



## **Kelsey Blaylock of Chico State, Johnny Buchanan of The Master's University, and Alisha Wilson of The Academy of Art University Named CalHOPE Courage Award Winners for April**

**SACRAMENTO, Calif. – APRIL 19, 2022**— Three California college student-athletes – **Kelsey Blaylock**, a member of the **Chico State** women's golf team, **Johnny Buchanan**, a volleyball player at **The Master's University** in Santa Clarita, and **Alisha Wilson**, a member of both the women's basketball and track and field teams for the **Academy of Art University** in San Francisco – have been selected as recipients of the **CalHOPE Courage Award** for April.

The CalHOPE Courage Award honors student-athletes at California colleges and universities each month for 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).

At the end of the spring semester, two of the seven student-athletes recognized this semester 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. Stories of all honorees are available at [CalHOPECourageAward.com](https://CalHOPECourageAward.com) and via social media on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at [@CalHOPE\\_Courage](#).

Here's a look at the honorees for April.

**Kelsey Blaylock, a senior golfer for Chico State**, did not expect serious medical issues to be her primary stress after transferring from Sierra College in Rocklin, California in 2019. But she has spent nearly two years in agony and confusion when the causes of her severe stomach pain and discomfort went undiagnosed and untreated because COVID concerns took priority with her doctors and hospitals. She began having medical issues in January 2020 and visited several medical professionals. They scheduled various tests and exams, but her treatment was delayed due to COVID protocols. A colonoscopy scheduled for April 2020 was postponed until March 2021. She was eventually diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease, had two colonoscopies, an endoscopy, an MRI, and numerous other tests. She has taken 25 pills a day,

started infusion treatments, and changed her diet. She is convinced that without the pandemic, she would have gotten a proper diagnosis and regained her health more quickly. The misery, mystery, and delay all affected her mental health as well as her physical health. Doctors were amazed at Blaylock's determination to continue golfing at the collegiate level. The native of Lincoln, California is a psychology major and plans to go to nursing school to become a pediatric oncology nurse.

"Yes, COVID had a huge impact on my mental and physical condition, but I am so lucky to have such an incredible support system to help get me through this," Blaylock said. "My teammates and coach are always telling me how my strength inspires them. I have continued to work to be a student-athlete throughout this experience by staying mentally tough and fighting through the pain. The people that know me best know that I am as tough as nails and will never give up on something, no matter what I may be dealing with. When I'm out on the course for those five hours, the only thing I'm thinking about is giving 110 percent, no matter how I may be feeling."

**Johnny Buchanan, a freshman on The Master's University men's volleyball team,** has not let Cystic Fibrosis (CF), nor being immunocompromised in the age of COVID, prevent him from developing his mind and body. His condition has always made sports difficult, even before COVID, because CF has an adverse effect on lungs, cardiovascular health, growth, and life expectancy. However, the pandemic presented additional challenges for Buchanan, who has lived his whole life understanding that he is always at risk. When COVID hit in the middle of his senior year at West Ranch High School in Valencia, California, it disrupted his college and volleyball plans. He decided to attend a local community college, where he did not play volleyball, before transferring this year to The Master's University. Through his strong Christian faith, Johnny has stayed resilient mentally through the numerous challenges caused by his CF, including isolation from peers when needing to undergo multiple breathing treatments a day. He prays, reads his Bible, and regularly attends church services to bring him peace and comfort in the trials he faces. On the court, he was the starting setter on the nation's 12<sup>th</sup>-ranked National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) men's volleyball team, finishing fourth in the Golden State Athletic Conference (GSAC) in assists/set, while setting single-match and single-season program records for assists. He helped lead the Mustangs to a 13-11 record and a berth in the GSAC championship game, where their magical run ended with a loss to Ottawa University in Arizona. In the classroom, the Kinesiology and Physical Education major has recorded straight A's, managing to find a balance of living his life while taking precautions to stay safe.

"While the rest of the world has seen the dangers of COVID the past couple of years, this is really all I've ever known," said Buchanan, who is a native of Honolulu. "That first year of college, I realized how much I missed competing and the grind of training. Coming to The Master's University has allowed me to continue my desire to develop my body, mind, and spirit for the glory of Christ."

**Alisha Wilson, a freshman starting forward/center for the Academy of Art University women's basketball team and a sprinter on the track & field team,** faced many obstacles before she arrived at the San Francisco campus. As a child, she exemplified strength and perseverance while

navigating the foster care system and exposure to gang violence. Balancing school and athletics at Bonita High School was not easy, as Wilson dealt with the mental trauma of her childhood and frequently relocated as a ward of the state. She used her background as motivation and sports as an outlet. In her final year as a varsity basketball and track and field student-athlete with Bonita in 2020-21, Wilson was named Palomares League Most Valuable Player on the basketball court and guided the Bearcats to a league title. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, her opportunities to participate in recruiting trips and access to in-person social and emotional support were limited. However, Wilson was determined to not allow isolation and the instability of her home environment to deter her from becoming a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) qualifier. With additional support and guidance from her high school family, Wilson was able to finish high school and focus on her transition to college, where she is currently majoring in Communications and Media Technologies. On the basketball court, she scored 9.2 points per game and led the team with a .466 field goal percentage as well as 10.3 rebounds per game, helping the Urban Knights to an 18-11 record and a third-place regular season finish in the Pacific West Conference. On the track, she competed in the 200-meter and 400-meter events, setting personal bests of 25.38 and 55.57, respectively.

"As a first-generation college student, my goal is to be a role model for my siblings and for other youth," Wilson said. "I'm very appreciative of the support my family has given me along the way. I was motivated to finish high school and become a student-athlete at the collegiate level. I hope my success can inspire someone else to believe in themselves and pursue their dreams."

The four other student-athletes honored thus far include: **Peter Andrews**, a baseball player for Butte College; **Breyon Zebaniah Jackson**, a basketball player for San Francisco State University; **Julia Scoles**, a beach volleyball player for USC; and **Julia Shwayder**, a lacrosse player for Occidental College.

"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."

Sports information directors at all colleges and universities in California are encouraged to nominate deserving intercollegiate student-athletes through April 2023 at [CalHOPECourageAward.com](https://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](#) and [Instagram](#) 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 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.ap.org).

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