirit of Sport Award winner Alana Bochanis a senior at Westbrook High School of Westbrook, CT.

Enclosed you will find all supporting documentation and testimony supporting Alana's candidacy for this highly prestigious award. Alana's courage and spirit are beyond remarkable and we are so proud of what she has accomplished and to be in the position to share with you her story and inspiration to others nationally through this award process.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of a truly outstanding young woman that has so much to offer others and help those around her.

Sincerely yours in the Spirit & Love of Sport,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teg Cosgriff'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Teg' being more prominent than the last name 'Cosgriff'.

Teg Cosgriff, CMAA  
Director of Athletics  
Westbrook Public Schools

**Westbrook Public Schools**  
**Department of Athletics**  
**156 McVeagh Road ~ Westbrook, CT 06498**  
**Phone: (860) 399 – 6214 ~ Fax: (860) 399 – 2007**  
**[www.westbrookctschools.org](http://www.westbrookctschools.org)**  
**Teg Cosgriff C.M.A.A. Director of Athletics**



# THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

November 30, 2018

## OFFICERS:

### Chair

Anthony Azzara  
Sacred Heart High School,  
Waterbury

### Vice Chair

Sheila Riffle, Principal  
Old Saybrook High School

### Secretary

Matt Ryan  
East Hartford High School

### Treasurer

Dr. Beth Smith  
Shelton High School

## CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF:

### Executive Director

Glenn Lungarini

### Associate Executive Director

Gregg Simon

### Co-Directors of Marketing

Stephanie Ford  
Mary Lee Weber

### Executive Staff

Joel Cookson  
Matthew Fischer  
Dr. Robert Lehr  
Joseph Tonelli

### Unified Sports@

Robert Hale, Jr.  
Paul Mengold  
George Synnott

## The CT Interscholastic Athletic Conference

30 Realty Drive  
Cheshire, CT 06410  
Phone: (203)250-1111  
FAX: (203)250-1345  
ciacsports.com

Mr. Teg Cosgriff, Athletic Director  
Westbrook High School  
156 McVeagh Road  
Westbrook, CT 06498

Dear Teg,

Congratulations to Westbrook student-athlete Alana Bouchanis for her selection as the 2019 Michael H. Savage Spirit of Sport award winner. She will be presented the award at the CIAC Scholar-Athlete Banquet at the Aqua Turf in Southington on May 4, 2019. Her parents will be invited to attend as guests of the CIAC.

Please complete the enclosed forms and send them back to me by December 17, 2018. I have enclosed a sample of a nomination submitted several years ago by Craig Semple. His nominee, Grace Cummings of Daniel Hand High School, won the National Federation of High Schools national award in 2015. Craig gave his permission to use his submission as a model.

Please let Alana and her parents know of her selection. Also, feel free to inform your school principal and others within the school. Joel Cookson, the CIAC Sports Information Director, will send information to the media.

As the Connecticut winner of the Spirit of Sport award, Alana will be nominated for the Section I award. Section I is all of the New England states as well as New Jersey and New York. The national award winner is selected by a national committee from the winners of the eight sections of the National Federation of High Schools.

Please feel free to call me with any questions that you might have concerning Alana's selection.

Congratulations on your nominee's selection.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Lehr, Ph.D.  
CIAC Executive Staff

Affiliated with the  
National Federation  
of State High School  
Associations

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Lake Region High School Boys Soccer Team  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Susan L. Robbins, CMAA, Yarmouth High School Athletic Administrator\_

Phone: 207-831-1497\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: susan\_robbins@yarmouthschools.org\_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: 286 West Elm Street\_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: Yarmouth, ME. 04096\_\_\_\_\_

Date: January 25, 2019\_\_\_\_\_

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: : Maine Principals' Association\_\_\_\_\_

Title: Mike Burnham, Assistant Executive Director\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Michael R. Burnham\_\_\_\_\_

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify: Boys Soccer Team)

Name of Nominee: Lake Region High School Boys' Soccer Team \_\_\_\_\_  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 1877 Roosevelt Trail \_\_\_\_\_  
(street address)

Bridgton, ME. 04055 \_\_\_\_\_  
(city, state, zip)

Phone: 207-693-6221 \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: Paul True Athletic Administrator: paul.true@lakeregionschools.org \_\_\_\_\_

School (if any): Lake Region High School lrhs.lakeregionschools.org \_\_\_\_\_

City: Bridgton \_\_\_\_\_ State: Maine \_\_\_\_\_

# NOMINATION FORM

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

## **Introduction: Susan L. Robbins, CMAA Athletic Administrator Yarmouth HS**

I am very excited to nominate the Lake Region High School Boys Soccer team for the NFHS Spirit of Sports Award. I have been an Athletic Administrator for 21 years and what I witnessed one day last Fall was truly sports at its best. Jared Conant is a freshman at YHS, however, he is no stranger to our school. He and his Dad have been on the sidelines of Soccer, Football, XC, Basketball, since moving to town several years ago. I have witnessed first-hand Jared's decline from a boisterous young boy running around the fields to a freshman who is confined to a wheelchair. Jared will be lucky to graduate from High School in four years. Jared's spirit and leadership sets him apart from his peers and adults for that matter. Jared lives each day to the fullest and sets an example for us all though his perseverance, integrity, and innate ability to want to help others. Jared is a role model for all. So, giving him an opportunity to score a goal as a freshman on our soccer team is truly something to celebrate. I offer you his father's perspective on the events to follow.

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

The Lake Region High School Boys Soccer team helped to produce one of the most memorable moments I've witnessed in my four decades of being involved in Maine high school athletics. My son, Jared, has Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy a non- curable terminal muscle disease. He loves soccer and being the part of a team. He played soccer until his disease made it impossible. He was the MVP of the Shining Stars Soccer Camp in New Mexico and once scored 7 goals in a game. He had assisted me charting shots and statistics for the past 4 years at Yarmouth High School. This year as a Freshman, he asked Coach Mike Hagerty to be a player on the Clippers team. Jared was given his own jersey (#63) and asked to be part of the Varsity team.

It was mentioned to Jared early in the season that there could be an opportunity for him to get onto the field. He initially declined the opportunity. Jared stated that he's hoping for a cure to his disease so he can run onto the field with his friends and play the game he loves during high school. A couple of weeks later YHS Coach Dale Wing had a couple of conversations with Jared. Recently, Coach Wing had lost his wife to CANCER a relatable occurrence because Jared's Mom passed away from CANCER when he was 4 years old. Their conversations gave Jared the courage to want to play in a YHS soccer game this year.

It was soon after Jared's decision that we worked on a plan with Athletic Director, Susan Robbins, to get him onto the field. The Lake Region Boys Soccer team was most cooperative and thoughtful when approached with this idea. We just wanted to get him into the game for a few minutes and possible kick the ball or have a throw in from the sideline. It was an anxious and exciting pregame for me...not knowing how this plan

would work. As I walked towards the YHS bench, I stopped by to thank the Lake Region coaching staff for their generosity and understanding. It was at that moment that I was told that the Lake Region players wanted Jared to have the feeling of scoring a goal in a high school varsity soccer game. I was blown away at this unexpected turn of events and incredibly grateful.

I was having many anxious thoughts until my son entered the game starting the second half. To this day, it still feels like a dream watching Jared on the soccer field again and putting the ball in the goal. The players' excitement was incredible and sincere. It appeared that the Lake Region players were as excited for Jared as his own teammates. My mind will be imprinted for a long time with the smile on Jared's face as he approached our sideline.

I have never witnessed a more genuine display of SPORTSMANSHIP in high school athletics ever. I do not have enough words to explain my gratitude. Lake Region High School Boys Soccer instantly became my second favorite soccer team. This moment has given Jared a feeling that I could not ever provide him. I hope I can replicate this moment for someone someday.

A heartfelt thank you to the Lake Region Soccer Coach, Ryan Harlow, the student-athletes and community for a most incredible moment and display of sportsmanship. This reflects your work and the outstanding communities which make up Lake Region High School.

Respectfully,

Barry J. Conant  
Yarmouth High School Varsity Boys Basketball Assistant Coach  
Yarmouth High School Varsity Boys Soccer Assistant Coach  
(207) 653-2343

The News clip of this event can be found [here](#)

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Solveig Steeman  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Peter Smith – MIAA Associate Director

Phone: 508-541-9834

E-mail: psmith@miaa.net

Street Address: 33 Forge Parkway

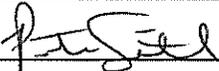
City, State, Zip Code: Franklin, MA 02038

Date: January 10, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Peter Smith

Title: Associate Director

Signature: 

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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Solveig Steeman  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 55 Tahattawan Road  
*(street address)*

Littleton, MA 01460  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 978-652-6760

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

School (if any): Littleton High School

City: Littleton State: MA

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Unified Track and Field Participant  
Unified Basketball Participant  
2018 MIAA Sportsmanship Moment of the Year Recipient

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

Solveig Steeman has been an athlete on the Littleton High School Unified Track and Field team for two years. Solveig has cerebral palsy and has participated in the 100m dash and javelin throw. This past season, she also participated in the 400m dash and shot put.

During the MIAA/Special Olympics Massachusetts Unified Track and Field Sectional Championship Meet at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School on May 21, Solveig had just competed in the 400m when she noticed a fellow athlete, Tyler Plotkin of Groton-Dunstable Regional High School, in need of some assistance. Solveig immediately went to help.

"There were other athletes getting ready for their event. They were lined up for running or wheeling," Solveig said. "There was an athlete using a wheelchair in the 100m dash. After the gun went off, all of the athletes started off for the 100m dash. However, the athlete using a wheelchair was struggling to push himself to the finish line. As soon as I saw him, I jumped in to help him get to the finish line."

One week later, at the MIAA/Special Olympics Massachusetts Unified Track and Field State Championship Meet, Solveig helped Tyler again. Spectators were impressed by her support of a fellow athlete, but she did not help Tyler for praise.

"I helped him not to feel good about myself, but I wanted to show everyone that people with disabilities can do anything. Yes, people with disability are able to do things, but in a different way than everyone else. It is okay because every person has different strengths and challenges. I believe that people with disabilities can do anything. Anything is possible when putting your mind to it. It was a great experience to be able to help him."

Jeffrey Wayman, a track and field official and starter at the MIAA/Special Olympics Massachusetts Unified Track and Field Sectional Championship Meet felt inspired, calling Solveig's actions an "exemplary display of the essence of sportsmanship." Explaining what he saw, he added, "Solveig came to (Tyler's) aid and helped him focus and begin wheeling to complete his race. Officials, coaches, competitors and spectators were all impressed with Solveig's efforts to help Tyler roll to his finish. It was a frequent topic of further discussion during the Meet and beyond."

He also commended Solveig's character and the example she set for others. "Solveig's commitment to competing and her compassion toward fellow athletes are noteworthy traits that deserve special mention. Solveig's family, school and our entire sport can be proud of her efforts that showed the character toward which every athlete should aspire," he said. "Witnessing her actions has helped deepen my belief in the values of athletics and why I participate as a Track and Field Official...it was good for my soul and I'm sure it had a similar effect on others at the events."

Please see the additional supporting materials for this nomination:

- Letter received from Track Official Jeffrey Wayman
- Video of the events that transpired at the MIAA/Special Olympics Unified Track and Field Sectional Championship Meet: <https://vimeo.com/312115540>

4-Jun-2018

MIAA Board and Littleton School Representatives,

I'm writing to recognize Solveig Steeman, a Unified Track athlete, representing Littleton High School. I served as this year's Starter for the Central Mass Unified Track Meet, and also for the Unified Track and Field Championship. During both events, I witnessed Solveig's exemplary display of the essence of sportsmanship.

After wheeling her chair to complete the 400-meter Trials at the Central Mass Meet, Solveig rolled back onto the track during the 100-meter Trials to assist one of her competitors (Tyler Plotkin of Groton-Dunstable's Unified team). Tyler was somewhat distracted at the start of his race and was challenged to regain the composure to direct his wheelchair to the Finish Line. Solveig came to his aid and helped him focus and begin wheeling to complete his race. Officials, coaches, competitors and spectators were all impressed with Solveig's efforts to help Tyler roll to his finish. It was a frequent topic of further discussion during the Meet and beyond.

Her efforts were DUPLICATED during the Championship event on May 30<sup>th</sup>, as she once again completed her race and then came back to the start line to help Tyler complete his 100-meter event. Solveig's commitment to competing and her compassion toward fellow athletes are noteworthy traits that deserve special mention.

Solveig's family, school and our entire sport can be proud of her efforts that showed the character toward which every athlete should aspire. Witnessing her actions has helped deepen my belief in the values of athletics and why I participate as a Track and Field Official... it was good for my soul and I'm sure it had a similar effect on others at the events.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Wayman

## Solveig Steeman Video

<https://vimeo.com/312115540>

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: [Tab here] Kevin Heinrich Hasenbein  
(first, middle, last)

## Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: [Tab here] John Power (Head Coach) SMITTY HORTON (ATHLETIC DIRECTOR)

Phone: [Tab here] 973 292 2022

E-mail: [Tab here] SMITTY.HORTON@MSDK12.NET

Street Address: [Tab here] 50 EARLY ST.

City, State, Zip Code: [Tab here] MORRISTOWN NJ 07960

Date: [Tab here] 1/15/19  
(1/22/19)

## State Association Endorsement:

Name: [Tab here] LARRY L. WHITE

Title: [Tab here] EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Signature: [Tab here] Larry L. White

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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: [Tab here] Kevin Heinrich Hasenbain  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: [Tab here] 19 Maxine Drive  
(street address)

[Tab here] Morristown, NJ, 07960  
(city, state, zip)

Phone: [Tab here] 973-683-9081

E-mail: [Tab here] Khasenbain@optonline.net

School (if any): [Tab here] Morristown High School

City: [Tab here] Morristown      State: [Tab here] NJ

# *Morristown High School*

50 Early Street, Morristown, NJ 07960-3898

Telephone: (973) 292-2000

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

Michelle Obama, when reflecting back on overcoming adversity stated, "You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages." I have the privilege of coaching a young man that lives each day by the sentiments captured in that quote. Kevin Hasenbein has a vigor and a zest for life that is among the most impressive I have seen in over 20 years of coaching and teaching.

I have the honor of coaching Kevin Hasenbein in football. Kevin has brought authentic joy and passion to the entire team. Kevin was born with Down Syndrome and, although faced with adversity, he does not allow his different abilities to hold him back from accomplishing his goals. Kevin is a shining example of what a student athlete should be and an inspiration to his teammates. Morristown High School's philosophy, "ALL IN," exemplifies Kevin in every single aspect. He is always performing with 100% effort and seeking out the next challenge.

In 2016, Kevin started attending football workouts during his brother Eric's Freshman year. At that time, Kevin was traveling from another school each day to attend practice. Since that time, Kevin has entered into Morristown High School as a full time student and his role has grown exponentially. He began by participating on a limited basis that year, to becoming a manager, then a member of the team, and this season asking for equipment, as he felt he was ready to suit up and play. Kevin has always had a passion for the weight room and now he has a passion for the field.

Outside of football season, Kevin has eagerly joined Morristown High School's first Unified Bowling team in 2018. He bowls with the rest of the team two days per week. Kevin is eager to cheer on his teammates after every frame. He works hard each practice and is willing to accept coaching and feedback in order to improve his bowling skills. The Morristown Unified Bowling team represents a true inclusive environment where all students can participate and enjoy sports with their peers. Kevin is an integral part of the bowling team and represents the ideals and values of Unified Sports.

Along with his excitement for sports, Kevin is a member of Allies in Learning and Leading: Inclusive Network (ALL IN). As a member of the ALL IN Kevin works alongside his general education and special education peers to enforce the belief that diversity should be celebrated to enhance the school community. Kevin attends ALL IN Student Board meetings and helps plan and participate in twice weekly lunchtime activities, monthly after school events, and large school events that focus on inclusion for every student. Events that Kevin has helped plan include, lunchtime game days, Unified Sports lunch activities, and after school events including movie nights and helping the board coordinate with friends from other clubs and sports to support all MHS programs. He is also an integral member of planning for the annual ALL IN Dance, an inclusive event that welcomes all students to celebrate diversity together. Kevin has established himself as an active member in the Morristown High School Community.

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

In addition to his dedication to athletics at Morristown High School, Kevin has been a member of the Summit Bandits, a N.J. Special Olympics basketball team since 2015. He dedicates his time weekly to this traveling to Summit and Old Bridge from November through March. Kevin has also been a member of the Unified Basketball team at Drew University since 2016. Remarkably, Kevin has qualified for the N.J. State Special Olympics championships in three of the last four years. Recently, he was featured on CBS2 News with some of his teammates highlighting a touchdown he scored (<https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2018/10/23/morristown-high-school-football-down-syndrome/>).

Kevin represents what is the best and brightest about our high school. Joy and passion come across in his school work, and athleticism. He is a true team player that exemplifies sportsmanship in every sense of the word. Kevin is a well respected, embraced, and beloved teammate, friend, brother, and son. Kevin Hasenbein has earned my highest level of recommendation not only because he is a dedicated and talented football player, but because he is a great human being.

Go Colonials!

Sincerely,

John Power  
Head Football Coach  
Special Education Teacher  
Morristown High School  
[john.power@msdk12.net](mailto:john.power@msdk12.net)  
Cell (908) 803-1621











Riddell

Woodwards

24

M





# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Pete Girolamo  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Jason Miller

Phone: 607-425-2777

E-mail: Jmiller@gstbooces.org

Street Address: 1 Frederick Street

City, State, Zip Code: Waverly, NY 14892

Date: 12/18/2018

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Robert Zayas

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student  Coach  Administrator  Official  Trainer

Athletic Administrator  Other (Varsity Football Assistant, Head Bowling Coach, Head Golf Coach)

Name of Nominee Pete Girolamo  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 1 Frederick Street  
*(street address)*

Waverly, NY 14892  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 607-857-5476

E-mail: PGirolamo@gstbooces.org

School (if any): Waverly High School

City: Waverly State: NY



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Pete Girolamo is a Physical Education Teacher in the Waverly School District in Waverly, NY. He is involved in coaching several sports including football, bowling, and golf. He has received many honors and has won several championships in all the sports. He is responsible for starting the girl's soccer program at Waverly in the mid 1990's and also started the girls golf program. He also began the boys and girls bowling teams at Waverly High School. He has had a tremendous amount of success, but more importantly gave many students an opportunity to get involved and compete at the varsity level in what I would call nontraditional sports. He has personally increased participation in athletics by the hundreds over his tenure at Waverly. He is a beloved physical education teacher and impacts our youth in the district by making it their best 40 minutes of the day every day they have his class.

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

Coach Pete lost his son to a car accident in the Fall of 2017. This was a tragic event as his son was also a star on the Waverly Football team. In addition, Coach Girolamo is an Assistant Coach on the Football staff. Over the past year, despite the immense grief and loss to him and our community, he persevered and continued teaching and coaching with the passion of a young man. He has had the option to retire for 5 years now. Instead, he has continued to lead in the face of the worst adversity imaginable.

Pete is a man who fits the description of this award perfectly and that is why I am nominating him. He continued to coach despite the biggest loss of his life. Pete only missed practice until they day he buried his son and returned to help coach a team that was broken and wanted to quit everything. Pete set the example of how to persevere.

All in all, some people talk about perseverance and some set the standard of how to proceed in life despite horrible circumstances. Pete's obvious impact throughout the remaining year coaching his bowling and golf teams is inspiring.

Last year (Winter and Spring 2018), Pete's girl's golf team finished third in the states and his bowling team participated in the state tournament. In fact, he received the "Coach of the Year" Award in the Spring 2018 for his dedication to his girl's golf team. In addition, he has been a faithful assistant coach and has worked and continues to work hard to set an example for young people.

Pete Girolamo deserves the recognition as a nominee for this award. Not only has he overcome adversity and challenging circumstances, but throughout it all, Pete has exceeded normal expectations in assisting others within the school and community. He has made people proud and has set a standard of strength and toughness, but more importantly love for his students and players.



WAVERLY  
BOWLING

Coach  
[unclear]

# Section 2

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Tori Hibbard

*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Colleen Kelley

Phone: 302-376-4149

E-mail: colleen.kelley@appo.k12.de.us

Street Address: Middletown High School 120 Silver Lake Rd

City, State, Zip Code: Middletown, DE 19709

Date: 1/28/19

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Thomas E. Neubauer

Title: DIAA Executive Director

Signature: *Thomas E. Neubauer, CMAA //*

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# NOMINATION FORM

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

Tori Hibbard is currently a senior at Middletown High School. She is one of the most hard working and responsible student-athletes we have had in our school. She is currently the President of the Best Buddies group, a member of the varsity fall cheerleading team, a member of national honor society, a coach for the unified cheerleading team, a coach for an MOT youth cheerleading team, a member of the Blue-Gold Cheerleading squad for this year's football game just to name a few.

From Her cheerleading coach, Jen Campbell:

It is with great pleasure that I recommend Middletown High School student Tori Hibbard for the Spirit of Sport Award. I have been Tori's varsity cheerleading coach since 2015, and I have seen her become the responsible, independent, determined young woman she is today. These qualities have led her to develop a genuine passion for inclusion in athletics, particularly cheerleading.

To give some background on Tori, let me start by saying that we have a student with intellectual disabilities on our squad. Tori has taken her under her wing, making sure she attends all practices and events. When we attended Pine Forest Cheer Camp, Tori made sure she was prepared for each day as her mentor. The amount of developmental knowledge required, as well as patience that Tori possesses, is well beyond that of a high school senior.

Another notable achievement that Tori should be proud of is her role in Best Buddies. Tori has been President of Best Buddies, Middletown High School chapter, for two years. Best Buddies focuses on general inclusion within the school. Typical students are partnered with those with disabilities to do fun activities which promote equality and inclusion. She attended leadership trainings in Indiana and organized events and fundraisers for our chapter. This, along with countless other volunteer experiences, have helped shape Tori into a high school senior worthy of this award.

Tori used her love of cheerleading, to start Delaware's first student-run Unified Cheerleading Team. This team combines students with and without intellectual and physical disabilities, in an effort to bring inclusion to the sport of cheerleading. Currently, Middletown High School also has Unified Track and Flag Football teams. Tori coaches two teams, one for football cheer and one for basketball. Her initiative drew statewide recognition as she was featured in our local newspapers as well as ABC channel 6 news. The amount of preparation and knowledge that is required to organize such a team is much more than the typical high school student exhibits.

Tori is one of the most mature and responsible, well-rounded students I have encountered. Her work ethic when pursuing a goal is a valuable asset that she will use to be successful in the future. She is kind, nurturing, and is able to take her love for the sport of cheerleading and turn it into a learning experience for those who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity. She has brought inclusion in athletics to the forefront of

our school and completely changed the culture of inclusion within our sports programs. I wouldn't be surprised if more unified sports programs began at our school, because of the vision and drive that Tori has shown as a student leader.

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

Over the past few years Delaware's Special Olympics Unified Sports has teamed with the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association to offer flag football, basketball, and track & field. Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. Middletown High School was on the forefront with creating these 3 new teams at our school. We piloted all 3 sports which have now become recognized as an official sport with DIAA. These teams are treated the same as all our other sports here at MHS.

Tori Hibbard is a senior at Middletown High School this year. She knows all about breaking down stereotypes and promoting friendships among students. She has been a member of the school's Best Buddies program for several years and this year she was voted President of the Club. Best Buddies is the world's largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. During her time with this club she has made many new and lasting friendships. A number of those "buddies" have been asking her since freshman year if they could be on the school's cheerleading team, but the opportunity hasn't been available until this school year. Knowing how important it is to be included, the senior varsity cheer captain was able to make her buddies' dreams a reality this year when she started the first unified cheer team in the state. The 12-member Middletown inclusionary cheer team represents a mix of students with and without cognitive and developmental challenges. She wanted to show them they can do whatever they want in life.

Tori was approached by the school's unified sports coordinator at the beginning of the school year about starting a squad that could cheer during the school's unified flag football games. She embraced the idea and is using it as her senior project, something every MHS graduating senior is required to complete. Although the cheer team is not recognized as an official unified sport Middletown High School has embraced the squad as they do all other sports.

The eight unified members and four cheerleader peers have been practicing every Monday since the second week of September. Each girl has her own reason for wanting to be an MHS cheerleader, but all like the idea of being part of a team and having mentors. Hibbard's favorite part of coaching the team is teaching the girls how to stunt, which is when they are lifted into the air. She says it's fun watching them try new things and seeing the sense of

accomplishment in their smiles when they finally put it all together. She said all of the girls from the various cheerleading squads have come to watch games and the band even came to a game and played for the unified squad.

The unified cheer team enjoyed their fall season so much that they have decided to stay together for basketball season. They will cheer on the unified basketball team at their games this season. This forced them to learn all new cheers that pertain to basketball instead of football. Tori hopes that she has inspired other schools in the state to start a similar team at their school.

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Kristie Combs

(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Julian Tackett

Phone: 859-299-5472

E-mail: jtackett@khsaa.org

Street Address: KHSAA, 2280 Executive Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Lexington, KY 40505

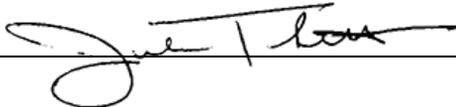
Date: January 25, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Julian Tackett

Title: Commissioner

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Kristie Combs  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 270 Pads Branch Road  
*(street address)*

Hazard, KY 41701  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 606-233-2045

E-mail: kristie.combs@perry.kyschools.us

School (if any): Formerly MC Napier HS

City: Hazard State: KY

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Kristie Combs is a Perry Promise from Hazard, Kentucky.

A 2010 Kentucky High School Athletic Association Hall of Fame inductee known for her stellar career as a basketball player from M.C. Napier High School. She finished her career with 2,792 points and 586 assists and led her high school team to a KHSAA state basketball championship in 1994 bringing home MVP honors.

Kristie is currently a licensed official in the state of Kentucky who has 16 years of officiating experience and is licensed in the sports of basketball, soccer, softball, and volleyball. As an official, Kristie was named the 2018 KHSAA Basketball Official of 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."

In February 2016, while officiating a basketball game, Kristie Combs noticed something was wrong as she began to lose her hearing and knew she wasn't feeling quite like herself. After a trip to the doctor's office, Combs heard the words no one wants to hear, "tumor". Doctors had discovered Combs had an acoustic neuroma, a brain tumor. Although the tumor was not cancerous, an 8-hour surgery was necessary to remove the tumor as she spent three days in the hospital. Upon returning home, Kristie wasn't healing as predicated and was experiencing severe headaches. Things began to take a turn for the worst.

Upon return to the hospital, doctors were able to diagnose her with bacterial meningitis and MRSA. This led to multiple complications and a 2-week hospital stint, a hard battle that was quite different than the one she was used to on the court. Through her perseverance and grit, Kristie has recovered, but still has no feeling on the right side of her face and has very limited hearing in her right ear.

Despite many setbacks, Kristie wanted to do the unthinkable and return to the court as an official that same year. She knew that some things wouldn't quite be the same, with the right side of her face still having little to no feeling. As she began to test her abilities, she found it difficult to blow the whistle. Kristie knew she was going to have to go back to her high school athlete days and "practice" to get better. She spent time teaching her lips how to control the whistle to ensure she was at the top of her game upon return. There are many times we never know why athletics is a motivator, but for Kristie, returning to the court as an official illustrates how high school athletics can get you through anything.

Believe it or not, Kristie returned to the court on the opening day of the 2016-17 basketball season, just 8 months after her diagnosis. Since then, she has been lighting up the court, this time not as an athlete. She was selected to officiate the 2018 KHSAA Girls' Sweet 16® and even selected to advance to the State Championship Game. In addition, Kristie went on to be selected as the 2018 KHSAA Basketball Official of the Year. Her story is the definition of Spirit of Sport and her return to the court is an inspiration story for many.

<https://www.wyvt.com/content/news/Former-basketball-star-shares-story-of-hope-and-healing-403458736.html>

<https://www.wyvt.com/content/news/Perry-County-woman-hopes-to-educate-others-after-brain-tumor-diagnoses-.html>



## Kentucky High School Athletic Association

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

January 31, 2019

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/jemKfINVEWg>. This is footage from last year's 2018 girls' state basketball tournament, in anticipation of this nomination.

This lady truly exemplifies what the NFHS staff and members originally 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. She is a very humble person, just prefers to live her day to day life. But her fight cannot be underestimated and was never more evident than in this recent battle.

Kristie Combs is special. I truly believe she is worthy of both section and national consideration. She didn't fight to come back for state tournament assignments, money or other motivating factors. She came back to the level she loves and the game she loves, truly for the love of the game. I wholeheartedly ask on behalf of the KHSAA that you and your committee review this material, and give Kristie the utmost consideration for both the section and national 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,

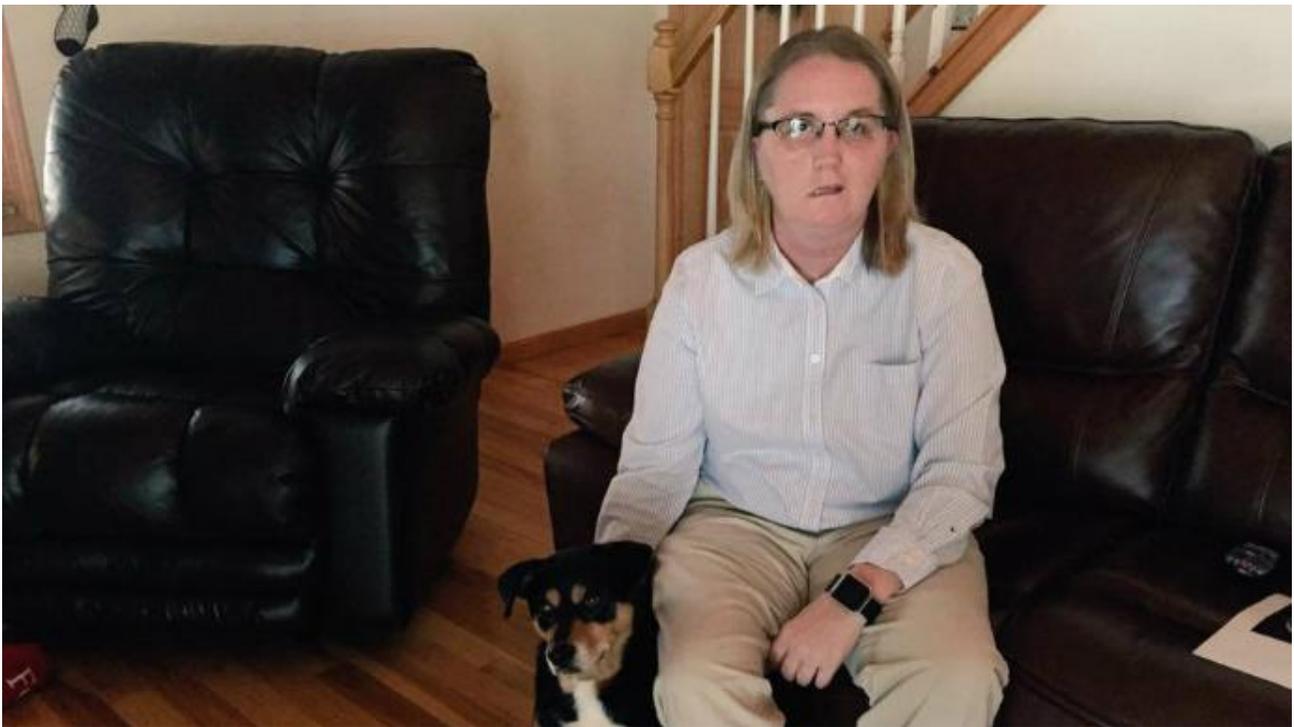
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julian Tackett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Julian Tackett  
Commissioner

# Former basketball star shares story of hope and healing

Angela Reighard Mon 6:41 PM, Nov 28, 2016

**PERRY COUNTY, Ky. (WYMT)** - Months ago, former M.C. Napier basketball star, Kristie Combs, found out she had a brain tumor.



Combs said she noticed something was wrong in February when she started to lose her hearing.

"I was refereeing a ball game and I could tell something different happened," she said. "It went out and my hearing never did come back on my right side."

Doctors in Cincinnati discovered Combs had an acoustic neuroma, a

brain tumor.

"You can't explain," Combs said. "You're thinking ... Oh my God, there is a tumor there. If it is cancer, where is it at?"

Luckily, the tumor was not cancerous. After an eight-hour surgery, doctors were able to remove the tumor. Combs spent three days in the hospital, but when she returned home, things got worse.

"I knew something was wrong," she said. "My neck started hurting."

Doctors said Combs had bacterial meningitis and MRSA. Still, she never lost faith.

"Everything was against me and I reached out in my faith in the Lord and he saved me," Combs said. "There is a purpose for me. Somewhere for somebody."

Combs said she is recovering each day. On Monday night, she did something she did not think would be possible a few months ago: she officiated opening night of the high school basketball season.

"I will say, it's probably a blessing being a referee and being deaf in one ear, you don't have to hear everything that they say," Combs joked.

She told WYMT she will return to Ohio every three months for a checkup.

# Perry County woman hopes to educate others after brain tumor diagnosis

Lauren Osborne Wed 1:46 PM, May 17, 2017

**PERRY COUNTY, Ky. (WYMT)** - May is Brain Tumor Awareness Month, a condition that has affected many people in our area, including MC Napier basketball star Kristie Combs.



It was a diagnosis that changed her life.

"I was actually calling a ball game and my hearing actually went completely out and I thought, something's not right here," said Combs.

Kristie Combs's world went silent the day she was diagnosed with a

brain tumor.

"Your body will tell you if something is wrong," said Combs. "You kind of need to listen to it."

The tumor was not cancerous, but nine months since surgery and 10 months since her diagnosis, it left her with no feeling on the right side of her face.

"I think I read a statistic that 688,000 people are diagnosed, a year, with brain tumors," said Kristie.

A statistic she said drives her to educate folks on the realities of brain tumors. She said the disease is affecting one of Combs's good friends, among others in the area.

"He was diagnosed with the same type tumor," said Combs "Same complications."

Combs said to be aware of hearing loss, vision issues, and dizziness.

If you experience similar symptoms, always check in with your doctor to be safe.

If you would like to learn more about brain tumors and how they can affect you, you can visit the American Brain Tumor Association's website at <http://www.abta.org/>.

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Amanda Merrell  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: VaShawne Gross

Phone: 443-550-8825

E-mail: grossv@calvertnet.k12.md.us

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: Huntingtown, MD 20678

Date: 1/30/19

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Andy Warner

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Executive Director

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ *R. Andrew Warner*



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Amanda is currently playing varsity basketball for Huntingtown High School with a 3.0 GPA.

Amanda is also a girl's lacrosse player and participates in many clubs within the school.

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

At the age of three she was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare cancerous tumor that grows in bones or soft tissue around bones. Her leg was amputated and she has had a prosthetic leg ever since. By the time she turned 3, she had completed 14 rounds of chemotherapy.

Her story in the Washington Post is very telling.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/01/22/she-had-her-leg-amputated-rounds-chemo-by-age-now-she-plays-varsity-basketball/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.7eacb489849b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/01/22/she-had-her-leg-amputated-rounds-chemo-by-age-now-she-plays-varsity-basketball/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7eacb489849b)

Amanda has been a true inspiration to everyone at Huntingtown High School and our community. Amanda is currently playing interscholastic basketball with a prosthetic leg. She never complains to anyone about her situation; however, she walks around the school every day with the biggest smile. During basketball games when she isn't playing, she's the biggest cheerleader in the gym for her teammates. Her love for the sport of basketball can't be measured, but the spirit she brings to school and community is one that will never be replaced.

Her ability to persevere in the face of adversity is the true essence of education based athletics and what we wish all students can learn from participation. Nothing is too great of a challenge for Amanda. When she is not playing sports, she is helping spread the message and raising funds for other children who have to go through similar obstacles in life as she has.

She is currently been interview by the Washington Post, and CBS News has just requested to do an interview to share Amanda's stories.

Hello. I'm a producer at CBS News in Washington, and I'm writing to inquire about doing a feature on one of your players, Amanda Merrell, for the Evening News. I find her story inspirational. I thought you might be the right person to ask her if she wants to share her story with us.

Please feel free to share this email and my contact information with Amanda and her parents.

Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Maggie Dore  
Producer, CBS Evening News

# Section 3

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

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# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD

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## Official Nomination Form – 2019



National Federation of State High  
School Associations  
PO Box 690 | Indianapolis, Indiana

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## NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Zoe Portis

*(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: January 29, 2019

### ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Steve Savarese

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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X Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Zoe Portis  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 8400 Waterford Park Blvd  
*(street address)*

Montgomery, AL 36117  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 334-546-2491 (parents Cole and Joy Portis)

E-mail: zoe@portis.org

School (if any): Trinity Presbyterian School

City: Montgomery                      State: Alabama

# NOMINATION FORM

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

**Zoe Portis graduated in May, 2018, as an honor student with a 3.75 GPA.**

**She was named the AHSAA Class 4A Bryant-Jordan Awards Program Student-Athlete Achievement Winner in 2018. She was selected by a panel of member school and college administrators, news media and state business leaders for this prestigious Award. (one of the selectors was Paul 'Bear' Bryant's grandson.**

**She was a member of the Wildcats varsity basketball team as a sophomore, junior and senior.**

**She was a member of the Wildcats varsity soccer team as a freshman, sophomore, junior and senior.**

**She received the Varsity Basketball Wildcat Award as a junior.**

**She was a integral member on the Trinity girls' soccer team that finished third in the AHSAA her freshman year, reached the quarterfinals her sophomore year, and won the state championship her senior year with a 23-2-2 record. The Wildcats won the championship with a 2-1 win that went two overtimes and was then settled in a sudden death shootout 4-3.**

**Was elected SGA president as a senior**

**Served as class president as a freshman, sophomore and junior.**

**Was inducted into the National Honor Society**

**Received the President's Award for Excellence (9<sup>th</sup>)  
Outstanding Achievement in Algebra II**

**Set Design for *High School Musical***

**Served on the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Leadership Board all four years in high school.**

**Was Interact Chaplain for three years.**

**Was a Change 4 Change Committee Leader all four years in HS.**

**Member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Leadership Board**

**Youth Judicial Club Team Captain**

**Spanish Club**

**She also was active at Morningview Baptist Church in Montgomery on the Student Leadership Team, was also taught Vacation Bible School**

**Montgomery Cancer Center Volunteer**

**Montgomery Area Foodbank Volunteer**

**Vaughn Road Elementary School Volunteer**

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



**FROM ETHIOPA TO AMERICA ... FROM STARVATION TO SALVATION ... THIS IS A STORY TOO AMAZING TO NOT BE TRUE.**

*THIS YOUNG PERSON'S AMAZING JOURNEY CAN BEST BEST TOLD BY HER. She beautifully wrote her life story in an essay as a class project in her junior year in high school.*

## **The Power of a Small Word**

By ZOE PORTIS  
Trinity Prebyterian School (2017)

**Yes!!!!**

A single word changed my life. I was trapped in a household that hated me. I was their maid and nothing more. I was not one of her children, so she did not have to love me; but a single word changed my life. My story now is one that I could have never imagined.

I was born in a little village in Ethiopia; but not in a fancy hospital with medicine and doctors for my mom. I was born in the kitchen of my family's hut; and my mother's life ended after I was born due to lack of proper medical treatment. Although I will never have an earthly relationship with my birthmother, I hope to see her one day in Heaven. My grandmother became my caretaker. My dad was present but worked most of the time at the market selling grain so that we would have money for essentials. My grandmother became my best friend. She faithfully raised me in her old age, but she had vision problems.

Her eyes became worse as she aged and she eventually became blind. Once she lost her sight, it was my job to take care of her. I was only six years old. As my dad was often away during the day, I took care of the house and my grandmother. She could not go anywhere by herself unless I held her hand to guide her. On top of being blind, my grandmother became very ill. Her condition worsened each day.

My heart tore in two as I heard her cry in pain at night. I was helpless. All I knew to do was cry. The weeks leading to her death were tough times for me. I had trouble grasping the thought of her leaving me. One night, she went to sleep and never woke up. Her funeral was the hardest part for me. Men had to hold me back because I wanted to jump in the grave with her. She was the biggest influence in my life and losing her was traumatic.

Not long after my grandmother passed away, my father also became sick. My father was also my next best friend; and my dad was my mentor. He was one of the hardest working men I have ever known. The people in the village always told me how much I resembled my father.

When he became sick, he had no way to get proper treatment. Like many people in Ethiopia, he had malaria. He thankfully did not suffer for a long time before he died. Losing him was also a big obstacle for me. My favorite memory with him was going outside when it was pitch black and looking at the sky full of stars. My father was my inspiration and continues to inspire me today

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After my entire family had passed away, I went to live with my mom's friends in Sodo. The family that I stayed with made me their personal maid. They had five kids in total; everyone except for the toddler went to school. I never got the opportunity to attend school. At seven years old, my day consisted of taking care of the toddler, cleaning, and cooking. The mother did not like me; however, I never did anything to upset her. She would pinch me every hard all around my body as I cried and begged for her to stop hurting me. No one came to rescue me. I also dealt with constant bullying from the older kids. What I did not know at the time was that I would soon be embarking on a journey across the ocean .

One day, as I was washing the family's clothes, I was told that a local orphanage was interviewing kids for adoption. They asked me if I wanted to be interviewed as well. As a seven year old, I did not know what an interview was. I did not know what adoption was either. Without hesitation, I said yes. I never imagined that a simple word would change my life forever.

I joined hundreds of children that were waiting to be interviewed. I

remember waiting in the line and being so nervous. After the interview, I was told I would be contacted if they found a family for me.

A couple months after my first initial interview, the local orphanage called me back to tell me that they have found a family in America that wanted to adopt me. Someone wanted me! I was shocked! I was going to an orphanage where they would take care of me.

Who knew one of my favorite places in the world would have been a small orphanage that was full of kids! I can say honestly that up to that point the orphanage was the only place that treated me as the child I was. I was amazed at the care every child was given. When I realized my time at the orphanage was coming to an end, I was upset.

Simultaneously, I was excited and anxious to meet my new family. I remember having so many thoughts going through my head. All my worries faded away the moment I saw my mom get out the car with tears in her eyes as she was running over to embrace me. My parents also adopted a baby from Ethiopia that happened to be in the same orphanage as me. I remember mom hugging my sister and I so tightly. Language was no border for the love she showed us.

The government require each family that was adopting a child to stay in the designated country two weeks prior to bringing the child back home. After the two weeks were up, it was time for us to travel to America. I had mixed feelings. It was weird knowing that I was about leave my country with people I had only met two weeks prior. I had never imagined in my life that I would be flying on plane.

On February 7, 2007, I landed in the Atlanta airport. In the airport, I was greeted by the rest of my new family members. Of course, I did not understand anything they were saying to me. I could tell they were excited to have the whole family back in the same continent. We left Atlanta and headed to Montgomery, Alabama in a big bus. I remember sitting by the window seat and looking at everything that we passed in our pathway. I could not believe how different America was from the poor streets of Ethiopia. After three hours of the bus ride, we got to our final destination; my new home. I could not believe that I had I was going to live in

the most beautiful house I had ever seen.

My siblings took me inside and gave me a tour, and I was amazed. I finally had a place to call my own. This is how a single word changed my life. God has richly blessed me and I did not deserve any of it. Before attending Trinity Presbyterian School, I went to a public school for two and a half years. Since walking into the halls of Trinity back in the fourth grade, I have been active in the school. I use the opportunities I have been offered to serve on Student Government Association as well as other organizations within the school. Currently I am the president of the Student Government Association.

Samford University (which specializes in missionary training) is the perfect fit for me. Samford caught my attention the moment I walked on the campus. I would love to continue the next chapter of my life at Samford University.

**NOTE:** Zoe's mom and dad in America, Cole and Joy Portis, have guided this young lady through this incredible journey with a faith that could move mountains ... and it did. She has nine siblings, seven of them adopted, and her oldest sister, who lost her own mother when she died giving birth to her, hand-picked Zoe out of a book of orphaned children because her bio explained that her mother had died in childbirth as well.

The two sisters were bonded by tragedy thousands of miles apart and now both of them are making the whole world a better place. The Spirit of acceptance, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of faith, the spirit of family ... NO DOUBT, THE SPIRIT OF SPORT

-- Ron Ingram

**Letter from her soccer coach**

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my privileged to write this letter on behalf of Zoe Portis. I have had the opportunity to serve as her soccer coach at Trinity Presbyterian School, as well having her in the classroom.

During that time, I have been able to observe her character and determination both on and off the field. Zoe has shown resilience, determination, leadership and joy in all things she pursues. She has a maturity well beyond her years.

Zoe has been an integral part of our student body and athletic program for many years, excelling in both. She has dedicated herself to improvement, constantly pushing herself to be better. She is very driven, not settling for less than her absolute best. This has also been observed in the classroom. Zoe is an excellent student. She chose to take an advanced track and was able to juggle the rigor of these classes while participating in so many sports and student activities.

Zoe was not always the first to play in a game and sometimes was the last but her attitude was always the same. She approaches every task with a can do attitude and a willingness to work. Zoe was always an encourager to her teammates and lead by her positive example. She has been an absolute joy to coach!

Sincerely,  
Analyn Coker  
Head Varsity Soccer Coach  
Science Teacher  
Trinity Presbyterian School



Dear Members of the National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee:

Around the age of eight, Zoe Portis answered "yes" to a question that she did not understand, and her life was changed forever. As an orphan in Ethiopia, she was alone, but the simple answer "yes" changed her life as well as the lives of those who have had the privilege of getting to know her.

I first learned about Zoe when her English teacher presented her with the sixth grade English award. Then, I had the opportunity to teach Zoe as she was an eighth grader at Trinity Presbyterian School. Thousands of young people have streamed through my life during my 42 year tenure in the classroom, and none finer than Zoe.

Zoe became a positive leader in our school, where she served as Student Government

Association President. She has affected change in the lives of others by serving on our

Change4Change committee. Each Friday, money is collected through our school wide

Change4Change endeavor; and at the end of her sophomore year, Zoe became an impetus for a well to be built abroad so that those in need would have access to clean water. It just so happened, that our lower school students were going to do a study of Africa the following year.

Therefore, raising awareness of the need for clean water and raising money to build a well would fit perfectly as our year-long mission project. Last year, during her junior year, Zoe stepped up and presented parts of her life story to our lower school student body. She explained the

circumstances in which she was reared in Ethiopia, and the effects of unsanitary drinking water. Our well in Zambia was drilled at the end of her junior year. Zoe has been there and understands the struggles of those who find themselves in dire circumstances. Thus, she is willing to reach out to others and to try and affect change where she can.

This is Zoe; this is who she is. I feel that Zoe Portis is truly one of the finest young women with whom I have been associated during my lifetime. Her desire to succeed and her willingness to put forth maximum effort in all that she undertakes exhibit a level of determination that is rarely seen today. It is sometimes difficult to remain true to oneself; however, Zoe is accomplishing that. She is a very special person, and one for whom God has a special plan. On a daily basis, Zoe Portis exemplifies the attributes on which the National High School Spirit of Sport Award is founded; and without reservation, I feel she is a worthy candidate for this honor.

**Kathy G. Pirtle**

**TRINITY PRES BYTERIAN SCHOOL**

**1700 EAST TRINITY BOULEVARD MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36106 OFFICE**

**334- 213-2100 | FAX 334-213- 2171**

**[trinitywildcats.com](http://trinitywildcats.com)**



Dear Members of the National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee:

Six years ago, while I was attending Trinity Presbyterian School's Middle School Awards Day, the seventh-grade English teacher was recognizing Zoe Portis who had written a very special essay. The essay was entitled, "The Power of a Small Word." Zoe's essay shared that she lived in a thatched hut in Ethiopia.

After learning about Zoe's story, I began to observe her at Trinity. Zoe had never even been to school prior to being adopted, yet she excelled academically and socially at Trinity. She seems to have better manners and social skills than most students at Trinity. How could that be! It is obvious that God has a very special plan for Zoe!

In high school, she has been elected President of her freshman, sophomore, junior classes and SGA President as a senior. Imagine that. An orphan from Ethiopia!

She has an outstanding cumulative grade point average of 3.75 and is a member of the National Honor Society. She lettered for the four years in Trinity's varsity basketball and soccer teams. This is what Trinity Varsity Girls Head Basketball Coach had to say, "I have worked with adolescents for twenty years. During this time, I have come to know some very remarkable young men and woman. With no disrespect to any of those gifted students, Zoe Portis is the most inspirational student I have ever had the privilege of working with. She is compassionate, smart, and humorous. Some people come into your life and you are better off because of it. Their presence calls you to be something greater than you are. Zoe possesses that quality.

I have three daughters. Zoe's presence in their life is a treasure. I pray they grow into the woman she is. That is the greatest complement I could give."

Zoe also serves on the Leadership Board of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and is an active member of Morningview Baptist Church. She volunteers at Vaughn Road Elementary School, Montgomery Area Food bank and the Montgomery Cancer Center. I have never worked with a student with such a story as Zoe Portis.

Zoe will undoubtedly leave a lasting and memorable mark on others for many years to come. She is truly an example of what is best about today's young people and is a young woman to be admired. I will be following Zoe's successes in life!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Mosley  
College Counselor  
**TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL**

# ARTICLES

## A shining light in this world:' Trinity senior Zoe Portis triumphs over childhood tragedy



By Josh Bean | [jbean@al.com](mailto:jbean@al.com)

on April 05, 2018 8:04 AM, updated May 03, 2018 5:05 PM

**Trinity** senior **Zoe Portis** has a favorite Bible verse.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord," she recites, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." --

Jeremiah 29:11

Talk to Portis for five minutes and it's apparent the verse fits her perfectly.

Portis, a soccer and basketball player at [Trinity](#) in Montgomery, emigrated to the United States from Ethiopia when she was adopted at age 7.

Today, a decade later and part of a family of 10 kids, she speaks poignantly and powerfully about her life and future plans.

"I apply that to my life," she said of her favorite Bible verse. "God has a plan for my life, even if I can't see it. God has a purpose for my life. I don't know why he chose me of all those kids to be here, but I trust in Him. All those trials I went through in my childhood brought me to where I am today."

Portis is a regional winner in this year's Bryant-Jordan Scholarship's Achievement category, which honors Alabama high school athletes who have overcome personal hardship to excel on and off the field. She has earned a \$2,500 scholarship and could get more at Monday's annual scholarship banquet in Birmingham before enrolling at Samford later this year.

"Is she perfect? No," said her father, Cole Portis. "Does she squabble with her brothers and sisters at times? Yeah. But that's rare. More importantly it's the influence ... she has an infectious personality that affects others."

Zoe's journey from Ethiopia to Montgomery has been filled with tragedy and triumph.

### **From the beginning**

Born in a small Ethiopian village, Zoe's mother died in childbirth. That meant she lived with her grandmother, whom she called her best friend, and her father.

Then, before she ever attended school, her grandmother and father died. Zoe became her grandmother's care-giver and said she "wanted to jump in the grave with her."

Essentially an orphan, she moved in with another family, where she became a servant.

Her days were filled with cooking, cleaning and caring for a toddler -- all at age 7. She was no longer a child and now admits she saw nothing bright about her future.

"I just really worked for them, didn't go to school," Zoe said. "I took care of their baby, cleaned up around the house, wasn't the best of treatment. The dad would get drunk and take it out on the mom and the mom would take it out on me .... It wasn't the best of conditions to be in, and I wasn't happy."

Then, she was asked if she was interested in a possible adoption by an American family. That led to an interview and a move to an orphanage to await a family match.

Did she know what adoption really meant? "It just sounded good to me," she said.

"One day, they called me back and said there's going to a family that's going to adopt me and I'm going to America," Zoe said. "I was like, 'Yes!' Because when we hear about America, we hear it's the land of milk and honey and just perfect and you get what you want and you're never going to lack food or lack water, and everybody is just perfect. So, I was very excited."

### **Coming to America**

Cole and Joy Portis already had three biological children before deciding to adopt. They have since adopted seven children -- three from China, two from Ethiopia and two from the United States, including one with Down Syndrome.

The couple first adopted a boy from China after much prayer and the decision was confirmed when Joy watched a segment on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" describing "death rooms" in China. That helped inspire the first international adoption.

The family later opted to adopt a child from Ethiopia, and Joy Portis and her sister traveled to the African nation. That's when she met Zoe and Emme, a baby from the same orphanage where Zoe lived, and brought both to Montgomery.

"I could tell she was really happy to see us," Zoe said, recalling her first meeting with her mom. "She hugged us so tight. She was radiating, smiling .... I knew she was a good thing. That was just a really amazing experience."

Zoe didn't speak any English when she arrived in Montgomery with her new, growing family. She's been enrolled at Trinity, a private school in Montgomery, since the fourth grade.

"I was thinking, 'I can't believe a place like this exists,'" she said. "I was in awe just looking around. It was amazing just to see the difference between Ethiopia and a street driving down in Atlanta."

### **Inspiring others**

Learning English was a major undertaking for Zoe, but a combination of tutoring, living with such a large family and watching American TV helped.

Today, she looks, sounds and acts like a normal teenager while walking the halls at Trinity, albeit one with a 3.75 GPA who has been elected class president and SGA president.

Those who know her marvel at the young woman she's become.

"Zoe Portis is truly one of the finest young women with whom I have been associated with during my lifetime," said Trinity teacher Kathy Pirtle in a letter in support of her Bryant-Jordan candidacy. "Her desire to succeed and her willingness to put forth maximum effort in all that she undertakes ... that is rarely seen today."

"Zoe will undoubtedly leave a lasting and memorable mark on others for many years to come," added Trinity college counselor Elizabeth Mosley in a letter in support of her Bryant-Jordan candidacy. "She is truly an example of what is best about today's young people and is a young woman to be admired."

Zoe said her deep Christian faith as helped develop a steely determination.

"I trust His plan is awesome and maybe going through those tough trials was not easy, but it really made me into the person I am today," she said. "For that, I am thankful. I know I am blessed beyond even what I can understand. I may not show it, but I am super thankful to be here and to have this education and to be in this school."

Zoe said she remains undecided on her college major, but said education advocacy has become a passion and she's considering a career in counseling.

Whatever the future holds, Zoe said she wants to serve as a role model for others and live a life "that's pleasing to the Lord."

"I have extreme confidence that she's going to be a shining light to the world," her father said. "Not just in Birmingham or Montgomery, she's going to be a shining light in this world."

***Josh Bean covers high school sports for AL.com. He can be reached [atjbean@al.com](mailto:atjbean@al.com).***





Zoe Portis, her mom Joy Portis and her adopted little sister, also from Ethiopia

## Teen Spotlight: Zoe Portis

October 16, 2012



*Photography by Martin Harris, BritSnap*

## **Claim to Fame**

Zoe Portis is in 7th grade at Trinity Presbyterian School. She's got a large, loving family and a great group of friends. But only a few years ago, a seven-year-old Zoe's picture looked much bleaker. She lived in a mud hut in Ethiopia where she had to walk miles for water and felt the pangs of real hunger all too often. She had no education. After the deaths of her entire family, her future was uncertain. But when Cole and Joy Portis adopted Zoe and brought her to their home in Montgomery, she was given the opportunity so many children take for granted, the chance to go to school. And it was a chance she seized. Despite not knowing a syllable of English, she entered 1st grade. Her enthusiasm for learning pushed her past the language barrier, and by the end of 2nd grade, she was in the highest reading group and won the trophy for most Advanced Reader points. "It is the accomplishment that I am most proud of," she said. "In the beginning, I had trouble with school. I didn't understand how to study. By the time I was in the 4th grade, I figured it out, and now I am able to study well."

## **All-Around Achiever**

Zoe's academic progress has been stellar for any student and made even more impressive by what she's overcome. Her pure determination and zeal for life have earned her the admiration of teachers and friends. She was recently voted class favorite. "I think it was because I am an optimistic person and a friendly person," she said. She runs cross-country, plays soccer and basketball and is learning more of her native language, Amharic.

But her gratitude and gracious manner truly set Zoe apart. "God has been so gracious to me that I haven't really had a major challenge that I had to overcome because of moving to a new country. I have a wonderful family and friends who accepted me and welcomed me with love and encouragement. I am blessed to have each and every one of them. "

She's considering devoting her life to mission work. "I have always wanted to be a missionary because I want to teach God's word to those who haven't heard of Him or His son, Jesus." But she's also interested in being a model. "I love fashion and being in front of the camera. I am always posing for the camera and I love it!"

## **Time for Fun?**

"My favorite things to do outside of classroom are reading, going shopping and spending time with friends."

## **PG (Parental Guidance) Rating**

"My parents have done so much for me I don't even know where to start. First of all, they adopted me and gave me a future. They brought me to their home, and I am able to say I have a Mom and a Dad. They have been great role models to me by showing me what love is and teaching me about Jesus. They have allowed me to go to a wonderful school where I am blessed to be."

## **Parents' Perspective**

Cole, a local attorney, and Joy, a stay-at-home mom have been overjoyed to see the young lady Zoe has become. "When she got the AR trophy, I was blown away," Joy said. "She attacks everything with that same passion: soccer, piano, basketball, running, friendships, helping with her siblings, missions, etc. She realizes she is blessed with many opportunities and she doesn't take them for granted. We are blessed to call her daughter! "

Cole and Joy know that some of who Zoe is comes from her early childhood, and they work to nurture the positives that have come out of her hardships. "She has so many life experiences that have shaped her character and attitude. I just encourage her to keep her focus on Christ and His plan for her and the gifts He has given her," Joy said. "She recently returned to Ethiopia on a mission trip and her passion and love for Ethiopia is so evident. As her mom I try to recognize areas where she is gifted and areas of interest and provide opportunities to mature them as she explores life." Cole echoed his wife. "Even after losing her biological mother and father, as well as her beloved grandmother, God instilled in Zoe a wonderful nature to be content in her circumstances and to do her best in the environment where she is placed. Zoe now understands that God was working all things together for good. She understands that God is in control and will never forsake her. As a result of her confidence in God, she genuinely is kind and generous with others," he said.

Cole and Joy also work to teach Zoe and her siblings that they don't have to be perfect. "We let her know that we will always love her and support her. I think children can put too much pressure on themselves to be perfect and they don't feel they have the freedom to fail. So many character-building lessons can be learned through those tough times. We don't try to prevent them but instead try to equip them and support them through it," Joy said.

**POSTED ON BRYANT-JORDAN SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE AFTER  
THE 2018 AWARDS BANQUER**

## **Zoe Portis Named Bryant-Jordan Class 4A Student-Achievement Winner**

"Eleven years ago, I was an orphan in Ethiopia. I was without a family, a home, and God. My parents—Cole and Joy—adopted me and gave me parents, family, a home, and a relationship with Jesus Christ. I literally would not be here today without them."

A dry eye could not be found in the crowd, during a standing ovation after Zoe Portis spoke these words as she accepted the United Methodist Children's Home Scholarship at the Bryant-Jordan Achievement Award ceremony held in Birmingham on April 9, where she was named the Class 4A Regional Bryant-Jordan Scholar-Athlete by the Alabama High School Athletic Association. Out of over 150,000 student athletes in the state of Alabama, Zoe Portis was among the elite 96 athletes recognized at this program.

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Payton Elizabeth Titus  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Erin Crabtree

Phone: 813-361-8502

E-mail: paxonswimdive@gmail.com

Street Address: 8343 Princeton Sq Blvd E #506

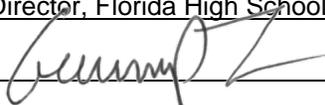
City, State, Zip Code: Jacksonville, FL, 32256

Date: January 28, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Mr. George Tomy

Title: Executive Director, Florida High School Athletic Association

Signature: 



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Payton does a great job at school with being involved in clubs and swimming at Paxon Schools for Advanced Studies. She also does outside activities that support the community.

## **Clubs/Extra Curricular Activities:**

- Swimming World Magazine College Intern Journalist- Summer 2018
- SwimSwam Article (international swimming magazine) published interview with head coach Erin Crabtree- 2018
- Washington Journalism and Media Conference National Youth Correspondent (WJMC)- Summer of 2018
- Member of C.H.A.T. (Cancer Healing Adolescents Talking)-11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Member of National Honor Society, Paxon chapter-11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Member of Science National Honor Society, Paxon Chapter- 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Member of Spanish National Honor Society, Stanton chapter-10<sup>th</sup> grade
- Member of Psychology National Honor Society, Stanton chapter-10<sup>th</sup> grade
- Member of Arlington United Methodist Church's Youth Group-9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Varsity Swimming-9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade (captain senior year)

## **Awards:**

- Reflections Award of Excellence (Duval County, onto states)- 2019
- Paxon SAS Student of the Year Nominee- 2019
- Golden Eagle Award- 2018
- District Champion: 100 yard butterfly- 2018
- 100 yard butterfly school record holder- 2018
- Regional qualifier: 200 medley relay (fly), 100 butterfly, 100 breaststroke, 4x50 freestyle relay- 2018
- WJMC Alumni and George Mason 1 Journalism class credit recipient- 2018
- AP Scholar with Distinction Award- 2018
- AP Art History Medallion Award for "highest GPA"- 2018
- Selected as a National Youth Correspondent for WJMC- 2018
- Selected for the National Academy of Future Scientists and Technologists Award of Excellence- 2017
- 4x100 freestyle relay alternate for 2A states- 2017
- AP Scholar Award- 2017
- 4th place 200 medley relay finish at 2A states (fly)- 2016
- Relay alternate for 2A states- 2016
- 4-time varsity letter recipient for Swim & Dive
- A-B Honor-roll throughout the entirety of academic career
- Class Rank: 8/302

## **Volunteer Work/Community Service:**

- Editor-in-chief at Florida Swim Network-12<sup>th</sup> grade (28 hours)
- Wolfson's Children's Challenge- 2019 (8 hours)

- Lifeguard skills review/training- 2018 (3 hours)
  - Dream Team mentorship- 2018 (10 hours)
  - Serving in pediatric oncology community in northeast Florida with Dreams Come True, Inc. (20 hours)
  - Volunteer writer for Florida Swim Network-11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade (21 hours)
  - Paxon 2018-2019 Orientation-12<sup>th</sup> grade (4 hours)
  - Wilma's Little People School Classroom Help-11<sup>th</sup> grade (4 hours)
  - North Florida Swimming Middle School Swim Clinic-9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade (10 hours)
  - J. Allen Axson School Classroom Help-9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade (24 hours)
2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

Payton was an avid swimmer and participated in swimming on her high school and club swim teams year around. After last year's state meet, Payton felt swelling and pain near her collarbone. After a few doctors visits, the doctors determined that she had Hodgkin's lymphoma. She went through four cycles of chemotherapy, and is now in remission. Payton worked with the school counselors to adjust the college workload. Payton had to step away from the pool after November, and returned in May to participate in summer league and now her senior year of high school. Through all she's been through in the last year, she's done an amazing job of keeping positive. Payton applied for and became a captain of the Paxon Eagles team. She's a great leader and mentor for her peers. She's also very supportive of other children with cancer, dedicating lots of time to activities that support the cancer community.

Payton in her own words:

I was diagnosed with Stage 2 Hodgkin's Lymphoma on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. A few weeks earlier, I was leading off Paxon's 4x100 freestyle relay at the FHSAA Class 2A State Championship meet. Now, I was unsure if I would ever get back in the water. In a matter of weeks, I transformed from a 3-year varsity athlete to an anemic cancer patient.

After a while, I became desensitized to the steady stream of pokes and prods that would have previously sent me to the floor, gripping legs of the doctor's chair for refuge. I had been a stomach sleeper since birth but for those 4 months I lay in my bed staring at the ceiling, fighting the urge to crawl out of my bloated dry skin.

In a vain effort to ease my mind, I attended the prescribed meetings for adolescents with cancer, C.H.A.T. My peers found comfort in each other's company, yet no matter how many functions I attended, I felt irretrievably isolated. Strangers around me were satisfied being each other's exclusive outlets of understanding; not me.

At school, I worked out an abbreviated schedule with my parents and my counselor that managed to keep 3 of my AP courses on it. That being said, maintaining a 4.66 GPA was a veritable challenge when all I felt like doing was sleeping or being sick. However, I managed to pull through with the help of family, friends, teammates, and coaches.

I will never forget the night that my medley relay girls came to my house and surprised me with a movie night. They brought a gift basket, candy, blankets, and their benevolent selves to cheer me up and show their support. So maybe they would never be able to truly understand what I was going through, but maybe that was okay; maybe I did not need them to.

Although I was still out of the pool, I managed to keep in touch with the swimming world through Florida Swim Network, SwimSwam Magazine, and Swimming World Magazine. In April of 2018, I was 1-month cancer free and a newly internationally published writer. I interviewed coach Erin about her experience as a female coach in a community virtually run by males that ended up in the spring issue of their globally distributed print magazine. In May, I became the youngest Swimming World Magazine Journalist intern of their 2018 class, where I submitted biweekly articles to be published on their website and promoted on their various social media accounts.

June, 2018, Summer Swim League starts. Terrified of how out of shape I was and scared to put my 10-pound-heavier frame in a swimsuit again, I decided that I would stick to the summer's lowkey intermural structure rather than going back to club practices. My plan was to condition through August, survive my senior season, and quit immediately after. But, as I started racing again, as my body began to readjust itself to the motions of the strokes and the feeling of the water, I knew it was time for me to come back; and come back I did.

I started practicing again with my year-round team, saying hello again to faces I had not seen in over 7 months. It was good to be back.

When I was finally able to get back to my regular routine, I felt a sense of relief. Although I will never be a "normal kid" again, this was the closest I would ever get to that person, to the old, healthy me. With that knowledge and that feeling, I was compelled to reflect. I reflected on my journey and remembered the new people I had met along the way that made it all bearable; my nurses, fellow patients and their families, Dreams Come True.

There was one child and family in particular that I had grown very close with. His name was Dallas, a baby with AML, Acute Myeloid Leukemia. In between chemo days, I found myself on Dallas's floor protracting visits.

I often sat at his bedside with my finger grasped tightly in his hand. I remember listening to Dallas hum along to Disney songs with musical therapy. His favorite movies *Moana* and *Sing!* played on a loop.

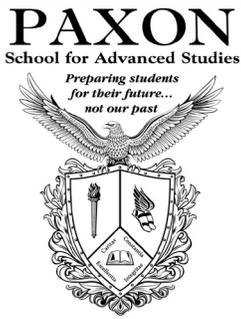
After 8 months of assiduous fighting, Dallas passed away. He is the youngest cancer survivor I have ever met. Dallas won his battle with leukemia; the lack of humane treatment available for kids proved too much for his body.

Forever changed, I decided to live my life in honor of him. His resolve inspires me to use my life for advocacy, kind acts of ministrations and love. I approach everything with a refreshed sense of vigor and commitment, just as Dallas did for those 8 long months.

During my senior year, I have taken that approach with swimming, with school, and with my volunteer service through Dreams Come True. In September, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, I organized gift bags and delivered them to the pediatric oncology floor at Wolfson Children's Hospital with the organization. I also was a part of the second-annual Taxslayer Bowl Dream Team, where I met and mentored two amazing little girls with stories similar to mine, named Cammie and Blake. I now continue to work with Dreams Come True and help them give dreams to children who have battled life-threatening diseases, like myself.

I am honored and humbled to be nominated by FHSAA for this award. Even without knowing what the results of the national competition will be, I already feel as though I have won. Being up for this award means so much to me because it proves to other children, and adults, that they truly

can do anything. It shows them that no matter the circumstances, you can push through and come out on the other side stronger than you ever thought possible.



# PAXON

## SCHOOL for ADVANCED STUDIES

3239 Norman E. Thagard Boulevard, Jacksonville, Florida 32254. (904) 693-7583

November 20, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

As a school counselor, one encounters many students. I have come to know Payton Titus over the past year and a half and I am able to recognize that she is an exceptionally knowledgeable, reflective, and ambitious student. Payton has the intrinsic motivation necessary to be successful not only as a college student, but as a global citizen.

Payton is currently a senior student in the Advanced Placement program at Paxon School for Advanced Studies. As a part of this course of study Payton will not only have immersed herself into a nationally recognized curriculum, she will have successfully completed twelve Advanced Placement courses. She has been named an AP Scholar of Distinction by the CollegeBoard in recognition of her high achievement on AP exams. Her academic achievements are highlighted by her membership in the National Honor Society and the Science National Honor Society. Additionally, she has been selected as a Golden Eagle Ambassador at Paxon. She is responsible for giving prospective students and parents tours of the school and presenting our school in a positive light.

In addition to her academic achievements, Payton has demonstrated a desire to be involved within her school and local community. This is evident through Payton's participation in varsity swimming ninth through twelfth grades. Payton's capacity for helping people has also allowed her to extend her talents into the community by serving over one hundred and twenty hours with various community organizations. Payton is the kind of driven, engaging, and dynamic student that makes our school great. She is willing to step up to any challenge and take risks, and always encourages her peers to do the same.

While the accolades for this student are numerous, what continues to impress me the most was her ability to strive for excellence during a time of great personal struggle. During her junior year of high school Payton received treatment for stage 2 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. This did not have an effect on her coursework and she excelled academically, successfully completing two Advanced Placement courses. Payton has my highest recommendation as a university applicant. She has demonstrated excellence in academics and leadership, whether it is organizing a school-wide function, collaborating with peers, or mentoring fellow students. Payton's limitless determination, combined with her willingness to learn and grow, leads me to believe there will be no limit to her growth and achievements beyond high school. She is one of the most outstanding students I have encountered in my career. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (904) 693-7583.

Sincerely,

Michelle Mullen  
School Counselor  
Paxon School for Advanced Studies

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PIC•COLLAGE

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Jordan Nicole Kozloski

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name Christy Jones

Phone: 478-396-2022

E-mail: christy.jones@hcbe.net

Street Address: 103 Seven Pines Court

City, State, Zip Code: Perry, GA 31069

Date: 12/4/18

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee Jordan Nicole Kozloski  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 112 Ellicott Dr  
*(street address)*

Warner Robins, GA 31088  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 478-918-5878 \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: sandrakozloski@gmail.com \_\_\_\_\_

School (if any): Houston County High School \_\_\_\_\_

City: Warner Robins \_\_\_\_\_ State: GA \_\_\_\_\_

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Jordan Kozloski is a senior at Houston County High School. She currently plays on three teams: the Houston County Sharks, Blaze Sports Jr Hawks, and North Carolina's Women's team. She has been invited to try out for the Women's National Wheelchair basketball team and the U.S. Women's Paralympic team. All three years that she has tried out she has made the final cut of 16. She travels to Colorado Springs, Colorado to the Olympic Training Center several times a year to practice. She is currently one of four alternates for the travel team. Her ultimate goal is to be a member of the Women's Paralympic Basketball team that will travel to Tokyo in 2020.

Academically, Jordan has overcome struggles in the classroom. She has learning deficits in math that has caused her to put in many hours on top of her normal class times. During her sophomore year she began taking criminal law classes thru the dual enrollment program with Central Georgia Technical School and Houston County High School.

Jordan has received many awards for her athletic abilities:

- 2018 Outstanding Female Athlete of the Year at the AAASP Aspire Awards
- 2017 Best Offensive Player in Wheelchair Basketball -Houston County Sharks
- 2017 Most Improved Player- Blazesports JR Hawks
- 2017 Shark Award- Highest Award given by the Houston County Sharks

Athletes receive this award for showing leadership characteristics both on and off the court.

- 2016 Best Offensive layer in Wheelchair Football- Houston County Sharks
- MVP of the Courage Kenny Classic Basketball Tournament
- Named 2<sup>nd</sup> Team All-Tournament at the NWBA Basketball Tournament in Carson, Ca.

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

Jordan Kozloski is an amazing young woman. She has overcome many hurdles since birth. She was born a drug baby with two holes in her heart. At 15 months she was adopted by Mike and Sandy Kozloski. Life was getting better for Jordan but at age 2 ½ she was involved in a lawn mower accident that caused her to lose her leg above her knee. Instead of seeing limitations Jordan stayed positive and saw opportunities.

She tried playing golf but when the Houston County School System started the Adapted Sports Program in 2007 she found her passion. Jordan joined the Houston County Sharks team when she was in the second grade. Even though she was usually the youngest and smallest player on the court Jordan showed no fear. She was often assigned an older more experienced high school player to guard.

As Jordan has grown and matured as a player, her no fear attitude has been the driving force behind her athletic accomplishments. Kozloski is not one to sit back and say I went to practice; I am done for the day. During practice she always leads the drills whether they be conditioning or skill building activities. After practice Jordan goes home and continues to shoot. Her goal is 1,000 shots a week in addition to what she does at practice. She also pushes 3 miles a day after practice.

When Houston Co. decided to begin a second adapted sports team Jordan took a big role in helping to recruit the younger players. Jordan is one of the first players to greet the new players when they come to practice. We had three players join the Junior Varsity team that had hearing impairments. Jordan worked with the interpreter that travels with the team. She learned sign language so she could communicate with them on the court. She wanted to make sure they did not feel left out and knew what was going on.

Kozloski has also expanded her playing experience by joining the Atlanta Jr. Hawks and the Women's North Carolina Wheelchair basketball team. She travels around the country playing in NWBA (National Wheelchair Basketball Association) tournaments. Her hard work and dedication paid off three years ago when she was invited to Colorado Springs to try out for the Women's National Team. As one of the youngest athletes ever invited to try out Jordan was selected as one of four alternates for the travel team. Her ultimate goal is to play on the 2020 Paralympic Women's Basketball team in Tokyo. Jordan works hard to reach her goals and she helps her teammates strive to be the best they can be as well. Without reservation I believe Jordan Kozloski exemplifies everything the Spirit of Sports Award stands for.

<https://youtu.be/rKoQajGwLDg>

<https://www.nfhs.org/articles/making-the-move-from-sidelines-to-game-time-georgia-s-jordan-kozloski/>



Dr. Douglas Rizer  
Principal

# Houston County High School

920 Ga. Highway 96  
Warner Robins, Georgia 31088  
Phone (478) 988-6340  
Fax (478) 988-6341

Jason Brett  
Karma Hayes  
Jay Jones  
Alyson Keenom, API  
Melanie Moore  
**Assistant Principals**

Ryan Crawford  
**Athletic Director**

November 7, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write a reference letter on behalf of Jordan Kozloski. I have known Jordan for over 10 years. I was fortunate enough to serve as her principal in both elementary and high school. It goes without saying that I have a special place in my heart for Jordan since the first time I met her so many years ago. She and I have always had a wonderful relationship. Even to this day, when Jordan and I see each other we always stop and talk and most of the time she still gives me a hug.

At the age of two Jordan had a childhood accident which resulted in losing her left leg. This accident, however, has never slowed her down. In the second grade Jordan played a major role in the Houston County Sharks Wheelchair Team that was being created in Houston County. Jordan has since played with the Sharks for over 10 years in handball, football, and basketball. During this time Jordan and the Sharks have brought home 22 State Championships to Houston County. In addition to being involved with the Sharks, Jordan also participates with the Hawks, a Junior National Wheelchair Team. For the Hawks, Jordan was named Player of the Year on two occasions. Jordan has also been invited these past two years to the USA Para-Olympics tryouts in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Just recently, Jordan received the Outstanding Female Athlete of the Year recognition at the AAASP Aspire Awards. Jordan and the Houston County Sharks just recently won a State Title in Handball and she is looking forward to the upcoming basketball and football seasons. She is in the process of talking with college coaches and hopes that she will earn an athletic scholarship and continue her academic and athletic career.

I have the upmost respect for Jordan and what she has been able to accomplish. I have participated in a couple of wheelchair events with Jordan. I had a wonderful time and will not forget the experience, even though she whipped me up and down the court. Perhaps what I love most about Jordan is her tenacity that can be seen each time she participates in an athletic event. Jordan has developed a wonderful rapport with her teachers and HOCO family. Her kind and caring manner carries over in every aspect of her life. Without hesitation, I would recommend Jordan in any of her future endeavors. You seldom have the privilege to have a student like Jordan, and I will truly miss her once she graduates this year. I am confident that Jordan will be very successful no matter what the future holds.

Sincerely,

Dr. Douglas Rizer  
Principal

Expect Excellence.... Academics, Athletics, the Arts, and Community Service





SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
DR. MARK SCOTT

BOARD MEMBERS  
MR. FRED WILSON, CHAIRMAN

HELEN HUGHES, VICE CHAIRMAN  
LORI JOHNSON  
DR. RICK UNRUH

DAVE CROCKETT  
HOKE MORROW  
BRYAN UPSHAW

November 30, 2018

National Federation of State High School Associations  
P.O. Box 690  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206

RE: Jordan Kozloski,  
Nomination for the 2019 National High School Spirit of Sport Award

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is in reference to the nomination for Jordan Kozloski for the 2019 National High School Spirit of Sports Award. Jordan Kozloski is an outstanding athlete and student for the Houston County School System. She has participated with our Sharks Adaptive Sports Program since its inception in 2007. She has been a valuable player in all of the 22 State Championships the Sharks have won. She is a leader and mentor to her team mates and a force to be reckoned with on and off the courts.

Jordan is one of the 13 courageous members of the campaign for 13 Reasons Why Not. The members share their personal tales of adversity in the hopes that their stories will help and encourage others. Jordan's story is about, "The way I look does not define me", and can be viewed on our county website, [www.hcbe.net](http://www.hcbe.net).

I am proud that Jordan is a part of our school system and personally recommend her for the 2019 National High School Spirit of Sport Award. I know she will continue to be a valuable player and leader in her college years ahead.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Scott, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

MAS:cam

# Making the Move from Sidelines to Game Time: Georgia's Jordan Kozloski

Jordan Kozloski is a gym rat who shoots over a thousand shots a week and completes three-mile laps around her neighborhood. It is this type of commitment that has helped this multi-sport athlete win 21 team state championships heading into her senior year at Houston County High School in Warner Robins, Georgia. Dedication and perseverance are common traits among student-athletes and are two characteristics Jordan had to learn at a young age.

Jordan's story begins when she was just a toddler.

"I lost my leg completely to a riding lawn mower when I was two and half years old." Jordan said. "I went up behind him (Jordan's father) while he was mowing the lawn. My mom ran out when she saw me, and I hear someone calling my name. So, I turned around with my left leg facing the lawn mower and he didn't see me and he backed right over me and shredded it off completely. They tell me that I flat-lined twice."

Due to the nature of her injury, doctors were initially unsure if Jordan would be able to wear a prosthetic. However, just three months later, Jordan was fitted for her first prosthetic and playing in a golf tournament fundraiser being held on her behalf. From there, a love of sports was born.

After a short-lived golf career, Jordan decided she wanted to play basketball. However, her coaches found it difficult to adapt their training to her prosthetic. That's when Christy Jones, a teacher for Orthopedically Impaired students in the Houston County School District, saw a need and stepped in.

Jones, a long time official with the American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP), is credited with helping to bring adapted activities to Houston County.

“We just had the opportunity, it was the right opportunity to bring it into the school system,” Jones said. “Our assistant superintendent and superintendent at the time, Dr. Hines, who’s the current executive director of the Georgia High School Association (GHSA), were huge supporters of the program.”

In addition to teaching, Jones has taken on coaching all wheelchair sports at Houston County High School: wheelchair basketball, wheelchair handball and wheelchair football.

Wheelchair basketball is Jordan’s self-proclaimed favorite sport, and her dedication to the sport is providing her with opportunities beyond high school. In January, Jordan earned a spot as an alternate for the 2018 U.S. Women’s National Wheelchair Basketball Team.

This opportunity wasn’t achieved without dedication and perseverance. Jordan’s been playing competitive wheelchair basketball since the second grade and hones her wheel skills by playing wheelchair handball and wheelchair football for her high school as well.

Playing three sports all school year can be time-consuming, but Jordan recognizes the importance of participating in multiple sports in high school.

“I think it gives you a different perspective with each one. Like you have different skills you can attribute to, different mindsets.” Jordan said. “It benefits you in a way where you learn to balance

different things all at the same time. You don't have to do just one thing. You don't have one mindset.

You can branch out and experience new things and I think that's really helpful in high school."

For these reasons and more, Jones is a strong advocate for adaptive programming in school systems across the country.

"Fight for the program. Don't just accept no as an answer." Jones said. "If that's something you truly want to have, make it happen. Everybody deserves that opportunity to compete and if you truly believe and want it then you can make it happen in your systems."

For more information on starting adaptive programming contact the American Association of Adapted Sports Programs at 404-294-0070, or at [sports@adaptedsports.org](mailto:sports@adaptedsports.org).





SHARKS

10

FLAGHOUSE

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Tyler Landon Wheeler  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Lee Sanders

Phone: 225-300-4210

E-mail: lsanders@lhsaa.org

Street Address: 12720 Old Hammond Hwy

City, State, Zip Code: Baton Rouge, LA 70816

Date: January 10, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Eddie Bonine

Title: Executive Director – Louisiana High School Athletic Association

Signature: 



# NOMINATION FORM

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

A member of the Louisiana High School Officials Association, Tyler Wheeler is in his eighth year as an umpire in the Monroe Baseball Officials' Association and his fifth year as an official in the Shreveport Football Officials' Association.

In 2018 Tyler was selected to officiate the Louisiana High School Athletic Association 4A football state championship game; Tyler also umpired in the 2018 LHSAA state baseball tournament.

The Louisiana High School Officials' Association honored Tyler as the original recipient of its Alexander Courage Award in 2018.

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

Tyler Wheeler has overcome adversity and challenging circumstances. His personal story is an inspiration and embodies the spirit of sport.

On January 7, 2017 – while performing his duties as a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Enforcement Division Senior Agent – Tyler was shot four times (including once in the head and once in the back) while questioning a motorist during a routine vehicle stop.

In the following months of recovery, Tyler courageously faced numerous surgeries and countless hours of physical therapy.

Tyler's passion for officiating high school sports led him back onto the field within one year of his near-death experience. In 2018 he officiated at the highest levels in the LHSAA – earning a state championship assignment in football and a semifinal position in baseball.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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[What It's Like Getting Shot in the Head Clarion Ledger](#)

[Wheeler Shares Story ArkLaMiss](#)

[Tyler Wheeler Wins LHSOA Alexander Courage Award](#)

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Taylor Hughes  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Todd Kelly

Phone: 601-918-7262

E-mail: tkelly@misshsaa.com

Street Address: 1201 Clinton-Raymond Road

City, State, Zip Code: Clinton, MS 39056

Date: January 28, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Mr. Don Hinton

Title: Executive Director

Signature: [Tab here] 

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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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**Student**    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Taylor Hughes  
*(first, middle, last)*

School contact: Pontotoc High School athletic director Josh Dowdy  
*(contact)*

123 N. Main Street, Pontotoc, MS 38863  
*(school address)*

Contact phone: 662-489-1275 (office)

Contact e-mail: jdowdy@pontotoc.k12.ms.us

School (if any): Pontotoc High School

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Taylor Hughes is senior at Pontotoc High School in Pontotoc, Miss. She has competed in three sports during her four years of high school: Football, Volleyball and Soccer.

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

Taylor has overcome adversity and shown exceptional perseverance in challenging circumstances, demonstrating great courage and a tremendous attitude in both her school and her community (I've enclosed two newspaper articles that explain her situation). She is a standout kicker for her football team who diagnosed with Chiari Malformation, a birth defect that required surgery to relieve the pressure on the base of her brain. She delayed major surgery as long as possible in order to continue kicking for the football team.

"Taylor has faced a lot of adversity and handled it really well," Pontotoc athletic director Josh Dowsy said. "I'm not sure most 18-year-olds could've done what she's done. She's just a natural leader in the hallways and on the playing fields. Academically, she ranks right near the top of the class. She takes care of her business. She's one of those special people. You don't find a lot like Taylor."

Taylor returned to the school in the fall after her surgery. She recently was crowned Miss Tupelo and will compete in the Miss Mississippi contest in June. She has signed a soccer scholarship with Itawamba Community College for next season.



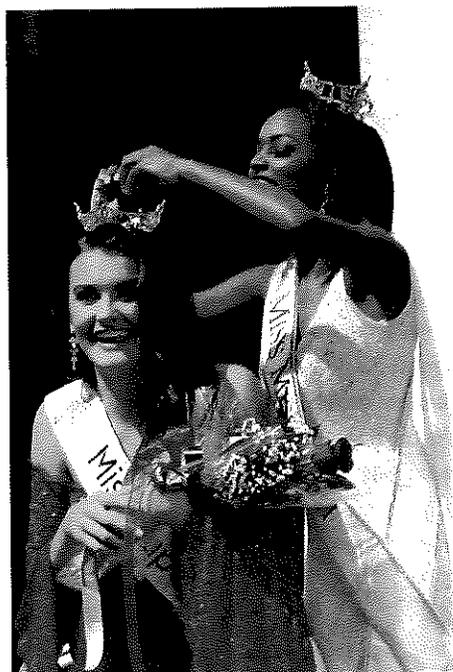
### Mississippi Drivers With No Tickets In 3 Years Should Do This In 2018

EVERQUOTE

[https://www.djournal.com/news/crowning-achievement-taylor-hughes-tackles-new-challenge-as-miss-tupelo/article\\_2f3b9dfb-4b08-5f6f-acde-7ebe2e14ea14.html](https://www.djournal.com/news/crowning-achievement-taylor-hughes-tackles-new-challenge-as-miss-tupelo/article_2f3b9dfb-4b08-5f6f-acde-7ebe2e14ea14.html)

## Crowning Achievement: Taylor Hughes tackles new challenge as Miss Tupelo

By John Luke McCord Daily Journal Jan 10, 2019



Taylor Hughes, left, smiles Saturday night as she receives the Miss Tupelo 2019 crown from Asya Branch, the reigning Miss Mississippi and last year's Miss Tupelo winner. Hughes, a Pontotoc High School senior who underwent successful brain surgery in September, was competing in her first Miss Mississippi local pageant. Eight winners were crowned during the Miss Tupelo Scholarship Pageant at the Tupelo High School Performing Arts Center.

Bobby Pepper | Daily Journal

#### MORE INFORMATION



Pontotoc kicker dealing with health challenges

**TUPELO** • Taylor Hughes isn't afraid to try new things. Instead, the newly-minted 18-year-old views such challenges as chances to prove herself.

On Saturday night, she was crowned 2019 Miss Tupelo, giving her the opportunity to compete in this year's Miss Mississippi pageant in June. And thus proving to herself she could find success in a new venture.

"It was crazy," Hughes said. "When they said my name, the video of my facial expression is great. I just wasn't expecting it.

"The main thing I'm excited for is that I can now use this platform to reach more people."

Warriors keep Hughes close to their hearts

A senior at Pontotoc High School, Hughes has garnered attention in recent years for her many athletic feats. In addition to starring for the volleyball and soccer programs, she joined the Warriors' football team to be the starting kicker as a junior in 2017. That move paid off, as she signed to play soccer and football when she arrives at Itawamba Community College later this year.

She's even done modeling in Atlanta, as well as for local clothing apparel startups. Singing, which serves as her talent portion of pageant competition, is also a part of her repertoire.

Competing in pageants, though? That's something she has very little experience with. Hughes says she had competed only twice in school beauty reviews prior to her mother inquiring about her interest in competing in the Miss Tupelo Scholarship Pageant. Her mother, Alisha, was named Miss Pontotoc in 1996 and went on to compete in Miss Mississippi, where she received a non-finalist talent award for her vocals.

When her mother asked last October if she wanted to compete in the event, Hughes was just a month or so into recovery from brain surgery. In mid-September she was diagnosed with a Chiari Malformation, a birth defect that causes the base of the skull to be shaped in a way that it is too small to house the base of the brain, and she had surgery to relieve pressure caused by this, as well as prevent permanent damage, just days later. With that, her senior football season was cut short, as was her final prep volleyball season.

It was an easy yes. In fact, she was eager to jump into the unknown. Her preparation began immediately, as she had just over two months to do so.

"After recovering from brain surgery, I feel like I can do anything," Hughes explained. "I wanted to follow in my mom's footsteps, as well as see how the process could help me grow personally."

"My whole thing is about empowering people. I don't shy away from things that girls shouldn't do or things people think I shouldn't do because I'm the athletic girl."

Now that Hughes has her first official pageant, and win, under her belt, she is beginning to look ahead to Miss Mississippi, where she will have to extend some of her study prep as well as her platform and performance aspects.

Hughes has chosen the platform Children's Miracle Network Hospital's Tackling the Toughest Medical Challenges, which is geared to help kids who find themselves exactly where she found herself last September.

In the future Hughes has plans to continue her efforts on the field and on the stage. She wants to keep kicking footballs and soccer balls at Ole Miss following her time at ICC. And she plans to keep going after pageant goals, as well.

"If I don't win this year, I'll go back and try again," She said of Miss Mississippi. "I want to be someone everyone can look up to, especially little girls."

jmccord



# Pontotoc kicker Taylor Hughes fights skull condition while chasing SEC history

IN THE MIDST OF HER SENIOR SEASON, A SKULL CONDITION THREATENS TO CHANGE TAYLOR HUGHES' LIFE.

Wilson Alexander, Mississippi Clarion Ledger  
Published 6:00 a.m. CT Sept. 7, 2018 | Updated 9:49 a.m. CT Sept. 7, 2018

PONTOTOC — Taylor Hughes buried her face in her hands. She stood in her grandmother's living room on a Monday night in late August while her mom, Alisha, flipped through a photo album looking for a picture sure to embarrass her daughter.



Alisha landed on a photo of Hughes dressed like an Ole Miss cheerleader, circa 2002. She pointed. Alisha and her ex-husband, Corey, took their daughter to Meet the Rebels, a preseason event where fans could interact with the football team. They snapped a photo of a 1-year-old Hughes sitting on a table in front of a smiling Eli Manning. Alisha grinned as she looked at the picture. Hughes' grandmother and two of Hughes' friends laughed.

Hughes frowned.

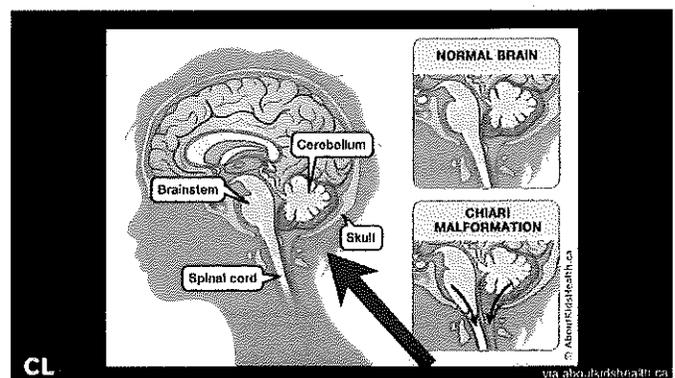
"Mom," Hughes said, drawing out the word.

On a coffee table behind them, a 2018 Pontotoc football program rested on top of a stack of magazines. It featured cheerleaders and football players and, on page nine, Hughes, a senior, stood with the kickers. She's a football player now, not a cheerleader, and she wants to walk-on at Ole Miss. She would be the first female football player in the SEC.

Hughes made 33 of 36 extra-point attempts and handled kickoffs last season. She kicked a 37-yard field goal in a game and said she made one from 55 yards during warmups. Hughes converted two field goals in a 6-3 win over New Hope in the playoffs. She has a powerful leg, but her technique needs work.

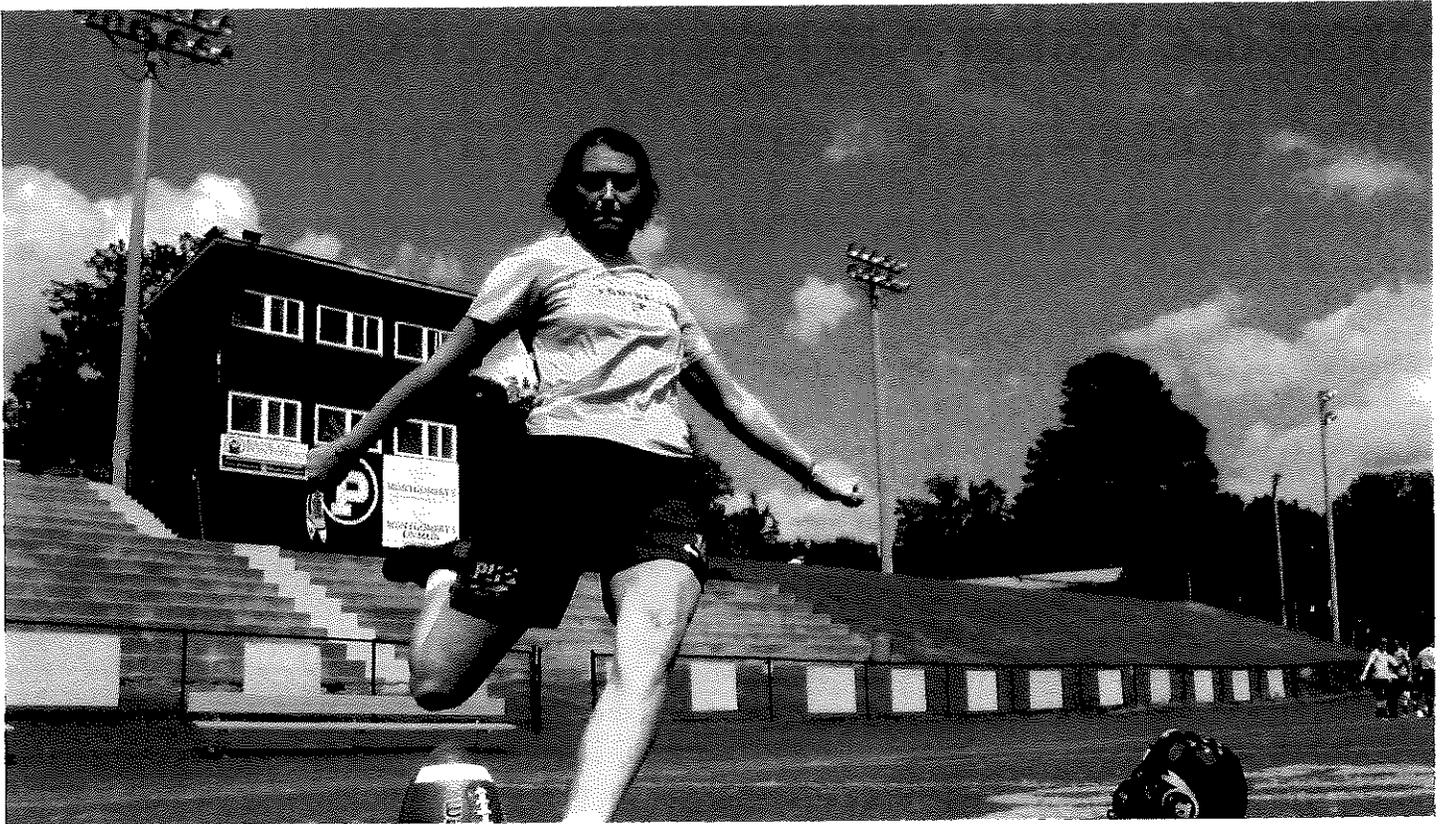
"If she can continue to progress," Pontotoc kicking coach Jonathan Beard said, "she could have the opportunity to play at the next level."

Alisha returned the photo album to a bookshelf. The group walked into the kitchen to eat fried chicken, green beans and mashed potatoes. They talked about school and teenage drama, but everyone knew the results of an MRI in three days might end Hughes' senior season.



Taylor Huges is a kicker on the field, a center back on the pitch, and a middle blocker on the court. Being a female isn't her greatest challenge.

Mackenzie Salmon, Mississippi Clarion Ledger



Pontotoc kicker Taylor Hughes practices kickoffs at Pontotoc High School on Aug. 27, 2018.  
(Photo: Wilson Alexander/Clarion Ledger)

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THE BACK OF Hughes' head slammed against the ground. She slipped in warmups before a soccer game her freshman year, suffered a concussion and passed out. When she came to, she didn't know where she was. Her eyes darted back and forth.

Alisha drove Hughes to a hospital where doctors performed tests to confirm her injury. She definitely had a concussion, the doctors said. But they noticed something else on the MRI.

The MRI revealed her cerebellar tonsils had extended 10.2 millimeters into her spinal area. Five millimeters is abnormal. Doctors diagnosed Hughes with Chiari I malformation. But Hughes didn't show any symptoms of the condition, which can block the flow of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) between the head and the spine. The resulting buildup of fluid within the spinal cord can cause, in some people, paralysis, numbness and chronic pain.

Doctors said Hughes, who's also on the volleyball team, could continue playing sports until she developed symptoms. Those appeared a few months ago. Alisha noticed tremors in her daughter's hands at the beginning of the summer. Alisha pointed them out, and Hughes laid her hands flat on a table to hide the shaking.

"Nothing," Hughes said. "It's OK."

The symptoms worsened. Hughes experienced blurred vision, neck pain, ringing in her ears, balance issues and, more than anything else, headaches. One violent, even ordinary hit playing football could paralyze her, but she argued she can get hurt doing anything.

A few days before visiting a doctor last week, Hughes wanted to postpone an inevitable surgery until after football season.

"I don't want to let down my team," Hughes said.

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TWO YEARS AGO, Jeff Carter stood near the main office at Pontotoc High School waiting for Hughes to leave class. Pontotoc needed a kicker after Carter's son, who was both the quarterback and the kicker, graduated in May. The soccer coaches recommended Hughes, who once scored a goal from past the midline.

Hughes left class and walked past Carter.

"Hughes," Carter said.

She turned around. He knew her name? They had never spoken to each other. What was going on?

"We need a kicker," Carter told Hughes.

"You want me to go find you one?" Hughes said.

"No," Carter said. "I need you to come to practice today."

Hughes earned the starting job, and this summer she attended a specialists camp at Ole Miss. She thought the coaches might teach her something new, but she dreaded the inevitable moment when people wondered if she was in the right place. As she walked onto the practice fields, none of the boys spoke to her.

After the camp, Hughes said Chris Rippon, an associate athletics director for community relations and special teams consultant, introduced himself inside the Ole Miss indoor practice facility.

"You definitely belong out here," Rippon told her.

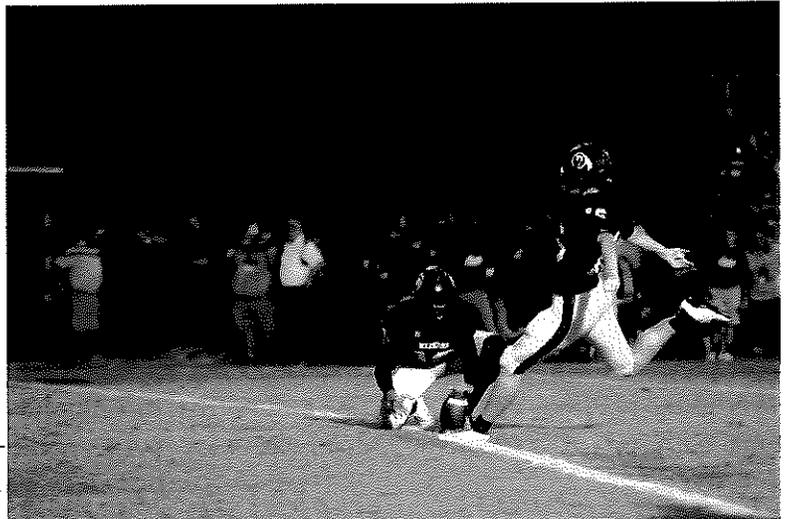
Hughes said Rippon told her if she played football for the Rebels it would be as a walk-on. He said he could petition the Title IX board for an extra roster spot. (College coaches are not allowed to publicly speak about unsigned recruits.)

"If she's determined to be here," Rippon told Alisha, "then I will see what I can do to get her a roster spot."

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AT A PRACTICE last week, Hughes struggled to make a field goal. Her first attempt missed low. So did her second. She missed her third to the left. Her fourth? She missed that, too.

When Hughes misses her kicks, it's usually because she hits the football like a soccer ball, wrapping her foot around the ball on contact. She often works with Beard on swinging her leg straight through impact.



Pontotoc kicker Taylor Hughes attempts a field goal during a game against Amory High School at Pontotoc High School on Oct. 6, 2017.

(Photo: Courtesy Bill Waldrop)

“Don’t bend it in the corner,” Beard said at a recent practice. “This ain’t soccer.”

Hughes’ fifth try clanked off the left upright. She stood next to Carter as the Warriors’ backup kicker took a turn.

Hughes, 17 years old and 6-foot-3, put her hands on her hips. A leather choker with pearls and a gold necklace that said “Taylor” hung from her neck. Her brown hair, held in a ponytail, flowed out the back of her helmet.

She missed two field goals during Pontotoc’s second game this season and cried in the restroom at halftime. She got benched during the second half. She thought the coaches were mad at her. Really, she was mad at herself. The coaches wanted her to forget the past and move on.

Hughes believed she couldn’t afford to miss. Her teammates didn’t accept her until she made kicks. Some opposing players resented her presence. One game last year, Hughes said an opponent pushed her to the field during a kickoff return and said, “Stay on the ground, b-----.”

She didn’t want to be perfect. She had to be perfect. The added pressure came from the fact she’s a girl who must change in a dingy restroom in the training room. She could only enter the locker room in the minutes before games, but she was OK with that. The locker room smelled like stale sweat.

Carter told the team to position the ball on the left hashmark. Hughes lined up behind the long snapper, then took three steps back and two to her left. Her sixth attempt missed. So did her seventh. Football practice ended, and Hughes left for volleyball.

“Let’s go,” Hughes said. “Awful. That was awful.”

She walked off the field, helmet in hand, her head throbbing.

After practice the next day, Hughes stood in her kitchen holding Advil and Dr. Pepper. Her head still hurt, just as it did the previous day and the one before that, too. Hughes popped four pills in her mouth and washed them down with soda. The medicine didn’t help.

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AT 7 A.M. LAST Thursday, Hughes slid into a car with her mom, her grandma and her best friend Brooke. The car rolled out of the driveway as the sun painted the sky, and they began the drive to Semmes Murphey Clinic in Memphis.

That afternoon, a few hours after receiving an MRI, Hughes and her family sat in a waiting room, their anxiety building with each passing minute. Hughes distracted herself with a game on her phone. Soon, a nurse led Hughes and her family to a doctor’s office. Dr. Frederick Boop entered the room and sat down next to Hughes on the examination table.

The MRI revealed Hughes’ cerebellar tonsils had herniated further, 11.5 mm now. The herniation put pressure on her first vertebrae. There was no blockage of CSF, but Boop recommended surgery as soon as possible.

Hughes agreed. Her head hurt. She couldn’t concentrate. Pain kept her awake at night. Alisha pointed out her fingers were shaking again.

Hughes had one request. Pontotoc had a volleyball game that night and a football game the next day. She asked if

she could play. Boop said OK. The surgery could wait for two weeks.

“If I don’t play in that game,” Hughes said before the appointment, “I’m going to regret it for the rest of my life.”

The group drove home, dropped off Hughes’ grandma and sped to New Hope for Hughes’ final volleyball game. Pontotoc won. Hughes scored the second-to-last point.

Taylor Hughes embraces her teammates and cries at New Hope High School after the final volleyball game of her high school career on Aug. 30, 2018. Her teammates brought her balloons and flowers.

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HUGHES DIDN’T SLEEP much after returning home from the volleyball game. She talked to friends, and when they all went to sleep, she watched movies. Rumors about her flew around school the next day. Some people thought she had cancer.

Alisha came to the fieldhouse to braid Hughes’ hair for the last time before a game. Alisha knew there would be many final moments during Hughes’ senior year. She didn’t expect them to happen so soon.

Junior wide receiver and holder Caleb Hobson sat in a corner of the training room icing his foot as Alisha worked on Hughes’ hair. Sunglasses covered his eyes. He always says hello to Alisha, but he didn’t this time.

Once Alisha finished with her daughter’s hair, Hughes walked over to Hobson, his back turned to the rest of the room. She leaned over, and the kicker and the holder cried as they hugged each other.

Pontotoc’s opponent, New Albany, scored to start the game, but the Warriors soon retook the lead. Alisha watched from the concrete stands with Corey. Hughes made her first extra point attempt. She made her second one, too. In her final high school game, Hughes made all five of her extra points. She also kicked a touchback. She did not attempt a field goal.

The game ended with five minutes left in the fourth quarter when a Pontotoc receiver delivered a violent block on a New Albany safety, bruising the boy’s lung. The collision looked bad. The boy coughed up blood. As athletic trainers tended to the injured player, referees let the final minutes of the game tick off the clock. Pontotoc won 43-14, but the score did not matter in the aftermath of an injury.

When the Warriors entered their locker room, Carter told his players not to post anything critical of New Albany on social media. Pray for that boy instead, he said. Then Carter told the Warriors Hughes had played her final game. He instructed Hughes to lead a cheer.

Hughes raised her arm toward the ceiling, and the Warriors surrounded her with their fists and helmets in the air.

“Warrior pride on three,” Hughes said. “One, two, three.”



Taylor Hughes embraces her teammates and cries at New Hope High School after the final volleyball game of her high school career on Aug. 30, 2018. Her teammates brought her balloons and flowers. (Photo: Courtesy Alisha Hughes)

The team yelled “Warrior pride,” then one-by-one, every player hugged Hughes.

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THE WARRIORS HELD practice on Labor Day. Hughes didn’t want to go. Alisha told her she should. She needed to return her shoulder pads.

Before practice began at 2 p.m., the team gathered in the JV locker room to receive awards from the last game. Carter announced Hughes as the special teams player of the game and presented her with a small plaque. Soon, the team filed out of the locker room and walked toward the field. Hughes moved in a different direction.

Hughes will undergo surgery in less than two weeks. She tried to watch a video of the surgery and turned it off after five minutes. Her skin crawled when she thought about lying face down on an operating table.

When the surgery ends, Hughes will spend about a week in the hospital. She will miss up to a month of school. Instead of kicking footballs, she will spend her days strengthening the muscles in her neck. She might be able to play sports again as soon as January. She plans to regain her strength in the spring.

In late June, Hughes committed to play soccer and football at Itawamba Community College. She said ICC wants her next fall despite the coming surgery. For now, she still dreams of playing football at Ole Miss.

“If it’s something she wants to do,” Alisha said, “I have no doubt in my mind she’ll do it.”

Hughes held her plaque, the final tangible memento of her high school football career. As the Warriors started practice, Hughes stepped into her car and drove away.

Her head still ached, but maybe it won’t for much longer.



Pontotoc head coach Jeff Carter congratulates Taylor Hughes after she kicked a touchback in her final high school football game on Aug. 31, 2018.

(Photo: Courtesy Alisha Hughes)

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Ramon Emanuel Serrano

(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Mark Dreibelbis

Phone: 919/240-7372

E-mail: mark@nchsaa.org

Street Address: P.O. 3216

City, State, Zip Code: Chapel Hill, NC 27515

Date: January 16, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: North Carolina High School Athletic Association

Title: Associate Commissioner

Signature: [Tab here]



Handwritten signature of Mark P. Dreibelbis in cursive script.



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Ramon has participated in the Football, Track & Field, and Basketball programs at Hoggard High School since his freshman year. He is currently a senior and played Football, is on the Basketball team, and will be a member of the Track & Field team this year.

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

Ramon is a senior at Hoggard High School. He has been a participant in Football, Basketball and Track & Field during his 4 years while maintaining a 3.3 weighted Grade Point Average. On July 2, 2016 Ramon was experiencing a severe migraine headache and was taken to the hospital and released. The next day, he woke up experiencing stroke-like symptoms. Ramon's parents rushed him to the emergency room. At that point, Ramon was placed in a medically induced coma for the following two (2) weeks. He had a probe placed in his cranial cavity to measure fluid and pressure on the brain, as well as being given spinal taps. Doctors could not identify the problem and placed him on various medications to try and treat the symptoms. These efforts were unsuccessful.

That day, the doctors met with Ramon's parents and informed them that Ramon would most likely not live through this health ordeal. Later that day, a prayer vigil was held at the family's church. When the prayer vigil was over and everyone was walking to their cars, they witnessed a double rainbow. Families contacted Ramon's parents saying that God had given them a sign that everything would be alright.

Later that day, the same day the doctors who spoke with his parents, they started to initiate additional treatment options. Recovery was long and hard. Ramon had to learn how to walk, write, feed himself, brush his teeth, etc. After sending test results to Dallas, Texas, it was discovered Ramon had a disease known as Eastern Equine Encephalitis. This disease affects only 5-6 people per year in the United States. Statistics show a person either passes away, becomes severely mentally handicapped, or develops into a vegetated state. Ramon is currently the only survivor from this condition to return to his same physical/mental state as he was before the onset and diagnosis of this disease.

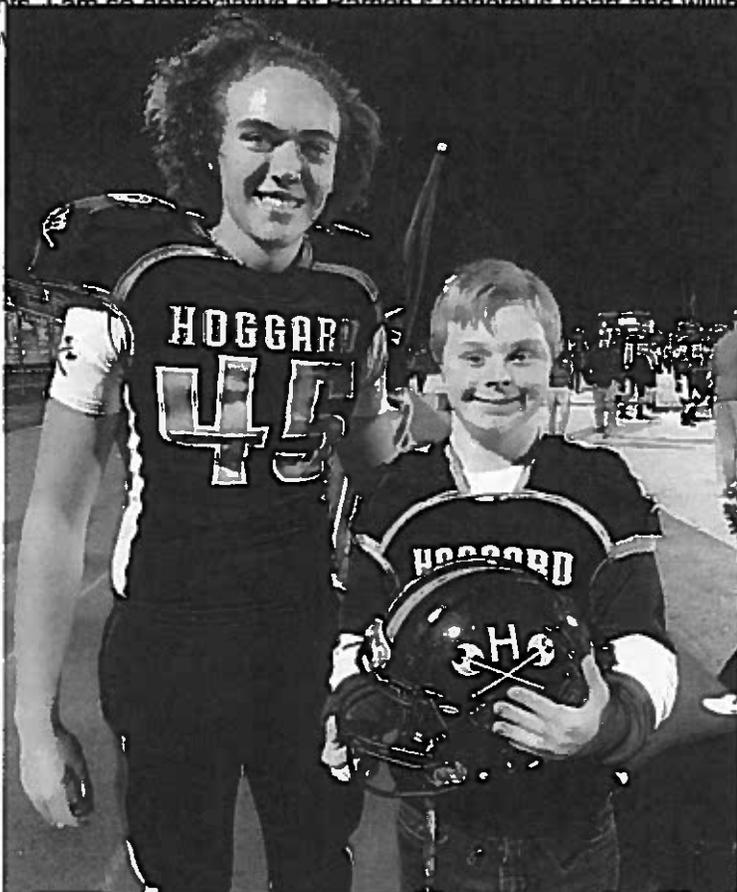
The doctors instructed Ramon to take a year or two away from sports (he did not participate during the 2016-17 academic year) to allow for recovery and the symptoms of extreme physical weakness. From that point forward, Ramon chose to live each day to its fullest. He is an advocate and active participant with the EC students at Hoggard High School, and he is often seen around campus being a buddy to students with disabilities. His spirit for sports and life in general is something from which we should all learn. He has been an absolute pleasure and leader to everyone at Hoggard HS, and the administration at the school can not think of a better student to recommend for the Spirit of Sport Award.

Recommendation from Tammy Pruden, EC Teacher:

Ramon Serrano has been a part of the EC Buddies United Club at Hoggard since its inception. Our club seeks to provide inclusion opportunities, friendship, and unified sports for our students with intellectual disabilities and their peers. Ramon approached me to inquire about the club and said his heart goes out to the students in my class because he knows how it feels to learn how to do basic, daily tasks. He told me his story of being in a coma 3 years ago and having to relearn all of his functional and daily living skills after coming out of his coma. That experience has helped him realize people's abilities as opposed to their challenges. Ramon decided to do his Senior Project with my students and has become friends with each of them. He regularly spends his lunchtime

socializing and playing basketball with them. Ramon is compassionate, patient, and kind. He has even encouraged his football teammates to join him in building relationships with our EC students. I am so appreciative of Ramon's generous heart and willingness to spend time to get to know, and aid, in the betterment of their social/academic experience at Hoggard High School.

our students. I am so appreciative of Ramon's generous heart and willingness to spend time to get to know





# Section 4

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Riley Estella Maher  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Matt Troha

Phone: 309-663-6377

E-mail: mtroha@ihsa.org

Street Address: 2715 McGraw Drive

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

Date: January 31, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Craig Anderson

Title: Executive Director

Signature: Craig Anderson



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Riley is currently a senior and involved in the following programs at O'Fallon HS:

- Girls Varsity Lacrosse team member.
- National Honor Society member.
- Vice-President of the National Honor Society.
- National Spanish Honor Society member.
- Spanish Club member.
- Rho Kappa History Honor Society member.
- Saturday Scholars member.

Riley is also involved in the community in the following programs:

- Teen Life Council Member at St. Louis Children's Hospital.
- St. Nicholas Youth Group.
- Luke 18 Leader.

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

Riley Maher's indomitable spirit was on display during her fight to not only overcome her bout with cancer, but to amazingly go from diagnosis to playing in a varsity high school lacrosse contest in less than six months.

Riley was your run-of-the-mill teen in October 2017, excelling academically at O'Fallon High School while working toward varsity playing time on the lacrosse team that spring. After a club lacrosse game in the fall, she felt a pain in her chest and assumed it was a bruise sustained in the contest. After the pain persisted, she went to the doctor, and was then sent to the hospital, where a softball sized mass was discovered in her chest. Riley and her family were shocked when she was diagnosed with B-Cell Lymphoma, especially given that she had not displayed any of the usual symptoms associated with the cancer.

An aggressive chemotherapy treatment regimen followed just two days after the diagnosis, with six rounds of chemo being administered between October 2017 and February 2018. Each 21-day cycle of treatment required a five-day hospital stay followed by 16 days of recovery at home.

A naturally bright student, Riley maintained straight A's despite the missed class time, and kept her connection with the lacrosse team through her twin sister, Adler, when she couldn't be there in person.

"There were times where I wondered if I was going to get to play again," said Riley. "I was really missing my team. Open gyms, tryouts, practices. I was there for as much of it as I could be. As I began feeling better and knew the treatment was working, I got brighter, and was excited to start working my way back."

Riley and her battle remained top-of-mind with her OHS teammates, while also giving new perspective to old traditions.

“Riley was still able to be around a lot which helped the girls, and when she wasn’t, Adler kept us updated on what was happening,” said O’Fallon High School Girls Lacrosse head coach Rob Garrison. “The team made the decision to wear green socks to every game (green is the cancer ribbon color for lymphoma). We have hosted a fundraiser game for St. Jude for many years, so that event also took on bigger and deeper meaning (over \$6,000 was raised). There were a lot of organic things to celebrate Riley, from selling special t-shirts to a boys vs. girls lacrosse fundraiser game. The girls really wanted to make the season about her.”

Amazingly, following a good PET scan on March 21, Riley immediately asked and was granted clearance to return to practicing with the lacrosse team. As she worked her way back into shape, she was stunned when the coaching staff gave her the opportunity to play in the second half of the Panthers 11-9 win over Marquette High School (Chesterfield, MO) on April 9, a mere six weeks after finishing chemo.

“It was a night game and I will never forget walking out on the field and looking up at the lights,” said Riley. “I thought to myself ‘I’m back.’ It was a really strong moment for me.”

Lacrosse debuted as an IHSA sport in the spring of 2018 and the Panther girls lacrosse team seemed to take on Riley’s endearing spirit in the postseason. Nearly all of the IHSA schools playing the sport are located in Chicagoland, while O’Fallon sits 17 miles from St. Louis, Missouri. O’Fallon won its postseason opener at home and then covered nearly 1500 miles on three trips to Chicagoland in seven days, winning two contests before falling to the eventual state champions in a Super-Sectional game that advanced the winner to the state semifinals.

“It was an amazing season for my lacrosse family and the community,” said Riley. “Everyone was so excited and I was honored to be a part of it. On and off the field, I got so much support from so many people I didn’t even know.”

Riley followed her IHSA Sectional title with an amazing community honor, as St. Louis Children’s Hospital asked her to join its Teen Advisory Council. As a part of that role, Riley meets and comforts fellow teens like herself who are fighting illnesses at the hospital, while also providing important feedback to hospital decisionmakers on care and comfort for patients.

“Giving back to a place that given so much to me is very special,” said Riley. “It’s a good feeling to be able to share experiences with teens going through the same feelings. I tell them to ‘stay positive and not give up.’ When you are sick, it can be overwhelming, but you have to surround yourself with supportive people and take it one day at a time.”

Coach Garrison believes that Riley’s story embodies the mission of education-based athletics.

“The reason I got into high school coaching was to teach kids to overcome adversity in sports and have that carry over into life,” said Garrison. “Riley is such an inspiration to our athletes. She showed us that there are things in life we cannot control, but that we can control how we react to them. She faced an obstacle head on and refused to be defeated.”

Riley will attend the University of Missouri next fall with plans to play club lacrosse while majoring in Psychology and minoring in Spanish.



# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Robert L. Baxter  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Chris Cuellar

Phone: 515-432-2011

E-mail: ccuellar@iahsaa.org

Street Address: PO Box 10

City, State, Zip Code: Boone, IA 50036

Date: January 23, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Iowa High School Athletic Association

Title: Chris Cuellar, Communications Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Robert L. Baxter  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: PO Box 2004  
*(street address)*

Sioux City, IA 51104  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 712-560-5441

E-mail: rbaxter@longlines.com

School (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Bob has been a registered official with the Iowa High School Athletic Association for 35 years, and a wrestling official for a total of 46 years. He was selected to the IHSAA Officials' Hall of Fame in 2018 and will be honored at the 2019 tournament in February.

Bob was a 1972 graduate of Bishop Heelan Catholic High School in Sioux City, and he still resides in Sioux City with his wife Maureen. He routinely is a highly-rated and annually recommended wrestling official across northwest and central Iowa.

He also officiates college wrestling and has been featured in the IHSAA's "Add One" campaign to help recruit and retain officials across the state.

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

On his drive down Interstate 29 to officiate in the Council Bluffs Wrestling Classic on December 8, 2018, Bob lost control of his Chevy Silverado as a front wheel and brake lines broke and became trapped under the truck as it skidded to a stop on the shoulder. Bob smelled burning and tried exiting the truck to examine the damage, but the door jammed because of the wheel issue. He managed to push his way out, saw no immediate issues, and got back in the truck to use his cell phone and figure out a solution for his wrecked pick-up. Suddenly, fire and smoke emerged from under the hood and smoke filled the cab with Bob still inside. The door was again jammed and his windows would not roll down. The 64-year-old resorted to grabbing a flashlight out of his truck console and hitting the window until it cracked. He climbed out and fell on to the concrete on the shoulder. Then his truck completely went up in flames.

Bob's wallet, phone, keys, and officiating gear were all lost in the truck fire. A passing car stopped to offer assistance to Bob and call emergency personnel. Bob was unharmed, but stunned at what had happened just 10 minutes north of his tournament. Firefighters and patrol cars arrived on the scene. Talking as his truck's flames were put out, the wrestling connections started to come through: Three of the firefighters had sons competing in the Council Bluffs Wrestling Classic, another firefighter was a former West Lyon High School standout and recalled Bob officiating his matches, and the assisting passerby was heading to the tournament, too.

That passerby ended up giving Bob a ride down to the MidAmerica Center, and they arrived around 10 a.m., just before the matches started. Word spread quickly around the locker room about what Bob just endured, and the other officials quickly assembled pants, a shirt, arm bands, and even a spare whistle. As quickly as he lost the equipment necessary to do his job, his colleagues had found replacements for him. He immediately ran out on the mat and officiated the full day of matches he had planned when he left Sioux City around 6 a.m. When Bob called Maureen to tell her of the incident during a break in matches, Sergeant Bluff-Luton coach Clint Koedam stepped up to offer a ride back north after the tournament to save Maureen the long trip.

"What happened to me along the way that day, it shows how many of us are really proud of wrestling, proud to say we wrestled in high school and college," Bob told the Sioux City Journal after the incident. "The wrestling family is so tight."

The sport's camaraderie and the bond it creates in Iowa immediately assisted Bob on a harrowing day, all without him asking for help. The humble Hall of Fame selection escaped a potentially fatal situation and went about his business for the benefit of the sport and its participants.

"Thank goodness I'm in shape," Bob said. "It all sank in when I was riding home on Saturday, just how serious it was.

"I guess I was really lucky."

TWO PHOTOS ATTACHED FOR REFERENCE:

1. Bob Baxter – Officiating
2. Bob Baxter – Truck Fire





# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Searra Inman  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Geoff Kimmerly

Phone: 517-332-5046

E-mail: geoff@mhsaa.com

Street Address: 1661 Ramblewood Drive

City, State, Zip Code: East Lansing, Michigan 48823

Date: 1/31/2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Geoff Kimmerly

Title: Media & Content Coordinator

Signature: Geoffrey Kimmerly

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

---

Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Searra Inman  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 1832 Pucker Street  
*(street address)*

Niles, Michigan, 49120  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 269-362-3346 (father Chris Inman)

E-mail: [cinman@brandywinebobcats.org](mailto:cinman@brandywinebobcats.org) (father Chris Inman)

School (if any): Niles Brandywine High School

City: Niles State: Michigan

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Searra Inman has wrestled and played soccer during her career at Niles Brandywine High School, which is tucked a few miles north of the Michigan/Indiana border and has an enrollment of roughly 360 students. She was preparing last summer to enter her senior year with 75 victories on the mat and two goals – to achieve 100 wins and earn a four-year varsity wrestling plaque.

Those goals became seemingly impossible to accomplish July 9, when Searra was involved in a motorcycle crash that left her with a displaced vertebral fracture that severed her spinal cord and resulted in her being paralyzed from the waist down.

Searra underwent surgical procedures at Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital. Surgeons in Indianapolis used her as a case study due to the fact that almost no one with such severe spinal cord injuries has reached the operating table alive. Her initial prognosis was that she would remain hospitalized into January 2019.

But on Sept. 14, she led her school's football team onto the field for its Week 4 game. On Dec. 9, during Brandywine's season wrestling opener, Inman locked her wheelchair, crawled in uniform to the circle on the wrestling mat and was awarded a forfeit win.

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

Obviously, this isn't a story about all-state honors or MHSAA championships. Her accomplishments have been learning a way to stand, returning to school and sports when she was supposed to still be hospitalized and inspiring many with her continued presence in the athletic arena.

She's ignited the spirit of her community – which has raised significant money to assist with her care. She's inspired her teammates, with whom she was able to enjoy one more season. She's impacted officials who have worked her team's matches – in fact, an official was the first to contact us at the MHSAA about this incredible story. She's impacted opposing teams that have shown amazing sportsmanship in agreeing to allow Searra to win matches by forfeit when they do not have wrestlers to face her at her weight. At the start of this week, Searra had added 22 wins for a career total of 97 – so she's almost reached her on-mat milestone goal as well.

Following are links to some of the coverage of Searra's fight from our MHSAA *Second Half* website and also a pair of local TV stations:

"In her Fight, Inman Seeks to Provide Hope"

<https://secondhalf.mhsaa.com/All-News/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/7889/categoryId/50/In-Her-Fight-Inman-Seeks-to-Provide-Hope>

"Searra Strong: The remarkable return to wrestling"

<https://wwmt.com/sports/content/searra-strong-the-remarkable-return-to-wrestling>

"Brandywine wrestling celebrates Searra Inman on Senior Night"

<https://www.abc57.com/news/brandywine-wrestling-celebrates-searra-inman-on-senior-night>





# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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XX  Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Ashley Hope Stich  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 3525 88<sup>th</sup> Street  
*(street address)*

Kenosha, WI 53142  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 262-620-1916 (mom's phone)

E-mail: [kimsbp@yahoo.com](mailto:kimsbp@yahoo.com) (mom) - Ashley can't read yet, but is improving every day

School (if any): Kenosha Tremper High School

City: Kenosha State: WI

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Ashley Hope Stich

(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Stephanie Hauser

Phone: 715-344-8580 (work) 715-340-1428(work cell)

E-mail: shauser@wiaawi.org

Street Address: 5516 Vern Holmes Drive

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

Date: January 18, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA)

Title: Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINATION FORM

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

For the first two years of high school, Ashley played three Varsity sports: Golf, Basketball and Track & Field. Beginning with her junior year, after the strokes and brain surgeries, Ashley could not continue with basketball, but she continues her love of the game by serving as a volunteer coach with the middle school teams. She resumed her participation in track and field just four months following her surgeries (see attached photos) and golf in the following fall.

Varsity golf career:

Freshman year: 9-hole scoring average = 60

Sophomore Year: 9-hole scoring average = 54.8

Junior Year: 9-hole scoring average = 50

Senior Year (following surgeries): 9-hole scoring average = 51

Earned 4 Varsity letters

Medalist at Racine Park Invitational

WIAA Sectional Qualifier – Freshman, Junior and Senior year

All Kenosha-County – 2<sup>nd</sup> Team (Junior); 1<sup>st</sup> Team (Senior)

Wisconsin Golf Coaches Association Academic All-State – Sophomore, Junior and Senior

Even with all of Ashley's therapy sessions, she still finds time to participate in the following school activities:

Student Government – she volunteers to be the school mascot (see attached photos).

National Honor Society

Renaissance Club

Academic Letter – all four years of high school

Kenosha Bowman Archery Club – they volunteer time to help run archery shoots during the year (see attached photo)

Volunteer at a local nursing home – plays games and helps polish the nails on some of the ladies

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

Ashley did not feel well during the 2017 Fall golf season. Her family didn't realize just how "unwell" she felt. Ashley was soon diagnosed with Moyamoya a rare, progressive blood vessel (vascular) disorder in which the carotid artery in the skull becomes blocked or narrowed, reducing blood flow to the brain.

Ashley had a series of strokes and underwent brain surgery to increase the flow of blood to her brain in January 2018. She was in the hospital for about 8 weeks and returned to school in March 2018. Her ability to talk, count, and read were impacted by the strokes. Even though she was still recovering, she did attend school with a modified schedule and attended track practice on a limited basis. When school dismissed for the summer session, she began feeling better and got back to work on improving her golf game.

Her family states that sport has been the best thing for Ashley. They are amazed that with all the health challenges she has faced, along with occupational, physical and speech therapy, her golf

average only increased by 1 stroke from the season prior to her surgeries, and she returned as the #2 player on her Varsity golf team. This was achieved through a lot of practice and drive by this strong-willed young woman. She only missed one match that next fall, due to feeling ill. The WIAA did provide an accommodation for her by allowing her to use an electric golf cart throughout the season. Her mom, Kim, took a leave from her work which has allowed her to help with Ashley's recovery and to serve as an assistant golf coach and to drive the cart for Ashley. Ashley's golf coach, Nancy Bednarz-Phillips, told Ashley as she left the 18<sup>th</sup> green at the conclusion of her Senior season, "I am so proud to have been your golf coach this season and for the last four years. Her coach states that Ashley won all of our hearts on the golf team with her fortitude and drive and that she is a winner in every way. Furthermore, she says that coaching Ashley has been the highlight of her 34-year coaching career.

To recognize the leadership, dedication, loyalty and power to fight through obstacles, Kenosha Mayor, John Antaramian, declared July 1, 2018 as "Ashley Stich Day" (see attached photo).

To further detail Ashley's challenges and accomplishments, please review the attached Make A Wish article and photos.

Ashley Kenosis Archery Club

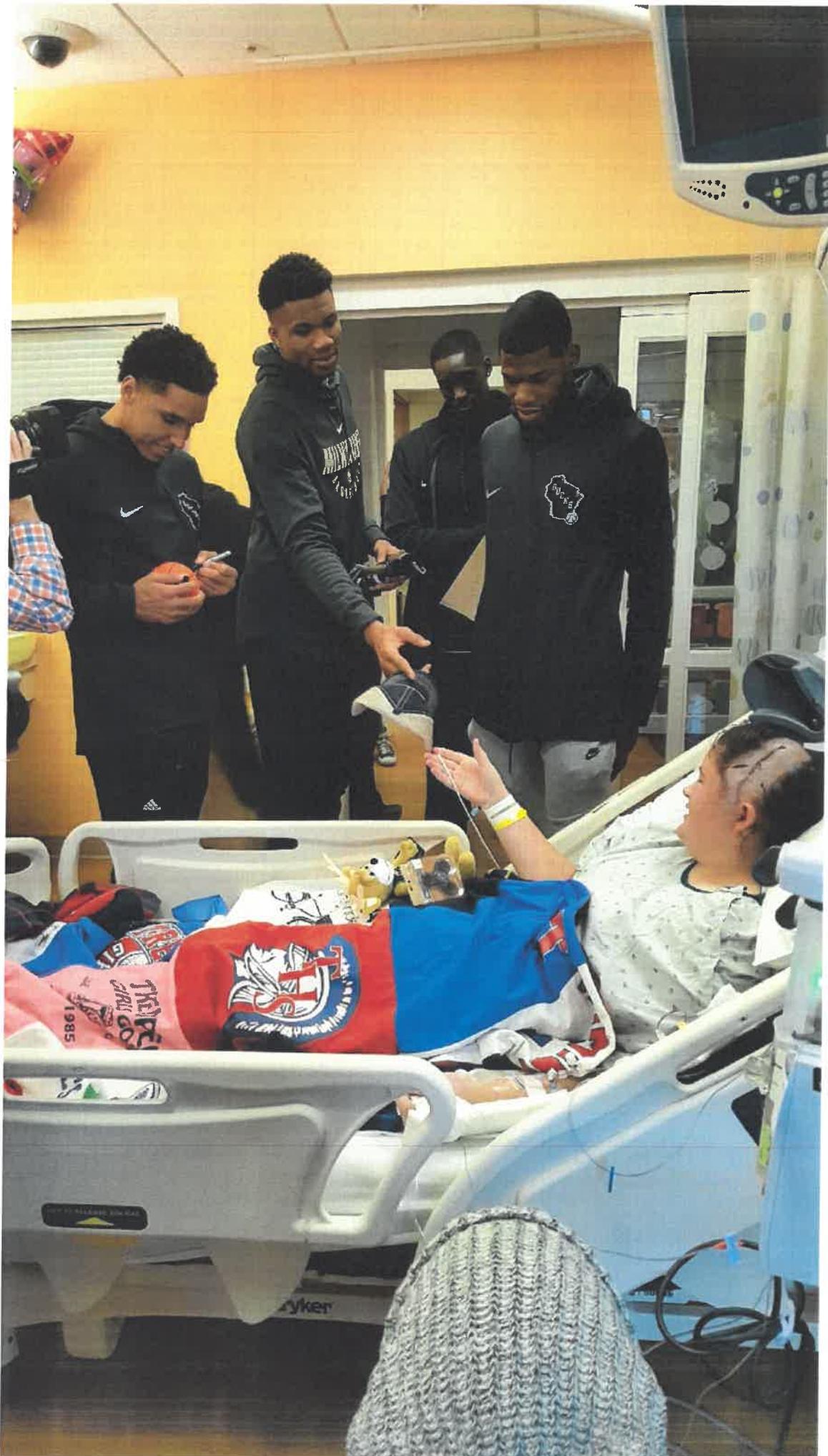




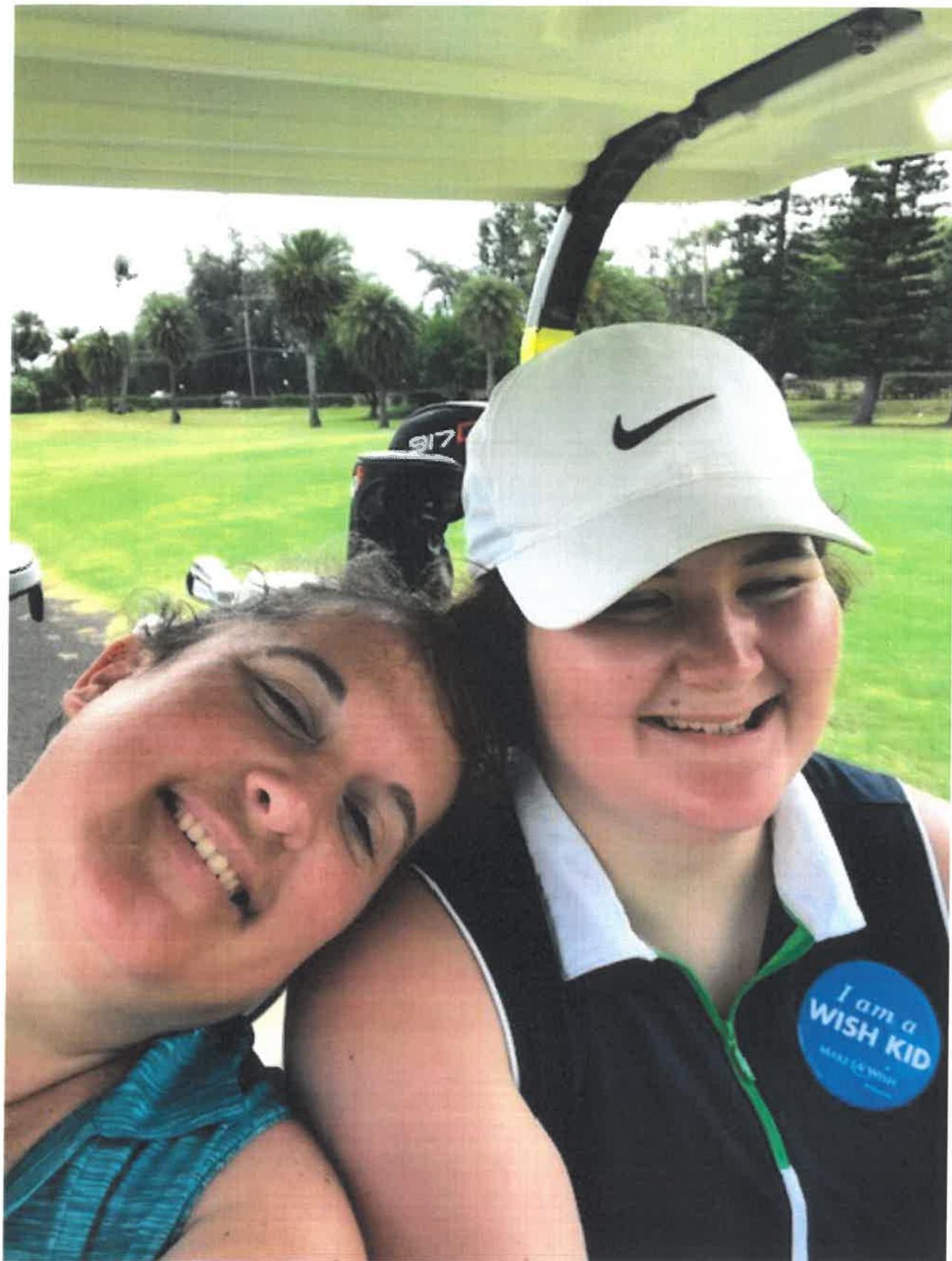
Ashley as school mascot

Ashley as School mascot

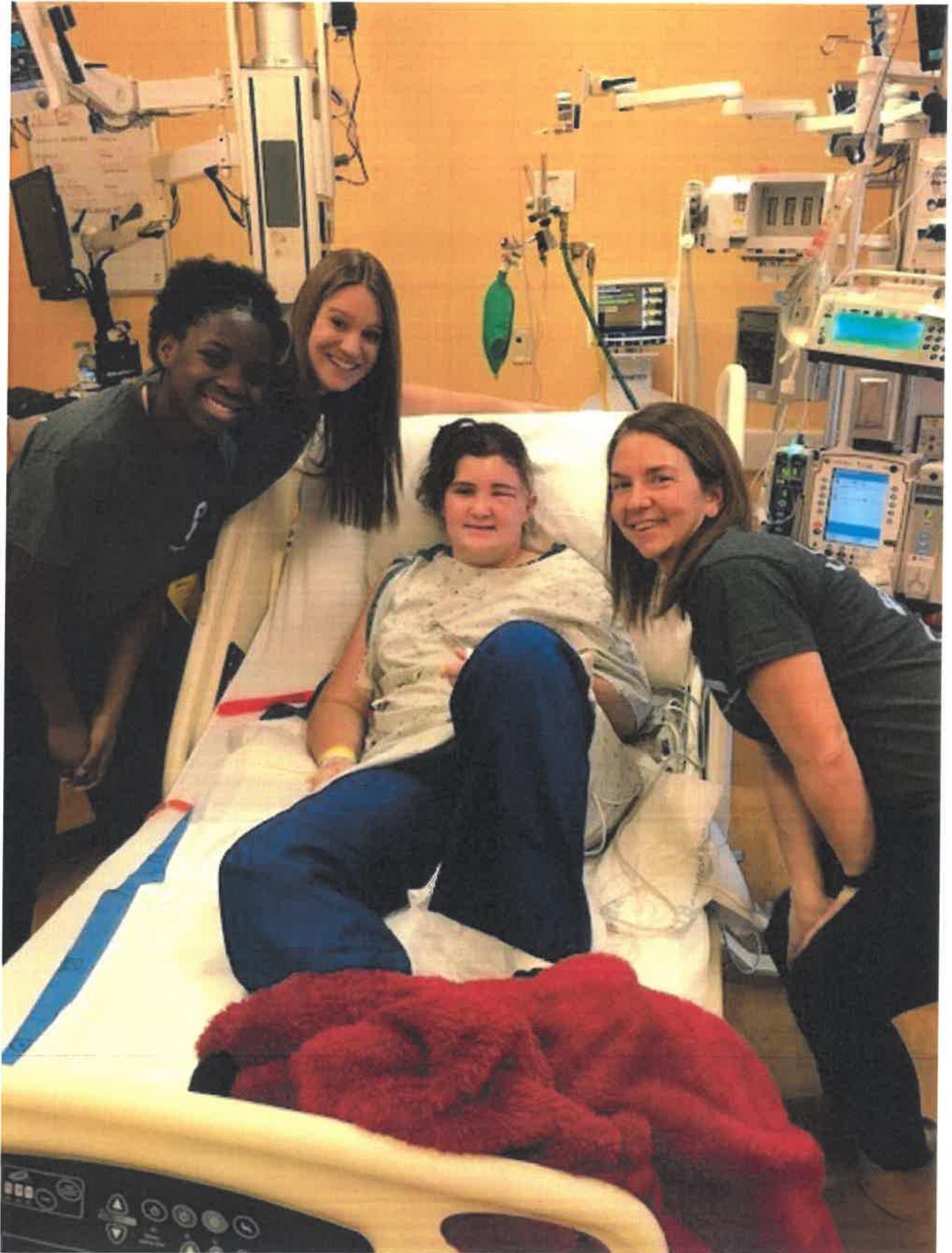




Ashley and Mom - Make A Wish trip  
golfing



Ashley post surgery visit from coaches and friends



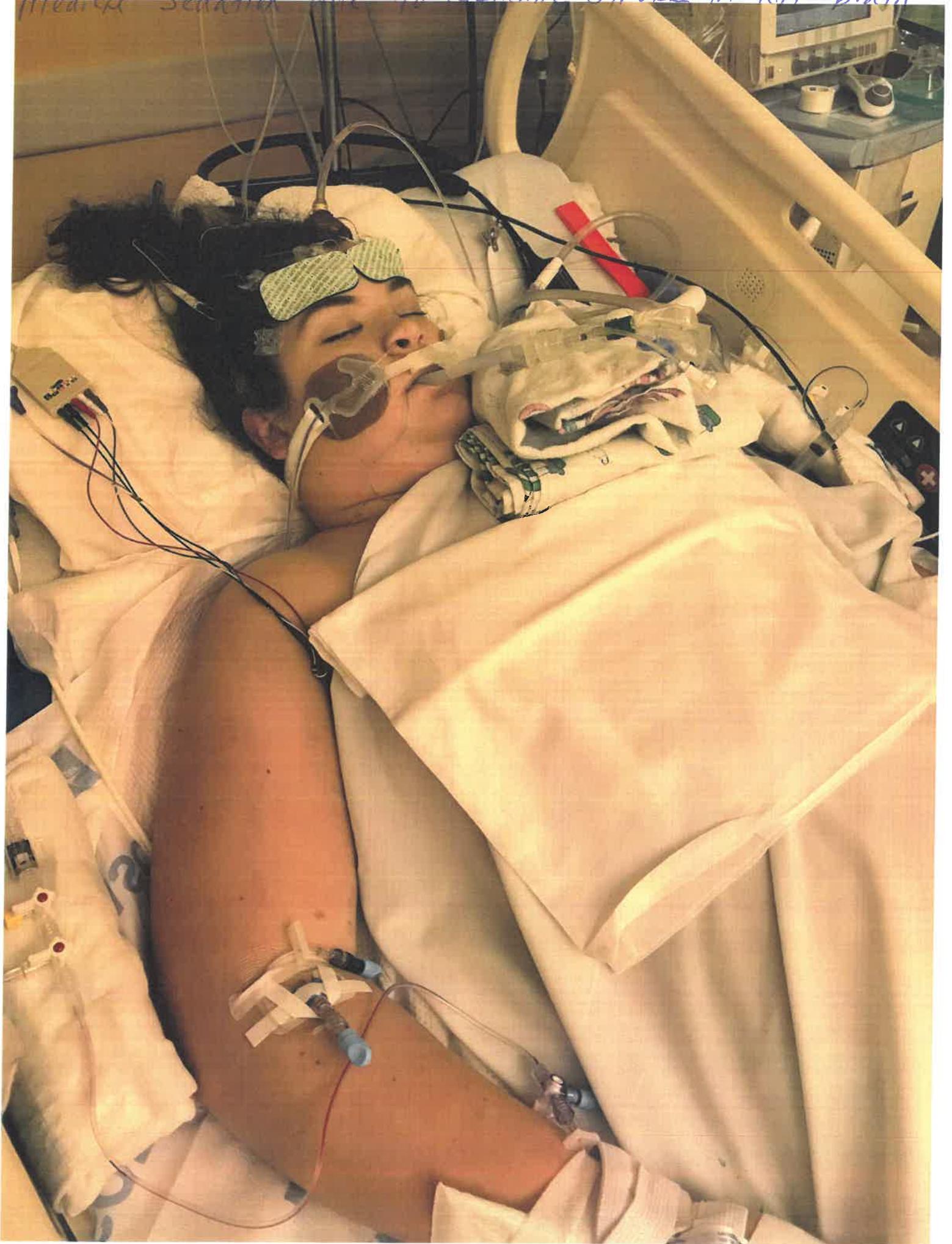
Ashley post-surgery with therapy dog



Admitted into hospital pre-surgery



Mediocr sensation due to ischemic stroke in left brain



Ashley - track + field season, 4 months  
post surgery



Ashley - track + field season, 4 months post surgery



Ashley post surgery



Ashley Surgery # 2



Ashley - Make A Wish trip, Hawaii



Ashley and family - Make A Wish trip, Hawaii!



# Ashley Stich Day Proclamation



## PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, **ASHLEY STICH** displays the power to fight through an obstacle alongside her battle with **Moyamoya**, a rare, progressive cerebrovascular disease; and

WHEREAS, **ASHLEY STICH** portrays leadership and dedication within her peer group as a star student and athlete; and

WHEREAS, **ASHLEY STICH** is immensely loyal and the love she has for her friends is one of a kind; and

WHEREAS, **ASHLEY STICH's** admiration, love and bond with Andrew is pure and unbreakable; and

WHEREAS, **ASHLEY STICH's** appreciation, love and support of her mother and father is endless and evermore.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, **JOHN M. ANTARAMIAN**, Mayor of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin, do hereby proclaim Sunday, July 1, 2018 as

### ASHLEY STICH DAY

in the City of Kenosha, and urge all citizens of Kenosha to acknowledge the dedication and commitment she has shown to her family and friends while she faces her health challenges with strength and courage.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City to be affixed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2018.

**JOHN M. ANTARAMIAN**  
Mayor



# Make-A-Wish sends student to Hawaii

BY BILL GUIDA  
bguida@kenoshanews.com

Three-sport Tremper High School athlete Ashley Stich celebrated a wish come true Thursday, thanks to Make-A-Wish Wisconsin and Jewelers for Children — a week in Hawaii.

Her welcome home Thursday afternoon at Gold Diamond & Design, 10320 75th St., included pizza, cake, cookies and other treats courtesy of husband and wife co-owner/gemologists John and Audrey Langenfeld.

Make-A-Wish held a send off party July 1 for the trip by Ashley, her parents, Joe and Kim Stich, and Ashley's younger brother, Andrew.

The family departed July 4, the day after Ashley turned 17, and arrived back July 11 from the Aloha State.

Ashley chose the Hawaii trip because she wanted everybody to be able to relax there together after all she'd been through with their love, caring and support.

There, they golfed, fished and enjoyed recreational activities. Among Ashley's favorites: the fire dance they attended and a luau.

"We didn't relax very much," Kim said, laughing with Ashley as they recounted the full schedule of events in the island paradise.

"It was sunny and

gorgeous every day except the day we went golfing."

Kim added, recalling how they got caught in a down-pour on the links. "When we hit the ninth hole, it just opened up."

In their Hawaii hotel and at the various activities, they regularly encountered other children and families there by courtesy of Make-A-Wish chapters from other states and Canada, Joe said.

## Rare disorder

Now about to enter her senior year at Tremper, Ashley underwent treatment and surgery late last year for a rare disorder known as "moya moya," which causes fibrous tissue to form in the carotid artery and hamper blood flow to the brain.

The condition caused Ashley to suffer a series of strokes that began last August and led to her diagnosis in October, Kim explained.

"On Dec. 1, I woke her to go to school, and she was talking but not making any sense. By the time we got to the emergency room, she couldn't talk at all," Kim said.

That led to Ashley undergoing revascularization brain surgery last December at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. The surgery aims to direct blood flow to the top of her brain, but it's success won't be determined until Ashley undergoes further

testing this December, according to Kim

Ashley returned to school in March but continues to receive therapy due to aphasia, which was induced by the strokes and impairs her ability to speak clearly.

Being granted her trip to Hawaii meant a lot to her and called to mind all those who came together to support her and make it happen, Ashley said.

## Make-A-Wish efforts

"Ashley's biggest thing was, at first, that she didn't deserve it," Kim said. "Jessica and Brianna helped her understand that, with all she went through she did deserve it.

She was referring to Jessica Hubrich and Brianna Hansen, both of Racine, who are Make-A-Wish volunteer advisers, who meet with Wish candidates and their families and report back to the organization.

They were on hand for the family's send-off and Thursday at Gold Diamond & Design to welcome Ashley back.

Hubrich, a stay-at-home mom with two toddlers, has been a volunteer adviser for 12 years. Hansen, who works for Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Metro Milwaukee, has been at it for two years.

"It is our favorite thing," Hansen said. "I talk about it all the time

to everybody."

Hubrich said the organization does all the behind-the-scenes work. "We're just kind of the happy Wish messengers," Hubrich said, smiling broadly.

Forrest Doolen, Make-A-Wish Wisconsin marketing and communications director, said Ashley was referred to them as a potential Wish recipient.

## Jewelers for Children

After confirming her medical diagnosis, learning about her treatment and having Ashley's doctors OK her for travel to Hawaii, the organization worked with Jewelers for Children, a national group, to make Ashley's wish come true.

As members of the association, the Langenfelds, who hadn't met Ashley or her family until Thursday's celebration at their shop, readily agreed to get involved after speaking with an Oconomowoc jeweler.

"He said he did it and would do it again. We said, 'That's enough for us,'" John Langenfeld said.

Audrey recalls her grandmother telling her, "We have so much love to give, you have to share it."

"And, if everybody did, the world would be a wonderful place," Audrey said.

# Section 5

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominees: Maddy Amsink & Julie Bachard – Cheney High School Cross Country Team  
(*first, middle, last*)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Greg Rosenhagen, Principal Cheney High School

Phone: (316) 542-3113

E-mail: grosenhagen@usd268.org

Street Address: 100 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street

City, State, Zip Code: Cheney, KS 67025

Date: 1-29-18

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Bill Faflick

Title: Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Students    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominees: Maddy Amsink & Julie Bachard – Girls Cross Country Team Members  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 100 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
(street address)

Cheney High School, Cheney, KS 67025  
(city, state, zip)

Phone: (316) 542-3113

E-mail: grosenhagen@usd268.org

School (if any): Cheney High School

City: Cheney State: Kansas



Maddy Amsink and Julie Bachard of the Cheney High School Girls Cross Country Team coming to the aid of a Holcomb High School runner, Julissa Rodriguez, during a KSHSAA 3A Regional Cross Country Meet.

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Maddy Amsink: Cross Country Team Member (1 year)  
Class of 2020 Volleyball Team Member (2 years)  
Basketball team member (1 year)  
Track Team Member (2 years):

- KSHSAA State Track & Field Championships: qualified 1 event as a Freshman
- KSHSAA State Track & Field Championships: qualified 3 events as a Sophomore  
Placed 5th in Class 3A High Jump as a Sophomore

Cheer Squad: 2 year member and 2-time Class 3A Champion  
National Honor Society (1 year)  
Vocal Music (3 years)

Maddy has a cumulative GPA of 3.60 and has been on the Honor Roll all five semesters of attendance at Cheney High School. She was also a member of the recently crowned Class 3A State Championship Cheer Squad. Maddy and her team defended their Class 3A State Title and have now won back-to-back State Championships in the first two years of the event's existence. As a sophomore, she placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the 3A State High Jump. It comes as no surprise that with Maddy's drive and determination, she has begun her CNA classes and can be foreseen dedicating her life to helping others.

Julie Bachard: Cross Country Team Member (1 year)  
Class of 2019 Track Team Member (1 year)

Julie moved into our district from the east coast and made an immediate impression on our staff. Julie has a cumulative GPA of 3.30 and has been on the Honor Roll all three semesters she has attended Cheney High School. As a result of her athletic involvement, Julie has aspirations to become a physical trainer. She has worked extremely hard on her physical conditioning and has plans to work at a local gym helping others reach their highest physical fitness potential. One can often find Julie in the evenings helping her mother clean the school.

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

At the KSHSAA 3A Regional Cross Country Meet at Lake Afton on October 20, 2018, a student athlete (Julissa Rodriguez) from Holcomb High School went down during the Class 3A girls' race. Cheney High School runners (Maddy Amsink and Julie Bachard) were close behind and stopped to assist the competitor. Maddy stayed with Julissa, while Julie went to go get help. After help arrived and Julissa was able to stand, the three girls linked arms for support and continued on the course all the way to the Holcomb team tent sacrificing their own individual opportunities to place as well as the opportunity to qualify for the 3A State Cross Country Championship Meet. Essentially, the Cheney girls put a competitor's needs before their own.

We appreciate the Regional Cross Country Manager (Tyler Fraizer) informing the KSHSAA about the actions of these two selfless athletes. It was Tyler that received a radio call that a girl was down at the far end of the course. Holcomb High School Principal (Jason Johnson) verified the following week that the girl began "not feeling well" and "blacked out". When she regained consciousness, the Cheney athletes were kneeled down beside her administering care.

The principals of the two respective schools spoke on the phone and Mr. Johnson indicated he would like to send t-shirts with #HornsUp (Horns is the Holcomb High School Mascot.) for the girls commemorating them for their character. We are very proud of them and not surprised at their action. Empathy is one of

the five core values at Cheney High School, and we were glad they were able to demonstrate empathy that day.

**NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is  
February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominees: Ty Koehn and Jack Kocon \_\_\_\_\_  
(first, middle, last)

***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: John Millea \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: 612-834-5528 (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: jmillea@mshsl.org \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: MSHSL, 2100 Freeway Blvd \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date: Jan. 23, 2018 \_\_\_\_\_

***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: John Millea \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Media Specialist \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: John Millea \_\_\_\_\_

## **NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET**

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**STUDENTS**    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer  
 Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify  
\_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominees: \_\_\_\_\_ Ty Koehn and Jack Kocon \_\_\_\_\_  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_  
*(street address)*

[Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

School (if any): Mounds View High School, Totino-Grace High School

City: Arden Hills, Fridley      State: Minnesota

## **NOMINATION FORM**

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

Ty Koehn, a 2018 graduate of Mounds View High School in Arden Hills, Minnesota, was a member of the Mustangs baseball and football teams. He was a captain of the football team and an all-conference player. He was an Honor Roll student with a grade-point average of 3.7 and is now a freshman at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he is a member of the baseball team.

Jack Kocon, a 2018 graduate of Totino-Grace High School in Fridley, Minnesota, was a member of the Eagles baseball team, was a manager for the girls hockey team, and was involved in DECA and the National Honor Society. He is currently a freshman at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis.

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

It was "The Hug Seen 'Round The World."

When two baseball players from opposing teams, a pitcher and a batter, embraced after one struck out the other to end a win-or-go-home postseason game, the scene became national news. And their simple hug and words of love makes these two young men Minnesota's entry for the 2019 NFHS Spirit of Sport Award.

Ty Koehn and Jack Kocon, 2018 high school graduates who attended different schools and played on different varsity baseball teams, clearly demonstrated exemplary sportsmanship and/or citizenship in playing the game as it should be played during the 2018 Minnesota State High School League postseason playoffs. Their act of friendship and love earned the

duo many national accolades, including an ESPY Award, and provided inspiration to countless others, including professional athletes.

But they didn't really care about all the publicity they received. The most important thing to them was their long friendship, which began when they were 8 years old.

In a June 6 section championship game – with the winner becoming one of eight teams to advance to the Class 4A state tournament -- Ty was on the mound for Mounds View High School; he needed one final out to secure a 4-0 victory and trip to state. Jack was at the plate for Totino-Grace; he needed a hit or a walk to keep his team's season alive.

Earlier in the section tournament, Jack had driven in the winning run with a hit in the bottom of the 13th inning. So he was prepared for the moment when he stepped to the plate against his friend Ty.

Mounds View is a public school and Totino-Grace is a Catholic school; they are little more than three miles apart in the suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Ty and Jack had been teammates for years in youth baseball until their high school careers took them to different schools and different teams. But their friendship never wavered.

"We are very close friends," Koehn said. "We were on the same Little League team. It was tough when we went to separate schools, but we kept in touch."

With two strikes on Jack, Ty wound up and fired the ball across the plate for a called third strike that secured Mounds View's trip to state and ended Totino-Grace's season. That's when something magical happened, something that was captured on video and seen around the nation.

Ty's teammates on the field and the bench raced toward him as the wild celebration began. But Ty sidestepped around them and went straight to his buddy Jack, who was standing all alone at home plate. Ty wrapped his arms around Jack and told him he loved him. This wasn't something that was planned; it sprang directly from their friendship.

"I didn't think. I just ran over there, instinct," Ty said. "It felt like the right thing to do."

He said he told his friend, “You had a great season, you’re a great player and don’t let this situation, don’t let this outcome affect our friendship. And I told him I loved him and he’s my brother and our friendship will always last longer than this silly game and its silly outcome.”

Video of their embrace quickly spread, with media organizations including NBC Nightly News, ESPN and Sports Illustrated highlighting how the game’s outcome took a back seat to friendship. Koehn’s gesture was not lost on his coach, Mark Downey.

“Whether this happened or not, I’d tell you Ty’s a high-character kid, a wonderful human being,” said Downey. “He’s a tremendous competitor, but as you saw on the video, he understands there is a bigger picture and friendship really mattered to him.”

Ty and Jack were thrilled with one hometown opportunity: Throwing out dual first pitches at a Minnesota Twins game. They also were guests on ABC’s “Good Morning America,” interviewed in a New York City studio by host Robin Roberts. In a surprise moment, Green Bay Packers wide receiver Randall Cobb informed the boys via video that they were recipients of an ESPY award.

Cobb told them, “This is Randall Cobb from the Green Bay Packers. I just wanted to tell you that both myself and my teammates take inspiration from the kind of sportsmanship you demonstrated at that game. I’m excited to also let you know that ESPN has selected you to be a recipient of an honorary ESPY award. Thank you for being a great example for all of us.”

The boys were inundated with other media requests but turned most of them down. As Mike Smith, athletic director and baseball coach at Totino-Grace said, “They are both really good kids who got ‘caught’ doing something that really displays what we hope every high school athlete would learn along the way.”

Jack said, “I was just thinking in 20 years I’m not going to remember the score of that game. But I’m going to remember (Ty) coming up to me after that and just kind of being there for me when I needed someone.”

Video links...

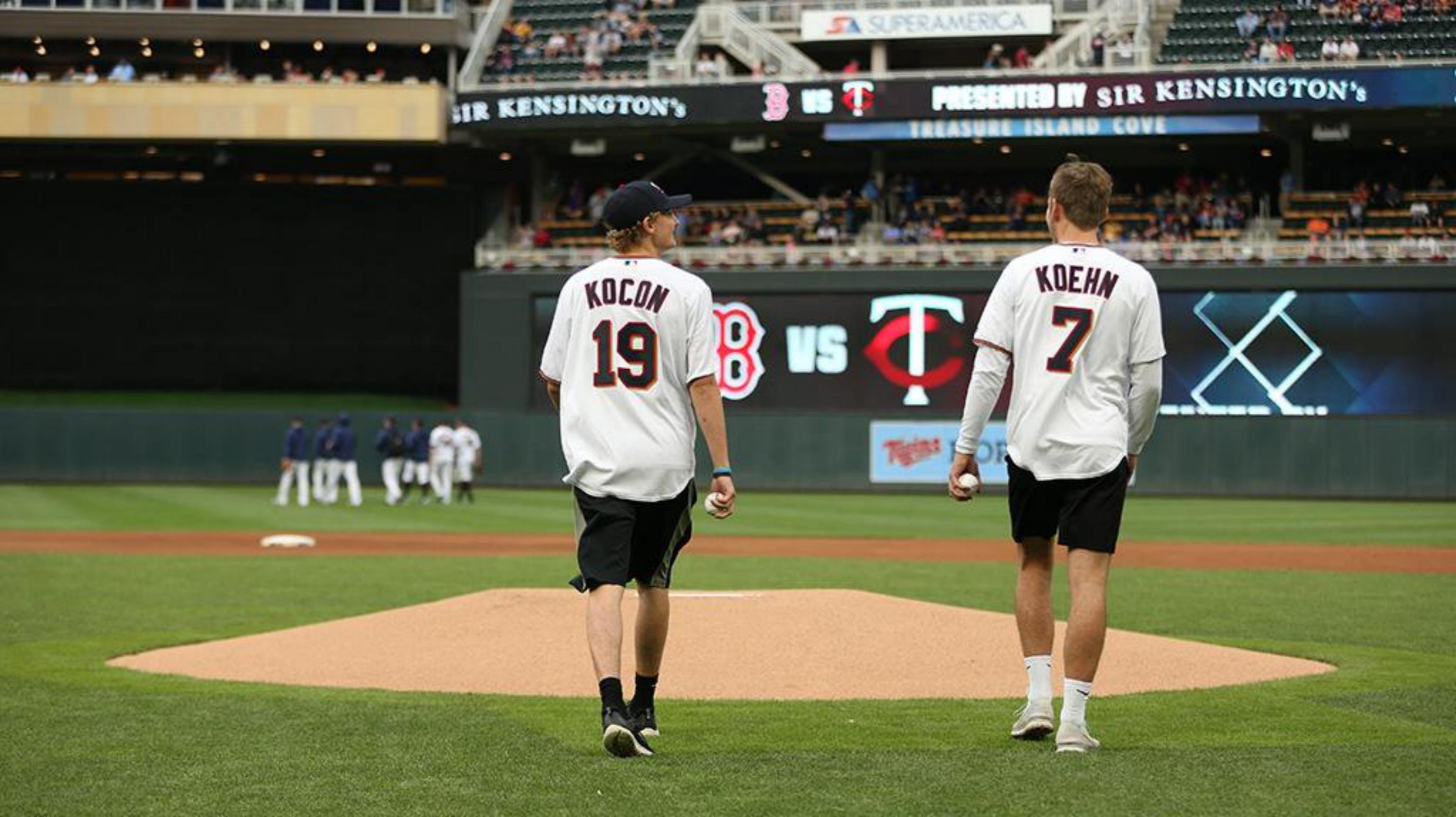
<https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2018/06/11/baseball-friends-embrace/>

<https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-lifestyle/mounds-view-pitcher-totino-grace-batter-who-went-viral-were-on-good-morning-america>

Four (4) photos are attached.







SUPERAMERICA

SIR KENSINGTON'S

B vs T

PRESENTED BY SIR KENSINGTON'S

TREASURE ISLAND COVE

KOCOU  
19

B

vs

T

KOEHN  
7

X



PRESENTED BY SIR KENSINGTON'S



PRESENTED BY SIR KE

TREASURE ISLAND COVE



Twins HOPE WEEK

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: **Collin James Brauer**

***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: **Donna K. Wiedeburg**\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: **308-249-0836**\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: **donna.wiedeburg@raidermail.org**\_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: **2004 Maple Street**\_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: **Sidney, Nebraska 69162**\_\_\_\_\_

Date: **1.18.19**\_\_\_\_\_

***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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**Student**    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: **Collin James Brauer**

Current Address: **1328 Maple Street**

(city, state, zip) **Sidney, Nebraska 69162**

Phone: **308-250-0105**

E-mail: **collin.brauer234@gmail.com**

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

City: **Sidney**

State: **Nebraska**

## NOMINATION FORM

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

Collin is a 4 year Cross Country and Track member and I am nominating him specific to his XC team information because that is what I coach him in. This past season he was our boys team captain and was voted (almost unanimously) by his peers. The past 3 seasons he was a leader without a title of "team captain" and this year he officially took that role on. He is a 4 time State qualifier and a 2 time State medalist. He has also been one of our leaders for our service project called "Helping Hands for Hometown Heroes" where our cross country team worked service projects for Veterans and/or their surviving spouses all summer. Collin was also selected to be on the Nebraska Coaches Association 2018 All-State Boys' Cross Country Team. In addition, he led his team this past season to win the first State Championship in Sidney High School history.

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

Collin was injured last track season and entered his senior cross country season a little timid about his abilities. During track last year, he had a Hip Flexor injury. The doctors attributed it to overuse. Something no runner ever wants to hear. After seeing physical therapy, chiropractors, doctors, specialists, and having X-rays, dry needling and allowing himself time to heal, time turned track season into summer conditioning for XC. Taking time off from being in shape is hard and often time kids come back and see people they used to beat, now running in front of them. That's a tough mental hurdle to get over; for anyone. I could see it taking a toll on Collin. He started out the season running a 19:25 (5K) at the Gering Invite and had no faith in himself; several times he was going to turn in his jersey and tell me he quit. As fate would have it, he could never find it clean when

that decision cemented into his thoughts. He continued to fall a bit mentally and physically and hit what we referred to as “*rock bottom*”. I told him the best thing about “*rock bottom*” is there is really nowhere to go but up!!

C

ollin was the team captain of our boys team. This group of young man were very tight this season and they were more like brothers than teammates. They all rallied around Collin and I could start to see glimpses of the “old Collin” coming back to us. At the Ogallala Invite, I knew he was back! He looked amazing and ran with heart and a strong purpose! He ran an incredible race that day and he never looked back the rest of the season. He continued to work hard, and I will tell you, I have only met one other athlete with his work ethic. It’s not often you get a kid with his determination.

Collin has an amazing spirit and passion for this sport. He finished our season running a 16:22 at the C-4 Districts and was the District Champion. He was 5th at State and led his team to the first State Championship in our school’s history. The best part about it is we have near 90 kids out for XC in grades 7-12 and all of them saw where Collin started the season and all of them saw how it ended for him ... I heard an 8th grade boy say “I want to be like Collin when I am in high school, I never want to give up and I want to lead a team to State!” The kids saw his progression and they saw that HARD WORK DOES PAY OFF. His spirit, passion, and love for this sport is an inspiration to everyone here. He has battled through injury that completely wrecked his previous season as well as his confidence and turned it around into a huge success story. I know I will be talking about his season for years to come and using him as an example of why you should never quit!

Before this cross country season began, we talked about what had been his dream for many years, to run at college and he said “no one would want him with the way he was running” and I told him to keep the faith. Before this season ended, he had a few offers to choose from and good news is, in the fall, he will be living his dream and running XC and Track at Black Hills State University!

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you need more information.  
Thank you for your time!

# **COLLIN BRAUER**

1328 Maple Street  
Sidney, Nebraska 69162  
(308)-250-0105  
[collin.brauer234@gmail.com](mailto:collin.brauer234@gmail.com)

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## **Education**

- Sidney High School, Sidney, NE
- GPA 3.2 / Ranked 35 of 104 / ACT = 26
- Sidney High School A/B Honor Roll (9, 10)
- **Honors Course of Study**
  - Sociology
  - Psychology
  - Spanish 2
  - American Literature and Composition
  - American Literature and Creative Writing
  - Chemistry 1
  - Algebra 2
  - College Algebra
  - Physics
- **Dual Credit Classes**
  - Personal Finance
  - Body Structures

## **Honors and Awards**

- **Cross Country**
  - All District Team (10, 11, 12)
  - All Conference Team (10, 11, 12)
  - State Qualifier (9, 10, 11,12)
  - District Medalist (10, 11, 12)
  - District Champion (12)
  - Western Conference Champion (11)
  - State Medalist (11, 12)
  - State Champion Team (12)
  - Nebraska Coaches Association - All-State Team (12)
  - Sun Telegraph: Athlete of the Week (2017, Sep 2018 and Oct 2018)
- **Track**
  - All Conference Team (9, 10, 11)
  - District Medalist (9, 10)

## **High School Activities**

- Varsity Cross Country (9, 10, 11, 12)
  - Team Captain (12)
- Varsity Track (9, 10, 11)
- Wrestling (10)
- FCA (9, 10, 11, 12)
- Cross Country (9, 10, 11, 12)
- Track (9, 10, 11, 12)
- Sidney Youth Group (9, 10, 11, 12)
- S Club (9, 10, 11, 12)

## **Community Service/Volunteer Activities**

- Ronald McDonald House - Youth Group (5 hours)
- Youth Group Yard Work for Elderly (2 hours)
- Thanksgiving Soup kitchen (2 hours)
- Mentoring Program through Sidney Cross Country (200 hours)
- Night of Hope (2 hours)
- Vowers Family Spaghetti Banquet (1 hour)
- Western Conference Junior High Track Meet (Timer) (6 hours)
- Challenge Conference (2016, 2018) (5 hours)
- Helping Hands for Hometown Heroes (2018) (20 hours)

## **Work Experience**

- Dairy Queen
  - Various lawn mowing jobs
  - Farmhand (current occupation)
-

**Sidney High School  
1100 19th Avenue  
Sidney, NE 69162**



**308-254-5893**

**Mike Brockhaus, Activities Director**

**Chris Arent, Principal**

**FAX (308)254-5992**

**Paul Newland, Assistant Principal**

1100 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Sidney, NE 69162  
January 25, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to recommend Collin Brauer, a senior at Sidney High School in Sidney, NE, for your scholarship. As a high school English teacher at Sidney High School, I have had the pleasure of having Collin in my classroom. He is an excellent, involved, and high achieving student. His advanced organizational skills and extreme attention to detail set him apart from his peers. In addition, he seeks out challenging course work, always making the best of his opportunities to maximize his high school educational experiences. He is well spoken and mature beyond his years, both of which contribute to his record as an exemplary student. I believe that the strong academic foundation he has laid has fully prepared him for college level work. More than that, I expect him to excel in the challenging academic environment of post-secondary education.

Collin is very involved in our high school community. He is a dedicated member of our athletic department, representing our school as a member of both the varsity cross country and track teams. He is also a Nebraska State Cross Country and Track Meet qualifier, and was the senior captain of the 2019 Class C State Champion Boys Cross Country team. Collin was also named to the 2018 All State Cross Country team. His dedication to excellence is not limited to the field of play, however, as he is member of our Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter and S Club. Collin is also very involved in the community service arm of the cross country team, Helping Hands for Hometown Heros. In short, he is a very high achieving, well liked member of our student body.

Finally, Collin is truly a good person. Aside from my educational association with him, I have known him and his family for many years. Alongside his many academic and athletic achievements, he is a dedicated member of his church youth group. Collin serves as a positive member of our school community and a great example for our underclassmen. He is a joy to work with and be around, and he will be a great asset to any college campus. I am honored to have the opportunity to recommend him.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tanya Lewis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Tanya Lewis

“Empowering students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to become productive citizens.”



**Sidney High School**  
**1100 19th Street**  
**Sidney, NE 69162**

**308-254-5893**

**Chris Arent, Principal**  
**Mike Brockhaus, Activities Director**

**FAX (308) 254-5992**

January 23, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter of recommendation in support of Collin Brauer. This young man has many characteristics that make him an outstanding applicant for this scholarship. He is a hard worker, a leader among his peers, and an all-around exceptional young man. Collin is one of those athletes that coaches pray to find. He knows who he is and where he is going and doesn't lose focus of his goals, no matter what obstacles are in his path.

I am confident Collin will welcome the challenge of college life. I have been fortunate enough to be one of his cross country coaches for the past 4 years. He will leave quite a void on our team when he graduates. He has been an exceptional leader to the boys' varsity team since he was a freshman. He is one of our top runners and he is always good about supporting his teammates, no matter whether they are faster or slower than him. He has a unique way of making everyone feel as if they are the best asset to the team. It is a great quality to have in life – to be a strong leader as well as a solid team player. He demonstrates this quality in all aspects of his life; not only sports.

This past season Collin led his teammates to the first State Championship in school history. Winning the championship had been a goal of Collin's going into this season. I will never forget what he said the day after the team won State. We met for the "Welcome Home" ceremony and he said "well, how did you feel when you woke up this morning Coach?" and I said "I felt great! How about you?" I will never forget what he said ... "he said I felt the same as before we won. Nothing has changed!" It hit me that this was NOT his defining moment, it would have been for many people. He is just that way – set a goal, achieve the goal, then set a new one! It's a great perspective and one many young people don't have yet. Collin is a very humble young man. He doesn't want to be the center of attention and just wants to work hard for himself and not for rewards from others.

I can honestly say that his character sets him apart from many of his peers. He embraces life and welcomes challenges, is refreshingly honest, and is easy to be around. He is a dreamer and he has enough will power and determination to follow his dreams. I believe no matter where he goes in life – he will be successful. I recommend Collin Brauer without reservation or hesitation. He is one of the finest young men I have ever known. If you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact me!

Sincerely,

Donna K. Wiedenburg  
Sidney Public Schools Webmaster  
PowerSchool Administrator / Head Cross Country Coach  
(308) 249-0836

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Sheyenne High School Boys' Hockey team, Head Coach David Benson  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Mark Rerick, Director of Athletics, Grand Forks Public Schools

Phone: 701-787-4869

E-mail: mrerick230@mygfschools.org

Street Address: 2400 47<sup>th</sup> Ave S

City, State, Zip Code: Grand Forks, ND, 58201

Date: December 4, 2018

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: North Dakota High School Activities Association

Title: Assistant Director

Signature: Brenda Schell

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify Entire Team\_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Sheyenne High School Boys' Hockey team, Head Coach David Benson  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 800 40<sup>th</sup> Ave E  
*(street address)*

West Fargo, ND, 58078  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 701-356-2160

E-mail: richards@west-fargo.k12.nd.us

School (if any): Sheyenne High School

City: West Fargo State: ND

# NOMINATION FORM

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

N/A

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

Sheyenne High School was scheduled to play boys' hockey games in Grand Forks against Red River High School on a Thursday afternoon. Before going to the hockey arena to prepare for the contests, the Sheyenne team bus stopped at the front door of the house where one of the Red River hockey players lives. The Red River player's mother had passed away on Monday earlier that week after a lengthy battle with cancer, and Thursday's game would be the second time that week that the Red River athlete would choose to play in a hockey game. Upon arriving at the residence, the Sheyenne team greeted the Red River player at his front door offering him and his family their condolences and some flowers in memorial of his mother.

Instead of ignoring the situation and focusing on just the game that night and instead of simply addressing the Red River player at the rink, the Sheyenne hockey team under the leadership of head coach David Benson choose to disrupt their usual game night routine to go out of their way to visit a grieving opponent at home prior to competing against him. As we continue to seek ways to strengthen the importance of character in educational-based athletics, the importance of this action will likely stick with the young men on both teams for a long time.

<https://www.grandforksherald.com/sports/hockey/4536294-sheyenne-hockey-team-delivers-flowers-red-river-player-who-lost-his-mother>



Dec. 11, 2018

TO: Brenda Schell, Assistant Director NDHSAA

FR: Ross Richards, Activities Director

RE: Spirit of Sport Nomination

Brenda,

I am writing to offer support for the Spirit of Support Nomination by Mark Rerick for the Sheyenne Boys Hockey Team and Head Coach David Benson.

The act of kindness and caring exhibited by this group was undenounced to myself or any administration at Sheyenne High. It was truly a surprise to all of us when the story broke. It is something that we are very proud of but not something that we are looking to draw attention to publicly considering the circumstances.

The lessons learned by all through the team's gesture embody the idea of education-based athletics. Recognition of our team's thoughtfulness and humanity is deserved and would send a positive message to all.

I do believe the team and our coach are worthy of an honor such as the Spirit of Sport.

*Ross Richards*

**Activities Director**

**West Fargo Sheyenne HS**

800 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue East

West Fargo, ND 58078

(701) 356.2160 / 499.3220

[richards@west-fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:richards@west-fargo.k12.nd.us)



# Sheyenne hockey team delivers flowers to Red River player who lost his mother to cancer

By [Brad Elliott Schlossman](#) on Nov 30, 2018 at 1:24 p.m.



*The West Fargo Sheyenne bus outside of Tanner Bernhardson's house. Submitted photo*

Grand Forks Red River junior defenseman Tanner Bernhardson was preparing for his game against West Fargo Sheyenne on Thursday afternoon.

Bernhardson was ready to play with a heavy heart.

His mother, [Pam, died Monday after a two-and-a-half year battle with cancer.](#)

But while sitting at home Thursday afternoon, he got quite the surprise.

The West Fargo Sheyenne team bus pulled up at his house at about 4:30 p.m. Bernhardson's opponents for that night filed out of the bus carrying flowers and brought them to Tanner at the front door, offering condolences.

"Pretty incredible," Tanner's father, Duane, said. "We knew our hockey community was pretty strong. We met a lot of friends. We've been involved with hockey not only in Grand Forks but across the state. It's something we've enjoyed because of the people and stuff like this."

“It’s a surprise, but it’s not, you know?”

Duane was in the garage when the Mustangs showed up, and he didn’t even know what had happened until Tanner came and told him.

Tanner said the first two people he recognized walking up to the front door were Sheyenne head coach David Benson and junior defenseman Blaze Ackerland.

“When you look at being part of a team, you don’t realize how big that team is,” Duane said. “It means a lot.”

That wasn’t the only surprise they had Thursday.

While the Bernhardsons were at the rink watching Red River’s 8-0 win over West Fargo Sheyenne, a number of hockey moms that knew the Bernhardsons from their youth hockey days went to their house, cleaned it from top-to-bottom and made sure they were stocked up on everything for the next month.

When the family returned home at 9:30 p.m., they were blown away.

“The hockey community is the gift that keeps on giving,” Duane said.

Benson said there wasn’t much discussion among his staff or the team about the delivery.

“I think it’s just something you do,” Benson said. “It’s a good family. I’m a little hesitant to even talk to anybody about it. It’s not about us. It’s about the family.”

On Tuesday, a day after Pam’s death, Tanner played against East Grand Forks Senior High. Purpur Arena officials held a period of silence in her honor before the game.

Pam’s visitation is from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday with an 8 p.m. prayer service at Amundson Funeral Home in Grand Forks. Services are scheduled for 11 a.m. Saturday at Sharon Lutheran Church.

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Desiree Lyn Parmenter  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Jim Altenburg

Phone: Office: 605-743-9026

E-mail: Jim.Aaltenburg@k12.sd.us

Street Address: 1300 W. Willow St.

City, State, Zip Code: Harrisburg, SD 57032

Date: January 23, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: John Krogstrand

Title: Asst. Executive Director

Signature: /s/ John Krogstrand

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# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Desiree Lyn Parmenter  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 307 Jeannie Lane  
*(street address)*

Harrisburg, SD 57032  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: (951)-973-2912

E-mail: Desiree.Parmenter@k12.sd.us

School (if any): Harrisburg High School

City: Harrisburg State: South Dakota

# NOMINATION FORM

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

For this award, we are nominating Coach Desiree Parmenter and the Girls' High School Soccer team from Harrisburg High School in Harrisburg, S.D. Despite only having a sanctioned team within the SDHSAA for three years of Activities Association-organized play, Coach Parmenter was able to lead the program to the playoffs for the first time this year. The team was also selected as an "All-Academic Team" honoree for each of the past three years.

With that being said, it is not perhaps the on-field accomplishments for which we are nominating the team. Recently, Coach Parmenter and the Harrisburg Lady Tigers implemented a "Player of the Game" program, as detailed throughout this application and supporting documents. This action encompasses the exact ideals of the "Sprit of Sport" award as sought by the NFHS.

(SEE ATTACHMENTS)

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

Desiree (Dez) Parmenter has been the High School Girls Soccer Coach for Harrisburg High School for 3-years. She started with the district has as student-teacher and assistant girls soccer coach and transitioned into a head coach during her first-year of teaching special education within the district. Every year the team participates in a community service events along with a variety of team bonding experiences. This year the team served at: Harrisburg Food Pantry and Ronald McDonald House. In addition, the team participated in a new program created by the Harrisburg Girls Soccer Program called: "Player of the Game," this program recognized a player at each home game. The player of the game was unique by integrating students with disabilities and sharing their passion with both players and families. Each player received a customized jersey and soccer ball that that was signed by player. All players of the game participated in the walk out with the starting lineup and were announced with the players. The player's developed an additional purpose for playing each game. One of the most impactful moments for the team was honoring Brayden Mager and celebrating his life. Brayden was selected as a player of the game during his fight to receive a heart transplant. He contagious smile and passion for soccer was memorable. The team chose to play for Brayden in multiple away games and represented him through the symbol of Superman. The Harrisburg Girls Soccer Team will forever have an honorary game designated to Brayden and his family member. The player of the game positively impacted the growth and purpose of the Harrisburg Soccer Program and will continue in upcoming year. The purpose of the Player of the game was to provide all students with an opportunity to have a celebratory moment of being a player part of a team. The team will continue to be inspired by the gratitude that each player of the game brings.

(SEE ATTACHMENTS)

# SOUTH DAKOTA

## HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION



804 N. Euclid / PO Box 1217 - Pierre SD 57501  
Telephone: 605-224-9261 – Fax: 224-9262

Dr. Daniel Swartos  
Executive Director

***“During that moment, he was a seven year old boy, doing seven year old things. Not a boy that uses a gait-trainer to walk and a communication device to talk.”***

***“As a player, this program gave me a reason to play, and a greater love for the game.”***

***“For a lot of people, this season will pass on like any other sports season does, but for me, each and every one of those kids is what made this season unforgettable.”***

***“I hope I can do it again, because it made me feel important and happy.”***

***“Playing a sport you love is an amazing thing to do, but impacting others’ lives in the process is so influential.”***

Earlier this fall, our office became aware of an extraordinary program taking place within our state that truly exemplifies what we all feel to be the “Spirit of Sport.” Harrisburg High School Head Soccer Coach Desiree Parmenter had truly taken servant leadership to a new level with her program, through the implementation of a number of efforts. Specifically, these efforts included a number of community service projects throughout their local community and area, as well as the recognition of a “Player of the Game” prior to each varsity contest the Tigers hosted this fall. Coach Parmenter and her program went out of their way to involve youth from the Harrisburg community within their soccer program, with many of these honorees being those that are likely to never suit up for a varsity athletic activity.

On the top of this letter are four direct quotes from individuals affected by this program, showing the resonance that has occurred in one of our South Dakota communities. The first, from the father of seven-year old Grant, whose son is limited in his physical abilities. This special group of young women recognized Grant as their player of the game, allowing him to feel the love and inclusion we want for all of our children.

Second, one of Coach Parmenter’s own players found out at the beginning of the season that the team was going forward with a new “Player of the Game” initiative. After first thinking the idea was to simply recognize one of their own athletes with another award, she was floored as the program took hold in recognizing fellow students in the manner it did. She notes that her love for activities and athletics grew because of this initiative – again, what we would want for all of our participating kids.

Third, another athlete for the Harrisburg program coming into her senior season knew that it would be tough to hang her cleats up at the end of the year, after soccer had been such a big part of her life. In her own account, she notes that soccer was just the vehicle that allowed her to realize more about caring for others, especially those who might be less fortunate – creating a senior season that will be truly unforgettable, and not just because of the time on the field, but certainly more because of the efforts off of it.

Next, a note from one of the honorees, a young man by the name of Peter. Also with significant needs in his life that many will never be forced to face, Peter was so moved by his part in the “Player of the Game” recognition, he personally took a moment to write out to “Mrs P,” and signed the letter as “your friend.” Truly, special bonds and relationships were formed throughout the program, and those reaching out exponentially to bring all members of a community to feel the Spirit of Sport throughout Harrisburg.

Finally, again from one of Coach Parmenter’s players. This program shines through as our Spirit of Sport selection and nominee for this line and realization that several young women were able to realize throughout the Player of the Game program – realizing that being part of something bigger than yourself, and the impact that you can have on others can be so significant in even your high school years must be a cornerstone of our athletic programs.

While perhaps much of this went under the radar, a bond with a special young man, Brayden Mager, helped elevate the work even further. As one athlete tells the story:

***“One special player was a twelve year old named Brayden Mager. He was chosen to be the Player of the Game for our (Homecoming), but was not able to make it as he was traveling to Michigan for a heart transplant. His body simply was not strong enough. While we were waiting for his return, we learned that Brayden had a love for superheroes, especially Superman. At that moment, he became our superhero.”***

Brayden’s tough hand he had been dealt immediately opened the eyes of the players on the program. Four of the team captains were waiting to see him upon his return to South Dakota from this serious surgery (below).



***“When we got news that he was back, we were sitting on pins and needles waiting to meet him. When he got there, he and his family were overjoyed to see us. We had brought him several gifts all while keeping the Superman theme, as it was his absolute favorite thing. He was smiling and so joyful to be around. It was a humbling experience. To us, it was a new connection; we felt we had an instant bond with him.”***

While the interaction had a great impact on young Brayden and his family, similar thoughts resonated through the players in the Harrisburg HS program as well.

***“While talking with his parents, it really opened my eyes to what it was like, not only for their family, but for Brayden himself. Seeing how a twelve year old was battling something most people couldn’t imagine taught me that no excuse, no setback, or roadblock should stop me from pursuing my goals. It also made me realize just how much I take them for granted every day.”***

Sadly, not long after the recognitions, both on the field and in the hospital, Brayden passed away. The team focused even harder on their efforts not only on the field, but throughout the school year to date. Several individuals have commented on the improvement in climate & culture from within the district and the efforts to become more inclusive as a result of these small efforts, started by Coach Desiree Parmenter and her Lady Tigers.

In the following pages, please find more supplemental information on the work of the Lady Tigers, and don’t hesitate to contact our office for more information.

**It is with great pleasure that we submit Coach Desiree Parmenter and the Harrisburg Lady Tiger Soccer Program for the 2019 Spirit of Sport award!**

Respectfully submitted,

John Krogstrand  
Assistant Executive Director  
South Dakota High School Activities Association

**\*\*Letter to Coach Parmenter from Jackie Lefforge, parent of a Player-of-the-game honoree\*\***

As a parent of a blind child, it is important for me to keep my daughter physically active and involved. This isn't always an easy thing to do and that's exactly why I'm so thankful for the Harrisburg High School Girls Soccer Team. Last summer my daughter, Grace (10) was asked to participate in soccer with the High School girls along with other children with disabilities. Grace LOVED this experience. Usually when Grace has an activity or birthday party, I always stay to assist her. Not this time. This soccer team surrounded Grace and I knew right away that she was going to have fun and be safe. Grace felt "so cool" to be hanging out with these girls. Grace not only had a blast, but she learned some soccer basics. When I told Grace she was going to be a "Player of the Game" at an actual High School soccer game she smiled, cheered and flapped her arms in excitement. She felt special....but not special because she is different than others. She felt special because she was chosen by a group of girls that she admired. Grace had the chance to go out on the field as the crowd cheered. She was given a soccer ball, but not just any soccer ball. This ball was adapted just for her. It makes noise! It also has all of the girl's signatures on it. Grace and I played with that ball many times this summer. Now that it is winter, she has it proudly displayed on her book shelf. Thank you Harrisburg Girls Soccer Team. You made a difference in my daughter's life this summer. Her name is Grace Lefforge and she will always remember the experiences you gave her.

**GO #11**

**\*\*Letter to Coach Parmenter from Robyn Winge, parent of one of the Player-of-the-game honorees\*\***

Dear Mrs. Parmenter,

I am writing to tell you Thank you for showcasing Thomas as player of the game during our district's soccer season. This meant so much to Thomas and our family. Thomas had so much fun running out on the field with you and high fiving all of the players.

It is not every day that children with special needs are recognized in our community. These moments are huge milestones for the our kiddos. It gives them a chance to feel included within all peer levels in our community. I have noticed that when we are out in the community there are a lot of people who will say hello and/or high five Thomas . They have also made mention of seeing him at the soccer game. This has got to build his self-confidence SO much.

Thank you so much for giving Thomas the opportunity to be a part of a school sport activity.

**Robyn Winge**

**\*\*Letter to Coach Parmenter from Shane Hamilton, father of one of the Player of the game honorees\*\***

Grant (7 years-old) had the privilege of being an honorary player of the game for the Harrisburg Girls' Varsity Soccer Team this past fall. He had an absolute blast during this special occasion! He was given a signed Harrisburg Soccer jersey and soccer ball. He was introduced with all of the other soccer players at the center of the field, and had front row seats to watch the game with all of his family members. During that moment, he was a 7-year-old boy doing 7-year-old things. Not just a boy that uses a gait-trainer to walk and a communication device to talk. He was a boy all of his cousins were jealous of. While Grant is unable to speak verbally, his smile and laughter communicated how much fun he was having. That night he requested to sleep with his soccer ball, and he loves to wear his soccer jersey every chance he gets. Just this morning his face lit up when he saw he was getting to wear his soccer jersey to school. Grant is a soccer fan for life!

-Shane Hamilton

**\*\*Letter to Coach Parmenter from Peter, one of the Player of the Game honorees\*\***

Dear Mrs P,

Thank you for letting me be player of the game. I felt good when they called my name from the speakers. Getting to know all of the soccer players on the field, and letting me be a ball holder was awesome. I hope I can do it again because it made me feel important and happy.

Your friend,  
Peter P.

**\*\*Letter from Sami Farrell, HHS Tiger Soccer Player\*\***

As I reflect on the 2018 soccer season, it taught me there is more to life than the game of soccer. This year our coach introduced The Player of the Game program.

I think about the incredible lives that touched not only mine, but every girl on the team this past season. We were able to meet so many new faces. The enthusiasm we shared in meeting these children soon began to grow throughout our Tiger Community and the Sioux Falls area and allowed us to have confidence in a program that created a new identity for us. It changed our Harrisburg Girls Soccer program. It changed our lives. It has always been a goal of mine to inspire others, however, this season the young individuals I was honored to meet, inspired me.

The Player of the Game program was new to our team this year. It was pretty simple, our coach Dez would select a student from her program as a SPED teacher or another special education child from the community to honor at each home varsity game.

We made them each a jersey to wear with their name on the back, and gave them a ball that was signed by all of the players. Before each varsity game, they walked out onto the field with the team and had their names announced as well.

One special player was a twelve year old named Brayden Mager. He was chosen to be our Player of the Game for Tiger Bowl, one of the biggest games of the season. He was not able to make it to our game because he was traveling to Michigan to receive a heart transplant. It was devastating news to hear that he was not able to receive the transplant. His body simply was not strong enough. The decision was made to bring him back to Sioux Falls. Our coach set up a visit for the four varsity captains to meet him in the hospital when he returned to Sioux Falls. While we were waiting for his return, we learned that Brayden had a love for superheros, especially Superman. At that moment he became our Superhero.

When we got news that he was back, we were sitting on pins and needles waiting to meet him. When we got there, he and his family were overjoyed to see us. We had brought him several gifts all while keeping the Superman theme, as it was his absolute favorite thing. He was smiling and so joyful to be around. We took pictures with him and enjoyed each others company, if only for a short time. It was a humbling experience. To us it was a new connection. We felt we had an instant bond with him.

While talking with his parents, it really opened my eyes to what it was like, not only for their family, but for Brayden himself. Seeing how a twelve-year-old was battling something most people couldn't imagine taught me that no excuse, no setback, or roadblock should stop me from pursuing my goals. It also made me realize just how much I take them for granted every day.

A week later, we learned that Brayden had passed away. It was hard on our team, especially the four of us who went to visit him. In his memory before our next home game, our team let go of SuperMan balloons and had a moment of silence. We had not simply made a new connection, but an immediate and unbreakable bond. We continued the Player of the Game program throughout the season.

Toward the end of the year, we caught the attention of our local newspaper The Argus Leader. This was exciting for our team and something we had never imagined would happen. Our coach asked us, the four captains that visited Brayden, to be part of an interview that would be used for an article that they wanted to publish. In the interview, as we talked about the our team's experience with Brayden and the rest of the kids, it was very apparent to us the impact

that it had on all of us and that our community is something truly special. I will forever be grateful to have been involved in the Player of the Game program and to be a part of a community that continues represent something so much bigger than themselves.

Thank you,

Sami Farrell

**\*\*Letter from Emily Shields, HHS Tiger Soccer Player\*\***

Looking back on my experience with the Player of the Game program I recall nothing but happy, exciting memories. Being both on the team, and the older sister of Lily Shields (A Player of the Game) I have seen first-hand the joys this program can bring. As a player, this program gave me a reason to play, and a greater love for the game. The Harrisburg Girls Soccer team hasn't had the greatest luck the last few seasons; however, this last season my teammates and I have had a greater passion and purpose to play for. Seeing how passionate and excited these kids were stepping onto the field boosted the team's confidence and their fire. Talent, teamwork and endurance go a long way in soccer, but it is the last piece of the puzzle that is most important- your mental outlook. Stepping onto the field on fire for the kids we play for completed our puzzle and allowed our team to accomplish great things. Meeting these kids showed us how much soccer means to people, and why we started playing in the first place.

My younger sister Lily had the great opportunity to be a Player of the Game, and it was one of her greatest memories. We adopted my sister almost four years ago and she completed my family. Throughout the four years she has spent with us she has been on a rollercoaster of medical needs, and this program gave her a ray of sunshine during the storm. From the moment she found out she was going to play soccer with me she could not stop talking about it. Every day she would ask me, "How many sleeps until I get to play soccer with you?" The day she got her jersey she didn't want to take it off, and when she wasn't wearing it she laid it out at the end of her bed. The day of the game she could not stop smiling, and she told everyone she saw about her game. This program gave my sister one of the happiest days of her life and helped push our team to complete the last part of our puzzle and achieve greatness in honor of these amazing kids.

**\*\*Letter from Emma Malcom, HHS Tiger Soccer Player\*\***

Senior year, my last year of high school soccer. I couldn't wait to go out with a bang; making memories with my teammates, coaches, and community members. Every year, my team participates in multiple community service projects during the season, whether it be the food pantry, soccer camps, the Ronald McDonald house, etc. No matter the activity, we are always sure to be engaged with our community and give back with all the free time we have. Being a captain, I talked with my coaches on and off the field on a daily basis. Coach Dez, or head coach had an amazing idea of introducing player of the game for each home game. What is player of the game? Designated players who may not be capable or eligible to play the sport of soccer get the opportunity to be with the team during warm up, and watch the game alongside with the rest of the team. They are announced and walk out to half field with us. Before every game, during our pregame, the girls and coaches would sign a tigers jersey and ball for the player to wear out on the field. The excitement on these kids face gives our team a purpose; something and someone to play for. Not only did my team lead player of the game, but also a mini soccer scouts camp for the children who took part. These kids loved being with the team and playing ball with one another. The parents were so grateful for the opportunity for their children, and we were grateful to make it. Playing a sport you love is an amazing thing to do, but impacting others lives in the process is so influential. Community is great to do, no matter what it is. However, i truly believe that the player of the game was so unique to the lady tigers soccer team, and taking part in it was a new experience for all. I am so glad to have been a part of a team that made community serving projects as important as the game of soccer itself. I hope to hear that player of the game occurs for years to come on the lady tigers soccer team, and I hope athletes in future years cherish the experience as much as I and my team did.

**\*\*Letter from Jace Poelstra, HHS Tiger Soccer Player\*\***

At one of the first practices of the season, my coach pulled the team together and told us that we would all be participating in something that she called “Player of the Game.” Before she explained to us what this was, I believed that we were going to be nominating one person from the team after every game to be the “MVP” for that game. What we ended up doing was much more special.

The Player of the Game was an amazing way to see all of these kids and get to know all of them on a personal level like Dez does. She has the privilege of seeing these children almost everyday but even though I only saw them once, I felt like I connected with them through the love of soccer. One very special little boy that I connected with was Brayden Mager. I’m sure everyone knows the story of Brayden but going to see him in that hospital bed was something I could never have prepared for. Even with all of those wires and tubes connected to him, he always had a fighting spirit and brought joy to everyone who met him. Every single kid that I got to meet this year holds a special place in my heart because they made this year more special than I ever could have imagined.

Going into my senior year of high school soccer, I knew there would be a lot of lasts. A last first game, a last wave out to the parents, and a last time walking out with the girls who had become my family. Because of those lasts, I knew I would miss this season, but I never could’ve imagined I would miss it this much. The Player of the Game made this season amazing. For a lot of people, this season will pass on like any other sports season does, but for me, each and every one of those kids is what made this season unforgettable.



*Entire HHS tiger soccer team sporting Superman shirts in support of Brayden*





*Honoring Brayden at the Tiger Bowl, prior to his surgery in Michigan*



*Release of balloons in honor of Brayden after the final soccer game and his passing*



*HHS Lady Tigers with other select honorees from the 2018-19 Player of the Game program*

# Sports

# Heroes at heart



Corey Surikov and Grant Hamilton are named Players of the Game for the girls soccer Harrisburg vs Hurrion game Sept. 13, at Harrisburg. BRIANA SANCHEZ / ARGUS LEADER

## Harrisburg girls soccer team finds higher calling

**Brian Haenchen**  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Brayden Mager wasn't feeling well when Sami Farrell, Emma Malcom, Lily Petersen and Jace Poelstra came to visit him at Sanford Children's Hospital in early September.

But you wouldn't have known it that afternoon. The infectiously cheerful 12-year-old, who was awaiting a heart transplant at the time, was all smiles when the four captains of the Harrisburg soccer team entered the room. He proudly sported maroon pants in honor of his favorite team.

"We all went in thinking he might not be super willing to see us," said Poelstra, a senior defender for the Tigers. "But when we got there, he was extremely happy. He was just like, 'Oh my gosh. They're here!'"

Knowing his love for superheroes, the girls brought Brayden new toys and a hat – which he wore for the entire visit. He felt special that the "big girls" were taking time for him, Brayden's mother, Lyndsey Mager, said.

A week after the girls' visit, Brayden passed away.

See HARRISBURG, Page 3D



Brayden (middle) poses for a photo with (L-R) Lily Petersen, Emma Malcom, Sami Farrell and Jace Poelstra. SUBMITTED

## Jackrabbits escape Indiana State in overtime

**Matt Zimmer**  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
USA TODAY NETWORK

BROOKINGS – A week after suffering their first loss and losing the Dakota Marker, South Dakota State bounced back.

Well, sort of. The Jackrabbits escaped Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium with a 54-51 overtime win over Indiana State, but they blew an 18-point lead, allowed the Sycamores to drive 93 yards in barely over a minute to convert the game-tying field goal, and gave up 569 yards of offense to a team that was shut out last week and didn't win a game last season. Yes, the Sycamores are a better team than they were a year ago, but the alarmingly poor performance

See SDSU, Page 5D



SDSU's Isaac Wallace bursts through a hole during the second quarter of the Jackrabbits' matchup against the Sycamores Saturday evening at Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium in Brookings. JASON SALZMAN / FOR THE ARGUS LEADER

## USD holds off MSU with help from Coker's goal line stop

**Mick Garry**  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
USA TODAY NETWORK

VERMILLION – In a rousing attempt to entertain a Dakota Day crowd, the South Dakota football team maintained the suspense on Saturday much better than they maintained the lead.

But it doesn't matter if the right things happen at the right time, because the Coyotes cranked out several key plays in key situations in the fourth quarter in a wild 35-28 win over No. 24 Missouri State at a sold-out DakotaDome to move to 2-0 in the Missouri Valley Conference.

For all the back-and-forth on the scoreboard and on the field – the teams combined for 991 yards and five lead changes – it was a pair of rugged defensive plays inside the USD1 late in

the fourth quarter where for the first time all day, the contest made a permanent pivot.

A play after Cameron Tisdale and Jack Cochrane stopped quarterback Peyton Huslig for a 4-yard gain just short of the goal line, Alex Gray stuffed Donovan Daniels on third down. Then Alex Coker tackled Daniels two yards behind the line on an attempt to get around the right side on fourth down with 2:22 to play.

It didn't lock down the game – Missouri State got into USD territory again in the last minute – but the back-to-back stops were by a mile the most definitive moments. From the first quarter on, nothing that happened up to Coker's stop had lasting value.

"I'm so proud of our defense," said

See USD, Page 5D

## AVERA ORTHOPEDICS URGENT CARE



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**Avera**  
Orthopedics

# Lincoln claims third consecutive state tennis title

**Brian Haenchen**  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader  
USA TODAY NETWORK

With champions at four of six singles flights and in top-flight doubles, the Lincoln Patriots secured their third consecutive girls state tennis title Saturday afternoon in Rapid City.

Johana Brower (Flight 1), Ava Leonard (Flight 2), Brita Quello (Flight 4) and Avery Blackman (Flight 5) all took home singles titles for the Patriots, while Brower and Leonard teamed up to beat O'Gorman in No. 1 doubles play.

Lincoln entered the day in third place (unofficially), trailing O'Gorman by 28.5 points and Rapid City Stevens by 19.5 points. O'Gorman's Danielle Sebata was positioned to claim her fourth consecu-

tive state title at No. 1 singles, but she injured her knee while playing a ball at the net, according to Rapid City Journal reporter Geoff Preston. The senior standout attempted to continue playing, but was forced to retire, conceding the match to Brower.

Watertown's Abbi Cummings (Flight 3) and Rapid City Stevens' Erica Wing (Flight 6) were the other singles champions.

Full results were not available at deadline.

Check [ArgusLeader.com/Sports](http://ArgusLeader.com/Sports) and/or Monday's paper for my complete notebook, which will have more insight on the Patriots' comeback, as well as a look at the legacy of Danielle Sebata.

**Follow Brian Haenchen on Twitter at @Brian\_Haenchen.**



Lincoln's Brita Quello defeated Watertown's Mackenzie McClemons to win the state title in No. 4 singles on Saturday in Rapid City. SDPB



Kate Hamilton tells her son Grant Hamilton to wave to their family in the stands before the Harrisburg vs Hurrion game Thursday, Sept. 13, at Harrisburg. Grant Hamilton and Corey Surikov, back right, were named Players of the Game. BRIANA SANCHEZ / ARGUS LEADER

## Harrisburg

Continued from Page 1D

His final days were brightened by the support of Harrisburg's players and coach, who rallied around him and brought him closer to the game he loved.

"We got to see someone who we honored at one of our games who wasn't able to be there with us," Farrell said. "He has really inspired us this whole season."

Harrisburg coach Desiree Parmenter connected her team with Brayden as part of a season-long outreach that hits close to home, and the message is catching on.

"Dez is really focused on things outside of soccer, because we're not going to be playing soccer for all of our lives," Petersen said. "We're going to carry on the lessons that we've learned throughout our high school careers for the rest of our lives."

Inspired by her son Jaiden who has cerebral palsy, Parmenter introduced a "Players of the Game" program at the beginning of the season.

Understanding how significant it is for her son to be recognized, the coach organized the pregame ceremony as a way to give special needs students who are passionate about soccer an opportunity to experience the moment of walking onto the field before a game.

"My goal (in the classroom) is to know that they know that I believe in them," said Parmenter, a special education teacher at Horizon Elementary. "I apply it to coaching as well. If they have that one person who believes in them, then we can be successful at anything."

After networking with other special ed teachers, Parmenter decided they needed to spoil their Players of the Game. So in addition to joining the team on the field for pregame introductions and team huddle, the honorees also receive a jersey, a signed shirt and a soccer ball.

"I think we needed a visual representation of what was actually going to happen," Parmenter said. "It all came together when you saw the experience and got to see that kid's smile. That's when you went, 'Oh, this is going to be

awesome."

Parmenter wants her players to have an impact beyond the field.

Each season, the team tries to work in at least 3-4 volunteer experiences. This year, their volunteer work took them to the Harrisburg Food Pantry and the Ronald McDonald House. Both experiences brought the players closer together, but Parmenter recalled a particularly valuable life lesson from their time at the Ronald McDonald House.

The girls were trying to make Scotcheroots for the families after their visit, but realized they were short on an ingredient. It was by no means a dire situation, but Parmenter reminded the girls giving up wasn't an option. They had to get creative and figure something else out.

The solution? Chocolate peanut butter Rice Krispies balls.

"I'm here for these kids. I believe in them," Parmenter said. "I want to be that person who can inspire kids to do more... At the end of the day, the stats matter, but the impact of the kids and the culture is more important to me."

Though the wins-and-losses are secondary, the players' growth as individuals did translate to on-the-field success in 2018. Tuesday afternoon, No. 15 Harrisburg played in its first state tournament game in program history, falling to No. 2 Rapid City Stevens in the opening round of the Class AA playoffs.

The stats are slowly coming along for the Tigers, but what's most important and what they all take the most pride in is the impact they've had away from the pitch.

"It's not just the soccer portion we're working on," Malcom said. "We're trying to build the community as a whole."

It was through the Players of the Game program that the Tigers were introduced to Brayden.

Born with a chromosome abnormality that affected his heart, hearing, and learning abilities, he had become close friends with Jaiden. Though both boys were nonverbal, they'd formed a special relationship.

"They lit up when they were around each other," said Lyndsey of her son and Jaiden. "You could often find Brayden pushing Jaiden around and both boys would always have huge smiles on their faces. Jaiden was Brayden's ears



Members of the Harrisburg girls soccer team honor Brayden before their game against O'Gorman. SUBMITTED

and Brayden was Jaiden's legs."

Parmenter, who also got to know Brayden through Dakota Alliance Soccer Stars, was inspired by that connection.

"I knew we had to do something for him," said the coach, whose team decided to dedicate their entire season to Brayden.

Though unable to be there in person, he was honored at the team's Tiger Bowl game against O'Gorman. The Harrisburg players, all of whom had his name written on the inside of their wrists with a Superman logo, attached a cape to a jersey with his name on it.

Two days later, Farrell, Malcom, Petersen and Poelstra went to the Sanford Castle to meet their superhero.

"They had tears of joy in their eyes," Parmenter recalled. "Just hearing them speak, you can tell it really made a significant impact on them and at the end of the day, I want to make a slight impact on every kid. If I can say, 'Oh they remember that moment,' then I did my job for them."

For his memorial service, Brayden's family requested everyone wear either Disney or superhero attire as a way to honor his memory.

The soccer players happily obliged. "Seeing them wear super hero capes to his service was amazing," Lyndsey said. "I am sure he was smiling from above to see everyone dressed up."

**Follow Brian Haenchen on Twitter at @Brian\_Haenchen.**

**ARGUS LEADER (SIOUX FALLS, S.D. NEWSPAPER) VIDEOS, FEATURING  
THE PLAYER-OF-THE-GAME PROGRAM AND ALL THE WORK OF THE  
HARRISBURG TIGER SOCCER TEAM:**

ON PLAYER OF THE GAME PROGRAM:

[https://youtu.be/x9HKYPO\\_0NM](https://youtu.be/x9HKYPO_0NM)

ALSO, ON VARIOUS SERVICE PROJECTS THE TEAM COMPLETED THROUGHOUT THE SEASON:

<https://youtu.be/fJnRWqWnuU4>

# Section 6

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee Dalton Lee Tatum \_\_\_\_\_  
(first, middle, last)

## **Individual Submitting Nomination:**

Name Ricky May \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: 479-675-3277 \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: ricky.may@boonevilleschools.com \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: 945 North Plum \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: Booneville, Ar 72927 \_\_\_\_\_

Date: January 24, 2019 \_\_\_\_\_

## **State Association Endorsement:**

Name: [Tab here] Lance Taylor, Arkansas Activities Association \_\_\_\_\_

Title: [Tab here] Executive Director \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: [Tab here] Lance W. Taylor \_\_\_\_\_

## NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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- Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer  
 Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Dalton Lee Tatum  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 2157 Mid Valley Road  
*(street address)*

Booneville, Ar 72927  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 479-495-1188

E-mail: tatum.dalton@boonevilleschools.com

School (if any): Booneville High School

City: Booneville State: Ar

# NOMINATION FORM

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

## Honors & Achievements

2019 Mr BHS  
2018 Boys State Delegate  
BHS Show Choir  
First Booneville Student Praise Band  
Superintendent Honor Roll (all A's)  
Honorable mention all-conference Football  
30 Composite on the ACT  
2017 Third place State Chess Competition  
Numerous Piano solo & ensemble awards  
2018 3A State Football champion  
2018 4A State weightlifting champion  
2018 All conference in track  
2016 3A State Runner up Baseball  
Passing Scores on AP Language, AP Biology  
Lead male character in school play, Hairspray.  
3.95 Current GPA, will fall somewhere in the Top 5 of his class.

## School & Community Clubs

Fellowship Of Christian Athletes  
Beta Club  
Future Business Leaders  
BHS Chess Club  
BHS Quiz Bowl  
First Western Youth Advisory Board

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

Dalton was born with congenital radioulnar synostosis of the left arm. His forearm is fixed in a prone position due to the radius and ulna being fused where they enter the joint at his elbow. His family figured out there was something wrong when he had a hard time fielding a ground ball in tee ball. The doctor advised them that they could have surgery but the likelihood of the bones fusing back was very great. He has learned to compensate for his limited range of motion in everything he does. He is very reliant on his right arm due to this condition. Through modifying his body position, Dalton has learned how to be successful in sports and playing the piano.

As Dalton entered his senior year, he became the starting tight end and rotated at linebacker on defense along with being on every special team. In the second game of the season, Dalton fractured his right arm during the game. He had to miss the next 5 games, including homecoming. As he pushed to get back as soon as possible, he began having pain in his arm during the first game back let never resided but he kept playing because he didn't want to miss any more action. When asked how it felt, his response was always that he was fine; however, the broken bone kept calcifying into a very obvious deformity in his right forearm. After winning the State Championship, he had another X-ray on that arm and found out that the ulna had been broken and healed several times, in several places at the site of the original break. He had made up his mind that he wanted to be a part of a special team no matter the cost. He had surgery twelve days after the championship game. The surgery required a plate and 6 pins to be put into his "good" arm. Eighteen days after surgery, he went to his first baseball practice and hasn't missed a day.

Due to these dire circumstances, Dalton has developed a hard work ethic, grit, determination and a drive that might not have been the case otherwise.

## Volunteer Status

Fields of Faith	Plays piano at area churches
Chamber of Commerce Banquet	Nursing homes visits
Rise & Shine Elementary program	Arkansas Marathon
National Cemetery Wreath Ceremony	Boy & Girls Club



# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: **Aaden Michael Valdez**  
(first, middle, last)

## *Individual Submitting Nomination:*

Name: Elly Naill

Phone: 719.549.7246

E-mail: elly.naill@pueblacityschools.org

Street Address: 9 MacNeil

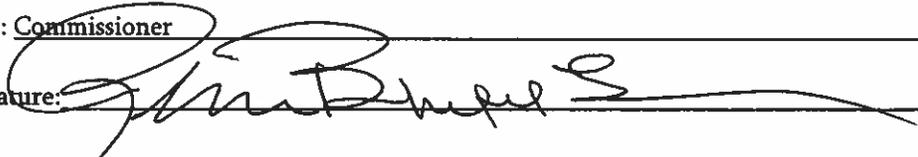
City, State, Zip Code: Pueblo, CO 81001

Date: November 27, 2018

## *State Association Endorsement:*

Name: Rhonda Blanford-Green

Title: Commissioner

Signature: 



# NOMINATION FORM

---

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

A student-athlete must maintain their academics regardless of their after-hours athletic schedule. Aaden has embraced this philosophy and ensures that he maintains his academics. While carrying a diversified class load of both honors and advanced classes, Aaden maintains a 3.0 grade point average and 93.7% attendance rate. Involvement in the school community is very important to Aaden, he participates in the AVID program and also serves on the Junior Class Prom Committee. Aaden and his family have been in charge of a local community outreach program called "La Gente". The La Gente organization offers opportunities for hundreds of youth as young as 4 to participate in a variety of athletics and activities, flag football, soccer, wrestling to name a few. These opportunities serve underprivileged youth and creates a sense of community and provides hope to all of the young children that participate. Aaden is always willing to reach out to the athletes and serve as a mentor and coach for them. East High School's students and staff have embraced Aaden and have been supportive of his journey to recovery and success. The support is reciprocated as Aaden is full of school spirit, participating as a number one fan in as many school functions and sporting events that he can. When you see the student body at sporting events, Aaden is the spirit leader, supporting his peers and always dressed up for the theme of the night, even if it means wearing a Star Wars singlet and Chewbacca head on a 50 degree night!

You do not know your personal strength and capabilities until you fully embrace the challenge ahead of you. Aaden has embraced the challenges and adversities of a tragic firework accident by not only thriving personally, he has created his own campaign for public awareness and safety for the kids in our community. Through his campaign, "Aaden's Story", Aaden authored a comic book that educates younger children about the risks and dangers of fireworks. He built partnerships with the local Fire Department and dedicated time handing out safety goggles for kids along with his comic book. Hundreds of children in the community received the goggles for eye protection as a result of Aaden's efforts this past year. Aaden has become very popular in the community and has already donated several hours to guest speak at elementary schools and middle schools about his accident and how he has worked to overcome the barriers of being an athlete with a prosthetic eye and not having the use of one hand. Aaden's positivity and energy for life is contagious. Those who spend time with him are inspired and encouraged to live life to the fullest and especially, Never Quit!

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

On July 4, 2017, at the young age of fifteen and going into his sophomore year, Aaden Valdez was involved in a terrible firework accident. In the accident, Aaden lost his left eye and three fingers and his thumb on his left hand, leaving only his pinkie. After several surgeries, occupational therapy, and determination, Aaden adapted to his injuries. Only four months after his injuries, with his scars not fully healed, Aaden competed in the CHSAA high school varsity wrestling season. He took a winning record of 45-6 and a regional champion title to state. Even more astonishing, Aaden was runner-up at the Colorado High School Activities Association 4A State Tournament, losing by one point in the last seconds of the match.

Aaden continued wrestling after season and for the anniversary of his accident in July, he participated in one of the most prestigious and nationally recognized high school age tournaments in the country, the US Marine corps/USAW Cadet National Championships in Fargo, ND. There he earned an All-American classification by taking 4<sup>th</sup> place.

Going in to his junior year and unable to participate in football, a sport Aaden played since he was four years old, Aaden played tennis for the first time in his life. Staying involved, perseverance, and positivity are just a few words to describe Aaden's approach to life!



Colorado High School Activities Association

'Seeking Excellence in Academics, Activities and Athletics'



14855 E. 2nd Ave.  
Aurora, CO 80011  
(303) 344-5050  
Fax (303) 344-0775  
www.chsaanow.com

January 10, 2019

Mr. John Gillis  
National Federation of  
State High School Associations  
P.O. Box 690  
Indianapolis, IN 42606

Dear John:

Please accept this nomination for the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. It is for Aaden Valdez and it is a story of a tragic mistake, personal redemption and an active role in educating for future generations on dangers of fireworks.

There is a poignant quote that sums up life succinctly, "Life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% of how you respond." Aaden's story puts this quote into context.

Not to spoil the nomination form information, but to briefly give an overview of why we are submitting Aaden's name, on July 4, 2017, Aaden was involved in a fireworks accident leaving him without sight in his left eye and three fingers and his thumb on his left hand.

The recovery required several surgeries, much time in occupational therapy and personal determination for him to recover. He is an accomplished wrestler and maintains a solid grade point average and has established himself as a leader and role model, all because he made a mistake.

I'll let the reader review this material to see the rest of his story and to absorb the tremendous impact he has had on his community and young children.

Aaden Valdez and his journey from tragedy, to redemption and leadership is what the Spirit of Sport Award is about. The Colorado High School Activities Association respectfully submits this nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bert Borgmann'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.  
Bert Borgmann  
Assistant Commissioner

/bb



Colorado High School Activities Association

*'Seeking Excellence in Academics, Activities and Athletics'*



MEMBER  
SINCE 1924

14855 E. 2nd Ave.  
Aurora, CO 80011  
(303) 344-5050  
Fax (303) 344-0775  
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January 10, 2019

It is with great pleasure that I am writing this letter recommending Aaden Valdez for the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. Aaden suffered a debilitating accident at the age of fifteen. Since then, not only has he demonstrated a resiliency that is remarkable, but he has also used his circumstances to create a platform that educates local children on the dangers associated with fireworks, gives them tips on how to avoid those dangers, and encourages them to take part in displays that are safe and legal.

Aaden was involved in an accident in the summer between his freshman and sophomore years in which he lost several fingers and his thumb on his left hand as well as his left eye. Many fifteen-year-old students would have given up on their athletic dreams. Instead of taking that route, Aaden hardened his will, set some lofty goals and immediately started working towards those goals. Within four months of his accident, after several surgeries and weeks of therapy, Aaden stepped back on the competition mat with his Pueblo East wrestling teammates. Aaden learned to wrestle essentially with one hand and with vision that was limited to just his right eye. He earned a varsity spot on a very talented team that was ranked within the top three at state every week of the 2017-2018 season. He refused to feel sorry for himself or to use his limitations as an excuse. In fact, Aaden became adept enough at wrestling with his new techniques that he won a regional championship and was the state runner-up in his weight class, coming within seconds of winning the state title in a highly contested and entertaining match.

Aaden Valdez has demonstrated the character and attributes that are worthy of recognition with the National High School Spirit of Sport Award. He has overcome adversity through hard work and perseverance, doing so while exhibiting humility and grace. He has used his unfortunate circumstance to create a platform of children's education, serving as a role model in the community. He has made no excuses and continues to challenge himself in the classroom, on the playing field and in the community. I can think of no better person that could be recognized for this honor.

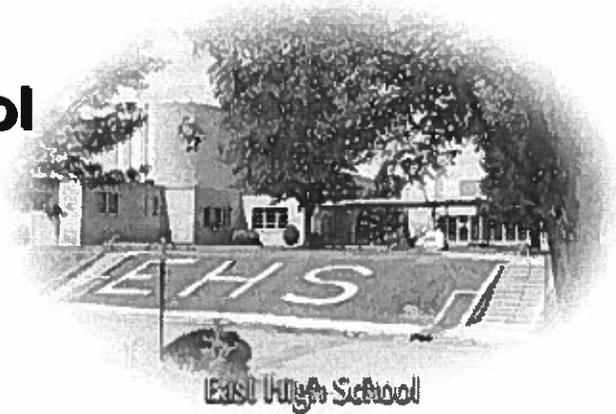
Sincerely,

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

Ernie Derrera  
Assistant Commissioner  
Colorado High School Activities Association

# Pueblo East High School

9 Mac Neil Rd  
Pueblo, Colorado 81001  
(719) 549-7231 Fax (719) 253-5272



October 31, 2018

To The Nomination Committee:

I am honored to write this letter of support for Aaden Valdez in the nomination process for National High School Spirit of Sport Award. As Aaden's school counselor and high school wrestling coach, I can attest to the great inspiration Aaden has been to our wrestling team and how he has made a difference for our wrestling program. I have known Aaden for several years as he has competed in our youth program starting at four years of age. Aaden's father (Zach) has been my assistant wrestling coach the past twelve years as well as running our youth wrestling program.

On July 4, 2017 Aaden suffered extensive injuries in a horrific fireworks accident. Aaden lost most of his left hand and vision of his left eye in this tragic accident. He was taken by Flight for Life from Pueblo to Denver for medical treatment. I had returned home from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration that night hosted by Aaden's parents to get a phone call that Aaden had significant injuries. After multiple surgeries Aaden was back on the wrestling mat practicing with our team months ahead of what his doctors expected.

Aaden has faced this accident head on with grit, determination, and a no excuse attitude. Through much determination and practice, he has learned to wrestle from the opposite side of what he was accustomed to doing before the accident. As a high school wrestling coach of 33 years, learning to wrestle from the opposite side is highly difficult and frustrating to say the least. Aaden has mastered this technique and was crowned 4A Regional champion and State runner-up compiling a 45-6 record for the 2017-2018 season as well as placing in a National Tournament.

Aaden continues to inspire our community and high school through his infectious positivity and no quit attitude. Aaden is an inspiration to everyone he comes in contact with. He possesses a rare desire to succeed no matter the obstacles before him.

The National High School Spirit of Sport Award encompasses the journey that Aaden has been on. His story is truly inspiring and would be motivational and encouraging to the entire NFHS community!

Patrick L. Laughlin  
Head Counselor/Head Wrestling Coach  
719-549-7226

November 23, 2018

To whom it may concern,

It is my honor and privilege to write to you about an inspirational young man, Mr. Aaden Valdez. I have many reasons why I feel so strongly about Mr. Valdez. My journey with this upstanding young man began 3 years ago in my AVID classroom and then shortly after continued into my Spanish classroom. He was one of my most spirited AVID/Spanish students and I have wholeheartedly enjoyed his presence since then. He has impacted my life as a teacher due to his compassionate heart and his way with students as well as his tenacious work ethic athletically and his inspirational attitude toward life.

As I begin to paint the picture of who Mr. Valdez is, it is important to know that in July of 2017, he was involved in a tragic firework accident. In the accident, Aaden lost his left eye, 3 fingers and his thumb off his left hand leaving only his pinkie. He was sent flight for life to Denver where he began his journey to healing. Before this moment in his life, Mr. Valdez was an athlete in several sports, but his passion and love has always been for Wrestling. As anyone could imagine, facing not only life, but your love of your sport after an incident of this nature WAS life changing. Mr. Valdez has faced this challenge head on. As his teacher, I can be real honest with you and say I was worried not only about his academics and his ability on the mat, but my heart hurt for the thought of his emotional journey ahead. Mr. Valdez came back to school on fire! He not only embraced his new way of doing things, he wanted to "be the boss" of them. He took on each challenge as they happened, from learning to work with 1 complete hand and how to use his 1 eye to face his day to day activities. For example, he was in the gym lifting the moment his doctor released him. He had a special brace he wore as he dead lifted...he was moving mountains! I remember the 1st time he got to be back on the mat. It was emotional for those who saw it but he was the same tenacious wrestler...only with 1 eye and 6 fingers. He inspires anyone that has heard his story. However, his real influence has been his dedication to others!

Mr Valdez's dedication is found in several places. He has volunteered with the Special Olympics miniature golf activity and was a willing participant in that event. He gives of his time in the space that is his home away from home; the wrestling mat. Through the La Gente program, he coaches younger wrestlers to be the best that they can be on and off the mat! He has dedicated hundreds if not thousands of hours to helping, boys and girls alike, in this program. Mr. Valdez has taken this shift of life's circumstances and he also has been invited to speak at several different schools about pushing through challenges and how to be a person of integrity in spite of obstacles in your way. Within our community, a specific example where Mr. Valdez has exceeded normal expectations in assisting others in our community is through his Firework Safety Campaign. He set this important event this last year on the anniversary of his accident. A coloring book was made of his story, he passed out safety glasses to our community, did a commercial promoting safety for the 4th of July, and spoke to audiences about his experiences. He has given back to our community directly from his pain and his heart.

His heart can be seen in the classroom as well. Mr. Valdez is always found supporting his peers and often finding a way to explain things so other students just understand better. He has always maintained a leadership role in class simply due to his personality to lead. He speaks and people listen! He is a passionate and powerful young man with a great sense of humor! It is like an art watching him interact with people. His no nonsense approach to life is classic in the classroom when students try and give any excuse. Mr. Valdez is always there with the voice of truth and consistently challenging others to be the best that they can be. He himself does the same by maintaining a GPA and takes several IB and honors level classes.

My wish is that my words reached your heart in this little snapshot of who this inspiring young man is! Please feel free to contact me if any member of your prestigious organization would like to know more about Mr. Valdez. I look forward to the opportunity to continue highlighting his heart and sincere dedication to excellence. Thank you ahead of time for your attention to his nomination.

Best regards,



Clarissa E. Feliciano-Maldonado  
East High School  
Spanish and AVID Teacher  
(719) 406-1812

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter in regards to one of the most amazing people I have ever met, his name is Aaden Valdez. I have been fortunate enough to have known Aaden since he was four years old, his dad and I coached Football together at Pueblo East High School - since 2007. Aaden was one of the football team's ball boys and was a staple in the program.

As Aaden grew older and was starting to get serious about wrestling, his dad asked if I could start training him at my gym that I own named FAST-Functional Athletic Strength Training. I have been training Aaden since he was a 6th grader and I have seen Aaden grow from a young kid to a strong young man. Aaden is one of the hardest working and most dedicated athletes that I know, Aaden and his mom come to the gym every morning at least four times a week. He also happens to be one of the strongest pound for pound kids that I train, and he also helps me with some of the younger kids. Aaden loves to help others and will make a great coach someday.

My family and I were at his house the night of his accident on the 4th of July last year, and to see that happen first hand, was one of the saddest nights of my life. To see how hard he worked and to almost lose it all in an instant was unreal, I didn't like seeing him and his family going through so much pain. In addition, not having him in the gym after that happened affected all of us in the gym, we are like a big family in there. It definitely wasn't the same in there without him.

But I knew that it wouldn't stop him from his dream, and sure enough two months later, he was back in the gym training for his upcoming wrestling season. Aaden and I had to adjust some things and get a little more creative but it wasn't hard at all with a kid like Aaden. He uses a hook like attachment that acts as his fingers on lifts and he never uses it as an excuse or never complains. Matter of fact, Aaden works even harder now, and to be real honest, to see him lose four fingers and his eye that night and to come back the way he has (State Runner up, National placer) is an inspiration to me personally. I'm a firm believer that sometimes people are put in your life for a reason, and I believe Aaden was put in mine, to help me be the best that I can be, regardless of whatever life throws at me. Aaden comes from a great family, and I will always be here to help him in any way that I can. He's Family in my book! I am proud and honored to be a part of his journey and can't wait to see what his future holds. #AadenStory #HWPO

-Coach Paul Andrada

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Andrada". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal tail stroke.

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created by  
Gabriel Pacheco



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# #AVADENSTORY

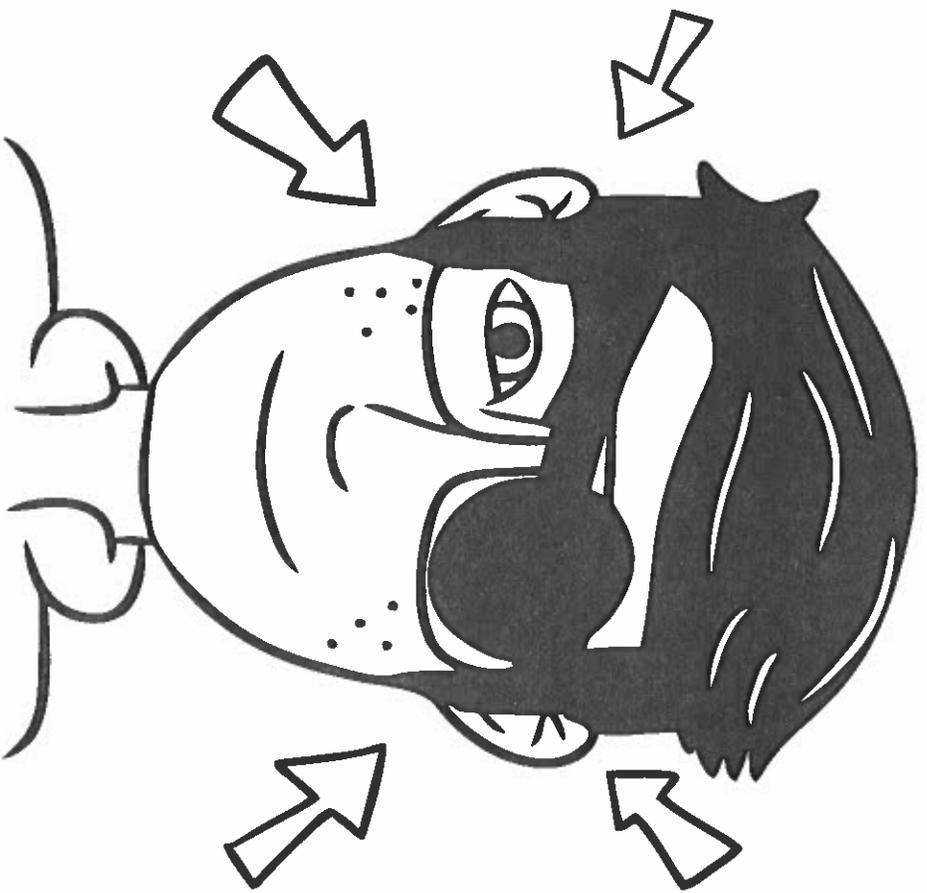


STAY SAFE  
FIREWORK  
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**ALWAYS WEAR**

**PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR**

-There are a lot of sparks and flying pieces-



**ALWAYS LET ADULTS**

**LIGHT FIREWORKS**

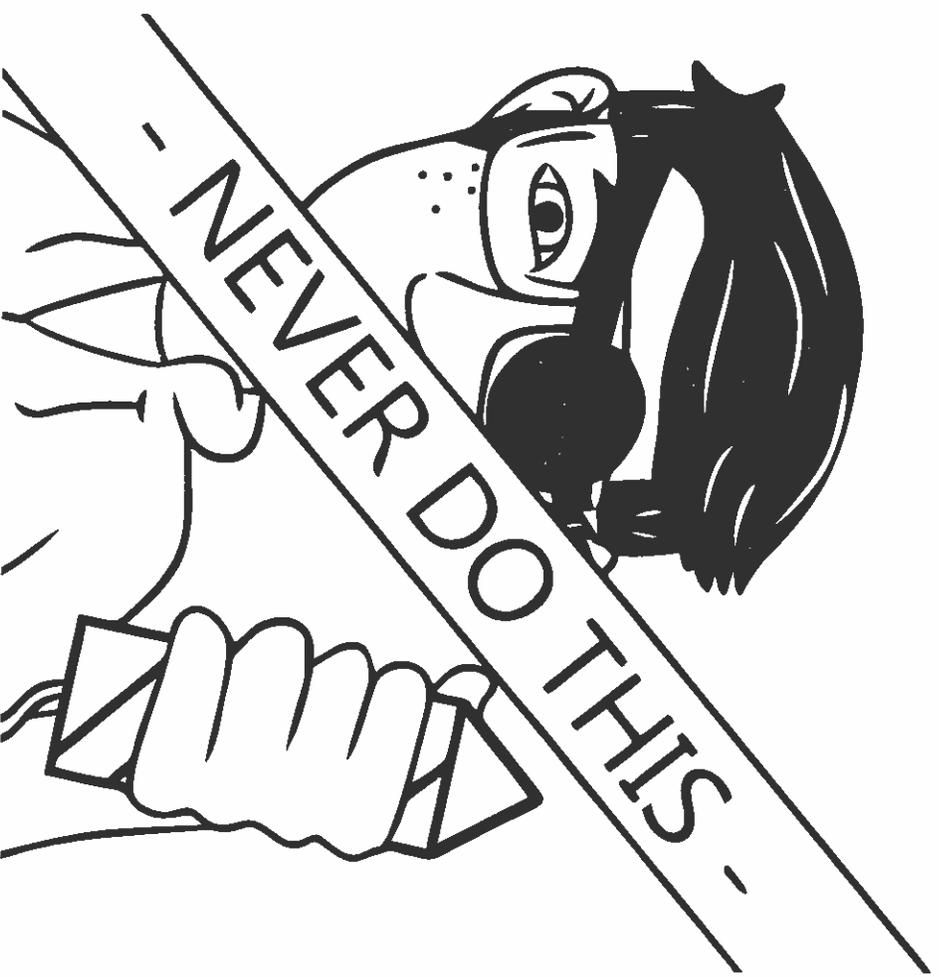
-Kids should never light them-



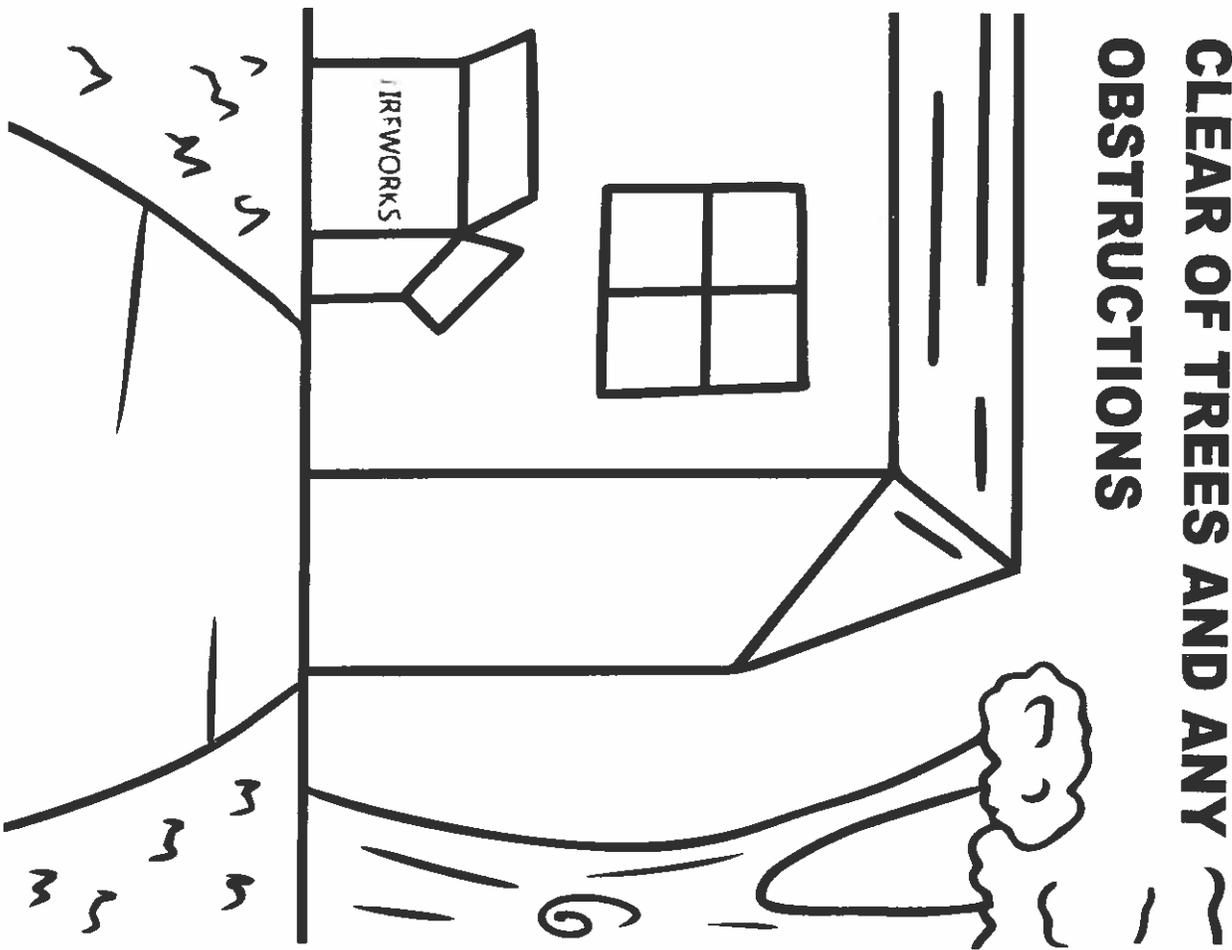
**NEVER USE A BUTANE LIGHTER  
OR OPEN FLAME LIKE A LIGHTER  
ALWAYS USE A PUNK TO LIGHT  
FIREWORKS.**



**NEVER HOLD FIREWORKS  
OR STAND OVER THEM  
WHEN LIGHTING**



**LIGHT FIREWORKS IN AN OPEN  
SPACE OUTDOORS THAT IS  
CLEAR OF TREES AND ANY  
OBSTRUCTIONS**

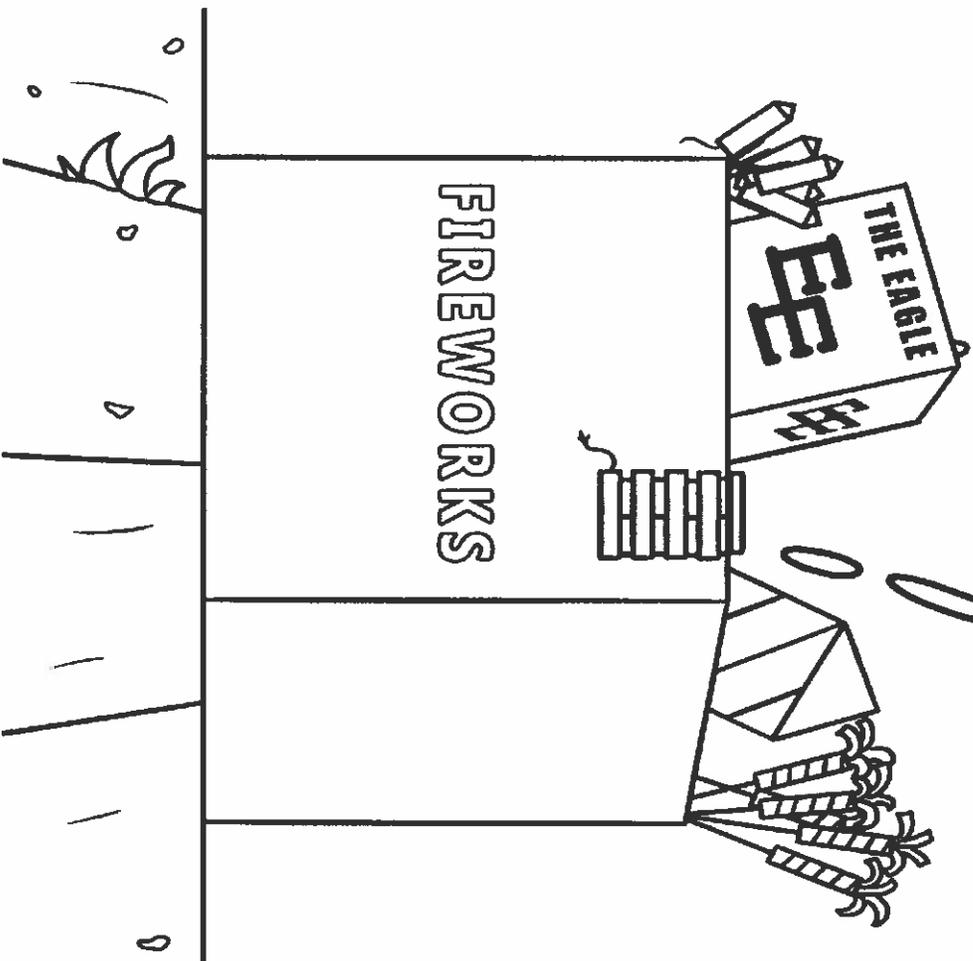
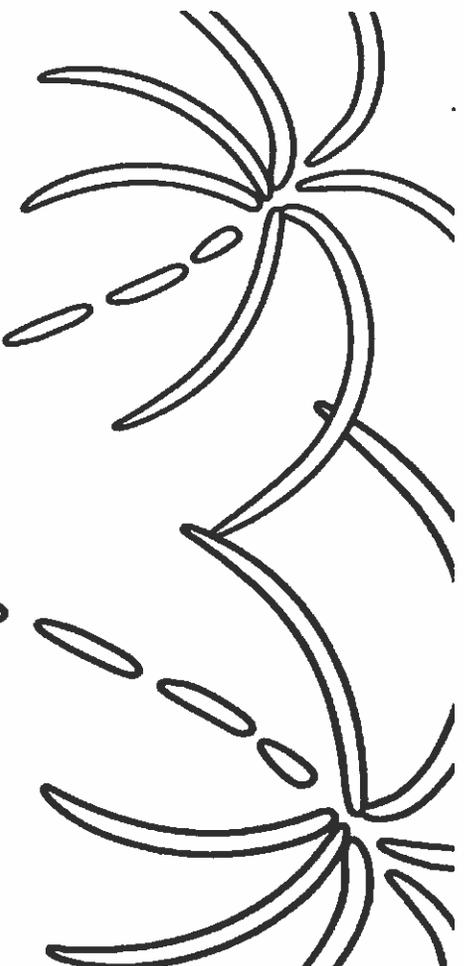
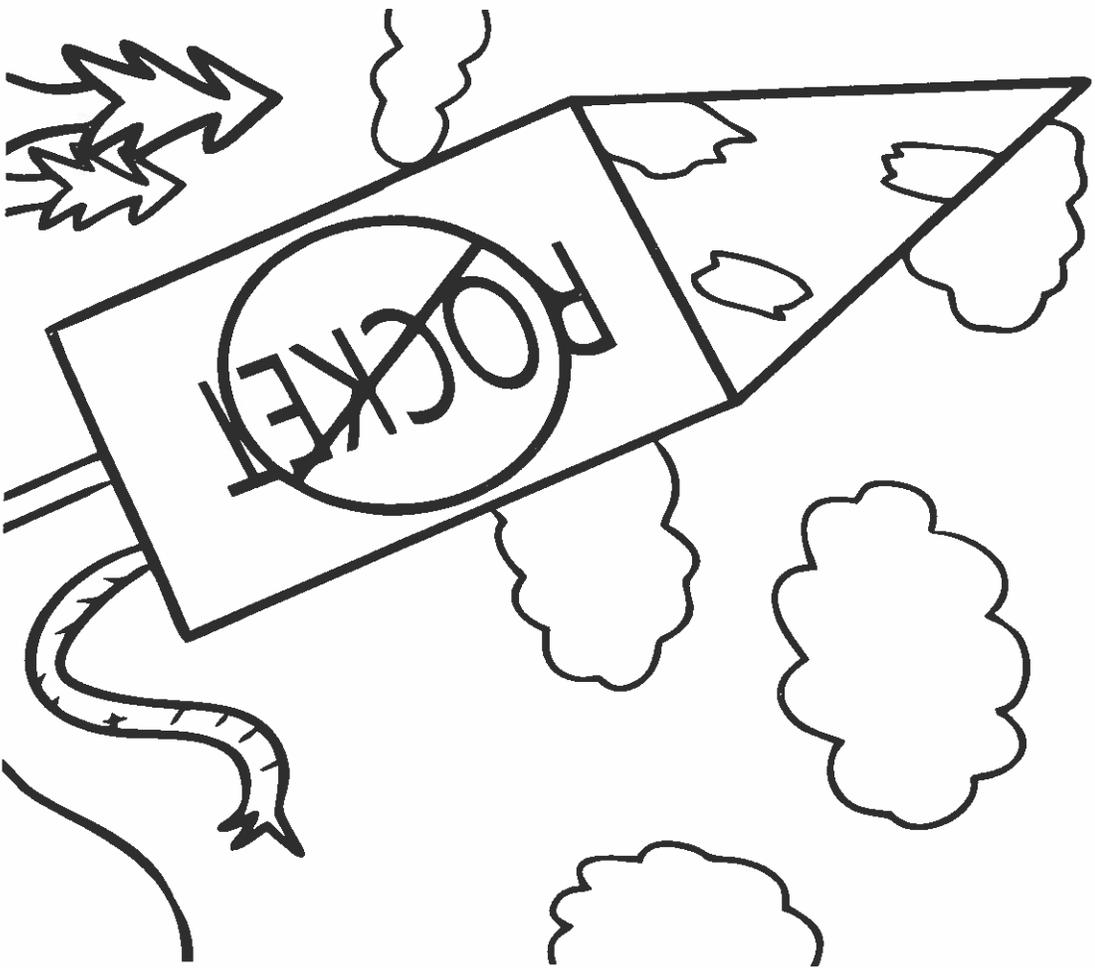


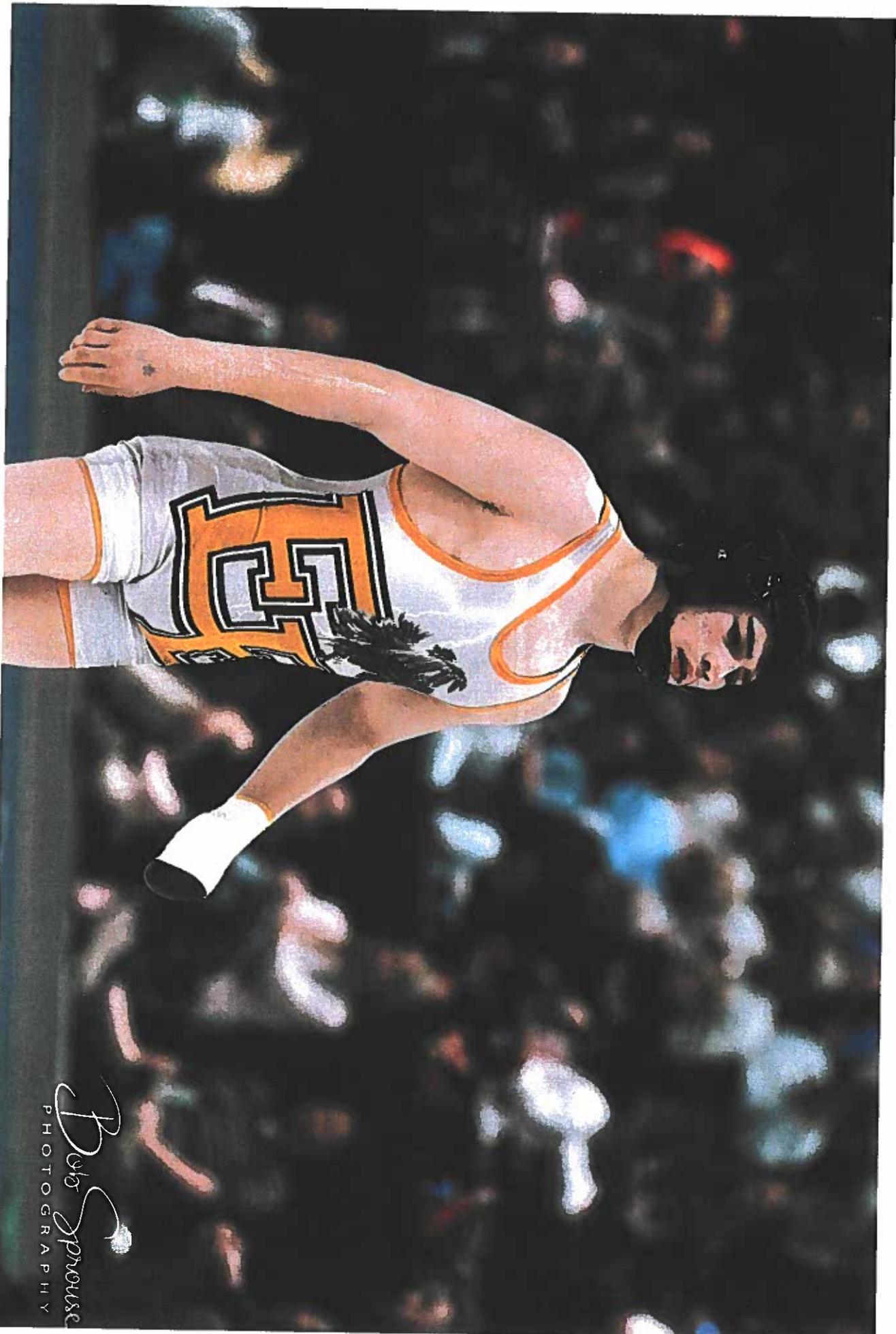
**HAPPY**

**4th of**

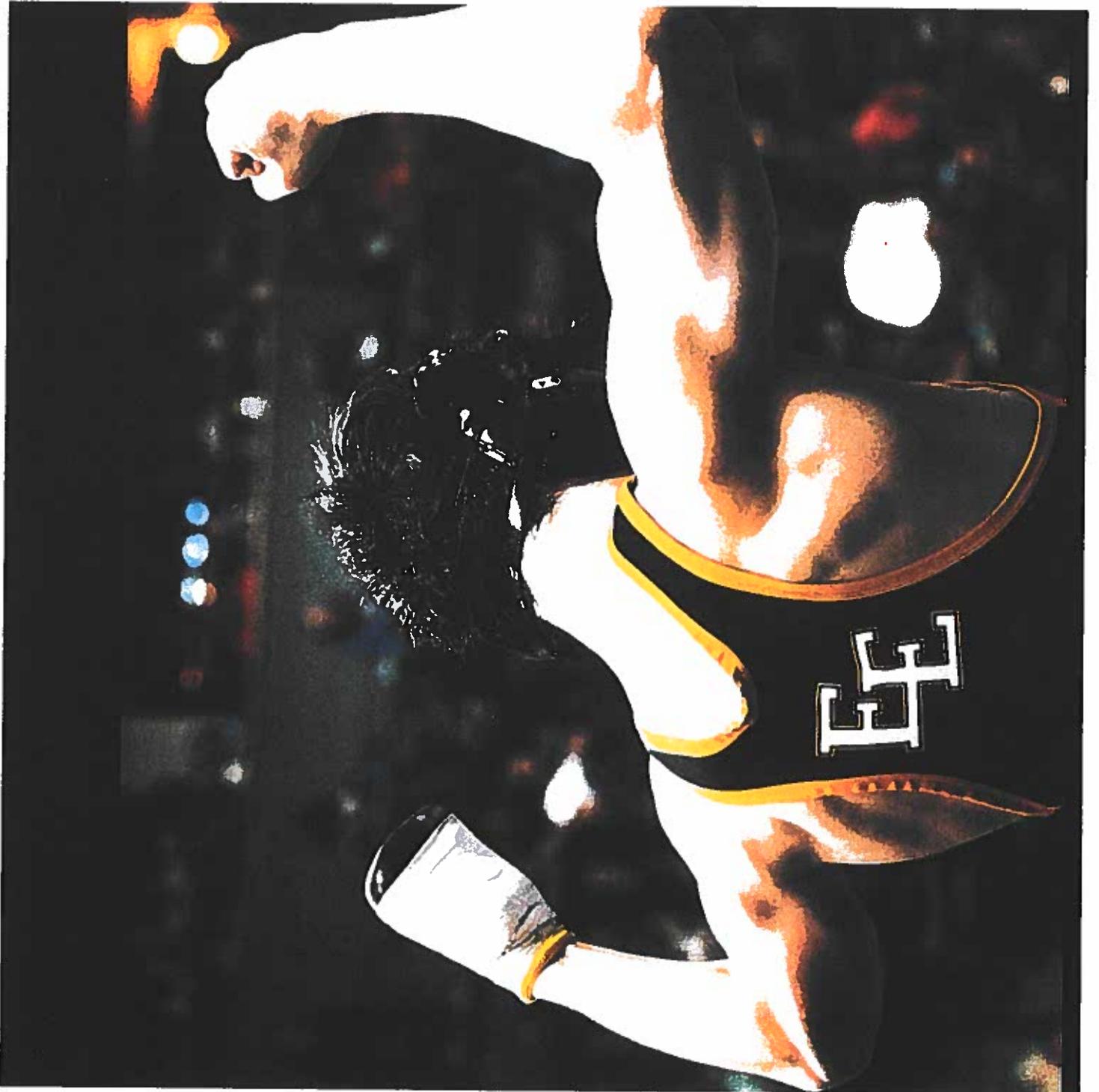
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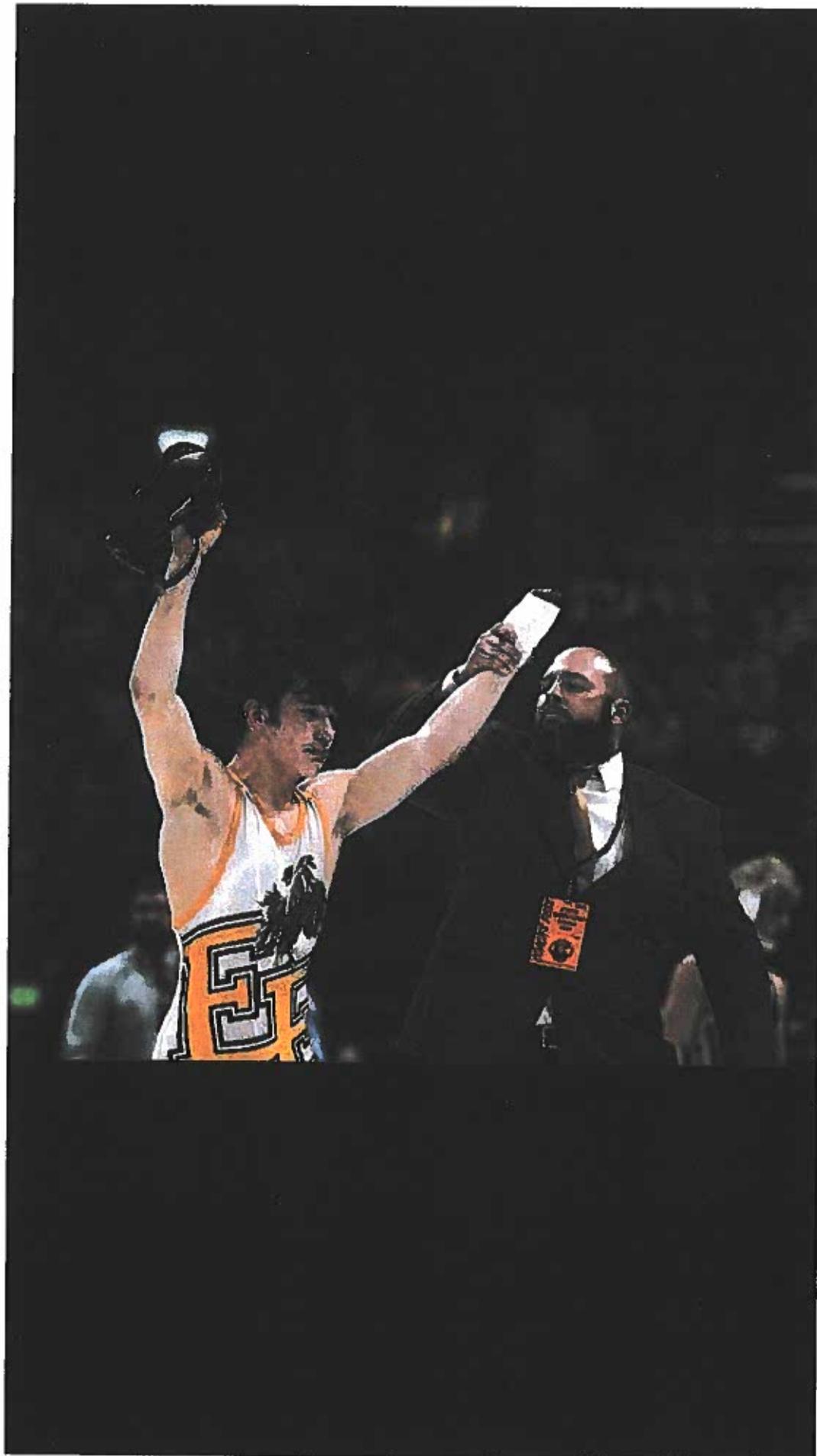
# NEVER LIGHT ILLEGAL FIREWORKS

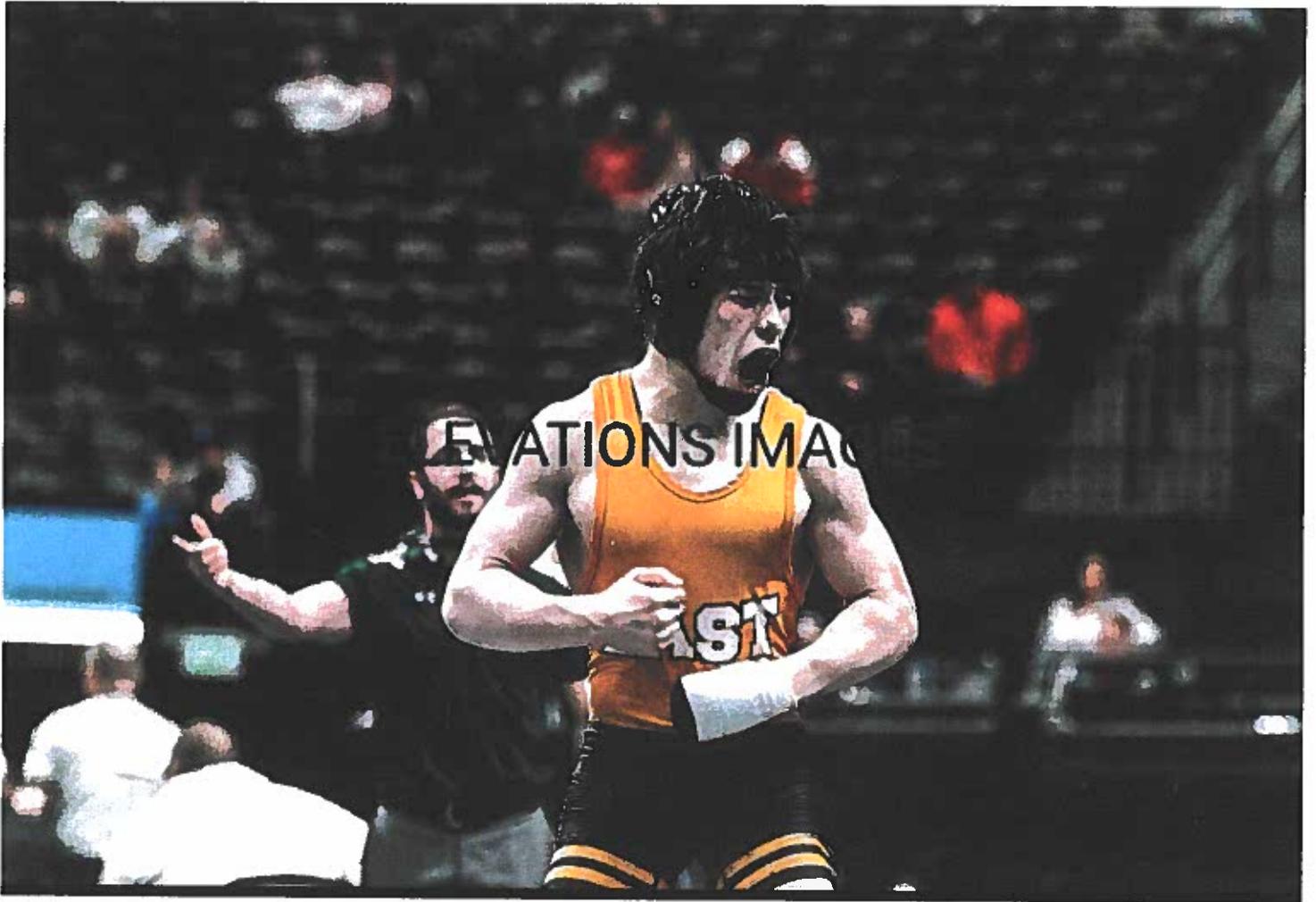




*Pete Sprouse*  
PHOTOGRAPHY







# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Ella Puckett  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: J.P. Murrieta- NMAA Sports Information Director

Phone: 505-923-3299

E-mail: jp@nmact.org

Street Address: 6600 Palomas Ave NE

City, State, Zip Code: Albuquerque, NM 87109

Date: January 15, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Sally Marquez

Title: Executive Director

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Ella is a student at Cloudcroft High School. She competes in volleyball, basketball and track and field. Ella has competed in multiple sports, despite the fact she's had to endure multiple rounds of chemotherapy as she battles a rare form of cancer. Life-changing events can sometimes stop you in your tracks, but not Ella Puckett.

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

"Ella's a model athlete of what we look for in every athlete in Cloudcroft," says Cloudcroft High School athletic director Hayden Burnett.

Warrior. Inspiring. Powerful. These are all words to describe Ella Puckett. This 16-year old has always been active in sports, but a couple months ago, something wasn't right.

"I was growing a lot of facial hair, really bad. It wasn't normal," said Ella. "We thought it was just from the athletics, doing everything I was doing. Apparently, it was from the tumor."

"It creates testosterone, high levels of testosterone," explained Renee Puckett. "Over the first months before this, she started to get a lot of hair. Her voiced dropped. We found out that those things won't ever go away. It will be a little better, but it caused permanent damage."

The facial and vocal changes were only the beginning. One morning Ella woke up in excruciating pain.

"The doctor said there was definitely something wrong because I looked really big, my stomach was bloated. That was on a Friday and by Sunday I looked six months pregnant and I was in a lot of pain so my dad took me to the ER and everything was figured out and they found a 7-and-a-half inch tumor."

Doctors discovered Ella had ovarian cancer, a rare condition for teens. The diagnosis was hard to hear.

"I couldn't breathe," said Renee. "It was horrible. I felt guilty because we didn't catch it sooner."

"Everything changes when a doctor looks you in the face and tells you 'You have cancer'," Ella explained. "It's hard, it's really hard to deal with especially at my age, it was rough."

Doctors operated and removed the tumor two days after being admitted to the hospital. It had ruptured. The next prescription was four rounds of chemotherapy involving a five-day hospital stay. While in the hospital, Ella tries to stay busy and get out of her room as much as she can with trips to the art room, even tricycle races in the hallway.

Despite the physical toll chemotherapy takes on the body, Ella won't let the disease bring her down. She draws inspiration from others fighting the same battle.

"That's a whole other thing that gets me through is seeing little kids that are doing two years of chemotherapy and I only have four rounds which is only a few months. It's inspiring how they get through it because they're so positive about it too."

Ella's positive attitude is infectious. She talks, behaves and carries herself as if nothing is wrong.

"I think for most people, I don't know if they would understand how difficult it is because of how well she holds herself," said Burnett. "She doesn't let people see that side of her. She holds herself like there's nothing wrong and she's just going through life every day the way it is."

"I'm very grateful for everything that I have and I want to be positive about everything and I don't think being negative is going to help me through it," said Ella. "It's just going to make it worse. I'm trying to be super positive and have a good outlook on it because if I'm going to go through it I want to take advantage of it and help anybody I can or help somebody who's going through a hard time or anything I can help with."

"She's 16 and she wants to be a normal 16-year old," said volleyball coach Joni Watson. "One text I got from her late one night was 'I just want to be normal and be an athlete.'"

Just like other athletes Ella wears a knee brace when she plays, but the blue ribbons on her shoes that represent her fight might be an even stronger accessory.

"She played volleyball for the first time because she had a knee injury that had her out her entire sophomore volleyball season," said her coach. "She stepped foot on the game floor yesterday for the first time since the end of her freshman year and she couldn't have been more excited to play volleyball."

"To know what she's going through and how she holds herself every single day when she walks in that school building, that's greatness," said Burnett.

All around the gym you can spot messages for Ella. The school and community won't let her go through this challenge alone.

"It's amazing having so many of my friends there for me and supporting me," said Ella. "We have our shirts that we sell and almost everyone bought them in about three days."

"It's overwhelming, I can't even describe it," said Renee. "It blows me away how supportive everybody is and how much everybody cares about her."

It's easy to care about someone who doesn't give up in the face of adversity or quit when diagnosed with a potentially fatal disease. Ella is always looking to the positive, even when it comes to her diagnosis.

"They say it most likely won't come back after so I'm praying that it won't, but I think I'm going to be just fine."

"It's hard for me to go through," said Renee. "It's hard for me to see my daughter going through something like this and to be scared and sick, but I think that she's teaching everybody to be strong and be positive no matter what and that's pretty powerful."

"I just want people to know that you can do anything, it's not impossible" Ella added. "You can do whatever you want to do and you can get through it. God gives us another day and you just have to be positive and look at the bright side of everything."

Overcoming adversity, staying positive and moving on to help inspire others. That's the spirit of sport and that's Cloudcroft's Ella Puckett.

Here is a link to see more of her story (**I strongly encourage you to watch**)

<https://youtu.be/PpNIN-AMuNU>

*\*update: Ella has finished her last round of chemotherapy and is cancer free! She continues to recover physically in the hopes she is ready to compete for her school in track and field this spring. (see photo below)*



# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Casey J. Mick Rowell and Montie Burl Blair  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Aaron Weast

Phone: 580 606-3915

E-mail: aaronweast@cpsok.org

Street Address: 1030 Ash Ave

City, State, Zip Code: Comanche OK, 73529

Date: 1/31/19

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name David Jackson

Title OSSAA Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

---

Student   X Coaches    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Casey J.Mick Rowell and Montie Burl Blair  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: (Casey Rowell) 183809 N 2810 Rd (Montie) 281931 E. 1840 Rd  
*(street address)*  
(Both) Comanche OK 73529  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: (Casey) 580 560-9274 (Montie) 405 850-7448

E-mail: (Casey) [caseyrowell@cpsok.org](mailto:caseyrowell@cpsok.org) (Montie) montie102@gmail.com

School (if any): Comanche High School

City: Comanche State: OK

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Casey Rowell: Casey is a Biology teacher and assistant football, wrestling, and track coach.

Montie Blair: Montie is an assistant football coach.

Both gentlemen received the Woodmen Life Insurance "Lifesaver Award" for their actions listed below.

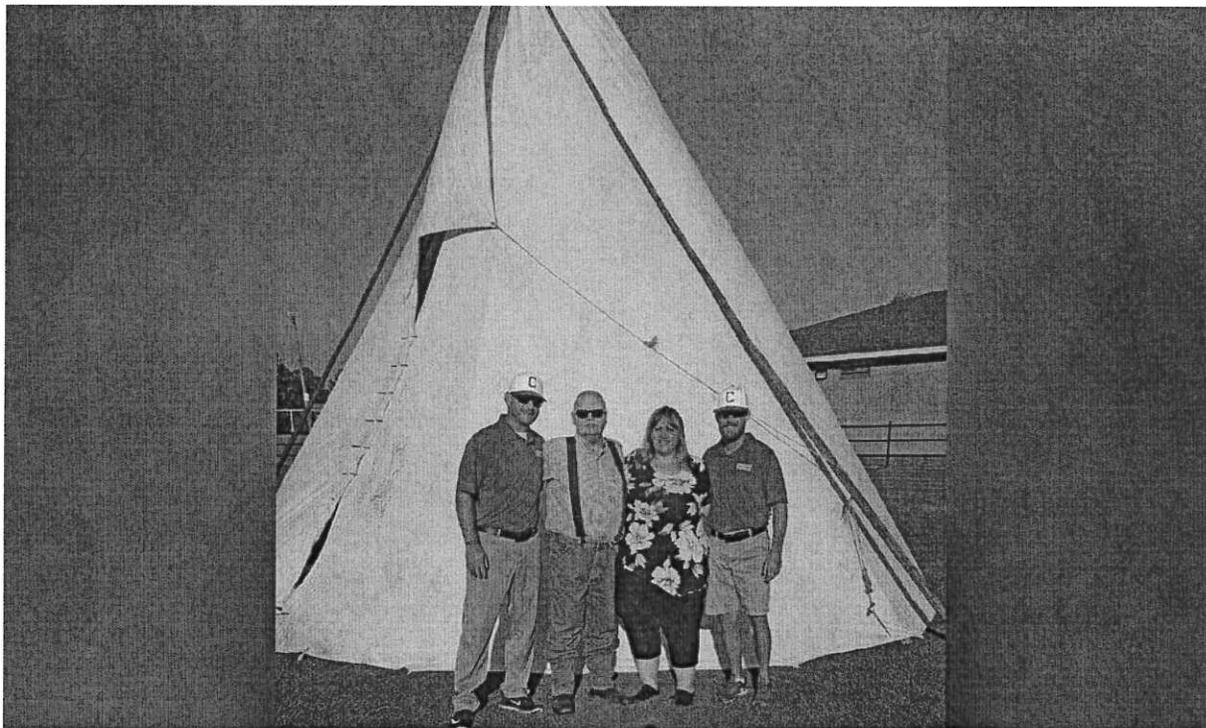
2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Spirit of Sport Award."

While taking team pictures for the Comanche High School Football team in August of 2018, Steve Bolton, Publisher/Editor of the local newspaper, collapsed on the field suffering from a heart attack. Casey Rowell and Montie Blair administered CPR for over 20 minutes while paramedics were on their way from nearby Duncan, OK. With the use of an AED machine, the two were able to save Steve's life. After making a full recovery, Steve would sadly pass away 2 months later from another heart attack. The quick actions of both coaches allowed Mr. Bolton to live long enough to see his first grandchild be born.

# Comanche Times reporter saved by football coaches



by ADAM KEMP  
Published: Sun, August 26, 2018 5:00 AM



Comanche Times editor Steve Bolton and Kelli Bolton (middle) pose with Comanche assistant coaches Montie Blair (left) and Casy Rowell. The coaches helped save Steve's life earlier this month. [Photo provided]

Game nights without Steve Bolton are unheard of at Comanche High.

For more than 25 years Bolton has made it his mission to be at every school event, whether that's for football, basketball, baseball, softball or school plays, cookouts and fundraisers.

Bolton covers it all.

As lead reporter, photographer, editor in chief and publisher of the Comanche Times, Bolton prides himself on knowing his community and shining a light on what makes the small town of 1,600 people special.

"Today's news is tomorrow's history of our community," Bolton said. "I take that very seriously.

"We are a little country, weekly newspaper and that's exactly what we want to be."

So on Friday night, when Comanche hosted Frederick for its season opener, of course Bolton was there.

He stood in the end zone next to where the players ran onto the field waiting to shake hands with the coaches, mere yards away from where his life almost ended.

### 'He was gone'

Bolton's dedication to Comanche has led him to take the team pictures for the football program for more than two decades.

On Aug. 11, standing at the 50-yard line on Barnett Field inside Harley Stadium, Bolton was finishing up the portraits of players and coaches when he said he felt "lava in his chest."

He called for his wife and co-editor of the newspaper, Kelli, to come to him before dropping to his knees, collapsing on the football field.

"He was gone," Kelli Bolton said. "You could just see that he was gone."

Without hesitation the Comanche football coaching staff jumped into action.

Assistant coaches Montie Blair and Casy Rowell went to work starting CPR while paramedics were called.

Head coach Brad Perry and several of the players set off to find an automated external defibrillator in one of the nearby school buildings.

Blair, a volunteer firefighter and former EMT, said he recognized Bolton was having a heart attack and went to work on chest compressions while Rowell did the breathing.

Around the field some of the players gathered in groups to watch their coaches work to save Steve's life while others still circled up and began to pray.

"There was no pulse and he was turning blue," Blair said. "It looked like he was gone, but I knew we just couldn't stop."

Eventually someone made it back with the AED and they hooked Bolton up.

The shocked him once. They shocked him twice.

About seven minutes had elapsed since Bolton had collapsed, but the two assistant coaches continued to do CPR.

"I had never been apart of anything like that before," said Rowell, 27. "I didn't know any better to stop or start. I just knew I was just going to keep going until they told me to stop."

Then Steve Bolton came back to life.

The 59-year-old man took in a deep breath and the color slowly began to return to his face.

"Hey, Steve," Blair remembers saying in the moment. "Stay with us."

The ambulance arrived after nearly 20 minutes. Bolton was taken to Comanche County Memorial Hospital where scans revealed he had a 100 percent block of the left coronary artery, known as the widowmaker.

Another valve was more than 75 percent blocked.

Bolton had two stents put in and was treated for broken ribs and bruising from Blair's CPR, a tell-tale sign that Blair performed his role perfectly, doctors said.

### **An asset to the community**

Blair went to visit Bolton in the hospital the day following the incident.

Bolton tried to apologize, but Blair cut him off.

"I hate that this happened, but it happened in a good place," Blair said, referencing the numerous AED machines around the school. "You wouldn't be here if you had been anywhere else, Steve. God had a different plan for you."

Blair has a particular fondness for Bolton. He was a football player for Comanche in the mid-1990s and was the subject of many of Bolton's stories in the newspaper.

"I've still got all my newspaper clippings he wrote," Blair said. "Steve is such an asset to our community. As a newspaper guy for 25 years,

he's always involved with and knows everything going on."

You better believe the latest edition of the Comanche Times still came out on schedule. Bolton wouldn't hear of delaying or taking an issue off.

Kelli Bolton got help from their son with the layout and design while Steve proofed pages from his hospital bed.

Bolton doesn't love the fact that he's made some headlines. He still abides by the rule that he reports the news, but doesn't make it.

But for Bolton, who is set to become a grandfather next month, he'll break that rule if it means Blair, Rowell, Perry and everybody that helped or said a prayer for him gets the recognition they are due.

"It makes me very proud of my community," Bolton said. "I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

"I wouldn't want to die anywhere else."



**ADAM KEMP**

Adam Kemp is a high school sports reporter for The Oklahoman and Newsok.com. Kemp grew up in Oklahoma City before attending Oklahoma State University. Kemp has interned for the Oklahoman, the...

[Read more >](#)



## Comanche Woman Admitted To OU Medical Center In Critical Condition

Oklahoma Highway Patrol investigated a personal injury collision at approximately 6:37 p.m. on Sunday, August 26, on CR2810 37 mile south of Fuller Road, 3 miles south of Duncan.

OHP reports state that a 2003 Dodge Ram 1500 driven by Sheron Kay Skaggs, 64, of Comanche, failed to maintain lane and departed the roadway to the left striking a mailbox and continued north bound for a distance of 53 feet before rolling 1/4 turn and coming to rest on the driver side.

Ms. Skaggs was transported by AMR to Duncan Regional Hospital and transferred to OU Medical Center by AMR reportedly in critical condition with trunk internal injuries.

## Rodeo Grounds To Be A Comanche Hot Spot Once Again?

The Comanche City Council in their August regular council meeting voted 4-0 after discussion to enter into a contract with Toby Martin that would get the rodeo grounds back operational and hopefully the asset it should be for a town that its rodeo history and heritage is as much a part as any community in the country.

Terms of the contract would include: \$300 yearly lease to be paid to the City of Comanche for use of the property; A cow would be grass fed at the facility and each year said cow would be processed by the lease holder and all meat donated to the City or nutrition center. A minimum of eight events per year would be guaranteed to be held at the facility; lease holder to make immediate repairs and provide required equipment to get the facility back operational at their expense; City commits to install RV hook-ups at City's expense and City retains all rental income from the use of the hook-ups at \$25 a night, dump station to be established; City to work with lease holder to raise funds relating to restrooms and concession for the facility.

## Council Okays Purchase of 3 New Police Cars

"Five or six months ago the PD came to us requesting to purchase or lease/purchase new police cars," City Manager Ralls told the Council during the August meeting.

"At that time we tabled it," Ralls added.

Ralls told the Council that the police department is prepared to present a couple of different options after watching the PD asset fund grow and see what monthly average growth would be.

"We originally tried to get the figure around \$1750 per month for a couple of Chargers," Chief Straily told the Council.

Straily told the Council that he had been working with Asst. Chief Harkins and they believed with their work they could get 3 cars for the department with a monthly lease payment of \$1878.00 with \$10,000 down from the police asset fund that the Council created.

"The reason they were working toward the \$1750 number is that is the average that is being deposited into that fund per month," City Manager Ralls shared. "Over the last 5 months that was the average."

"The grant car is coming on Friday and this would give us 3 more new ones. Then we would also have the K-9 unit with 60,000 miles on it," Chief Straily said.

"You can make all the promises about the cars and how long they will last," Councilmember Janice Willis said. "It won't be two years and you are going to come back and say we have a problem with one of the cars," Willis added.

"I don't want to come back every 2 years or every 3 years to ask for a car," Straily said. "That is why I am asking for them all at once to get it done and over with," Straily added. "We can build up that money in the asset fund so down the road if we need the money, it will be there."

Straily stated that assigning a car to each officer to take home makes them more accountable for maintenance rather than cars being shared.

Mayor Dobbins made the motion to get 3 Chargers with the \$10,000 down and a lease of \$1878 per month from the police asset fund. Councilmember Michael Moore made the second and the motion passed 5 aye, none against.



## (Reprint of This Past Sunday's Oklahoman Feature Story of Comanche Coaches' Quick and Heroic Action.....)

### Comanche Times Reporter Saved By Football Coaches



Comanche Times editor Steve Bolton and Kelli Bolton (middle) pose with Comanche assistant coaches Montie Blair (left) and Casey Rowell (right). The coaches helped save Steve's life earlier this month.

by Adam Kemp,  
The Daily Oklahoman

Game nights without Steve Bolton are unheard of at Comanche High.

For more than 25 years Bolton has made it his mission to be at every school event, whether that's for football, basketball, baseball, softball or school plays, cook-outs and fundraisers.

As lead reporter, photographer, editor in chief and publisher of the Comanche Times, Bolton prides himself on knowing his community and shining a light on what makes the small town of 1,600 people special.

"Today's news is tomorrow's history of our community," Bolton said. "I take that very seriously."

"We are a little country, weekly newspaper and that's exactly what we want to be."

So on Friday night when Bolton hosted Frederick for

its season opener, of course Bolton was there.

He stood in the end zone next to where the players ran onto the field waiting to shake hands with the coaches, mere yards away from where his life almost ended.

"He was gone."

Bolton's dedication to Comanche has led him to take the team pictures for the football program for more than two decades.

On August 11, standing at the 50 yard line on Barnett Field inside Harley Stadium, Bolton was finishing up the portraits of players and coaches when he said he felt "lava in his chest."

He called for his wife and co-editor of the newspaper, Kelli, to come to him before dropping to his knees, collapsing on the football field.

"He was gone," Kelli Bolton said. "You could just see that he was gone."

Without hesitation the Comanche football coaching staff jumped into action.

Assistant coaches Montie Blair and Casey Rowell went to work starting CPR while paramedics were called.

Head coach Brad Perry and several of the players set off to find an automated external defibrillator in one of the nearby school buildings.

Blair, a volunteer firefighter and former EMT, said he recognized Bolton was having a heart attack and went to work on chest compressions while Rowell did the breathing.

Around the field some of the players gathered in groups to watch their coaches save Steve's life while others still circled up and began to pray.

"There was no pulse and he was turning blue," Blair said. "It looked like he was gone, but I knew we just couldn't stop."

Eventually someone made it back with the AED and they hooked Bolton up.

They shocked him once.

They shocked him twice. About seven minutes had elapsed since Bolton had collapsed, but the two assistant coaches continued to do CPR.

"I had never been apart of anything like that before," said Rowell, 27. "I didn't know any better to stop or start. I just knew I was just going to

keep going until they told me to stop."

Then Steve Bolton came back to life.

The 59-year-old man took a deep breath and the color slowly began to return to his face.

"Hey, Steve," Blair remembers saying in the moment. "Stay with us."

The ambulance arrived after nearly 20 minutes. Bolton was taken to Comanche County Memorial Hospital where scans revealed he had a 100 percent block of the left coronary artery, known as the widow-maker.

Another valve was more than 75 percent blocked.

Bolton had two stents put in and was treated for broken ribs and bruising from Blair's CPR, a tell-tale sign that Blair performed his role perfectly, doctors said.

An asset to the community Blair went to visit Bolton in the hospital the day following the incident.

Bolton tried to apologize, but Blair cut him off.

See Heroic Action p. 5



Above, Comanche Celebrated "Public Power Week" at City Hall grilling out BBQ chicken legs and giving away door prizes, light bulbs and other prizes. Above, Comanche City Manager Chuck Kalls visits with Comancheans Helen Johnson and Teresa Jones during celebration festivities this past week.

Above right, Comanche firefighters Ryan Ellis and Hunter Wright deliver a pizza to a residence in Meridian as part of the annual Tribe Pride Pizza "Pizza and Prevention" fundraiser for the Comanche Fire Department held this past week.



# The Comanche Times

Comanche, Oklahoma Caring People with Hometown Pride...  
Where The Courageous Spirit of Cowboys On The Cherokee Trail First Indians To The Territory Lives On

VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN, NUMBER 6 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2018 50 CENTS



In what Comanche Times reporter/editor/publisher Steve Bolton calls "Angels Among Us", Comanche Football Coaches Monte Blair and Casey Rowell were once again honored this past Friday afternoon at the Tommy West Gymnasium for their heroic efforts back in August saving the life of Bolton.

Bolton was at the stadium taking the traditional pre-season photos when he collapsed on the football field in what appeared to be full cardiac arrest. Blair and Rowell jumped into quick heroic action saving his life by performing CPR for over 20 minutes and were also able to utilize an AED from the elementary building nearby.

Steven Embree of the American Heart Association presented the coaching duo the prestigious American Heart Association Heartsaver Hero Award. Coach Blair and Coach Rowell were also recently honored pre-game by the Southwest Oklahoma Air Evac flight crew that landed on the 50 yard line and presented them with an Air Evac signed football for their quick heroic efforts followed by presentations to the duo of lifesaving awards by Woodmen Life.

## Gospel Bluegrass Music Jubilee This Saturday

The Old Country Church is happy to invite you to their monthly gospel blue grass music jubilee. Everyone is invited and it is an open mic format.

The event will take place this Saturday evening 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Asbury Complex located at 410 S. 2nd in Comanche. Donations toward the Comanche Nutrition Center will be accepted at the door.

The featured gospel artist this month will be Bill Baker and The Bill Baker Band.

Bill Baker is a Christian singer/songwriter who grew up in southern Oklahoma and now calls the small town of Healdton his home. The son of a preacher, he began writing songs with his four piece band anywhere the door is open, from traditional, contemporary, from cowboy churches to opries to festivals.

"Anywhere we can tell anybody about Jesus. That's where we want to be," Bill said.

His latest CD, "Brand New Cowboy" is full of original songs written, arranged, and performed by Bill and his band.



**WE NEED YOUR VOTES!**

**VOTE EVERY DAY!**  
 UNTIL OCTOBER 31, 2018 at 11:59:59 PM!  
 VOTE HERE: [WWW.VIK9S.ORG/SUVGIVEAWAY](http://WWW.VIK9S.ORG/SUVGIVEAWAY)  
 Vested Interest in K9s, Inc. -  
 K9 Law Enforcement SUV Giveaway  
 Visit <http://www.vik9s.org/suvgiveaway> for official rules

**Vote for Your Favorite K9 Team "Comanche!"**  
 With The Chance To Win "A New Chevy Tahoe SUV K9 Police Vehicle"

## 2018 CHS Homecoming Royals Anna Ramos and Rowdy Rhone

Comanche High School held their CHS Football Homecoming 2018 in pre-game ceremonies this past Friday night at Harley Stadium. The theme this year was "Rock of Ages" with the winning class golf cart entry receiving \$200.

The freshman candidate was escorted by a traditional '70's Volkswagen hippie van complete with disco dancers in their disco dance hall. They were gettin' down to some of the top '70's hits for their boogie night. The Class of 2022 said "Catch You On The Flip Side!"

The sophomore class chose the year 1957 with the release of Jailhouse Rock for their golf cart. Eisenhower was President, gas was 24 cents a gallon, a new home was \$12,200 and two popular toys were Slinky and Hula Hoop. American Bandstand was all the rage.

The junior class golf cart float entry was the B-52's famous "Love Shack". Just a little ole place where everyone is movin' and groovin'.

The senior golf cart flat was a tribute to the 90's with packman, rubics cubes, 80's mixed tapes, and a giant boom box.

When the exciting announcement came, Miss Anna Ramos and Mr. Rowdy Rhone were announced as this year's Comanche High School Football Homecoming Queen and King.

Anna is the daughter of Juan and Margarita Ramos. He future plans are to graduate high school and continue her studies to become a dental hygienist. The person Anna admires the most is her dad because he pushes her to better herself in everything she does and to always strive to do her best.

Rowdy is the son of Ronnie and Sandra Rhone. Rowdy's awards are 2-time Academic State Champion for wrestling, 2-time state qualifier for speech and debate, 3-time dual state wrestling semi-finalist, and wrestling state team runner-up.

Rowdy's plans are to go to college, make bank, have a hot wife and make little Rowdys.

Freshman candidates were Caitly Blair, daughter of Greg and Quinn Blair, and Bryson Evans, son of Aaron and Brooke Evans.

Sophomore candidates were Baleigh Harris, daughter of Harold Wayne Harris, Dianna Harris, and stepdad Tim Thomas.

Sophomore candidate escort was Hunter Beck, son of Chance and Miranda Beck.

Junior candidates were Bende Bigford, daughter of Joie and Bubba Bigford, and Trevor



Cusumano, son of Jennifer Reicosky.

Senior king candidates/escorts were Ryley Walden, son of Ryan and Ashley Walden, and Elton Hamrick, son of Amy and Cody Johnson. They escorted 2017 HC

Queen Caitlin Allen, daughter of Chad Allen.

Flower girls for the ceremonies were Berkley Dobbins, daughter of Nic and Jacy Dobbins, and Emi-Jo Dempset, daughter of Billy Don and Bethany Dempsey.

Crown bearer for the evening was Jagger Wilson, son of Toby and Shelby Wilson.





## Nine New Buses Arrive Bringing Big Smiles To Students

Nine new school buses arrived in Comanche Thursday afternoon of this past week, purchased with proceeds from a bond issue approved on April 3. All nine buses are equipped with air-conditioning, inside and outside camera systems, and many other safety and convenience features. One of the buses is equipped with a handicap lift system. Supt. Terry Davidson said that some of the buses have been ready for a couple of weeks but that he thought it was important to have them all arrive at the same time. "I knew the students would be excited and I wanted them all to share in the first ride experience on the same day," Davidson said.

"We are all so grateful to our community for their support of the  
*See Buses p. 3*

**The Comanche Times**  
Comanche, Oklahoma Caring People with Hometown Pride...  
Where the Courageous Spirit of Cowboys On The Cherokee Trail And Indians In The Territory Lives On  
Rodeo Capital Native American Heritage

## Comanche Woman Taken For Over \$15,000 In Phone Scam

Comanche Police Chief Bill Straily Reported he was contacted by Comanche dispatch to go to a residence on South 10th in Comanche on a fraud report.

Upon his arrival, he met with a lady that told him she had been a victim of fraud. The lady told him that a woman named Cindy Allen had contacted her on the messenger on her phone and told her if she would send \$3450 that she would receive \$120,000 on an old claim through workman's compensation. The woman reportedly told the fraud victim that the money was to cover the taxes on the \$120,000. The victim told Chief Straily that the woman, "Cindy", told her that her friend had already received \$120,000 and provided her with alleged proof. The victim said she did not call her friend to verify the information until much later.

The report states that the woman sent \$3450 by wire transfer to a TD Bank in Florida to the name of Diane Owen. The report also states that over the course of a month the reporting victim was asked several  
*See Scam p. 6*

## Chamber Sets Important Dates

The Comanche Chamber of Commerce met for their regular monthly meeting luncheon Tuesday of this past week at Patterson Avenue Baptist Church.

Important upcoming events and dates were set that include: Weather Rescheduled Comanche Chamber Charity Golf Tourney to be held at Comanche Golf Course on November 3; Trick or Treat the Trail to be held from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, October 31 with annual costume contest to be held at American Nation Bank parking lot at 5 p.m., public to be invited to trunk and treat along the trail; Annual Christmas Parade to be held on Saturday, December 1 at 7 p.m. with theme of "Merry Christmas!"

The Chamber also voted to ask Cassidy Morgan and Brayden Harris to serve as co-host announcers of this year's Christmas Parade. The Chamber membership nominated a number of people for "parade marshal" and will be voted on at the next Chamber meeting slated for October 30.

The Chamber also voted to once again pay for porta-potties for downtown for the Ag Booster Fall Fest and Comanche Toys 4 Tots Car Show.

## Supt. Davidson Expresses Appreciation For Actions, Assistance During Lock Down

Comanche's School Campus went into lock down before noon Thursday of this past week following the discovery of a note in the high school girls' bathroom that gave a possible indication of gun violence that could be planned for the school.

"From the beginning, we doubted that a real threat existed, but we can never take chances with our students' safety," Supt. Davidson told The Times this week.

"I am very proud of our faculty members, administrators, and students who followed the protocol we practice on a regular basis.

"Officers from the Comanche Police Department headed up the search of our building with assistance from the Stephens County Sheriff's Department. We are grateful for their help.

Davidson also expressed appreciation to parents for their patience and support during the lock down. "We appreciate the fact that they trust us with the safety of their children, and want them to know we will always do our very best to keep them safe."

VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN, NUMBER 4 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2018 50 CENTS

## Honoring Our Life-Saving Heroes ..... Coach Monte Blair and Coach Casy Rowell



Cheerleaders, fans, firemen, and policemen present the Woodmen Life 180 sq. ft. American flag during the National Anthem at the football game this past Friday night to help honor assistant coaches Casy Rowell and Monte Blair for their "LifeSaver" awards. Photo by Marie Parrish



AirEvac presenters and honorees - (l-r): David Shorter, Josh Morgan, Casy Rowell, Monte Blair, Melissa Dearing, Mike Riggins and Kayla Malcolm.



Woodmen Life Insurance Company presenters and honorees - (l-r): Brandon Armstrong, Recruiting Sales Manager, Grayson Armstrong, Casy Rowell, Monte Blair, Representative Janet Asbury, Community Outreach Manager Billie Floyd, Regional Director Stephen Priest.

Coach Monte Blair and Coach Casy Rowell were surprise honorees this past Friday night at Harley Stadium for their heroic acts on that very field on August 11 where they quickly went into extended lifesaving mode with cpr and later with aed saving the life of Comanche Times Publisher/Editor Steve Bolton. Bolton went into full cardiac arrest on the field while taking team photos during pre-season media day, a proud tradition for him for over a quarter of a century. The story has since went nationwide. The two coaches were honored by AirEvac that flew into the stadium landing on the 50 yard line presenting the coaches a signed football from their flight crew. Woodmen Life Insurance Company also recognized the two coaches with the most prestigious award they present, "Lifesaver Award" presented by their Regional Director Stephen Priest. The WoodmenLife also allowed Comanche to feature their 180 square foot flag during pre-game ceremonies and the presentation of the National Anthem. The ceremonies were featured on KSWO Channel 7 News later that evening.

## Happy 95th Birthday Kenneth Simmons!

The children of Kenneth Simmons wish to invite you to help celebrate his 95th birthday. The event will be held this Saturday, October 6, 2018 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Comanche Housing Authority Community Room. No gifts are requested, but cards and funny stories about the honoree would be welcome and greatly appreciated.

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Forney High School Softball Team  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Chris Schmidt

Phone: 512-232-9101

E-mail: cschmidt@uiltexas.org

Street Address: 1701 Manor Rd.

City, State, Zip Code: Austin, TX 78722

Date: January 31, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Chris Schmidt

Title: UIL Public Affairs Representative

Signature:



# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_SOFTBALL TEAM\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Forney High School Softball Team  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 1800 College Ave.  
*(street address)*

Forney, TX 75126  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 469-762-4200

E-mail: patrick.eitel@edu.forneyisd.net

School (if any): Forney High School

City: Forney State: Texas

# NOMINATION FORM

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

The Forney High School softball team is in good standing with UIL rules and policies. In a year dedicated to the memory of their fallen teammate, Emily Galiano, Forney won the 2018 Conference 5A UIL Softball State Championship (the first softball state championship in school history).

In 2018, the PlayforEm Foundation was established as a charitable 501(c)(3) foundation focused on helping make the world a better, happier place as it celebrates the life of Emily Galiano. With the help of their community, they organize fundraisers to help high school students reach their dreams of attending college through PlayforEm scholarships. In its first year, the foundation awarded \$9,000 in scholarships to 12 graduating seniors from Forney High School. The plan is to include North Forney students in 2019 and a school outside of Forney ISD the following year.

"We like to give back to the community," said Madison Galiano, twin sister of Emily. "We want to keep her name going by spreading her story and doing things to let her legacy last."

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

The Forney High School softball team suffered a tremendous loss when a teammate, Emily Galiano, passed away after a car accident. The softball field became a sanctuary for the team, a place where they could mourn and honor their fallen sister. A year later, they dedicated their season to Emily and their steadfast perseverance to honor her led to a fitting tribute at state as the team won its first UIL softball state title. For their perseverance through adversity and for being an example of the healing power of sport, we believe the Forney softball team is deserving of the National Spirit of Sport Award.

On May 16, 2017, the Forney High School softball team gathered together for a team dinner the night before their scheduled regional semifinal playoff series against Lake Ridge would begin. As teammates left the dinner party, 14-year old freshman outfielder Emily Galiano was fatally injured as she was struck by a vehicle driven by one of her teammates. The accident and untimely death devastated everyone associated with the softball team and sent shockwaves through the community.

The next day, a prayer vigil was held and additional counselors were called to help the students grieving over the loss of their friend and teammate. Coach Pat Eitel gathered the team together to discuss whether or not they wanted to play that week's playoff series against Lake Ridge, which had been postponed. He told the girls there are bigger things than softball, and there would be no shame if they chose not to play. The team got together and decided to play, it was what Emily would have wanted and they wanted to play for her. At the game, the two teams joined hands around the pitchers circle to honor Emily. Many of the capacity crowd were wearing shirts bearing Emily's No. 6 inside a softball surrounded by angel wings and a halo. A large banner hung from the back of Forney's dugout reading "We play for Emily" and Emily's name remained in the game program. Forney wore stickers on their helmets, both teams wore ribbons and Lake Ridge presented each Forney player with a yellow rose during pregame introductions. Various teams from around the area, along with others as far as California and Virginia, collected money or donated proceeds from concessions to the Galiano family. In that moment, the softball field offered a place for the players and community to heal.

"It was a healing process, I think, after tragedy," Eitel said. "On the field, it was a safe haven. Emily? We called Emily an angel in the outfield for us."

Forney would go on to win that playoff series, but was defeated in the next round in the regional final. Ending their season only a week after losing their teammate, the Forney softball team lost that connection they had felt to Emily while on the field. They decided to dedicate their entire 2018 season to Emily, make it to the state tournament, and win the school's first softball state championship in her honor. The team motto would be, "Play for Em."

"It means the world to have this team go out and do it for her. To dedicate our whole entire season to her means the world," said Emily's twin sister Madison, who was a backup infielder for Forney's varsity team. "It's not been easy, but it's been less of a struggle to go through it with sixteen of my other 'sisters.'"

Showing great fortitude, Forney rallied after an 8-6 start to win the next 23 straight games and advance to the UIL Softball State Tournament. Every game along the way brought healing for Emily and Madison's father, Denny Galiano.

"I tell people many times how lucky they are that they live in Forney, Texas," Denny said. "The way that the community has put their arms around us and embraced us. It's awesome to be around these kids. These girls are so loving, they're so strong."

During the playoffs, Forney defeated defending champ The Colony in the area round. In game 2 of that series, Forney turned a double-play to clinch the sweep and a 4-3 victory. They would clinch the regional final and stamp their ticket to the state tournament by defeating Hallsville by the same 4-3 score (getting the final out at third base). Through all of the close calls, Forney knew they had an angel on their side.

"We know she's with us. We were here for a bigger purpose," said pitcher Savanna DesRochers.

The miracle plays continued at the state tournament. Leading by a score of 1-0 in the state semifinal, Barbers Hill loaded the bases against Forney in the fourth inning. A hard hit ball to the outfield allowed the Forney right-fielder to throw out the runner at first base, escaping the inning unscathed. They would win the state semifinal, 3-0, and advance for a chance at the state championship.

In the state final, Forney took a 4-1 lead against Richmond Foster into the seventh and final inning. Foster would load the bases with no outs, but lined into a double play to bring the game to its final out. With the tying run at the plate, the Foster batter fouled a ball down left field that looked unplayable. Running at a full sprint, the Forney left fielder, Caroline Tedder, made the catch against the fence, nearly flipping over it in the process. The game was over and the celebration was on. The final play, which made No. 2 on SportsCenter's Top 10 that night, was even more significant because it was made by the left fielder, the same position played by Emily.

"I said 'it's two outs, we give everything we got, and we do it for our angel above,'" said Tedder about the final play.

"Right before [the final play] we all said a prayer, like 'please help us, give us the strength and show us that you are here because we are doing this all for you,' and that happened. So, I don't think it was a coincidence," said Madison after the game.

At home plate, Madison was presented with the championship trophy as the promise to her sister was fulfilled.

"To get the trophy from our coach, it just meant the world," said Madison. "For all of us, to come out here and become one and to get the trophy, not only for ourselves but our angel in the outfield, just means the world to us."

“We’re playing for Em, and we do that every time,” said Eitel. “We want to get on the big stage and we want to raise money for her foundation, where her name stays going forever.”

“We came out here for a bigger purpose than the title, we came out to win for her.” Said DesRochers.

Returning home to Forney, the entire team made one more stop to visit Emily. Madison placed the state gold medal on her sister’s tombstone and said, “Sis likes the bling.”

# Forney Softball Team “Playing For Em” As They Head To State Tournament

May 31, 2018 at 10:35 pm Filed Under: [Austin](#), [Car Accident](#), [Emily Galiano](#), [Forney Jackrabbits](#), [Forney Softball](#), [Play For Em](#), [State Tournament](#), [Texas](#)



**FORNEY, Texas (CBSDFW.COM)** – The focus of Forney softball team is undeniable. The Jackrabbits are riding a 23-game winning streak into the state tournament [this](#) weekend in Austin.

“We don’t talk about the streak.” Head Coach Pat Eitel admitted. “We know we [just](#) want to win every game.”

While the team is keeping quiet about the winning streak, the Jackrabbits are very vocal about [their](#) inspiration.

They’re [playing](#) for Emily – their “angel above”



Emily Galiano (credit: Quintana Photography)

Emily Galiano, a member of the Forney Softball team, was killed in a car accident leaving a team dinner last year.

This season, the Forney players are wearing a wristband inscribed with “Play for Em,” as both a tribute and a reminder of the teammate they lost in the tragic accident.

“It’s just a reminder to know who we are doing this for, and who we are playing for,” said left fielder Caroline Tedder, describing the wristbands.

Pitcher Savanna Desrochers added, “Our season is dedicated to her. I mean from here on out, it’s all for her.”

“We know she is always looking down on us,” said catcher Brittany Lee, describing her feelings when she takes the field.

Another way that Emily is being remembered is through the Play For Em Foundation. It’s a charitable foundation focused on helping make the world a better, happier place – just [like](#) the young lady it’s named for.

“She was a caring sole,” said infielder Tatum Stover

This [season](#), the Forney Softball team held a fundraiser for the Foundation, raising \$6,000.

The Jackrabbits [have](#) also retired Emily’s number-six jersey.

Emily’s twin sister Madison is a sophomore on the Jackrabbits team.

For Madison, both the memory of Emily, and those who promise never to forget her is something that warms her heart.

“It means a lot to me. My sister was my best friend,” said Madison. “For them to step up and become like my second sisters, it’s helped a lot.”

# A year of grief: Forney softball player Emily Galiano's family opens up on challenge of losing 14 year old daughter

HIGH SCHOOLS, SOFTBALL, FORNEY



Courtesy of Forney softball team/Courtesy of Forney softball team

The Forney softball team held PlayforEm night on Monday, March 26, 2018, paying tribute to former player Emily Galiano, who died in 2017.

By Greg Riddle, Staff Writer @DMNGregRiddle

**FORNEY** -- Denny Galiano tries to attend every Forney softball game, even though each trip to the ballpark provides agonizing memories of the death of his daughter, Emily.

Just as he visits Emily's gravesite nearly every Tuesday and Friday, the elder Galiano keeps going back because it is therapeutic.

Each game that Forney has played leading up to this week's state tournament in Austin has helped with the healing process for a family, a team and a community that were united by the accident that claimed the life of a 14-year-old freshman softball player on May 16, 2017.

"I tell people many times how lucky they are that they live in Forney, Texas," Denny said. "The way that the community has put their arms around us and embraced us. It's awesome to be around these kids. These girls are so loving, they're so strong."

That support gave him the strength to talk publicly this week about the trying times his family have faced since Emily Galiano was struck and killed by a Jeep driven by a Forney teammate as they left a team dinner party.

"We've been really private," Denny said. "It's hard to talk about because of the different emotions that you go through during the year. When all of this happened, it was pretty rough. The holidays were very difficult. We're a tight family, and we've just kind of been there for each other."

Emily's older brother, Zachary, found it difficult to leave for college. But the former Forney basketball player did what he could during his freshman year at Texas A&M.

"You really don't want to leave your family at a time like this," the 19-year-old said. "In my mind-set, the only way that I could really contribute was calling every week, or just making good grades, trying to be successful. I knew that making them proud would help bring some relief."

Help came from near and far.

Emily's mother, Laura, is an elementary school teacher in Forney ISD, and teachers throughout the school district banded together to provide meals for the family for a couple of months after Emily's death. The entire front room of the family's house was filled with flowers from well-wishers.

NCAA career home run record holder Lauren Chamberlain, a former Oklahoma All-American who now plays in the National Pro Fastpitch league, posted on Twitter that she was dedicating her 2017 season to Emily and the Forney softball team. Teams around the area collected money and donated concession-stand proceeds to Forney, and fans from as far away as the UK sent condolences on Twitter.

"It was absolutely amazing," Denny said. "I never realized our little girl touched so many."



Greg Riddle/Greg Riddle

Many fans at Saturday's Forney vs. Mansfield Lake Ridge softball game wore shirts honoring Forney freshman Emily Galiano, who was killed after being struck by a vehicle while leaving a team dinner party Tuesday.

Emily's twin sister, Madison, is also a Forney softball player and was at the team party when her sister was run over as teammates piled into a Jeep. Madison was the one who had to call her mother and deliver the news.

But Denny said Madison never considered quitting softball, even though she and her sister were inseparable and had always been teammates from a young age. Tuesday morning, as the Jackrabbits (31-6) practiced ahead of Friday's noon Class 5A state semifinal against Mont Belvieu Barbers Hill (39-6), it was clear that the chance to win the school's first softball state title isn't what has kept the sophomore going.

"The girls have my back, no matter what," said Madison, who is a backup third baseman and catcher. "They support me when days are rough, they pick me up. We are not playing for ourselves. We are playing for reasons so much greater."

Forney has hit 38 home runs this season, a total that would rank No. 23 in the national high school record book if submitted to and verified by the National Federation of State High School Associations. Coach Pat Eitel thinks divine intervention played a part in the most recent home run.

Senior Samantha Coker hit a ball in the regional final against Hallsville that Eitel didn't think was going to leave the ballpark, but it ended up being a solo home run that was the difference in a 4-3 victory Friday that put Forney in the state tournament. Last year, four days after Emily Galiano passed away, Caroline Tedder hit a two-run home run that was the difference in Forney's 7-5 victory over Mansfield Lake Ridge in the final game of a regional semifinal series.

"It was just like Tedder's hit," Eitel said of Coker's home run. "I didn't think that was going out, but it carried and carried. I always say there is that angel in the outfield."

Her presence will be felt when Forney takes a 23-game winning streak into Friday's state semifinal at the University of Texas' Red and Charline McCombs Field. Forney listed Emily Galiano's name and No. 6 jersey on the roster that it submitted to the UIL for the state tournament.

"My wife, it was her idea," Eitel said of Michelle Eitel, who is also his assistant coach. "It was all about Em. We don't want anybody to forget her."



Greg Riddle/Greg Riddle

The Forney softball team poses for pictures after Saturday's game while holding a picture of teammate Emily Galiano, who was killed after being struck by a vehicle while leaving a team dinner party Tuesday.

Three days after Emily passed away, Denny delivered an impassioned speech on the team bus to a heartbroken group of teenagers to "get them focused back on playing softball, and just letting them know that regardless of what they did, that she was going to be there with them." Ever since, PlayforEm has been more than a hashtag on Twitter.

"We think about her every day," all-state sophomore pitcher Savanna DesRochers said. "We miss her a lot. This is for her."

The PlayforEm Foundation was established late last year and raises money for college scholarships in memory of Emily. This year, the foundation awarded \$9,000 in scholarships, spread among 12 Forney High School students. The plan is to include North Forney students next year and a school outside of Forney ISD the following year.

"We like to give back to the community," Madison said. "We want to keep her name going by spreading her story and doing things to let her legacy last."

Twitter: @DMNGregRiddle





# Dallas-area softball player Emily Galiano killed when run over by car leaving team dinner

(Photo: Twitter screen shot)

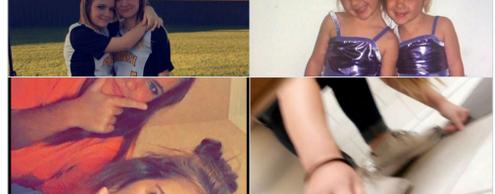
6.2k SHARES SHARE TWEET EMAIL

By: **Cam Smith, USA TODAY High School Sports** | May 18, 2017

A 14-year-old softball player at Forney (Texas) High School was tragically killed leaving a team dinner when she fell as a car reversed to leave the event and was run over.

As reported by Dallas-Fort Worth CW affiliate KDAF, Forney freshman **Emily Galiano was pronounced dead Tuesday night** shortly after she was airlifted to Baylor Medical Center in Dallas. The teen was run over by a teammate when a group of team members were piling into a Jeep. The driver began to move the car precisely as Galiano slipped and she was run over almost instantly.

Among the teammates Galiano leaves behind is her twin sister, Madison, who tweeted out a remembrance of her sister hours after her death. The two were said to be inseparable best friends, and even wore neighboring numbers on the softball diamond; Emily Galiano wore number 6 while Madison is number 5.



**madison galiano** @GalianoMadison  
 may 16, 2017 at 9:21pm i lost my bestfriend, sister, wombate, teammate, etc, rest easy baby. everything i do is for you now ❤️ i love you 🙏  
 7:13 AM - May 17, 2017  
 7,692 likes 3,214 people are talking about this

The entire town of Forney was quick to rally behind the Galiano family, with counselors available at the school throughout Wednesday and a candlelight vigil scheduled for Saturday. A previously scheduled game against Mansfield Lakeridge was understandably postponed.

Others were also quick to post their remembrances of Galiano to social media, often using the hashtag #prayersforemily



**han** @HannahHoldbrook  
 I don't know what to say bc words can't describe how much you will be missed. Just know that we love you and you have changed so many lives  
 11:36 PM - May 16, 2017  
 97 likes See han's other Tweets

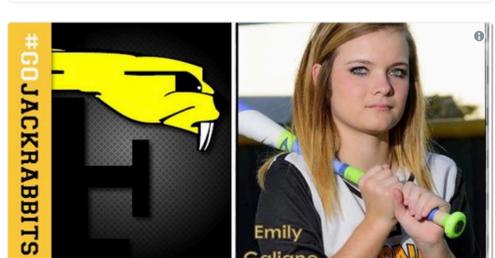


**Kambell Coker** @kamcoker  
 I love you so much em... stay strong babe!!!! ❤️ #prayersforemily  
 8:41 PM - May 16, 2017  
 105 likes See Kambell Coker's other Tweets

**Coach Lee** @CoachLee\_❤️  
 Please send thoughts & prayers to the entire Forney softball program, Emily & her family. This town & this sport are one.  
 #prayersforemily  
 8:42 PM - May 16, 2017  
 422 likes 171 people are talking about this



**kenzie** @kenziejaayyy  
 support our neighbors over at @forneyisd !! ❤️❤️❤️  
 8:29 PM - May 17, 2017  
 139 likes 47 people are talking about this



**LadyJacketSoftball** @LJacketSoftball  
 LadyJackets are asking everyone 2 come out Fri@6 to support Forney in their Regional SemiFinal Game @RHS.Lets Show Forney RKWLL Love! ❤️🐰  
 7:11 PM - May 17, 2017  
 232 likes 83 people are talking about this



**LadyJacketSoftball** @LJacketSoftball  
 Our hearts go out to the Forney Softball Team, Emily's family and friends. We are all praying for you.  
 11:04 AM - May 17, 2017  
 128 likes 36 people are talking about this



**Quintana Photography** @QPhotoQ  
 Prayers for peace and comfort. @FHSJackrabbits  
 7:49 AM - May 17, 2017  
 216 likes 67 people are talking about this



**alyssa** @alysagaidos  
 im still speechless. there are no words for this tragedy. emily, i will forever remember you and your sweet soul. fly high baby girl.. 🙏  
 10:18 AM - May 17, 2017  
 70 likes See alyssa's other Tweets

**Lauren Chamberlain** @LChamberlain44  
 Hard to fathom... Rest In Peace to Emily and my sincere condolences to her family, friends, and the Forney softball community. So so sad.  
 10:15 PM - May 16, 2017  
 527 likes 192 people are talking about this

**Taylor Edwards** @TayAnnEdwards  
 softball community lost a good one today. Prayers go out to friends and family..#prayersforemily  
 10:16 PM - May 16, 2017  
 50 likes See Taylor Edwards's other Tweets

**Kambell Coker** @kamcoker  
 a girl that i was on the field w/ almost everyday in the summer, the one i had so many laughs & memories with.. gone. i miss you.  
 #RIPemily  
 9:47 PM - May 16, 2017 · Rockwall, TX  
 37 likes See Kambell Coker's other Tweets

**Kambell Coker** @kamcoker  
 Gonna miss you so much on and off the field em... I love you babe  
 ❤️❤️❤️ #ripemily  
 9:33 PM - May 16, 2017 · Rockwall, TX  
 28 likes See Kambell Coker's other Tweets

**Kambell Coker** @kamcoker  
 i can't do this.  
 9:51 PM - May 16, 2017 · Rockwall, TX  
 7 likes See Kambell Coker's other Tweets

6.2k SHARES SHARE TWEET EMAIL

# Section 7

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Forest Lake Christian School  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Roger Blake - CIF

Phone: 916-239-4477

E-mail: rblake@cifstate.org

Street Address: 4658 Duckhorn Drive

City, State, Zip Code: Sacramento, CA 95834

Date: January 24, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Roger Blake

Title: CIF Executive Director

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

---

Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Team/School)

Name of Nominee: Forest Lake Christian School

*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 12515 Combie Road

*(street address)*

Auburn, CA 95602

*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 530-269-1540

E-mail: AD – LaRon Gordon [l.gordon@forestlakechristian.org](mailto:l.gordon@forestlakechristian.org) and

Girls Volleyball Coach – Travis Smith. [t.smith@forestlakechristian.org](mailto:t.smith@forestlakechristian.org)

School (if any): Forest Lake Christian School

City: Auburn

State: CA

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Forest Lake Christian School Girls Volleyball Team participated in the 2018 CIF NorCal Division VI Championships and finished as runner-up.

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 articles/video links included with this application. Content below is pulled from various articles which reported on this act of sportsmanship.)*

Videos:

[https://youtu.be/eqMl13\\_XNJY](https://youtu.be/eqMl13_XNJY)

<https://faithtap.com/11434/teens-who-lose-uniforms-in-fire-are-left-in-tears-by-opponents/>

The Forest Lake Christian girls' volleyball team hosted Paradise Adventist in the 2018 CIF NorCal Division VI Semi-final. Paradise Adventist, a team and community that nearly lost everything in the Camp fire (the deadliest blaze in the history of California), including homes, decided to play the scheduled game, desperate for some normalcy.

The welcome Paradise Adventist received upon arrival is something the team said they'll never forget. Within 24 hours of hearing about the tragedy in Paradise, the Forest Lake community stepped in raising over \$16,000 support. In addition to meals, uniforms and equipment, each member of the Paradise team received flowers, gift bags filled with essential toiletry items and a \$3000 gift card after the game. No fan or family member of the Paradise team paid admission to the game or snack bar. Forest Lake Christian also filled a room full of food and clothing free to anyone affiliated with Paradise Adventist.

Wednesday Nov 14 2018 | 6 comments

109

## Fighting Fire with Familiarity

Forest Lake provides sense of relief, normalcy to a team and town devastated by fires

By: Nick Pecoraro



Travis Smith had been retired from coaching for three years. He and his wife Elizabeth were ready to enjoy life as grandparents.

So naturally, when the Forest Lake Christian athletic director LaRon Gordon asked Smith to return to the sideline to guide the 2018 varsity girls volleyball team for a fourth stint as head coach, his answer was a hard no.

But Elizabeth had a feeling. She looked at her husband inexplicably and intuitively and said, “You need to do this.”

Even after a successful season in which the Lady Falcons went 25-7 and won their first ever NorCal playoff game, Coach Smith often questioned why he returned.

“I was looking for that reason all season long,” said Smith. “Saturday, it all made sense.”

Saturday night was the Division VI NorCal semifinal, where Forest Lake hosted Paradise Adventist Academy, a team and a community that has lost nearly everything in the Camp fire that has burned over 130,000 acres in Butte County and claimed at least 48 lives since last Thursday, making it the deadliest blaze in the history of California.

After learning of the devastation of the Paradise community, Smith and the Falcons were certain there wouldn't be a volleyball game. Why would there be?

According to Paradise head coach Jason Eyer, their school has been severely damaged and at least eight of his 12 players had lost everything in the flames, including their homes.

“It's heartbreaking,” said Eyer. “Most of our girls landed with relatives and friends spread out from Mt. Shasta all the way down to Stockton.”

Desperate for a fraction of normalcy, the Cougars, who set a program record for wins at 29-3 and recorded the school's first Northern Section championship in any sport, decided to make the trip to Lake of the Pines Saturday to somehow play what seemed like such a meaningless game in a suddenly insignificant season.

The welcome the team and its families received upon arrival to Forest Lake was something Eyer and his players said they'll never forget.

“All I knew was that they were planning to feed us after the game,” he said. “We walked in door and the first thing we saw lined up on the bleachers were uniforms for every girl with the correct number. They didn't just pick random numbers, they got them all right. They gave us shorts, socks, knee pads, shoes – it was overwhelming.”

Within the 24 hours of hearing about the town's tragedy, the Forest Lake community stepped in and stepped up in a big way, raising over \$16,000 in support of its neighbors to the north.

“I was just in awe – in complete shock and amazement at what they were able to put together,” said Eyer. “Several of our players just broke down in tears. It still gets me choked up. Over-the-top generosity and compassion. We've never played them in any sport. I don't know the coach or the AD. I've never spoken to them before – no direct connection. They were doing this for complete strangers.”

In addition to meals, uniforms and equipment, Forest Lake administration supplied each member of the Paradise team with flowers, gift bags filled with essential toiletry items and a \$300 gift card after the game.

Smith said his friends and staff members may have bought out every gift card Target had in its inventory.

“Some of the gift cards said ‘Happy Anniversary,’” he laughed.

“It really meant a lot to all of us,” said Paradise senior middle Sarah Goymer. “I started bawling. They were so overwhelming with their generosity and effort they put into that.”

The generosity didn’t stop with the team. No fan or family member of the Paradise team paid admission into the game, nor did they for anything from the snack bar. Forest Lake also filled a room full of food and clothing free to anyone affiliated with Paradise Adventist.

“They treated us like family even though we’ve never met,” said Paradise senior hitter Quincey Carter. “We had no personal connection, but they took us in and made sure we were okay. It was really amazing to see their compassion and empathy. It just made us feel like there are good people out there.”

As for the game itself, the match was tied at one game apiece before Forest Lake eventually grabbed the last two sets for a 3-1 victory, advancing to Tuesday’s NorCal championship game. But remarkably, the Forest Lake gym was beyond capacity, a majority of it with Paradise supporters.

“I was blown away,” said Smith. “For them to have so much support there – I talked to people in that gym that had never seen a volleyball game in their life.”

Said Paradise senior Samantha Sayegh: “It was a hard game, but it was good. We could feel the crowd’s energy. It made it a little easier and took our minds off everything. It was the one normal thing out of all this.”...



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**Lynn Forbes**

Compassion won the day. Just beautiful.

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**Dotty Hiatt**

Good people always rise to the occasion.

Like · Reply · 9w



**Brenda Krischen Brabrook**

It was an amazing night. To know someone cares so much and to see the happiness on the girls faces in such a moment of chaos was touching. It wasn't so much about the gifts we received as much as it was about the love we felt.

Like · Reply · 2 · 9w



**Jeff Jones**

I am in awe of the Lord's love shown through the hearts of Forest Lake Christian School. So proud of this school. Why isn't this story on the major networks?

Like · Reply · 3 · 9w



**Brandon Pinney**

Being there was an experience I'll never forget. What a wonderful story in the midst of the tragedy.

Like · Reply · 3 · 10w



**Pete Dufour**

Great piece Nick! Way to go FLCHS

Like · Reply · 1 · 10w



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# OUTPOURING OF LOVE: Forest Lake Christian community lends helping hand to Paradise Adventist Academy during time of need

November 12, 2018



Hide Caption

## Submitted photo

Forest Lake Christian and Paradise Adventist Academy competed against each other in a CIF NorCal Division VI volleyball semifinal contest. Even though there was a trip to the championship game on the line, the contest became more about one community helping another.



Even when the stakes are at their highest, sports are often about far more than what happens between the lines.

That was never more evident than what took place at Forest Lake Christian on Saturday night.

Coping with the ongoing devastation and tragedy from the Camp Fire, the Paradise Adventist Academy volleyball team courageously made their way to Forest Lake Christian to face the Lady Falcons in the CIF NorCal Division VI semifinals.

The Lady Falcons, and the Forest Lake Christian community as a whole, welcomed their playoff opponent the only way they know how, with love, support and a helping hand.

The Cougars from Paradise Adventist arrived to Forest Lake Christian to find brand new custom jerseys, shorts, knee pads and socks waiting for them as well as truck loads of donated clothes and more than \$16,000 in cash and gift cards. All of which was pulled together by the Forest Lake Christian community in less than 24 hours.

"To have our community show up in such a huge way, I'm still blown away by it," FLC head coach Travis Smith said. "I've never seen that many people in our gym, and there were people there who had never watched a volleyball game in their life, but they came to support what we were doing."

After the game, Paradise Adventist coach Jason Eyer addressed the standing-room only crowd to express his gratitude.

"I've never been so overwhelmed by so many things I would have never thought possible, and this is one of the most amazing things I could ever have thought would happen," he said. "Your community is awesome and we are forever grateful."

Forest Lake Christian athletic director LaRon Gordon was instrumental in coordinating the event, but was quick to credit the FLC administration and community as a whole for pulling it all together.

"It was truly an amazing scene, and on top of that the volleyball match was amazing too," Gordon said. "To have two great teams going at it the way that they did. It's hard to describe how electric it was. I've been in sports for 18 years and to be in an atmosphere like that, I can't really compare it to anything else I've been a part of."

Gordon said the outpouring of support was overwhelming, noting donations poured in all day long and the gym was packed 45 minutes before the game even started.

"The Forest Lake community is brand new to me, so I didn't really know what to expect," he said. "But, after that night and after getting to know people in that community and at the school, the outpouring of love and support shown has been truly overwhelming."

After the game, won by Forest Lake in four sets, tears flowed and new friendships were forged as the two teams posed for photos and enjoyed each other's company.

"That's just who my girls are and that's just what Forest Lake Christian is," Smith said. "It's a community coming together to share love."

Smith said Saturday night's experience is one his players will remember for the rest of their lives.

"These girls can look back on that and they can put their chin up and say 'we had a small part to play in a really difficult time and we were able to step up,'" he said. "This is a memory they will never forget."

The No. 2 seed Lady Falcons won 25-16, 18-25, 25-18, 25-13, and advance to today's championship bout against No. 1 Stone Ridge Christian (Merced).

The Lady Falcons got strong efforts from Lily Sween (15 kills, 4 blocks), Raegan Tanon (19 digs, 4 aces), Sonja Sween (5 blocks, 5 kills), Bella O'Neill (14 assists, 4 blocks), Taylor Dunn (13 digs, 5 kills) and Mackenzie Wickstrom (13 assists). The Lady Cougars were led by seniors Sarah Goymer (13 kills, 21 digs, 3 blocks) and Quincy Carter (14 kills, 14 digs).

"There were long rallies and both sides were fighting for every single point," Smith said. "The final score was not indicative of the level of competition that was going on."

However it may shake out in tonight's title bout, Smith said FLC's season has already been a success.

"No matter what happens (in the championship game), I know that that was what our season was all about," Smith said. "It was literally one of the highlights of my life. You can take something like a NorCal final four game, which is an accomplishment in of itself, and turn that into an outpouring of love for the other team. Those are the makings of a really good movie."

*To contact Sports Editor Walter Ford, call 530-477-4232 or email [wford@theunion.com](mailto:wford@theunion.com) (<mailto:wford@theunion.com>).*

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# When a High School Volleyball Team Lost Everything in the Camp Fire, Their Opponents Bought Them New Uniforms

POSTED 3:17 PM, NOVEMBER 20, 2018, BY CNN WIRE, UPDATED AT 03:05PM, NOVEMBER 20, 2018

<https://fox40.com/2018/11/20/when-a-high-school-volleyball-team-lost-everything-in-the-california-fires-their-opponents-bought-them-new-uniforms/>



As the Smoke Clears: Paradise High School Volleyball finds Hope and Friends at Fore...



For a high school volleyball team, making the state semifinals would normally be a big deal.

But for the girls' team at Paradise Adventist Academy in Northern California, this year was different. Some of the players had lost everything in the devastating wildfires — including their volleyball jerseys — and their match against Forest Lake Christian School suddenly felt less important.

"There were two or three (girls) that didn't have anything, they lost everything in the fire," Paradise volleyball coach Jason Eyer said. "And four or five more didn't have their jersey or their shoes. More than half of the team lost something they needed for that night."

When Eyer surveyed the players and their families about the November 10 semifinal game, the response was unanimous: They wanted to play.

"It was really good to have something normal in our lives to bring us together and bring our community together," said Paradise player Quincey Carter. So the team and its fans agreed to make the 80-mile trip south to Auburn, California, for the game.

There was just one other problem. Many of the players no longer had proper jerseys or equipment. Some were planning to play in T-shirts with makeshift jersey numbers written on them with Sharpies.

So when they arrived at Forest Lake Christian, they got a big surprise: An array of brand-new Paradise jerseys, along with kneepads, food and thousands of dollars in donations.

## It started with three bins

When he learned that Paradise would still be coming to play, Forest Lake Christian Athletic Director LaRon Gordon wasted no time. He set up a meeting with school administrators to see what they could do to help.

First, they called the California Interscholastic Federation and persuaded them to waive the fans' entrance fee for the game. Then they contacted everyone they knew and asked for donations.

"We got out and called our friends, community, got on social media," Gordon said. "And we set up three little bins outside the school (for donations)."

By the next day, the bins were overflowing.

"The whole front of the school was jam-packed full of donations," he said. "You couldn't even walk into the school from the front. You can't imagine it."

The night before the game, Gordon had another idea. He called a close friend and located a company that agreed to work overnight to make jerseys for the Paradise team.

### 'A sense of hope'

When the Paradise Adventist Academy team arrived at the gym they found their 12 new uniforms.

"We saw the jerseys with socks and kneepads and shorts and there were bags with jerseys and shoes," said Carter, the Paradise player. "We don't even know how they pulled that together so quickly. It was just a feeling of overwhelming love."

Carter said many Paradise fans drove more than two hours to watch them play, filling the gym with the largest crowd of the season.

Paradise lost. But their night wasn't over.

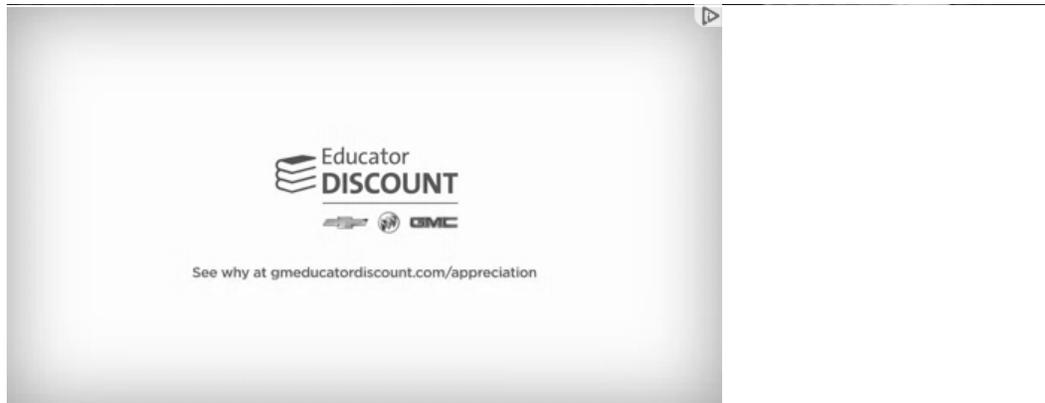
"At the end of the match they handed every girl on the team an envelope of \$300 worth of gift cards for places for them to buy clothes," Eyer said. "And they presented me with a box of gift cards and cash with over \$10,000 for the families at the school."

Eyer said everything about that night made a difference to him and his devastated community.

"It might seem like a little thing, but these people had nothing but their clothes on their back," he said. "We have now been helped in so many ways. The girls and I have talked about how when we get that opportunity ... it would be our turn to give back and try to pass (on) this generous spirit and sense of community."

Gordon, the Forest Lake coach, said he never could have predicted how quickly his community came together to help their less fortunate rivals.

"One of the biggest things it taught me is that we're there for each other in times of need," he said. "It could have been me, it could have been our school. The community that came out gave me a sense of hope for humanity."



AD 00:11 / 00:15





**Casa Roble Rams Invite Paradise Bobcats to Playoff Game, Start Donation Drive**



**'Paradise is Home:' Personal Stories Emerge from Camp Fire**





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Casa Roble Football Team Raises \$25,000 for Paradise High School Football Team



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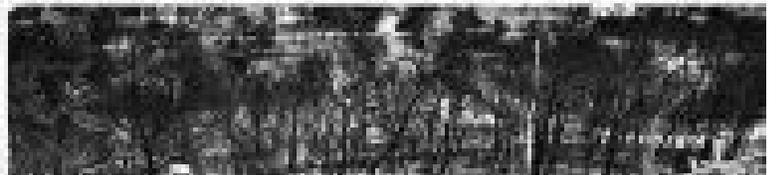




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Live TV

## in the California fires, their opponents bought them new uniforms

By **Christina Maxouris and Brandon Griggs, CNN**

🕒 Updated 12:43 PM ET, Tue December 4, 2018



The Paradise Adventist Academy team with their new uniforms.

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But for the girls' team at Paradise Adventist Academy in Northern California, this year was different. Some of the players had lost everything in the devastating wildfires -- including their volleyball jerseys -- and their match against Forest Lake Christian School suddenly felt less important.

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## 'A sense of hope'

When the Paradise Adventist Academy team arrived at the gym they found their 12 new uniforms.

"We saw the jerseys with socks and kneepads and shorts and there were bags with jerseys and shoes," said Carter, the Paradise player. "We don't even know how they pulled that together so quickly. It was just a feeling of overwhelming love."



Donated new jerseys greeted each Paradise player, along with kneepads and other items.

Carter said many Paradise fans drove more than two hours to watch them play, filling the gym with the largest crowd of the season.

Paradise lost. But their night wasn't over.

"At the end of the match they handed every girl on the team an envelope of \$300 worth of gift cards for places for them to buy clothes," Ever said. "And they presented me with a box of gift cards and each with over \$10,000 for

Eyer said everything about that night made a difference to him and his devastated community.

## **As the Smoke Clears: Paradise High School Volleyball finds Hope and Friends ...**



"It might seem like a little thing, but these people had nothing but their clothes on their back," he said. "We have now been helped in so many ways. The girls and I have talked about how when we get that opportunity ... it would be our turn to give back and try to pass (on) this generous spirit and sense of community."

Gordon, the Forest Lake coach, said he never could have predicted how quickly his community came together to help their less fortunate rivals.

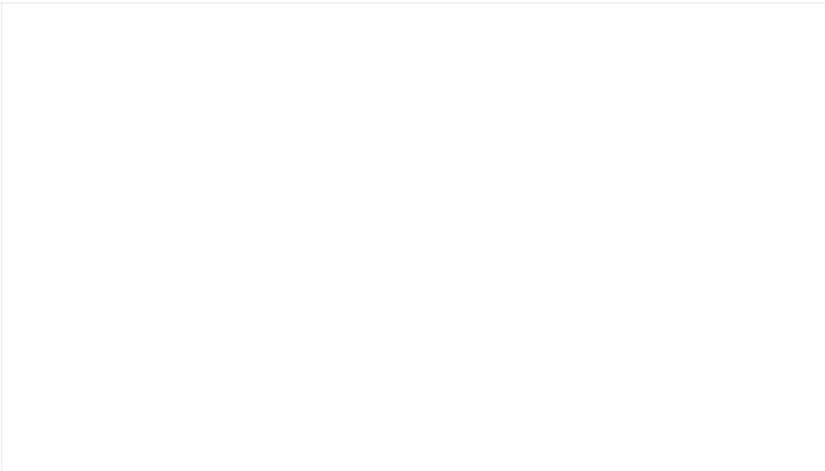
"One of the biggest things it taught me is that we're there for each other in times of need," he said. "It could have been me, it could have been our school. The community that came out gave me a sense of hope for humanity."

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# This team had uniforms, gift cards after a Paradise girls volleyball team lost everything in the Camp Fire

**David Benda**, Redding Record Searchlight

Published 12:02 p.m. PT Nov. 20, 2018 | Updated 2:24 p.m. PT Nov. 20, 2018



(Photo: Facebook)

Travis Smith still gets choked up when he talks about it — the game he says defined his Forest Lake Christian volleyball team's season.

The Lady Falcons won, which earned them a spot in the NorCal Division VI finals.

But that's not why the night of Nov. 10 and their NorCal semifinal against Paradise Adventist Academy on Forest Christian's home court in Auburn stands out.

**Order up:** [Volunteers plan 15,000 Thanksgiving meals for Camp Fire victims](https://story/news/2018/11/20/volunteers-give-camp-fire-victims-free-thanksgiving-meals/2058691002/)

Because what happened before, during and after the game was something each team will forever remember.

The Paradise Adventist players received \$16,000 worth of cash and gift cards, donated clothes and the goodwill from an opponent and community that like many in the wake of this horrific fire simply wanted to help.

The Cougars also played the game in uniforms made especially for them the day before. Shoes and knee pads were purchased for those Paradise players who needed them.

## As the Smoke Clears: Paradise High School Volleyball finds Ho



Nov. 10, a Saturday, was two days after the catastrophic Camp Fire eviscerated Paradise, Butte County's second largest city.

At the time, many players on the Paradise Adventist team didn't know if they had a home, or a school to go back to.

But Paradise Adventist coach Jason Eyer said they still wanted to play the game.

And he's glad they did.



**Paradise Adventist Academy**  
about 3 months ago

We are incredibly blessed that all of our children were vacated by 8 am on Thursday. The Camp fire struck swiftly and swept through Paradise with fury. Our school lost one building, the K-4. Some of staff and parents lost there homes. Our church across the street was totally destroyed. Through all of this, we praise God for the many miracles of survival and safety that occurred. We ask for your continued prayers for our school.

@PARADISEADVENTISTACADEMY  
**Paradise Adventist Academy**  
This is Paradise Adventist Academy's official Facebook page. Here you fin...

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53    16    5

"A lot of these girls lost everything," Smith said. "They just wanted a sense of normalcy. We said, OK.

"We as a school called in some favors, sent the word out. We didn't expect it to be such a big thing."

Eyer believes this story shouldn't be about his team.

**MORE:** [After Camp Fire, difficult decision, yes, but Paradise coach says it's the right one \(/story/news/local/2018/11/10/camp-fire-paradise-high-school-cancels-football-season/1958393002/\)](#)

"Honestly, I'm glad you talked to him (Smith)," Eyer told a Record Searchlight reporter. "They are the real story in all this. A lot of people have talked to us and want to get our perspective. To me, the story is the outpouring that they showed our community. It was overwhelming and it was an experience that all of us will definitely never forget. ... It was amazing; it was unbelievable."

It turns out, a portion of Paradise Adventist was damaged in the Camp Fire. About five of his players lost their homes, said Eyer, who lives in Chico so his house is OK.

But the day the fire erupted, nobody knew, and early on, it was ridiculous to even think about playing volleyball.

However, the more Eyer talked to his players and their families, it became clear they wanted to play.

[. Fullscreen](#)

"It turned into a situation where the girls and their families felt like they wanted to play because they felt like they were in the healing process of getting through this," Eyer said. "They wanted to do something normal and not just sit around and wait for things to happen."

## Camp Fire: Paradise wildfire explodes, leads to evacuations, devastation

Forest Lake Christian reached out to Paradise Adventist and finally received word the Friday before that the game was still on.

**MORE:** [Are you ready for some football? Paradise High football team guests of 49ers \(/story/news/local/2018/11/12/paradise-high-school-football-1-m-guests-49-ers/1983489002/\)](#)

Smith said Friday was an "emotional roller-coaster" for everybody. There were reports that Paradise Adventist Academy was destroyed. The plan was to get the Forest Lake Christian volleyball team family together and see how they could serve the Paradise Adventist family.

"Then Friday, after school got out, we heard they wanted to play," Smith said. "It was a little bit shocking because if that were me in the same situation, I would have been like, forget volleyball, I want to be with my community."

Phone calls, emails went out to the Auburn community: we need donations.

"People from our community who didn't go to Forest Lake, they just showed up and said, 'We heard and we want to help,'" Smith said. [Fullscreen](#)

Smith came back to coaching this season after taking three years off. It was his wife, Elizabeth, who **Camp Fire evacuees create makeshift camp in Walmart parking lot**

**MORE:** [Cost of battling Camp Fire grows to estimated \\$82.2 million \(/story/news/local/2018/11/20/cost-battling-camp-fire-grows-estimated-78-8-million/2064803002/\)](#)

"You look for those moments, for the reason why you do these things and I just looked over at my wife after the game, as the entire gym is filled with fans from both sides," Smith recalled. "I just looked over at my wife — this is the reason, it all makes sense now."

Forest Lake Christian lost to Stone Ridge Christian of Merced in the NorCal finals.

"Our season wasn't defined whether we won the NorCal championship game," Smith said. "It was defined by that previous Saturday, how our school was able to help another school."



## Forest Lake Christian School

about 2 months ago

Congratulations to our Lady Falcons for their victory in the NorCalfinal 4 volleyball game! Tonight was one of more special nights FLCS ever experienced.... the out pouring of love and support for the paradise community was overwhelming..... we were able to raise over \$16,000 for the Paradise community, new uniforms for The Paradise Adventist Academy volleyball team and donations of clothes etc with your generosity and love..... the gym was packed the volleyball match was amazing! More importantly getting to love on those broken, hurting and experiencing loss on a level most won't ever know! We are humbled and blessed just to be a part of tonight! Thank you thank you thank you...



+2

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18

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Read or Share this story: <https://www.redding.com/story/news/local/2018/11/20/camp-fire-donation-paradise-girls-volleyball-team-forest-lake-christian/2063968002/>

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SPORTS > HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

## Cougars experience a special night in a loss



Paradise Adventist Academy and Forest Lake Christian after the NorCal Regionals game that the Forest Lake won, 3-1.

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By RICK SILVA | [rsilva@paradisepost.com](mailto:rsilva@paradisepost.com) |

PUBLISHED: November 13, 2018 at 4:18 pm | UPDATED: November 14, 2018 at 2:23 pm

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On Nov. 7, the Paradise Adventist Academy Cougars swept visiting St. Bernard's. 25-

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Less than the 13 hours after the Cougars had won, that semifinal game became meaningless. That's because the deadly Camp Fire roared into Paradise, forcing the evacuation of the entire town and destroying thousands of homes and businesses.

Eight of the 12 players lost their homes that Thursday morning — four of the players live in Chico. Fortunately, the displaced families got out safely but were scattered. Once coach Jason Eyer was able to verify his team was safe, came the next question.

Do we play on Saturday?

"Obviously in one of these situations you never know if you should play, or not," he said.

But Eyer's girls knew what the right thing to do was: play. Their families agreed and Eyer said that they needed a break from what was happening around them. Once the team knew they were playing, now what did the players have. Two players had nothing, six or seven had some equipment while few others had brought it all to school that day because of practice that day.

So Eyer let the CIF know what they were facing, since they had just six or seven uniform tops. CIF gave them the green light to play — as some kids bought t-shirts and used a sharpie to write on their numbers on the shirts.

But even as the team traveled to Auburn to play, Eyer had his moments of wondering if this was the right move. Should we even be playing?

"When I walked into that door, I knew that we made the right decision," he said. "I knew."

They walked into the gym and within the 36 hours of the time that Eyer had informed Forest Lake that his girls were game — for a game — Forest Lake had bought the Cougars uniforms.

"That impressed me," Eyer said. "They had every girl's number. They must've gone to MaxPreps, but they got every girl right."

But that's not all, if players needed shorts they had them, if they needed knee pads, they had them. Eyer said Forest Lake even had shoes for any player who needed them.

The PAA fans were not charged admission and had free concessions.

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"But that was just the beginning" Eyer said

Forest Lake would beat the Cougars, 25-16, 18-25, 25-18, and 25-13, in game that Quincey Carter had 14 kills, 14 digs and Sarah Goymer had 13 kills and 21 digs. And two sophomores, Amanda Kitto and Stacy Wisener, followed up with 12 and 10 digs, respectively.

But the love continued after the game.

“After the game, their AD took the microphone and presented players and coaches with an envelope that had \$300 in gift cards to every player and coaches,” he said. “They could go shopping and buy some things.”

Each girl got a gift bag with pillow, toiletries, blanket and a towel. But that’s not all. They gave Eyer a box with more than \$12,000 in gift cards to give to the Cougars student body.

“I still haven’t given them all out,” he said. “I’m just overwhelmed by their compassion. It was a special night and I will never forget it.”

Because of the generosity, the Falcons of Forest Lake have fans in Paradise. In fact Eyer and seven Cougars left for Merced for last night’s final at Stone Ridge Christian.

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# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Frank Degele  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name Hoku Haliniak

Phone: 808-756-1544

E-mail: hoku.fernandez@gmail.com

Street Address: 2047 Uhaloa Road

City, State, Zip Code: Hilo, HI 96720

Date: October 12, 2018

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Christopher T. Chun

Title: Executive Director, Hawaii High School Athletic Association

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

---

Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Frank Degele  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: P.O. Box 1011  
*(street address)*

Keaau, Hawaii 96749  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 808-895-6723

E-mail: [mzpurple@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:mzpurple@hawaii.rr.com)

School (if any): Pahoa High and Intermediate

City: Pahoa State: Hawaii

# NOMINATION FORM

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

- Pahoa High School Head Baseball Coach (33 years)
- Pahoa High School Head Softball Coach (12 years)
- Pahoa High School Head Bowling Coach (1 year)
- Pahoa High School Unified Sports Softball Head Coach (1 year)
- 2018 Big Island Sports Hall of Fame
- 2017 Pahoa High School Coach of 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."

In addition to Mr. Degele's exceptional service to the Pahoa community by coaching four sports at the high school level all the while demonstrating exemplary sportsmanship, Mr. Degele is the inspiration for a remarkable story while teaching invaluable lessons to his students and the Pahoa community in the sport of bowling this year.

Please see accompanying material:

VIDEO – Bowling MVB (<http://bit.ly/2CaGj1M>)

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

Name of Nominee: *Hayden Scott Blonquist*

## *Individual Submitting Nomination:*

Name: Jerre Holmes

Phone: 801-718-4111

E-mail: [jholmes@nsummit.org](mailto:jholmes@nsummit.org)

Street Address: 60 Sagewood Way City, State, Zip Code: [Coalville, Utah, 84017](#)

Date: [January 24, 2019](#)

## **State Association Endorsement:**

Name:

Title:

Signature: Tab here

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

Official Trainer  Student  Coach  Administrator  Athletic  
Administrator Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Hayden Blonquist

Current Address: 60 North 300 West

PO Box 162

Henefer, Utah 84033

435-513-5359

haydenbl19@students.nsummit.org

School (if any): North Summit High School

City Coalville

State: Utah

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Hayden is currently a student body officer. He holds a newly assigned office called Spirit Leader. He is working hard to make up credits due to time missed during his illness. Before Hayden was diagnosed with cancer, he was clearly one of the best high school basketball players in his classification. As a sophomore he was named to the first team all-region team and would have been a shoe-in for all-state his junior and senior years. His vertical jump was incredible, and now he struggles to even walk. He goes to every game to support his team, and he also attends as many other activities as possible to fill his role as the Spirit Leader. He hasn't let this illness get in the way of being a friend, supporting his teammates, and cheering on his school. Neither his extreme nausea and weakness nor his baldness from the treatment has stopped him from taking in the high school experience.

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

Since learning of his cancer, leukemia, Hayden has demonstrated an incredible optimism that has spread throughout our community. He has been extremely sick from the chemotherapy and has missed quite a bit of school, but he has never used it as an excuse to be absent. He attends more than most would under the circumstances. He has been an inspiration to all of us who have watched his journey the past year. Not only has he touched his school and community, but he has been a bright spot at the hospital with other patients, nurses and doctors. He has helped many other cancer patients fight through their pains and illnesses with his short but positive visits. This young man who once played above the rim for his high school team now slowly walks the halls having to pay attention to every awkward step, but he is stronger than he ever was in mind and spirit. Our rival school thought enough of Hayden that they raised \$2500 and presented it to his mother and grandmother at one of our games last season. This year he didn't let that kind act go unnoticed as he went into their locker room before our rival game and tearfully thanked them for their kindness. It was a tender moment in that locker room that completely overshadowed the importance of the game to follow. Another school gave up their gate receipt earnings at a playoff game to help with Hayden's cause. He has touched many students at other schools with his humility and his optimistic demeanor. We have all been motivated to appreciate our health and to be a little tougher through our struggles as we have watched this young man's resiliency and commitment to survive.

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

Name of Nominee: *Hayden Scott Blonquist*

## *Individual Submitting Nomination:*

Name: Jerre Holmes

Phone: 801-718-4111

E-mail: [jholmes@nsummit.org](mailto:jholmes@nsummit.org)

Street Address: 60 Sagewood Way City, State, Zip Code: Coalville, Utah,  
84017

Date: January 24, 2019

## **State Association Endorsement:**

Name:

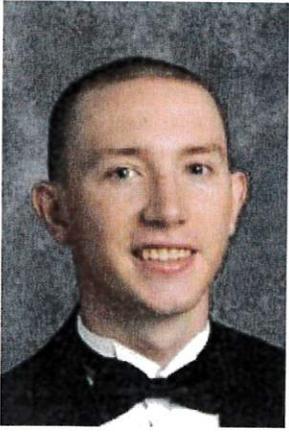
*Rob Cuff*

Title:

*Executive Director*

Signature: Tab here!

*[Handwritten Signature]*



# The Salt Lake Tribune

## North Summit's Hayden Blonquist sees leukemia as the next opponent to conquer



(Courtesy North Summit High yearbook) North Summit junior Hayden Blonquist was among the team's leaders before being diagnosed with leukemia earlier this year.



By Maddie Lee

Published: February 22, 2018

Updated: February 23, 2018

“You good?” asked Hayden Blonquist’s grandfather, Leeland Downard, from the passenger’s seat.

Blonquist, a North Summit basketball standout, hadn’t planned to visit his grandfather until Saturday, but he was so frustrated with his performance in that Friday’s game that he drove over that night.

Feeling sick that day wasn’t a satisfying excuse for him. Blonquist had experienced bouts of strep throat-like symptoms over the past two months, but his blood tests had come back negative for a slew of similar illnesses.

Now driving back home, Blonquist barely could turn his head, and his neck had swollen up. But he figured he just had slept on it wrong. Besides, his grandfather, sitting next to him, was battling stage 4 colon cancer. What did Blonquist have to complain about?

“Yeah, I’ve just got a kink in my neck,” he said.

Blonquist went to the emergency room that night. He was diagnosed with T-cell lymphoblastic leukemia later that week.

The North Summit forward was admitted to Primary Children’s Hospital two weeks ago and will remain there for a month. He will undergo chemotherapy at least once a week and receives daily steroid treatments. The goal is to put the cancer into remission. Once they achieve that, Blonquist can go home and return for treatments every week at first then once a month over the next three years.

“When they told me it was going to be three years, that pissed me off, I was mad,” Blonquist said. “I don’t know if I should say this, but I did get a little emotional for a second. ... All of the time you spent, every day in the gym and everything you worked for, and then ‘Just kidding, not anymore.’”

In December Blonquist began to have strep throat-like symptoms paired with a chest pain that he said, "felt like someone was sticking a knife in my chest."

He'd take a few Ibuprofen and play through it. That grit wasn't anything new for him.

"He plays extremely hard, sometimes he plays too hard," said Evric Gray, coach of Hayden's AAU team, the Salt Lake Rebels. "He had an injury last year. He didn't tell me. ... He likes to play, and he doesn't want to miss anything."

Blonquist went into the Feb. 2 game against Layton Christian feeling "really tired and really achy." He had what he described as "one of my worst games this year."

North Summit coach Aaron Preece had a different take on the 96-73 loss.

"That's Hayden, you know?" he said. "He misses a few shots or doesn't do what he feels is his best, he gets down on himself and says he didn't play very well. But I still thought he gave all he had against Layton Christian. He put himself out there for his teammates to try to put them in the best position to win that game."

The fact that he had played at all shocked the doctors, his mother, Christiane Blonquist, said. Chest scans days later revealed a mass the size of an apple. Hayden's bone marrow test results came back the Wednesday after the Layton Christian game, and the doctors presented him with his diagnosis.

"You just go numb when they tell you how long you're going to be here and the treatment," she said. "... I just wanted to be strong for him. I didn't want to cry, but it came out anyways."

Hayden began chemotherapy that Friday.

## Changing focus

Blonquist can't participate in any contact basketball activities for at least nine months, his mother said. The junior plans to complete this school year from home, and the rest depends on how his body responds to treatments.

He acknowledged the disconnect between the severity of his condition and his focus on a game. "I don't know if it's selfish that I just keep bringing basketball up," he wondered aloud.

"He loved to dunk," Christiane said as Hayden slept a few feet away in a reclined paper-lined bed. She pulled out her phone and scrolled through video after video of her son dunking in warmups. He levitated with ease, extending his disproportionately long arms to the rim.

When Hayden woke up 10 minutes later his energy seemed out of place, almost like he wasn't meant to be in that bed.

He hasn't been able to completely step away from basketball, either. Hayden dribbles around his hospital room, and a Nerf basketball hoop hangs from the cupboards under his TV. He rides the stationary bike for exercise.

"I still haven't wrapped my head around, 'You have leukemia,'" he said.

He said last week that he didn't feel much different after his first two chemotherapies, which can make patients feel nauseous or throw up. Christiane said the doctors told them that could continue, but everyone reacts differently.

"Can't complain," Blonquist said. "I've been able to stay active a bit and eat whatever I want."

That's the message he relayed to every visitor who stopped by to see him. He had three, including Gray, in the span of two hours.

Before Gray left he offered a confident word of encouragement. Blonquist smiled as if Gray had told him he'd seize a victory against a winless opponent.

"Oh yeah," Blonquist said, "we'll beat it for sure."

## Coalville raises money from Summer Celebration to help Hayden Blonquist pay for leukemia treatment

June 21, 2018

On Saturday, North Summit High School rising senior Hayden Blonquist (<https://www.parkrecord.com/news/summit-county/coalville-city-gears-up-to-host-annual-barbecue-festival/>) was feeling good, if a little awkward.

"It's weird coming to events that are (benefiting) you," he said. "But I like the support; it's been very helpful."

He stood at the starting gates of the 5K race and 1K walk at the Coalville City Summer Celebration, among more than 130 community members whose registration fees would be donated to Blonquist to help him pay for treating his leukemia.

Just behind him, plastic letters stood on hay bales reading "Attitude is Everything," a quote attributed to Blonquist, and the hashtag #BeStrongHayden, which was popularized by the high school and printed on shirts that students wore after he was diagnosed in February.

It would be hard to tell, just by looking, that Blonquist is sick. He wore a hat, but had hair poking out from under it, and apart from walking somewhat slowly, he had little trouble getting around.

But getting to that point has been a long process.

"It's been quite the ride," he said. "We've had some ups and downs but overall, I can't complain. I've been doing pretty well."

Of course, "pretty well" means something different when you're going through chemotherapy.

"There for a while, 'pretty well' was being able to get up and out of bed," he said. "Now I've been able to stay active and eat whatever I want."

His side effects have included pancreatitis ("that was really painful"), kidney stones, ("that was also really painful") and steroid-induced diabetes ("That was only temporary but was kind of a pain"). He was also recently diagnosed with osteonecrosis, a disease where bone dies faster than it can be regrown due to an inadequate supply of blood.

"There is no cure for it, but your bones can heal," he said. "I just have to wait that out. It can take years — usually years — so we will see how that goes."

Blonquist started to notice something was wrong during last basketball season.

He had been having strep-like symptoms for a while, but early one Sunday morning his neck swelled visibly, and the Blonquists went to the hospital.

"I found out I had a mass (of lymph nodes) in my chest about the size of an apple, so we went to Primary and went from there," he said.

The following Sunday, after doctors confirmed he had cancer, he started telling his basketball team what was going on. Doctors said he could no longer play, cutting short the shooting guard's season.

Because of his osteonecrosis, he will sit out next season as well, and probably an undetermined number of seasons after high school, which has led Blonquist to reevaluate his plans.

Just six months ago, he was hoping to earn a basketball scholarship and attend an out-of-state college.

"Any place that would give me an offer to pay for school," he said of his choices. "I wasn't picky."

Now he's wondering if he should defer attending college until his bones heal, though he isn't sold on the idea of being a 25 year-old college freshman.

In the meantime, he said his illness has shifted his focus. He still shoots around for fun, and does some limited weightlifting, but mostly, he said, he goes fishing.

"When you need help getting out of bed because you're too weak to do that on your own, it definitely makes you appreciate the little things," he said.

Some of those little things include the way people have helped his family, such as the efforts of his friend Brennen Richins.

"He was always plugging along, always just helping me and my mom out with little things," Blonquist said, who then added that there were probably "a million people" that had helped his family.

"The whole community really," he said.

On Sunday, his supporters included people like brothers Reed and Cash Robinson – old friends of Blonquist's who had come down from Evanston, Wyoming, to run the race, and Ashlee Pace, owner of the Coalville franchise of Sign Gypsies, a family friend who had donated the signs to the race. There were also runners who were simply there to run, and family friends who were not interested in running but had shown up to support the Blonquists anyway.

Regardless of their relation, those that had met Hayden described him as dependable.

Aaron Preece, head coach of the North Summit Braves basketball team, said Blonquist was "someone that works hard and has earned what he does on the basketball court through his hard work."

Coalville Mayor Trever Johnson said Blonquist "represents North Summit very well; has a lot of friends and comes from a really good family."

Over the course of the Coalville City Summer Celebration, proceeds and donations from a softball game, a motorcycle poker run, and the race allowed Johnson to present the Blonquist family with an oversized check for \$7,600.

Blonquist himself could not run the 5K, but he caught up with the 1K walkers.

Turning onto Main Street, racers passed in front of Blonquist's quotes to finish.

Blonquist walked in front of the "Attitude is Everything" sign.

"I've been feeling pretty good, and I can't complain," he said, reflecting on his own attitude. "Might as well make the best of it."

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# Utah Jazz's Derrick Favors surprises former North Summit basketball star battling leukemia

By Eric Woodyard @E\_Woodyard

Published: September 29, 2018 6:41 pm

SALT LAKE CITY — Hayden Blonquist appeared to be a typical teenager.

From the outside looking in, he's tall, athletic, handsome and appeared to be fully healthy.

At North Summit High School, he was extremely active, starring in varsity basketball, wrestling, rodeo and numerous other school-related activities throughout his junior year.

That was until his world came crashing down after learning he was diagnosed with T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia (T-ALL) in February.

Immediately afterward, he was admitted into the Primary Children's Hospital and is currently undergoing treatment during his senior year of high school.

"Still trying to graduate," said Blonquist, who averaged 15.7 points and 7.8 rebounds last season for North Summit in 18 games. "Right now, I'm going about once a week."

His mother, Christiane; younger brothers, Karson and Heston; plus other relatives and members from the community have helped the 17-year-old stay strong while battling the disease.

Now they can add Utah Jazz big man Derrick Favors to that list.

Ahead of Saturday's preseason game against the Perth Wildcats, Favors surprised Blonquist and his family with a pregame meet-and-greet on behalf of the Ronald McDonald House. He signed autographs and snapped pictures.



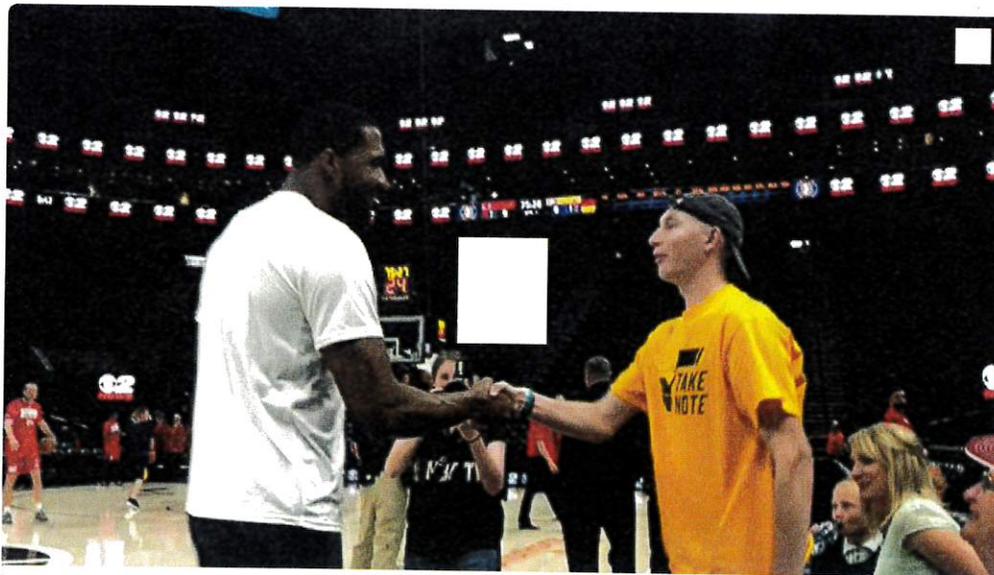
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### 5 fantastic northern Utah winter activities for families

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"We have certain people that go through certain situations in their life and sometimes they can't control it," Favors said. "So maybe if it's just me saying 'Hello' to him or 'What's up' to him, and him coming out on the court and shaking his hand or me talking to him on the court for a little while, maybe that'll brighten up his day or what he's going through."



**Eric Woodyard**  
@E\_Woodyard

Utah Jazz big man Derrick Favors surprises 17-year-old, former North Summit hoops standout Hayden Blonquist ahead of the Perth preseason game. [@hblonquist5](#) is currently battling leukemia.

121 4:51 PM - Sep 29, 2018

15 people are talking about this

Favors' charitable act was orchestrated through the Ronald McDonald House's Honorary Grandparent Fund. The fund is set up for children with life-altering or life-limiting diagnoses, such as Blonquist, to create special memorable experiences together with their families.

"This shows that Derrick is a very compassionate and caring person," Christiane said. "They're busy and for him to set time aside to offer that, I think its very kind."

Favors signed on to become an ambassador for the Salt Lake City-based charity in 2015 to help raise money and awareness for the Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Intermountain Area. He has also visited the building, donated tickets, money, gifts and time to the cause, plus participated in public service announcements and commercials for the nonprofit organization.

"This day is special as Hayden absolutely loves basketball and the Utah Jazz," said Carrie Romano, Chief Executive Offer of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Intermountain Area.

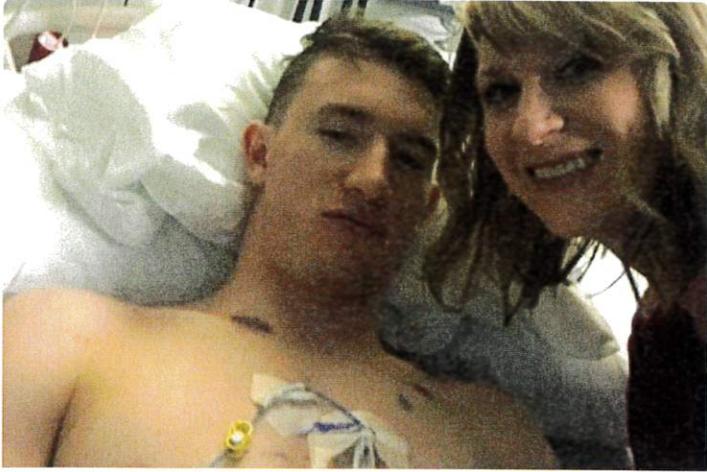
"These family experiences are especially meaningful as time becomes very precious and day-to-day life isn't routine anymore because of an unforeseen medical diagnosis and the challenging health issues of a child," she continued.

Hayden certainly won't forget the experience anytime soon.

He will continue to undergo treatment once a week for the next couple months before starting monthly sessions for two additional years. One side effect of those treatments is osteonecrosis, which causes his bone tissue to die faster, so his hoop dreams are derailed because of his brittle bones. He still goes to the gym occasionally and watches when he can, but his weight has dipped from 190 pounds to about 165. Although the experience is frustrating at times, he chooses to focus on the positive.

"It's way cool," said Hayden. "You don't get these opportunities a lot and, unfortunately, I had to get cancer, but everything that happens something good comes out of it, and this is one of them.

"This really does mean a lot."



**\$14,431** of \$20,000 goal

Raised by 149 people in 11 months

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## Help Hayden B Strong

Our dear friend and family member Hayden Blonquist received heartbreaking news this past week. On February 8, 2018 Hayden was admitted to Primary Children's Hospital after being diagnosed with ALL T Cell Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

Hayden is a Junior at North Summit High School and is an amazing athlete who has been involved in wrestling, basketball, rodeo and many other school and community programs. He is a loving brother, son and friend.

Hayden will be staying at Primary Children's Hospital to receive chemo treatments for one month. After his month long stay he will have to return weekly for additional treatments for several months and ongoing treatments for 2-3 years. There will be major expenses incurred from the medical treatments and hospital stays. There will also be a lot of travel expenses and regular bills that his family will need to pay, while having a loss of regular wages by not being able to maintain regular work while taking care of Hayden and his 8 and 5 year old brothers.

Please join with me in donating to help Hayden win this battle and support him and his family.

#HaydenBstrong

-  **\$50**  
Bryan Stephens  
16 days ago
-  **\$100**  
William Gargano  
7 months ago
-  **\$50**  
Kelvin Judd  
7 months ago
-  **\$50**  
Kenny Harvey  
7 months ago
-  **\$25**  
Nicole Wigton  
9 months ago
-  **\$80**  
Andrew Menke  
10 months ago
-  **\$100**  
Anonymous  
10 months ago

.(/).

**HOME (/)** > MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM HELPS ALL-STAR OPPONENT

# MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM HELPS ALL-STAR OPPONENT

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

**[Waterford News \(/news-type/waterford-news\)](#)**

**[Athletics \(/news-type/athletics\)](#)**

In a Men's Basketball game against North Summit, Waterford Head Coach Ryan Judd noticed their star player, Hayden Blonquist, was not on the court. While many coaches may have rejoiced to see a formidable opponent missing from a critical game, Ryan was concerned by his absence. After making a few calls to fellow coaches, Ryan learned that Hayden was recently diagnosed with Leukemia.

Upon hearing the news, Ryan immediately emailed the Waterford community: "Our team would like to help one of our friends, and his family. Hayden Blonquist, the star player for North Summit, who might of been the 2A MVP this season, was diagnosed with Leukemia last week. He will not be playing in our playoff game this Saturday, or the rest of the season, but we would like to try and help to do all that we can to get him back onto the court!"

Instead of preparing for their upcoming playoff game, the Men's Basketball team set aside time during practice for each player to shoot 100 free throws in support of Hayden. The team invited community members to sponsor a basketball player, and commit to donate a certain amount of money for each free throw made. Waterford faculty, staff, students, and friends pledged pennies to dollars for free throws.

Following the free throw fundraiser, the amount donated to Hayden's **[GoFundMe \(https://www.gofundme.com/HaydenBstrong\)](#)** page went from about \$2,900 to over \$10,000. The donor list is full of the names of Waterford families, faculty members, and "Friends of Ravens Basketball," who made donations both big and small. Ryan guessed that the Waterford community has donated roughly \$6,000 to date.

In an email thanking donors, Ryan wrote, "Not only have you blessed the life of Hayden and his family, both financially and emotionally, but you have provided my basketball players with an opportunity to develop kindness and compassion, and encouraged them to not be afraid to act."

*The thing I was most proud of from my team, and what I hope they take from this is experience, was simply their willingness to act. Instead of just sympathetically saying, "Aw man, that sucks!", and moving on. They changed their daily routine, went outside of their comfort zone and did their best to help, even though it was someone who they were supposed to see as "an opponent". -Coach Ryan Judd*

Several of the senior basketball players went with Ryan to visit Hayden at Primary Children's Hospital. Despite receiving his first Chemotherapy treatment only days before their visit, the team found Hayden in good spirits. Hayden optimistically walked Ryan and the players through his 24-month treatment plan, talked about 2A basketball, and dished out some playful trash about dunking on Waterford the last time he played.

Hayden's battle against Leukemia is far from over. According to his GoFundMe page, "Hayden will be staying at Primary Children's Hospital to receive chemo treatments for one month. After his month long stay he will have to return weekly for additional treatments for several months and ongoing treatments for 2-3 years. There will be major expenses incurred from the medical treatments and hospital stays. There will also be a lot of travel expenses and regular bills that his family will need to pay, while having a loss of regular wages by not being able to maintain regular work while taking care of Hayden and his 8- and 5-year-old brothers."

If you would like to support Hayden, please visit his GoFundMe page below.

**[SUPPORT HAYDEN BLONQUIST  
\(HTTPS://WWW.GOFUNDME.COM/HAYDENBSTRONG\)](https://www.gofundme.com/haydenbstrong)**

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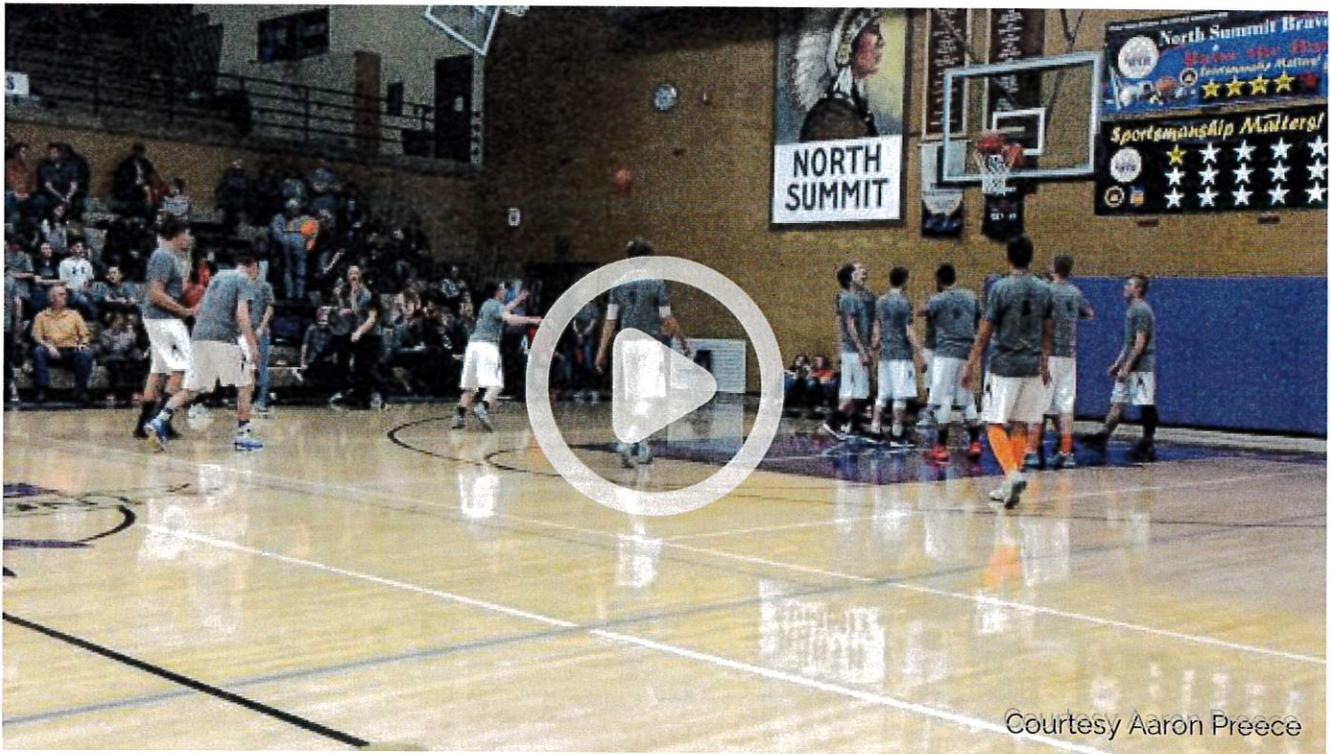
[./#email](#)

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UTA	26-22	BU	31	IND	31-15	VAN	9-8	LSU	14-3	BK	25-23	MIA	22-23		
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# South Summit basketball team raises \$2,300 for student diagnosed with cancer at rival school

By Lexi Lewis, KSL.com | Posted - Feb 15th, 2018 @ 3:15pm



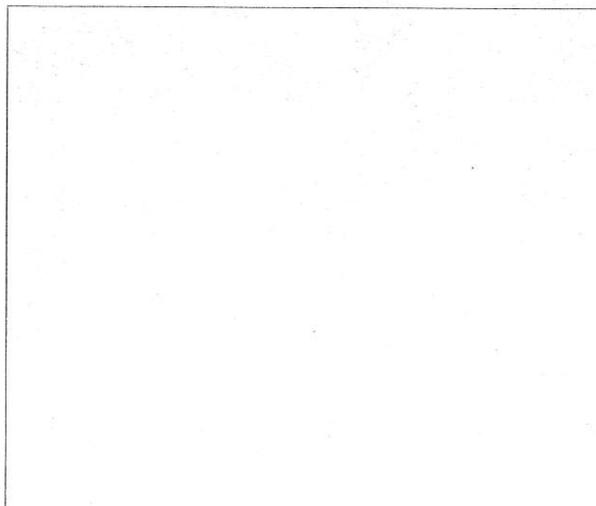
SALT LAKE CITY — When South Summit High School's basketball team visits rival North Summit, they are competing against each other on the court. But recently South Summit donated \$2,300 to a player on its rival team diagnosed with cancer.

North Summit junior Hayden Blonquist was diagnosed with leukemia on Feb. 7. Blonquist has been a star player for the Braves. When South Summit's basketball team heard the news, the program wanted to help Blonquist out in some way.

“It was emotional, I was teary eyed; I know his family very well and it was close to my heart,” said Dustin Hatch, head coach for the South Summit basketball team. “When something like this happens, it makes basketball seem small.”

The team decided to donate money for Blonquist and his family. The funds were raised by the parents and coaches of the team. North Summit's second-year head coach Aaron Preece was in awe of what the team had done.

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“It was pretty emotional; I was impressed with the support they offered to Hayden,” Preece said. “Even though there are rivalries in sporting events, when something like this happens and affects a young man who competes in these games against these kids, it can bring a community and schools together.”

part of.

"It was emotional even for the kids," Hatch said. "They felt a sense of camaraderie with North Summit. It was a great experience for these boys to be significant in other ways than just winning basketball games."

Rivalries are a part of the sports world, but Preece said he believes this can impact future rivalries for years to come.

"That memory for my basketball team and his, to see that the rivalry didn't matter, but that when a young man needs help you can overlook that rivalry to help out a buddy," he said.

*Lexi Lewis is studying public relations at Utah Valley University. You can follow her on Twitter @lex\_lev1018.*

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**Lexi Lewis**

3 Comments

0 Pending

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# Section 8

National High School Spirit of Sport Award

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Anchorage Christian School Activities Department  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Billy Strickland

Phone: 907-563-3723

E-mail: billy@asaa.org

Street Address: 4048 Laurel St #203

City, State, Zip Code: Anchorage, AK 99508

Date: January 18, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Billy Strickland

Title: Executive Director

Signature: See Above



# NOMINATION FORM

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

NA

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

On Friday November 30, 2018 at 8:29 am, as 40 athletes were warming up at Dimond High School for the second day matches of the State Mix Six/2A Volleyball Tournament, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake hit the Anchorage area. While the earthquake caused great structural damage to Dimond High School, along with all other Anchorage School District schools, fortunately no lives were loss. What was loss was the host site for our State Event, along with all the schools in ASAA's contingency plan.

As it soon became clear Dimond High School was damaged and could not be occupied for several days, the ASAA staff was faced with the following choices:

1. not complete the tournament
2. reschedule for a different weekend
3. find another location

As anyone with any experience in high school activities would agree, not having a culminating event for an activity would be a heart-breaking occurrence. Players strive for years to compete for a state championship, and while winning a state championship is not in itself life changing, the values earned along the way are. We felt it was extremely important to try everything imaginable to figure out how to complete the event.

Rescheduling the event would have resulted in other major issues. In Alaska, teams travel for 1000's of miles to attend a state tournament. The cost to the member schools to fly back to Anchorage for another weekend would have been extremely burdensome and would have resulted in some of the schools not being able to afford it. It would have also caused students to potentially miss additional days of school conflicting with school finals and other school events.

Fortunately we were able to find a location not damaged by the earthquake, that was willing to host our event. Anchorage Christian School (ACS), a private school located in Anchorage, had facilities they were willing to allow us to use. First, I would like to point out,

that ASC did not have a team involved in the State Mix Six/2A Volleyball Tournament. Also this event, while important to the students and fans involved, does not generate much of a crowd from which a school's concession stand can generate much revenue. In other words, ASC had no reason for helping, other than to help their neighbors in a time of need.

However, ACS's support went well beyond just the use of their gyms. When the ASAA staff arrived at the school at 6:00 AM. Two of ACS's staff members were already there setting up the courts. ACS's Dylan Hoch and Serg Duchatellier were there from 5:00 AM until 10:00 PM. They jerry rigged nets, fixed portable PA systems, worked out solutions for a leaky roof, got food brought in for our officials, cleaned and opened up concessions for the athletes and fans. The school and these two gentleman made it possible to complete the tournament.

While it was not the extravagant state tournament that we had planned for, we are indebted to ACS for their willingness to help ASAA meet our mission. We feel ACS's actions epitomize the values of sportsmanship and request they be given strong consideration for the Spirit of Sport Award.

To summarize, Anchorage Christian School was informed of a need, provided it to a group with whom they had no affiliation other than being fellow Alaskans and in doing so made it possible for the students and communities affected by the earthquake not to lose their chance to compete in a State Championship event.

# **NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE**

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Trevor Steelsmith  
*(first, middle, last)*

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: Jeremy Bergquist, VP, Ridgevue High School

Phone: (208) 453-4480

E-mail: Jeremy.bergquist@vallivue.org

Street Address: 18800 Madison Rd.

City, State, Zip Code: Nampa, ID 83687

Date: January 30, 2019

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Julie Hammons

Title: Assistant Executive Director, Idaho High School Activities Association

Signature: 

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

---

Student    Coach    Administrator    Official    Trainer

Athletic Administrator    Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: Trevor Steelsmith  
*(first, middle, last)*

Current Address: 10356 Cherry Ln.  
*(street address)*

Nampa, ID 83687  
*(city, state, zip)*

Phone: 208.697.0068

E-mail: tsteelsmith77@gmail.com

School (if any): graduated from Ridgevue High School, spring 2018

City: Nampa State: ID

# NOMINATION FORM

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

Trevor Steelsmith is the epitome of a dedicated, passionate student-athlete. Carrying a weighted GPA of 4.26 (4.0 non-weighted), Trevor was a three-sport athlete at Ridgevue HS before his graduation last spring. Ridgevue is a 4A school in Idaho, the second-largest classification, so committing himself to football, basketball and track at a school that size is no small feat. He was also a top ten student at RHS and president of the National Honor Society that included multiple hours of volunteer time and community service. Trevor is a quiet young man. He does not seek the spotlight, yet his qualities in and out of the classroom continually set him apart as someone of integrity and high expectations.

Trevor was named Idaho's 2018 Spirit of Sport recipient.

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

Trevor, like many students, dealt with the divorce of his parents early in his school career. In the fall of his senior year, his father passed away unexpectedly just before Thanksgiving. The funeral service occurred over Thanksgiving break and Trevor returned to school the next week. His grades did not suffer. His friends rallied around him and he stood strong.

During the football and basketball seasons of that same year, it became increasingly clear that Trevor's mother was not winning her battle with cancer. On New Year's Eve, at the age of 49, Trevor's mom passed away. Trevor missed one day of school, the day of his mother's service, then he played in Ridgevue's basketball game that night. This was not expected, but it speaks to how Trevor faces challenges in life. He accepts what he cannot change, looks to the future and keeps putting one foot in front of the other to reach his goals.

Trevor is humble and unassuming. He has an unsurpassed work ethic and competitive spirit. He is involved in positive activities at school and outside of school, demonstrating leadership through example. Trevor Steelsmith has faced adversity that most of us can't even imagine. Still, he keeps moving forward. He is worthy of consideration for the 2019 Spirit of Sport award.



# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: Kayla Nicole Bolnick  
*(first, middle, last)*

## **Individual Submitting Nomination:**

Name: Bryn Card

Phone: 541-207-8864

E-mail: cardb@wlwv.k12.or.us

Street Address: 24225 SW Durdel Dr

City, State, Zip Code: Sherwood, OR 97140

Date: 2/1/19

## **State Association Endorsement:**

Name: [Tab here] Peter Weber

Title: [Tab here] Executive Director

Signature: [Tab here] Peter Weber

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

---

(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)

Name of Nominee: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_  
(first, middle, last)

## ***Individual Submitting Nomination:***

Name: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

Date: [Tab here] \_\_\_\_\_

## ***State Association Endorsement:***

Name: Ron Laird \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Commissioner \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_



# NOMINATION FORM

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

Kayla is Wilsonville High Schools first Para- Athlete and has guided the way for all future Para-athletes within our district as well as helped to enlighten schools within our league and state. She is a student that is bound to a wheelchair but has not allowed this to define her as an athlete or a person. Kayla has competed in many sports during her time at Wilsonville High School, these sports include Cross Country, Swimming, and Track. While also competing outside of the school in Basketball and Triathlon's around the country. Kayla has won multiple awards including:

3 Varsity Letters in Track and Field  
2 Varsity Letters in Swimming  
3 Varsity Letters in Cross Country  
5 All League Awards  
Adaptive Sports Northwest Athlete of the Year 2016  
Sports and Spokes National Athlete of the Year 2016  
All American High School Courage Award 2018  
Challenge Athlete Foundation Rising Star 2018

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

Kayla is a pioneer for Para-athletes within the state and within the country, Kayla has helped to open many barriers for those students that are labeled "Para-athlete" and has continued to push for equality within sports and to help other para- athletes to follow in her path. When she first wanted to participate in cross country, the staff and coaches had many questions about the barriers that she would come up against; accessible practice and competition routes, equipment, weather, attitudes of others and state and local rules of participation. She continues to work to overcome these barriers. It is a beautiful testament to her will and spirit to see her competing in her cross country, swim lane and track chairs alongside her peers. And, she succeeds with a kind and humble attitude.

On top of all of this accomplishment and dedication to her sports, teammates and school, Kayla also has a dedication to other students, especially for other students with Disabilities. She has chosen to pursue a career as a Special Education Teacher and will be attending San Diego State University, or Oregon State University to study Education. Kayla has volunteered within Special Olympics at Wilsonville High School and has helped with the Unified Basketball team. This is a team for individuals with Disabilities to play basketball with their typical peers and have the opportunity to play other schools. Kayla has also volunteered for many years with Adaptive Sports Northwest, which is a non- profit designed to help enable para athletes, and allow them to participate in activities such as Swimming, Track, Running, Rugby, and Glowball. Kayla has been a volunteer at Camp Attitude which is a summer camp for Students with Disabilities and enables these students to have a typical camp experience and helps them to create a safe and fun environment for all students to attend.

Kayla is not done with just these contributions, she also has taken a class within the High School to go to an Elementary and help within the Special Education Department for students and has organized reading groups and spent time with a variety of students to help them with their daily routines and activities. Kayla has mentored a young lady within this setting who is a 1st grade student in the school district who just moved here from China and is in a wheelchair. Kayla invited her to the high school to teach her about sports equipment and access to a variety of opportunities she would have because of Kayla's hard work and dedication to breaking through

barriers. But as I watched, Kayla was sharing so much more. She gave genuine care and love and support to a young girl who is just learning that she does not have to choose to be held back. Kayla has inspired so many people around this school, community, district, and the State, I feel that she is the true definition of Spirit within Sports. Sports are designed to have you push through your personal barriers and reach new limits, Kayla has done that. Sports are designed to inspire others, from teammates to community members, Kayla has done that. And Sports are designed to give you a platform to do great things in and out of the actual sport and Kayla has done that. So to Wilsonville High School, Kayla is our true definition of Spirt and has shown all of us the great things that you can do within Sports.

# NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD NOMINEE

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**(The deadline for returning the completed nomination to the NFHS is February 1, 2019)**

Name of Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_Leonardo Dee Jason Hosen\_\_\_\_\_ (first, middle, last)

## Individual Submitting Nomination:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_Matthew Jensen\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_605-222-2169\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_mjensen@park16.org\_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_1808 Wyoming Ave. \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_Meeteetse, WY 82433\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_1/25/2019\_\_\_\_\_

## State Association Endorsement:

Name:

Title:

Signature:

---

# NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

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Student  Coach  Administrator  Official  Trainer

Athletic Administrator  Other (Specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Name of Nominee: \_\_\_Leonardo Dee Jason Horsesn\_\_\_  
(first, middle, last)

Current Address: 1233 Highland Ave. (street address)  
Meeteetse, WY 82433 (city, state, zip)

Phone: \_\_\_307-201-8823\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_21horleo@park16.org\_\_\_\_\_

School (if any): \_\_\_Park County School District #16\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_Meeteetse\_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_WY\_\_

# NOMINATION FORM

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

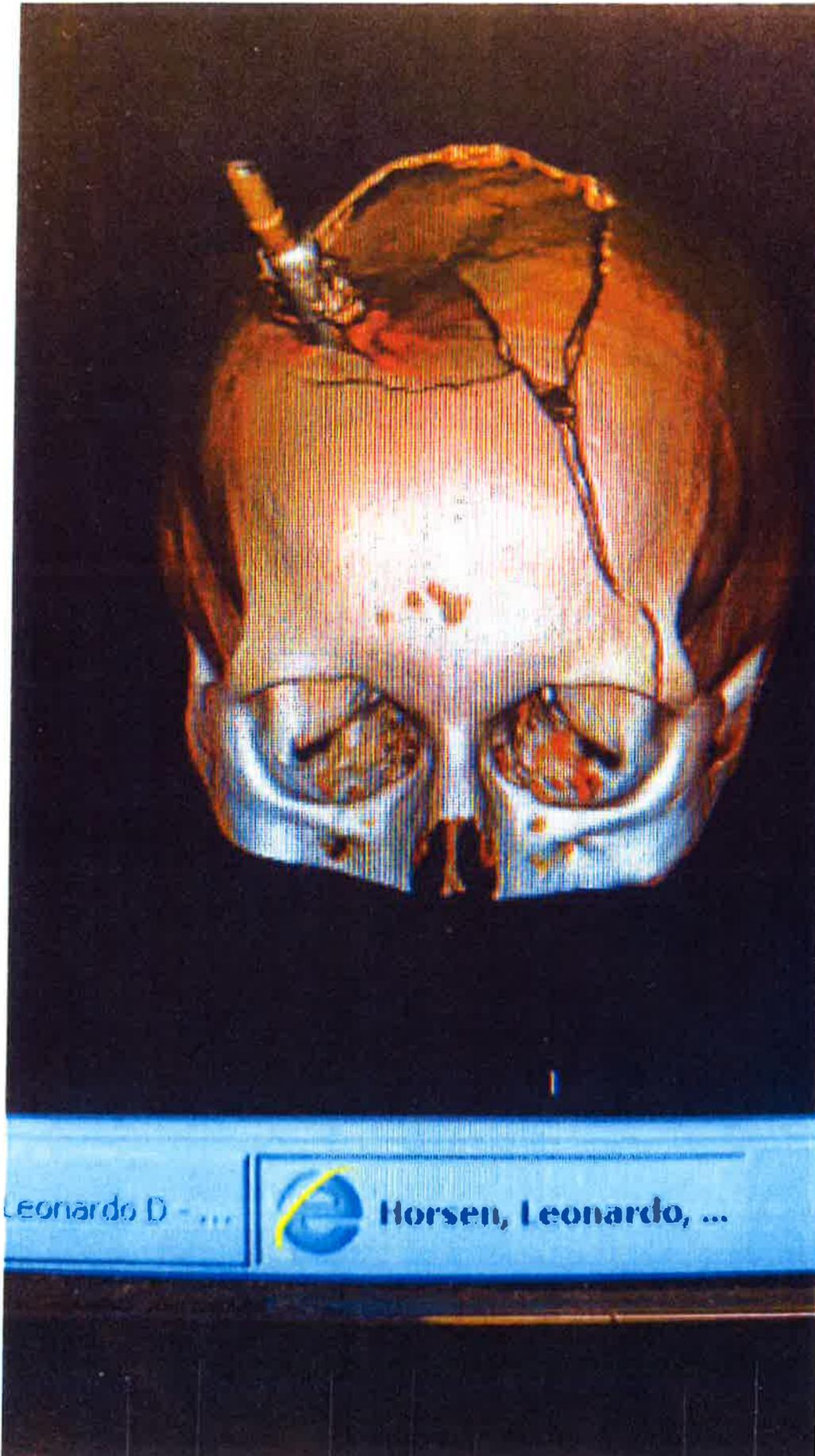
Leo has been a member of the Meeteetse Longhorn JV/Varsity basketball team for 2 years.

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

In Early May of 2016, Leo was helping measure shot put throws at the Meeteetse Track Invitational. During warm ups, an errand throw struck Leo in the head. He was air lifted to Billings, Montana, where on the way he stopped breathing and was resuscitated while in route. He was then placed in a medically induced coma. Many days passed and the communities of Northwest Wyoming rallied around him and his family, raising money for medical expenses for the family, but most importantly praying for a speedy recovery.

Leo made it out of his coma, so beginning his road to recovery. During his eighth grade year he spent a lot of time trying to get back to speed both in the classroom and on the basketball floor. He now get up every morning at 4:30 to work out with family members in the schools weight room and works hard on the basketball floor during practices and games. Because of his hard work and a change in his diet, he has lost over 100 pounds! His dedication to work hard and not taking anything for granted has been an inspiration for all at Meeteetse Schools and our surrounding communities. His smile and "Can Do" attitude is what makes him a perfect candidate for the National High School Spirit of Sport award.

Attached are newspaper articles, pictures and scans of Leo that chronicle this terrible accident and his road to recovery.





[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_9f128f1a-1147-11e6-8a06-bbbd7a9c4522.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_9f128f1a-1147-11e6-8a06-bbbd7a9c4522.html)

FEATURED

## Meeteetse boy struck in head with shot put

By LEW FREEDMAN Staff writer May 3, 2016

MEETEETSE – A seventh-grader helping to measure distances in the shot-put Monday afternoon at the Meeteetse Invitational was struck in the head by an errant throw.

After being knocked unconscious Meeteetse middle schooler Leo Horsen was flown to St. Vincent Hospital in Billings, Mont. by Reach Air Medical helicopter.

Tuesday morning Horsen remained a patient in the Intensive Care Unit.

The frightening incident halted the track meet for an hour as teams from Meeteetse, Cody and other schools were moved to the sidelines and spectators hushed.

Horsen was volunteering his help for the event and was injured during practice throws.

The helicopter landed on the football field, yards away from the throwing site and emergency medical technicians also were on the scene in ambulances from West Park Hospital, as well as Meeteetse volunteer firefighters.

Meeteetse activities director Cory Dziowgo said in his six years in that role no one had required such assistance at a sporting event.

"We were glad we were prepared," Dziowgo said. "It's a sad thing, but I'm glad we have that resource given where we are located."

Cody shot putter Zech Todd was standing near Horsen when a Lovell thrower unleashed the 12-pound ball. He said there was a moment of shock for all.

"My first thought was, 'Isn't anybody going to help?'" Todd said.

Immediately after, Horsen was surrounded by coaches and officials stabilizing him on the field as health professionals were summoned.

Further details will be reported as they become available.

(Lew Freedman can be reached at [lew@codyenterprise.com](mailto:lew@codyenterprise.com).)

[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_b917f7a2-124a-11e6-a175-474352a5b22a.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_b917f7a2-124a-11e6-a175-474352a5b22a.html)

## Fundraiser to help shot put victim

May 4, 2016



Emergency medical personnel and Meeteetse community members tend to Leo Horsen, a seventh-grader at Meeteetse Middle School, who was struck in the head by a shot put throw during a track meet in Meeteetse on Monday.

Raymond Hillegas

Thursday night's Meeteetse Schools Spring Concert will help raise money for Leo Horsen's medical bills.

The annual event was previously scheduled, but usually the concessions stand is not open. However, the Longhorn League, which operates the food bar, is going to open it for the 6:30 p.m. musical program of singing and band.

It will be the first fund-raiser for Horsen, the seventh grader hit in the head by a shot put Monday at the Meeteetse Invitational track meet.

Horsen was helping the officials at the shot put event and is now in an induced coma at St. Vincent's Healthcare in Billings, Mont.

There will be an art sale in conjunction with the concert and proceeds from one or more pieces will be donated to the Horsens, as well, according to Tess Fremlin of the Meeteetse Visitors Center.

Also, May 13-14, when Meeteetse conducts its annual Garage-A-Rama one location in the town-wide event will donate money raised from its sales to Horsen.

[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_63da2aee-1231-11e6-b104-638c7f04c46e.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_63da2aee-1231-11e6-b104-638c7f04c46e.html)

## Meeteetse boy remains in hospital after shot put accident

By LEW FREEDMAN Staff writer May 4, 2016



**Leo Horsen, a seventh-grader at Meeteetse Middle School, is tended to by emergency personnel and Meeteetse community members who wheeled Horsen on a stretcher to a waiting Reach Air Medical helicopter. Horsen was struck in the head by a shot put throw during a track meet in Meeteetse on Monday. He was flown to St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings.**

Raymond Hilllegas

A wild throw in shot put warm-ups sailed wide right of the sand pit and into the head of Meeteetse seventh-grader Leo Horsen, fracturing his skull, injuring an eye socket and damaging the side of his face Monday afternoon.

The frightening situation halted action at the Meeteetse Invitational track meet for an hour. The accident hushed spectators and athletes as the unconscious Horsen, who had been aiding officials by measuring throws, underwent emergency stabilization on the football field.

Athletes in the narrow area between the shot-put pit and the discus cage were among the closest eyewitnesses.

Cody thrower Zech Todd was standing next to Horsen and said his first reaction was shock. For long seconds, he said, everyone seemed paralyzed and Todd's first thought was, "Isn't anybody going to help him?"

Help from coaches and officials followed immediately as Horsen lay on his back on the grass until professional medical assistance took over his care.

Two West Park Hospital ambulances from Cody arrived, as well as Meeteetse volunteer firefighters, before Horsen was flown by a Reach Air Medical Services helicopter the

approximately 130 miles to St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings, Mont.

The accident occurred at 3:40 p.m. between sections of the shot put when the next scheduled flight of competitors threw warm-ups with the 12-pound ball.

Horsen's mother, Christine, a Meeteetse elementary school teacher, issued a statement Tuesday morning, saying she did not get to see her son in the hospital until 9 p.m. Monday night.

On Wednesday she reported he is heavily sedated and is expected to remain in an induced coma for another two days. He is also intubated for breathing purposes.

Christine Horsen, who was in Billings with her husband Roger, issued messages through Pastor Jim Barrick of the First Baptist Church of Cody, who is an assistant track coach for Meeteetse.

The severity of Horsen's injuries are rare at any kind of high school athletic event in Wyoming.

Being struck by a shot put and harmed is so uncommon that the Wyoming High School Athletic Association Commissioner Ron Laird could recall only one other instance anywhere in the state over the last dozen years.

Although a sizeable lump grew on Horsen's head, his mother said doctors monitoring him, "are hoping there will be no swelling on his brain."

The first hour-and-a-half of the meet that drew 11 schools from the region proceeded routinely on a sunny day with temperatures reaching into the 70s, cause for comment since the Cody-Meeteetse area recently coped with more than a week of unseasonable cold and significant rain.

So the mood was exuberant until Lovell's Dylan Hereth stepped into the circle for a practice throw.

Cody's Peter Klessens, another competitor, like Todd, said he was next to Horsen when the shot-put slammed into the boy. Klessens said the sound the impact made was awful.

"Oh, the noise," he said. "It was a thud."

A moment later, Meeteetse Activities Director Cory Dziowgo took charge on the field, summoning medical help and supervising the scene.

Athletes were told to clear the infield and spectators were moved back to the grassy hills surrounding the event locations. The rippling small colored flags ringing the field were rolled up to provide more landing space for the helicopter.

Jay Curtis, superintendent of Meeteetse schools, manned the microphone announcing meet information. He said, "If you are a praying person, pray for that young (man)."

Firefighters and medical technicians initially treated Horsen on the field after adults nearby were first responders.

Dale Query, a Meeteetse assistant coach who officiated the discus, said he had his back turned only a few feet from Horsen.

"As soon as I heard the yell I looked over," Query said.

The helicopter could be heard approaching before it was seen against the backdrop of blue sky and limited cloud cover.

Query stood in the center of the football field waving a makeshift flag of yellow caution tape provided by the firefighters as a guide-in tool when the copter landed 45 minutes after Horsen was struck.

By the time Horsen was lifted onto a wheeled stretcher, he was breathing into an oxygen mask. While some said Horsen was communicating, his mother later said "he became unresponsive on the flight."

Meeteetse is a community of about 325 people and is remotely located in the Absaroka Mountains.

In his six years on the job, Dziowgo said he has never had to seek emergency help of such magnitude for an athletic injury.

"It's a sad thing, but I'm glad we have that resource," Dziowgo said. "People were shocked, but those I called into action responded quickly. We were glad we were prepared."

After the emergency vehicles departed, Dziowgo called a coaches' meeting at mid-field. While some believed it was to discuss whether the meet should continue, he said that was never talked about.

Keeping the area between the shot put and discus clear and condensing the program by cutting the number of heats for the 1,600-meter and 3,200-meter runs were the topics.

Not all athletes stunned by Horsen's injuries were enthusiastic about resuming shot-put competition.

Meeteetse's Madeleine Myers dropped out of the shot put.

"I'm not throwing the shot today after what happened," Myers said, though she said blood was from Horsen biting his tongue. She did stick with the discus.

Jack Fremlin, another Meeteetse thrower, said athletes were upset.

"It's not what you expect to see happen," he said. "It's definitely going to throw everyone off."

Curtis said a counselor was sent to the throwing area.

Hereth remained in the competition. He finished seventh with a best throw of 39-5.

Barrick said people want to express the sentiment to Hereth that "It wasn't his fault. It wasn't that he was doing anything wrong."

Joe Koritnik, Lovell's athletic director, said he teaches Hereth in physical education. Tuesday, Koritnik said, "He was pretty upset. It is on his mind. It is a pretty traumatic experience. We'll keep them (Horsen's family) in our thoughts."

Laird said he recalled a middle school athlete being hit by a discus more than 10 years ago but could not remember where it happened.

"That's very rare," Laird said Tuesday. "The potential is always there. More with the discus than the shot."

In a community as small as Meeteetse everyone knows everyone and that includes Horsen.

Barrick said Horsen competes for the middle school football, basketball and track teams.

"He is a good kid," Barrick said.

Query called Horsen, "A tough kid. He'll be OK."

Meeteetse officials also hope Hereth is OK.

"Our students are reaching out," Curtis said.

One class was putting together cards to send to Hereth to make him feel better.

A day after Horsen was hospitalized, Meeteetse was formulating fund-raising plans to help with Horsen's medical bills. Curtis said an account is being opened at the Bank of the West and while it has not yet been determined, he said, the first fund-raiser may be the school's annual athletic banquet later in May.

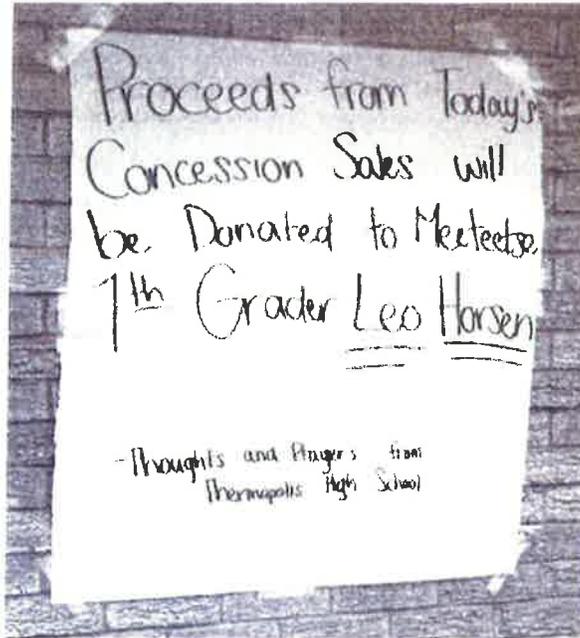
Christine Horsen said of her son, "The doctors are feeling real positive. Hopefully, he will keep doing well."

[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_ce61d99a-1621-11e6-bcd2-17439ecd0d3c.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_ce61d99a-1621-11e6-bcd2-17439ecd0d3c.html)

TOP STORY

## Boy hit by shot put remains in coma

By LEW FREEDMAN Staff writer May 9, 2016



Concession stand proceeds at the Thermopolis Invite track meet last weekend were donated to assist the Horsen family with various costs. (Courtesy photo)

Leo Horsen, hit in the head by a shot put during a track meet last week, remained in an induced coma Monday as doctors sought to gradually restore his health.

The Meeteetse seventh-grader suffered a fractured skull and other injuries at the Meeteetse Invitational on May 2 from a practice throw as he helped officials measure competitors' tosses.

He was transported to St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings, Mont., by helicopter and remains under care in that hospital.

Doctors hoped they would be able to bring Horsen out of the coma at the end of last week, but they decided that action was premature, according to Pastor Jim Barrick of Cody's First Baptist Church, who was told that by Horsen's father Roger.

Barrick is a Meeteetse assistant track coach and works with the school's athletic programs.

During Sunday services, he updated his congregation with Roger Horsen's report as he asked parishioners to continue praying for Leo's recovery.

"We're going to keep praying that everything goes well," Barrick said.

To some extent there has been improvement in young Horsen's health, he said.

Horsen has been intubated, but "he is doing more breathing on his own," Barrick said.

Horsen also suffered injuries to an eye socket and his face, but family members are "still optimistic" he will make a complete recovery, Barrick said.

Doctors will not be able to fully evaluate Horsen's status until he is out of the coma.

Meanwhile, the small community of 325 people has rallied with support for the Horsens, already raising money and planning additional fundraising activities to help with medical bills.

"It's on everybody's mind," Jay Curtis, superintendent of Meeteetse schools, said of Leo Horsen's health. "It's never very far from our minds."

Last Thursday, at the previously scheduled annual schools' spring concert, Curtis said, \$300 worth of concessions were sold and proceeds will go to the family.

At the same event, attendees placed \$600 in donations in a bucket and Curtis' son Colton sold five of his pottery works for \$570 and donated that to the family.

A bucket for donations was set up at the May 6 Thermopolis Bobcat Invite track meet where Meeteetse competed.

An account at Bank of the West has been opened for donations to the family and still other fund-raising events are in the works.

May 13-14 during the Meeteetse Garage-A-Rama several women, including Tess Fremlin of the Visitors Center, who was on the scene when Horsen was injured, are donating proceeds from anything they sell.

Also, it was announced that at the second annual Meeteetse Longhorn 6 Man Golf Tournament, scheduled for July 16 at Olive Glenn Golf and Country Club in Cody, proceeds from the silent auction will go to the Horsen family.

Assistant football coach Dale Query is seeking items or services for the auction.

"It would be much appreciated by the Meeteetse family," Query said.

Jay Curtis said he is speaking to area businesses about sponsorship of a potential barbecue-auction to be schedule in the coming months as another fund-raiser.

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[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_f40640f2-1ba1-11e6-997b-4355221c4b9e.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_f40640f2-1ba1-11e6-997b-4355221c4b9e.html)

BREAKING

## Meeteetse's Horsen awake, recovering

By LEW FREEDMAN Staff writer May 16, 2016

The Meeteetse seventh-grader who was struck in the head by a shot put and suffered a fractured skull is out of an induced coma and taking steps towards recovery.

Leo Horsen, who was injured in an accident at the Meeteetse Invitational on May 2, remains at St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings, Mont., and is due to start rehabilitation.

"He's making exceptional progress," said Jay Curtis, superintendent of Meeteetse schools. "It's a miracle. He's doing amazing."

Curtis said he received that report from Christine Horsen, Leo's mother and an elementary school teacher in Meeteetse.

Leo Horsen was injured during a practice session in the middle of the shot-put competition. A thrower's warm-up toss sailed off course to the right. All activity ceased at the meet and medical aid began promptly as ambulances and a life-flight helicopter arrived on the scene.

Doctors in Billings placed Horsen in a coma but that phase ended in recent days and "he is awake," Curtis said.

Responding to others, as well, and talking, Curtis said.

A number of fundraisers have been announced to help the Horsen family defray medical expenses. That includes buckets for contributions placed at some sporting events around the state. One school in Casper raised \$1,800, Curtis said.

Students statewide have taken note of Horsen's circumstances and begun a "Pray For Leo" movement.

Noting that Horsen's Jacksonville Jaguars shirt may have been ruined in the accident, track coach Ty Myers set in motion a plan to obtain a new one.

Those who know of Horsen's fan appreciation of the Seattle Seahawks reached out and the pro football team indicated it is sending a cheer-up package to him.

[http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article\\_cbd96164-0537-11e8-b6dc-0b8f5a14eef3.html](http://www.codyenterprise.com/news/local/article_cbd96164-0537-11e8-b6dc-0b8f5a14eef3.html)

BREAKING TOP STORY

## "I feel like me again" - Recovery hasn't been easy for boy struck by shot put

By LEW FREEDMAN [lew@codyenterprise.com](mailto:lew@codyenterprise.com) Jan 29, 2018 Updated 21 hrs ago



Leo Horsen (center) is recovering after being hit in the head with a shot put at a track meet in May 2016. He is pictured with his family (from left) Kayla, Christine, Roger and Kiana.

REBECCA NOBLE

Leo Horsen was not as lucky as Chicken Little. The fairy tale was sparked by an acorn hitting the fictional character on the head.

In the story, that tiny falling object spurs panic as the chicken dashes about shrieking "The sky is falling!"

For the Meeteetse seventh-grader, the sky did fall and it happened so fast he lacked even a false alarm, literally unaware what hit him.

The 12-pound shot put that plummeted from above on a sunny May afternoon at a Meeteetse High track meet in 2016 and hit him flush on the head, fractured his skull and nearly ended his life.

For Horsen, the drama and damage was no fairy tale.

"It was really scary," said sister Kiana, who was next to Leo when the shot put dropped. "I didn't know if he was alive."

Kiana was not alone. At different times, mom Christine, dad Roger and sister Kayla, also all worried Leo might die during his ensuing ordeal as he lay in a coma at St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings.

Head injuries are unpredictable and affect people's brains in unforeseen ways. Over the following months, Leo's speech, thinking and motor skills all lagged in recovery and family wondered when the old Leo would resurface – or if he would.

The comeback of Leo Horsen has been filled with tears and fears, but family, friends, the community of 325 people and much of Wyoming, rallied in support.

In the immediate aftermath, prayers for Leo echoed across the country and events raised money to aid the Horsens. And then radio silence. Reports ceased about how Leo was doing.

This is the first time since his release from the hospital June 8, 2016, five weeks after suffering his head injury, Leo and immediate family members have spoken about their anguish, relief and renewal.

Many people in Park County recall the terrible incident of a boy being severely harmed by a shot put throw, but not necessarily his name.

Twenty months after the shot put cracked his skull, Leo Horsen is a freshman at Meeteetse High School and a member of the Longhorns' basketball team. He can finally say, "I feel like me again."

This was a boy who wore a smile as naturally as others put on a baseball cap, but the smile was lost for a while.

The incident

The weather was mild on May 2, a Monday, for the 11-team Meeteetse track meet. Leo sat to the right of the sandy pit where shot put throws normally land. Head down, he fiddled with record-the-spot markers.

Tess Fremlin, who works for the Meeteetse Visitors Center and was measuring shot put throws, took advantage of the warm-up break for the next flight to climb the grassy hill and buy sodas for her and Leo at the concession stand.

Longhorns track coach Ty Myers was at the far end of the football field with pole vaulters and jumpers.

It was 3:40 p.m. when Lovell's Dylan Hereth unleashed a practice throw that sailed off-course and jump-started the emergency.

Cody's Peter Klessens was next in line for a practice toss.

"I can still see the shot put floating out of the ring," said Klessens, now a senior. "Everybody yelled, 'Heads!'"

Klessens said he heard a thud when the heavy ball struck Leo.

Leo went limp upon impact. It is unclear if he lost consciousness lying on the grass, but he was only vaguely responsive.

Kiana, now 13, who was next to Leo, ran to her father at the track finish line yelling, "Leo's hurt!"

A search party sought Kayla, who was in the library.

"I didn't know what was happening," said Kayla, now 11. "When I came out on the hill by the playground, everyone was crying."

Christine Horsen, a Meeteetse elementary teacher, was driving several miles away when informed by phone Leo was injured. She repeated, "He'll be fine. He'll be fine."

Myers ran to Leo and said he rubbed the boy's chest with his knuckles.

"We were just trying to keep him awake," Myers said. "You could see the indentation on his skull."

When Christine arrived, Leo was surrounded by a cluster of adults providing help. Fremlin held an umbrella over them, blocking the sun.

"They were angels," Roger Horsen said.

By then, assistant track coach Dale Query had called for assistance, bringing ambulances from West Park Hospital and a helicopter from Reach Air Medical Services.

Participants and spectators were ordered aside and gathered on the hillside above.

Christine knelt by Leo and begged him to show he could hear her.

"She squeezed my fingers," Leo said.

Upon approach the chopper's blades were heard before seen, reminiscent of a war-movie scene.

Leo was lifted onto a stretcher bed, wheeled to the chopper, and whisked to Billings, 130 miles away.

As Christine followed by automobile, her brother Matthew Mickelson of Laurel met the helicopter.

She reached the hospital about 9:30 p.m. Leo was in intensive care, hooked to monitors and tubes after undergoing initial tests.

Christine keeps an image of her boy's head on her cell phone, an enhanced X-ray with a Marvel comic-book-type metallic face in place of Leo's.

The disconcerting picture shows a lengthy crack running front to back just off-center, a secondary crack and a dip in the skull from the power of the blow.

Now Leo says the picture "is really cool. But knowing that's me, that's not cool."

### Saving a life

Christine wanted to stay in Leo's hospital room.

"He's my baby and they wouldn't let me stay with him," she said.

Doctors placed Leo in an induced coma and intubated him. He remained in the coma for 12 days of uncertainty.

Roger was riveted to one image. Doctors told him if the needle on one monitoring machine tilted one way Leo was in danger and if it tilted the other way it was a good sign.

"It stayed right in the middle for four days," Roger said.

Then it moved to the good side.

Praying for Leo began at the track meet, expanded throughout town and all around Wyoming.

Friend Hadley Abarr, acknowledging Leo's native Navajo heritage on his father's side, made bandanas with the words #hashtagPrayForLeo. Leo still has one.

Relatives elsewhere spoke up at their churches, in Arizona where Roger's Navajo relatives are based, Texas and Florida.

Fundraisers to cover travel, lodging and food expenses for family going back and forth between Meeteetse and Billings began in Meeteetse and followed in Thermopolis, Casper and Shoshoni. Cards came from other communities. People brought food to the house. The generosity was overwhelming.

"This community, if anyone gets hurt around here, just pulls together," Christine said.

Tiny Meeteetse is so small it is one big family and Leo was one of their own.

There was never any blame assigned to Hereth, the Bulldog shot-putter, but officials at his school said he felt terrible.

Months later, Hereth and his family quietly visited the Horsens' home.

"It was an accident," Roger said. "We let them know we were not vindictive."

### Returning home

From the moment Leo stood up in the hospital he was required to wear a protective plastic helmet. There were too many tender spots to risk taking a tumble and banging his head.

Upon leaving St. Vincent, Leo was still was uncomfortable verbally and his right leg and right arm were weak and needed therapy.

"Relieved and grateful," Christine said of the Horsens' reaction to him coming home.

Leo plunged into exercise during the summer of 2016. He swam three days a week. Carter Johnson, the Meeteetse grad who plays for the Yellowstone Quake hockey team, and his brother Kirwin were lifeguards.

Pool visits were the only times Leo was without his helmet and Carter said he was aware of the threat if Leo bumped into the walls. The Johnsons helped guide him in the water.

"There was no one else and I wanted to do it," Carter said.

Leo returned to school in the fall of 2016, with teachers recognizing he was slower to absorb information. He had to relearn how to write and that was frustrating.

"You could tell things were a little tougher for him," said Matt Jensen, the athletic director and a world history teacher. "It took him a little longer to process things."

Myers said in a bigger city, unlike Meeteetse where students of all grades attend classes in one building, children might have made fun of Leo's helmet.

"The kids didn't treat him any differently because of what happened," Myers said. "In Meeteetse and in other smaller schools, it's more like brothers and sisters. You've known them all forever."

### Road to recovery

Leo was plagued with frequent, intense headaches. The pain and thinking of "the accident," what he always calls what occurred, sometimes sent the boy with the perpetual smile into frown mode.

"There were times I was so angry," Leo said. "Sometimes something snapped. I was angry. It was, 'Why did this happen to me? Oh, it was that guy's fault.' I knew it was nobody's fault."

Now 15, Leo, who has black hair and a wide, friendly face, stands 5-foot-11 and weighs 210 pounds. But last year he was 70 pounds heavier. With his movements limited, he gorged on favorite foods like hot wings and Flamin' Hot Cheetos.

Then he took charge of his body again with diet and exercise. When told others say they think his smile is back, Leo agreed.

"I feel like it is back," he said.

Kiana and Kayla think the accident changed their brother. To them, pre-accident he was a 13-year-old hermit playing video games in his room who barely acknowledged them.

"He would never say anything," Kayla said. "He's nicer now."

Kiana thinks the siblings are closer.

"You realize life can change in the blink of an eye," she said. "Before, you didn't think you could lose one of your family members."

Leo barricaded in his room is old news.

"I loved them, but I didn't show it," he admitted.

As Leo healed, in the summer of 2017, a second Meeteetse boy suffered a debilitating head injury.

Ethan Salzman, 11, was concussed by a batted ball in Little League play and stayed in a Denver hospital.

When Leo was hospitalized in Billings, Ethan's older brother Caleb wrote a note of encouragement. Leo wrote to Ethan, saying he understood what he was enduring.

In part Leo wrote, "Hey, buddy, if I could take your place, I would."

Community outpouring

Leo bumps into people who recognize him as the boy hit by a shot put.

Initially, the helmet advertised that and someone at the Cody Walmart slapped cool stickers on the sides.

At Burger King people told him they prayed for him. In Shoshoni, the athletic director told him students raised money for him.

The Horsens kept boxes of get-well cards. The Seattle Seahawks – his favorite NFL team – sent a fan package.

Meeteetse students spelled out L-E-O on two-foot tall white letters and signed them. Those were saved.

For Leo, the most elemental signal he is healthy is just being one of the guys on the Meeteetse basketball team.

Cody senior Zech Todd was another shot putter at the 2016 meet and stars for the Broncos' basketball team. He never knew how Leo fared.

"I think that's awesome," Todd said of Leo playing ball. "It's one of those feel-good moments."

A center, last Saturday Leo saw Longhorn action in junior varsity and varsity games against Dubois.

Leo used to be a football and basketball guy, but with football shelved forever he is pouring his heart into hoops, rising at 4:30 a.m. for extra shooting before school.

He is building strength in his leg and hand while improving his game. Hitting the three is a bigger worry now than penmanship.

Longhorns basketball coach Zeb Hagen said Leo should have a good future in the game and contemplating how far he has come, Hagen said, "It's a miracle."

No one knows how much sweat went into the Leo of today than Leo.

1/30/2018

"I feel like me again" - Recovery hasn't been easy for boy struck by shot put | Local News | codyenterprise.com

"You can't change what happened," Leo said. "You've just got to get back up."

The sky fell on Leo Horsesen and temporarily turned off the lights. But these days he is walking in sunshine.



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## COLUMN: Horsen drops 104 pounds

By LEW FREEDMAN Dec 5, 2018



Leo Horsen (left) watches teammates run drills during basketball practice last January.

REBECCA NOBLE

The Atkins Diet, Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig. Not for him. Instead, Leo Horsen stitched together The Leo Horsen Magic Diet.

Those other groups, not to mention “America’s Biggest Loser,” should have him on speed dial.

As the Meeteetse boys basketball season begins its 2018-19 campaign this weekend, the numbers listed on the roster next to Horsen’s name announce 6-foot-2 and 180 pounds.

When he stepped on a scale in 2017, Horsen frowned at what he read. When he peered into a mirror he didn’t like what he saw. Back then he weighed 284 pounds.

Yes, he has lost 104 pounds.

“I was unhappy with the way I looked,” Horsen said, meaning his poundage was not muscle. “I came home one day and my feet hurt. My body was just sore. I didn’t feel right. One day I said, ‘I’m going to change.’”

How many of us have uttered such a phrase? How many times do New Year’s resolutions involve losing X amount of pounds? How often do our good intentions evaporate by February?

Horsen may only be 15, and while losing 100 pounds may make him a candidate for a skinny jeans commercial, he has already conquered a bigger challenge.

As a middle school student volunteering at a Meeteetse track meet in 2016, Horsen was hit in the head by a 12-pound shot put, fractured his skull and was in a life-threatening coma.

It took more than a year to rebuild his strength and Horsen was a little-used freshman member of the Longhorns last year.

But no one should underestimate the motivation connection between Horsen losing weight and seeking more playing time in hoops.

“I love the sport,” he said.

He also loved – still does – Flamin’ Hot Cheetos. The volume of Hot Cheetos in his life has declined so markedly it is possible Frito-Lay stock plummeted.

By considering Hot Cheetos a banned substance, Horsen went all in on his diet with the type of will, determination and discipline that aided him during his long recovery from the shot-put accident.

Horsen integrated some principles of Intermittent Fasting 101 into his diet, but told nobody about his weight-loss game plan. This has been a marathon, two-stage diet, first in 2017 and again this year.

Family and friends gradually began commenting: “Hey, Leo, you’re looking good.” Or, “Did you lose some weight?”

Some? Hah.

It is difficult to stay under cover if all you drink is water, eat at irregular times and your main course is calorie-free cardboard, or the equivalent.

Horsen's menus feature eight glasses of water, salads without dressing, egg sandwiches on multi-grain bread, chicken and cooked vegetables. On school days he crosses the street home to make his own lunch.

Mom Christine encouraged him and cooked for him, and then joined him on the diet, except for hanging on dearly to Crystal Light.

"He's not normal," she joked.

The Lay's chips slogan of "I Bet You Can't Eat Just One" could have been written for Horsen, applied when tempted by a Hot Cheetos bag or when he cheats with a smidgen of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

Anyone who ever considers losing weight in big gulps is informed the highway to success runs through diet and exercise.

Horsen rises at 4 a.m., skips breakfast (take that, most-important-meal-of-the-day acolytes) and throws himself into weight training, alternating working his chest, shoulders, biceps and triceps one day, and lower body muscles the next. Hardcore, but not mentally hard.

"When you get healthier, you have a better attitude," Horsen said.

Otherwise, Horsen practically lives with a basketball in his hands, taking extra shooting before school.

Horsen invested his money in his dreams last summer, paying for basketball camps at the University of Wyoming and Northwest College.

"I thought I was a good player before," Horsen said. "I look back at it now and I wasn't that great. I'm a better ballhandler than I was last year. I think I've really improved on my layups."

Coach Zeb Hagen has admirably followed Horsen's 100-pound reduction and dedication.

"I'm not surprised," Hagen said, "because I've watched him through the year. I knew how much work he put in. I'm very proud of him."

Hagen, sounding much like thousand of other Americans, said, "I would like to lose 10 pounds."

The Leo Horsen Magic Diet, patent pending, can show him how.