

SAN JOSE SPORTS AUTHORITY NEWS RELEASE

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7 Santa Clara County High School Seniors Awarded REACH Youth Scholarships

SAN JOSE (May 16, 2008) – Seven Santa Clara County high school seniors were awarded REACH Youth Scholarships today by the San Jose Sports Authority at the 2008 REACH Youth Scholarship Awards Breakfast, presented by Bridge Bank. The program honored a total of 36 local students who overcame adversity to excel in both academics and athletics. The breakfast was hosted for the fifth consecutive year by the San Jose Marriott.

NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott, honorary chair, women's soccer star Brandi Chastain, and, San Francisco Giants second baseman Kevin Frandsen distributed \$10,000 in scholarship awards on behalf of presenting sponsor Bridge Bank, with support from Hewlett-Packard, San Jose Marriott, San Jose Convention & Visitors Bureau, Team San Jose, National Tennis Championships, Cal-Hi Sports Bay Area, San Jose Giants, Corporate Printing Resource, Inc. and Southwest Airlines. REACH is an acronym for **R**ecognizing **E**xcellence, **A**dversity, **C**ourage and **H**ard work, in its 12th year as a program of the San Jose Sports Authority.

"The nominees and winners we recognized today are an inspiring group of students who, despite very difficult circumstances, have excelled and embody a spirit of resiliency." said Patricia Ernstrom, executive director of the San Jose Sports Authority. "As an avid supporter of youth sports in our community, the Sports Authority is proud to partner with Bridge Bank to honor the achievements of these outstanding young citizens."

Teachers, counselors and coaches from each high school in Santa Clara County were asked to nominate students who they felt matched the scholarship criteria. Students submitted essays detailing how they were able to overcome adversity and the role that sports played in helping them do so. A panel of local community leaders reviewed the essays, interviewed candidates and selected the six scholarship recipients, who received scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500 (list of recipients follows).

For event photographs and further information, please call the San Jose Sports Authority.

2008 REACH Youth Scholarship Award Winners

Melinda McDonald - Mountain View High School (\$2,500)

Two years ago, Melinda was diagnosed with cancer. Her diagnosis, hospitalization, and subsequent treatment forced her to miss significant time in the classroom and the sports field. However, Melinda persevered, and tackled her cancer with the same focus and intensity that she exhibited in her academic pursuits and athletic competitions. No longer able to participate in contact or impact sports, she continued her tennis career, finishing as a four-year varsity athlete. She attributes much of her recovery from cancer treatment to the decision to remain physically active, even when her body resisted. Melinda also ramped-up her class load, enrolling in three AP courses during her senior year, and she finished the first semester of her senior year ranked second in her class. Melinda says "I firmly believe that keeping my fatigued body active helped strengthen my immune system and kept my overall health as high as possible in order to fight the cancer. I am stronger, healthier, more determined, persistent, and more goal-driven because of my involvement in sports."

Sarah Schatzman - Presentation High School (\$2,000)

Sarah was a rising star in the local volleyball community, not only earning a spot on her high school's junior varsity volleyball team, but also being named the squad's captain. However, she never played a match that season, as she was soon thereafter diagnosed with two rare diseases, each treatable but physically draining. She returned to her volleyball team as a sophomore, but struggled to find her game. She addressed this challenge head-on, working harder than ever to regain her place as a team leader. By her senior year, she was again at the top of her game. Sarah was named All CCS 1st Team and All Mercury News 1st Team. The support Sarah received from family, friends, and even strangers, had a profound impact on her. She has since made community involvement and volunteerism important components of her life. She has been a spokesperson to raise funds for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and also partnered with a friend to organize an event that raised \$10,000 for the Foundation. This fall, Sarah will attend the University of San Diego where she will be a proud member of the Toreros volleyball team.

Matthew Whitehill – Monta Vista High School (\$1,500)

As a child, Matthew and his father spent countless hours together, playing sports, watching sports, and talking sports. When Matthew was in eighth grade, his father was diagnosed with brain cancer, sending shockwaves through his family. Only weeks later, his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. As his parents battled for their lives, Matthew was forced to grow-up quickly, taking more responsibility for himself at an early age. Matthew channeled the stresses of these challenges as a motivating force in his pursuit to be an elite baseball player. As he approached high school, Matthew logged extra hours to develop his skills, and during his freshman and sophomore seasons, his hard work began to pay off as he was a key player on his high school's junior varsity team. However, just as he was reaching the height of his potential, Matthew was hospitalized with viral meningitis. The disease severely weakened him and he missed much of the season, but he worked as hard as ever after his release from the hospital, and he took one at-bat during his team's final game that season. Matthew received the team's Most Inspirational Award.

Selina Stasi - Gunderson High School (\$1,000)

Sports were not always a focus in Selina's life, but when she spent time alone, she would dream of becoming an Olympic champion. That dream took a step in the right direction when her mother's co-worker asked if she wanted to try skating at Cal-Skate of Milpitas. Selina quickly fell in love with skating, and she was grateful for the people who provided the resources for her to participate. When her mother visited the rink, she found her daughter was no longer a beginner but had become a competitor in the sport of speed skating. The skating community supported her dream of competition and became an extended family. Eventually, she became a gold medal winner in national competition. She continued to explore her athletic potential when she joined After School All Stars at Steinbeck School which exposed her to new sports such as volleyball and basketball.

In high school, she participated in both basketball and softball while managing her skating schedule and earning a 4.0 grade point average. She learned from her mother that no matter what obstacles are in your way, you can overcome them.

Byanka Quinonez - Willow Glen High School (\$1,000)

Byanka is hardworking student athlete who is admired for her leadership and spirit. She is a four year competitor in field hockey, a three year basketball team member and she most recently joined the badminton roster. Athletics has provided a sanctuary for her when circumstances challenged her personal strength. Byanka considered basketball “her thing” in junior high but just as soon as she made the team, she had to switch schools. Joining a new team was helpful in creating new bonds, breaking down cultural barriers and helping her grow as a person. She is responsible for her siblings; she embraces leadership programs at school and has worked to help at her grandmother’s jewelry store. Byanka attributes her growth to teammates and coaches who served as exceptional role models. However, it was her own unrelenting approach to challenges and hard work that helped her to excel. As a sophomore, she was asked to compete at the varsity level in field hockey, but she requested to stay at JV because she wanted to improve her skills before taking the next step. In school, she found her coursework wasn’t challenging enough, and voluntarily enrolled in accelerated classes. She has also developed an interest in leadership, and has given back to the community as a volunteer coach and through the volunteer efforts of her field hockey team.

Gabriela Hopkins - Gunn High School (\$1,000)

Gabriela faced life challenges that tested her faith and personal strength. Through her young life she has experienced tragedies and unthinkable circumstances that most of us would never experience in a lifetime. A strong young woman, she became selfless – putting her feelings and emotions aside to care for her family. In addition to her love for sports, Gabriela is involved in community service, high school choir and bible study. At home, she helps her mother who she calls “one of the strongest members of our family.” Together, they have made the best out of life even when it seemed impossible.

Soccer provided balance in life and an extended family. Being a vital part of a team, knowing others are counting on her and being able to play a sport just for the fun of it was invaluable. On her soccer teams, she was able to build close relationships with her teammates and was given the role of a “big sister.” Gabriela helped teammates improve their skills and understand more about the issues they faced in life. When asked, her teachers and coaches describe her as a leader, dedicated student and a good listener. She has performed exceptionally as a 4.0 student. She is a Math & Social Studies department award winner who looks forward to attending Santa Clara University this fall.

Gary Ellis - Santa Teresa High School (\$1,000)

Gary is the definition of perseverance and resiliency. This young man is passionate about baseball and music. As a freshman, he did not make his school’s baseball team and he realized that making the squad as a sophomore would require dedication and a commitment to physical fitness. One year later - mission accomplished. He earned a spot on his school’s baseball team and joined his school’s marching band. Amidst his accomplishments, challenges arose as his grandfather’s health declined. He was thrust into the role of a care provider, assisting him with daily needs such as changing sheets and bathing. His daily routine meant going to school, immediately driving home to help his grandfather, going to baseball practice, then home to provide for his grandfather once again. Yet he did not think of it as a chore. He looked up to his grandfather as a hero.

Life then took a dangerous turn. While enjoying his birthday with friends the car we was riding in was involved in a serious car accident. His leg was severely injured and the doctors narrowly ruled out amputation. His odds of returning to high school baseball were unlikely, especially as a catcher. He underwent an incredibly successful surgery. Through his determination, he set his mind to recovery and focused on rehabilitation. He has not only made his family proud throughout the recovery process but is confident in speaking up about responsible driving – especially during the important weeks as we approach graduation.

2008 REACH Youth Scholarship Nominees:

Ashley Seymour, Archbishop Mitty High School
Miriam Magana, Eastside College Preparatory
Braden Langlais, Fremont High School
Jose Ortiz, Fremont High School
Amy Huang, Gilroy High School
Kristina Schmidt, Gilroy High School
Natalie Toews, Gilroy High School
Kevin Grove, Gilroy High School
Octavio Duran Jr., Gilroy High School
Luz Aceves, Gunderson High School
Jane Chang, Gunn High School
Dezmon Hunter, Gunn High School
Vasiliki Fkiaras, Leland High School
Nathaniel Polussa, Leland High School
Mark Good, Mountain View High School
Katherine Johnson, Mountain View High School
Tania Morimoto, Mountain View High School
Melissa Nilles, Mountain View High School
Erica Haedrich, Notre Dame High School
Hilda Garcia, Overfelt High School
Robert Miller, Palo Alto High School
Tyler Chase, Pioneer High School
Heather Goodman, Pioneer High School
John Kim, Pioneer High School
Kelly Sisney, Presentation High School
Mary Blake, Santa Teresa High School
Andrew Capek, Saratoga High School
Trevor Vlay, Westmont High School
Mohamed Abdalla, Willow Glen High School

About the San Jose Sports Authority

The San Jose Sports Authority is a non-profit organization whose mission is to increase the City of San Jose's economic development, visibility and civic pride through sports. Serving as the City's sports commission since its inception in 1991, the Sports Authority has provided leadership and support to attract or host nearly 200 sporting events in San Jose and the South Bay. The Sports Authority also supports and operates community, youth and amateur sports programs, including the San Jose Sports Hall of Fame, The First Tee of San Jose, and the REACH Youth Scholarship Program. To learn more, visit www.sjsa.org.

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