



Julia Shwayder of Occidental College and Breyon Zebaniah Jackson of San Francisco State University Named CalHOPE Courage Award Winners for March

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – MARCH 29, 2022— Two California college student-athletes, **Julia Shwayder**, a member of the Occidental College lacrosse team, and **Breyon Zebaniah Jackson**, a member of the **San Francisco State University (SFSU)** basketball team, have been named recipients of the **CalHOPE Courage Award** for March. At the end of each academic year, two student-athletes will be selected as annual **CalHOPE Courage Award** winners, and a donation will be made in their names toward mental health services at their schools. In February, Julia Scoles, a beach volleyball player for USC, and Peter Andrews, a baseball player for Butte College, were named the award’s inaugural honorees.

Shwayder will be honored on April 4 during the Los Angeles Kings versus Calgary Flames National Hockey League game at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. Jackson will be honored on April 5 prior to the Sacramento Kings versus New Orleans Pelicans National Basketball Association game at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento.

The CalHOPE Courage Award honors two student-athletes at California colleges and universities each month who fit the award criteria, which may include overcoming the stress, anxiety, and mental trauma associated with personal hardships, injury, or life circumstances, particularly during the COVID public health emergency. It is presented by the College Sports Information Directors of America (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, operated by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS). Stories of all the honorees are available at CalHOPECourageAward.com and via social media on Twitter and Instagram at [@CalHOPE_Courage](https://www.instagram.com/CalHOPE_Courage).

“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,” said Dr. Jim Kooler, Behavioral Health Special Consultant for DHCS. “CalHOPE’s purpose is to build community resiliency and help people recover from disasters through free outreach, crisis counseling, and support services. COVID-19 has increased the stress, anxiety, and isolation athletes have experienced, and highlighting these stories of courage will inspire us all.”

Julia Shwayder, a senior defender for the Occidental College women's lacrosse team, has dealt with numerous personal hardships during her four years of college. During the summer of her freshman year (2019), her father, Scott, unexpectedly died by suicide. Although distraught, the 19-year-old returned to campus that fall and remained fully enrolled and committed to her academics and athletics. However, in spring 2020, when her lacrosse season was cut short due to COVID-19, she returned home to Colorado, leaving behind her support system of friends and teammates. After spending the spring and summer there, she returned to Los Angeles for the fall semester, sharing an apartment with teammates, but depression brought on by a variety of factors, including COVID restrictions and a mysterious liver ailment, forced her to return home again. Then, at the end of her junior year (May 2021), while visiting campus to attend the graduation ceremony, her good friend and teammate Zoe tragically lost her life. This added considerable psychological stress and heartache to the emotional state of the entire team, but especially to Julia, who was still grieving the loss of her father. Despite the shock and sadness, she took charge of the situation and helped her teammates navigate the difficult times. Now, back on campus for her senior year, Julia is balancing a full academic load, playing varsity athletics, and preparing for life after college. A psychology major, she plans to attend graduate school to become a therapist and to help those who also struggle with mental health issues. Toward that end, she is a member of Active Minds, a mental health club on campus, and she has organized team walks with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

"Counseling really helped me get through these difficult circumstances," said Shwayder. "During my personal grieving, the distance of school from home and time well spent with my friends helped to take my mind off my father's death. I had a great support system at school, but due to COVID, I was forced to return home, which honestly helped me process my dad's death in a way I was unable to at school."

Breyon Zebaniah Jackson, a 6-foot-7-inch junior forward for the San Francisco State men's basketball team, has had a challenging coast-to-coast journey since graduating from high school in Maryland in 2017, at which time he was named first-team all-conference and defensive player of the year. After a successful freshman season at Cloud County Community College in Concordia, Kansas, where he averaged 8.4 points and 5.5 rebounds, he transferred to Long Beach State University. However, after just eight games, an injury forced him to miss the remainder of the 2018-19 season. Then, because of a mixture of mental health challenges brought on by losing three of his childhood friends to gun violence and other family hardships, he was forced to leave Long Beach State after just 10 games of the 2019-20 season. Jackson, whose father had died while he was at Cloud County Community College, chose to help his family by continuing his college career closer to home at West Virginia State University in fall 2020. The pandemic limited practice time and disrupted his attempts to travel back and forth between college and home. Travel expenses added to the family's financial difficulties and, because his mother and brother were at-risk of becoming infected by COVID, he had to quarantine at another relative's home. By the time basketball practice resumed at West Virginia, he had missed too much time traveling during the fall, and there was no longer a spot for him on the team. He attempted to earn a scholarship by attending open gyms while living out of his car. When this proved unsuccessful, he decided to take the COVID option granted by the NCAA and sat out the 2020-21 season. He

transferred again, this time to San Francisco State, where he thrived. Despite sitting out the first 14 games, he played in the next 13 games and averaged 5.9 points and 4.4 rebounds as a key contributor off the bench, shooting 48.1 percent from the field and 76.7 percent from the free-throw line. An international relations major, he hopes to work in the NBA or with NBA Cares, NBA Africa, or the NBA Foundation to use basketball to help make the world a better place.

“I’m grateful, and I appreciate this recognition,” said Jackson. “Mental health is undervalued where I grew up. As a result, I didn’t know that it was ok to not be ok and that it was ok to ask for help. I want to use this opportunity to become a mental health advocate for everyone, especially for Black men and Black communities. I hope to set an example for my community on how they can improve their mental health and well-being, whether it’s meditating, seeking therapy, prayer, or even a new hobby. I want people to know that taking care of your mental health is important.”

Sports information directors at all colleges and universities in California are encouraged to nominate deserving intercollegiate student-athletes through April 2023 at CalHOPECourageAward.com. The honorees will be selected by a panel of writers, editors, and sports information directors from CoSIDA and AP. 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.

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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 these difficult times. CalHOPE is a federally supported effort (Federal Emergency Management Administration and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) that offers critical behavioral health crisis counseling programs to states and Tribes after a federal declaration of emergency. CalHOPE uses a public health approach that’s focused on strength-based strategies of building resiliency and connecting people to the supports they need. CalHOPE resources may be accessed by calling the program’s warm line at (833) 317-HOPE (4673) or by visiting www.calhope.org.

About CoSIDA (College Sports Information Directors of America): CoSIDA was founded in 1957 and is a 3,000-plus member national organization comprised of the sports public relations, media relations, and communications/information professionals of all levels of collegiate athletics in the United States and Canada. The organization is the second oldest management association in intercollegiate athletics. For more than 60 years, CoSIDA has recognized student-athletes as part of its Academic All-America awards program. Approximately 5,000 student-athletes are recognized each year for their excellence in the classroom and in competition. To learn more, visit cosida.com.

About The Associated Press (AP): The AP is the essential global news network, delivering fast, unbiased news from every corner of the world to all media platforms and formats. Founded in 1846, The AP today is the most trusted source of independent news and information. On any given day, more than half the world's population sees news from The AP. For more, visit www.ap.org.

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