



## Lexi Zandonella-Arasa of Sonoma State and Amaya Gray and Anysa Gray of the University of California, Berkeley Named CalHOPE Courage Award Winners for October

**SACRAMENTO – OCT. 20, 2022** — Three California college student-athletes – **Lexi Zandonella-Arasa**, a sophomore midfielder for the Sonoma State University woman’s soccer team, and twin sisters **Anysa Gray** and **Amaya Gray**, junior forwards for the University of California, Berkeley women’s soccer team – have been selected as the October recipients of the **CalHOPE Courage Award**.

The monthly award honors student-athletes at California colleges and universities who have overcome 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; [CalHOPE](#), a crisis counseling and support resource for communities impacted by public health emergencies, operated by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS); and the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being.

At the end of the school year, two of the student-athletes recognized during this year will be selected as annual **CalHOPE Courage Award** winners, and a \$5,000 donation will be made in each of their names toward mental health services at their schools. **Cameron Brink**, a basketball player at Stanford University, and **Garrett Jensen**, a pitcher for San Francisco State University, were the September honorees. Stories of all honorees are available at [CalHOPECourageAward.com](#) and via social media on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at [@CalHOPE\\_Courage](#).

Here’s a look at October’s CalHOPE Courage Award honorees:

### **Lexi Zandonella-Arasa**

From the outside, Lexi looked like a typical teenager growing up in Concord, California, not one whose parents were both struggling with drug addiction. With school, soccer, friends, and helping to care for her younger sister, Lexi was able to keep busy, leave her problems at home, and put on a happy face.

However, in 2020, COVID-19 flipped the high school senior’s life upside-down. She was no longer able to escape her reality, and instead was forced to witness the chaos of her

parents' addiction first-hand. Despite these challenges, Lexi became the first person in her family to graduate from high school and eventually the first to attend college.

Between graduation and starting college, her father was arrested and had to spend three months in a sobriety program. Although this was an important step for him in getting his life together, it meant Lexi and her sister were left alone to care for their mother who was still suffering from her addiction. The stress of that summer, along with the fear of being unable to enroll at Sonoma State and the cancellation of the 2020 season, was nearly too much for the 18-year-old to handle. At the urging of a friend, she sought counseling.

"My counselor helped me grow and allowed me to see that people can heal from past wounds and traumas," said Lexi. "I believe mental health is super important, and I'm going to continue to make it a priority in my life. I've been able to overcome so much by receiving help and learning how to communicate my feelings, rather than brush them aside. I feel incredibly blessed and thankful that I have come out on the other side and can break the cycle in my family for future generations to come."

Following the cancellation of the 2020 season, Lexi earned a starting position for the Seawolves in 2021, helping lead them to a 15-6 record. She started all 21 games and led the team with 14 points and 6 goals. This season, through 14 games, she leads the team with 29 points, 11 goals, and 7 assists. A business major with a 3.59 GPA, she made the Dean's List last semester and earned California Collegiate Athletic Association All-Academic team honors.

### **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 situation at home, they would arrive at both their 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 were faced with 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 daunting time.

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

On top of 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 Gray twins have made a significant impact on the Cal women's soccer team, playing a combined 60 games and tallying six goals and 14 points. Additionally, although both girls were not on scholarship their first two years, this

year Amaya earned a scholarship from the Isabella Hill Perkins Soccer Scholarship Fund, while Anya was awarded the Jeff Kent Women Driven Scholarship.

“When trying to persevere through adversity, counseling and therapy are musts,” 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 hardships we’ve experienced.”

Said Dr. Jim Kooler, Special Consultant for DHCS: “CalHOPE is honored to recognize student-athletes throughout the state who, despite setbacks, have overcome life’s challenges to continue to perform their best as both scholars and athletes. CalHOPE’s purpose is to build community resiliency and help people recover through free outreach, crisis counseling, and support services. We hope that by sharing these stories that student-athletes have experienced, we will all be inspired.”

Sports information directors at all colleges and universities in California are encouraged to nominate deserving intercollegiate student-athletes through April 2023 at [CalHOPECourageAward.com](http://CalHOPECourageAward.com). The honorees will be selected by a panel of writers, editors, and sports information directors from College Sports Communicators and The Associated Press. Fans can learn more and engage on social media on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/CalHOPE_Courage) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/CalHOPE_Courage) at @CalHOPE\_Courage.

#### **ABOUT CalHOPE**

CalHOPE is a multi-level campaign 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 supports 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](http://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](http://collegesportscommunicators.com).

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