



Amaya and Anysa Gray of the University of California, Berkeley and Nigel Wilson of Pasadena City College Named 2023 CalHOPE Courage Award Winners

SACRAMENTO – MAY 10, 2023 — **Amaya and Anysa Gray**, twin sisters who play soccer for the University of California, Berkeley, and **Nigel Wilson**, a basketball player for Pasadena City College, have been selected as recipients of the **2023 CalHOPE Courage Award**. The inspiring student-athletes were recognized on May 9 at Oracle Park during an on-field ceremony prior to the San Francisco Giants versus Washington Nationals game.

To support other students battling through mental health challenges, a \$5,000 donation will be made in each of their names to support mental health services at the University of California, Berkeley and Pasadena City College.

The CalHOPE Courage Award, which has been presented since February 2022, recognizes student-athletes at California colleges and universities for overcoming the stress, anxiety, and mental trauma associated with personal hardships and adversity. It is presented by the College Sports Communicators (formerly CoSIDA), in association with The Associated Press (AP) and [CalHOPE](#), a crisis counseling and support resource for communities impacted by public health emergencies or natural disasters, overseen by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

Here are the inspiring personal stories of the 2023 CalHOPE Courage Award winners.

Amaya and Anysa Gray

The Gray twins grew up in East Palo Alto, California during a time when the city was plagued by gun violence and drugs. They were raised by a single mother. Their father, who struggled with drugs and alcohol, was incarcerated, and later moved out of state. During their tumultuous upbringing, they experienced homelessness and often had to sleep on the floors and couches of close relatives. Thanks to soccer and the support of their club soccer coach, who served as a trusted father figure, they were able to enroll at the Woodside Priory -- a boarding school in Portola Valley. To avoid their home situation, they would arrive at school and club team practices two hours early for extra training. Despite their difficult living circumstances, they excelled both in the classroom and on the pitch, with Amaya earning defender of the year honors and Anysa recognized as forward of the year.

As freshmen at Cal, in the early days of the pandemic, they faced the devastating reality of losing soccer, the most consistent and stable outlet in their lives. With counseling and the support of friends, they persevered through this stressful time.

In spring 2021, in just her second collegiate game, Anysa suffered a severe concussion. She could not play soccer, attend class, or read for seven months. She still feels the lingering effects of her injury today. Incredibly, she bounced back from the injury last fall and was named to the Pac-12 Academic Honor Roll.

In addition to their rigorous academic course loads at Cal, to help pay rent, Anysa is currently balancing three jobs as a dog walker, nanny, and tutor, while Amaya works from 6 p.m. to midnight three nights a week. Through it all, the twins have been key players on the Cal women's soccer team, playing a combined 99 games and tallying seven goals and 16 points. Additionally, although the twins were not on scholarship their first two years, this past year Amaya earned a scholarship from the Isabella Hill Perkins Soccer Scholarship Fund, while Anysa was awarded the Jeff Kent Women Driven Scholarship.

"When trying to persevere through adversity, counseling and therapy are a must," explained Amaya. "Honestly, if it wasn't for counseling and therapy, I don't think we would have been able to gain the mental strength to get through the adversity and hardships we've experienced."

Nigel Wilson

Following a successful high school career at Foothills High School in Tucson, Arizona, Nigel began his college basketball career at MiraCosta College in Oceanside, California during the pandemic shortened 2020-21 academic year. The combined effects of being far from home for the first time, several serious COVID-related family illnesses, the inability to connect with people in person, and a foot injury that kept him off the court put a strain on his mental health. He struggled with depression, but by opening up to his athletic counselor, he was encouraged to see a therapist. With the help of on-campus mental health counselors, an athletic counselor, and his teammates and coaches, he worked tirelessly to get his life back on track.

Last season, as he continued to work on his mental health, he played in 18 games at MiraCosta, averaging 4.2 points and 3.2 rebounds per game. The highlight of his season was a 6 point, 7 rebound, and 4 steal performance against San Diego City College in the California Community College Athletic Association (CCCCAA) SoCal Regional Finals. His steady improvement, strong academic performance, and superb athleticism convinced Pasadena City College head coach Ryan Frazer to offer him a roster spot for the 2022-23 season.

The 6-foot-9-inch forward started the season coming off the bench for the Lancers, but after just two weeks, he was inserted into the starting lineup. He delivered back-to-back 14-point performances, earning a starting spot that he kept for the remainder of the season. He was a big reason for the Lancers' dramatic improvement from a 1-26 record last season to a 22-9 mark and a berth in the CCCCCAA SoCal Regional Finals, where they eventually lost 63-58 to San Bernardino Valley. In 29 games, he averaged 10.3 points and 6.2 rebounds.

Nigel is on schedule to earn his AA degree this spring, and at the end of the semester will transfer to one of the many schools that have expressed interest in his talents.

Said Autumn Boylan, Deputy Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships for DHCS, which oversees CalHOPE: "CalHOPE is honored to recognize student-athletes statewide who have

overcome their challenges to perform their best as both scholars and athletes. CalHOPE's purpose is to build community resiliency and help people recover from disasters and public health emergencies through free outreach, crisis counseling, and support services. We hope that by sharing these stories of courage, we will all be inspired."

As the 2023 CalHOPE Courage Award winners, the Gray twins and Wilson join Breyon Jackson, (basketball, San Francisco State) and Julia Shwayder (lacrosse, Occidental College) who were the recipients last year. From September 2022 through April 2023, CalHOPE recognized several inspiring student-athletes, including: **Cameron Brink** (basketball, Stanford); **Garrett Jensen** (baseball, San Francisco State); **Lexi Zandonella-Arasa** (soccer, Sonoma State); **Anysa and Amaya Gray** (soccer, Cal); **Sam Nimmo** (lacrosse, Whittier College); **Ian Gilligan** (golf, Long Beach State); **Mike Asante** (basketball, Academy of Art); **Gretta Kirkby** (volleyball, Chico State); **Anastasiia Slivina** (rowing, USC); **Yuliia Zhytelna** (tennis, California State University, Northridge (CSUN)); **Nathan Merren** (volleyball, CSUN); **Jordan Smith** (soccer, Cal State East Bay); **Amiyah Aponte** (softball, University of the Pacific); **Nigel Wilson** (basketball, Pasadena City College); **Malia Talavou** (track and field, Long Beach State); and **Bailey Jones** (track and field, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo).

The honorees were selected by a panel of writers, editors, and sports information directors from College Sports Communicators and The Associated Press. Stories of all honorees are available at CalHOPECourageAward.com and on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at [@CalHOPE_Courage](#).

ABOUT CalHOPE

CalHOPE is a multi-level campaign run by DHCS to connect people with vital mental health and wellness resources and information to help them find their way during difficult times. CalHOPE offers critical behavioral health crisis counseling programs and uses a public health approach that is focused on strength-based strategies of building resiliency and connecting people to the support they need. CalHOPE partners with the California Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being to promote the CalHOPE Courage Award. CalHOPE resources may be accessed by calling the program's warm line at (833) 317-HOPE (4673) or by visiting www.calhope.org.

College Sports Communicators: College Sports Communicators is a 3,600-plus member national organization, comprised of the athletic communications, media relations, digital, and creative professionals throughout all levels of collegiate athletics in the United States and Canada. Founded in 1957, the organization is the second oldest management association in intercollegiate athletics. The organization's signature program is the Academic All-America program, honoring thousands of outstanding scholar-athletes annually. To learn more, visit collegesportscommunicators.com.

###

Media Contact: Doug Drotman (631/462-1198 or doug@drotman-pr.com)