



**Julia Shwayder of Occidental College and Breyon Jackson of San Francisco State Named 2022 CalHOPE Courage Award Winners**  
*Student-athletes recognized for overcoming adversity earn donation to mental health services at their schools*

**SACRAMENTO, Calif. – MAY xx, 2022—** Two California college student-athletes who have overcome personal hardships and mental trauma – **Julia Shwayder**, a lacrosse player at **Occidental College** in Los Angeles, and **Breyon Jackson**, a basketball player at **San Francisco State University (SFSU)** – have been selected as the recipients of the **2022 CalHOPE Courage Award**.

The new award has recognized seven student-athletes at California colleges and universities this spring for overcoming the stress, anxiety, and mental trauma associated with personal hardships, injury, or life circumstances, particularly during the COVID public health emergency. The award 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).

To recognize the two inspiring student-athletes and support other students battling through mental health challenges, \$2,500 donations will be made in each of their names to support mental health services at Occidental College and SFSU. Specifically, the funds will support “Between The Lines”, a free and confidential counseling service for student-athletes operated by the Occidental College Emmons Wellness Center and SFSU’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), which enhances the mental well-being of the entire campus community.

“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.”

Shwayder, a senior defender for the Occidental College 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 Shwayder returned to campus that fall and remained fully enrolled and committed to her academics and athletics. However, in spring 2020, when COVID-19 cut short her lacrosse season, she returned home to Colorado, leaving behind her support system of friends and teammates. After spending the spring and summer at home, she returned to Los Angeles for the fall semester, 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 Shwayder, who was still grieving the loss of her father. Despite the shock and sadness, she helped her teammates navigate through the difficult times. During her senior year, Julia balanced a full academic load, played varsity athletics, and prepared for life after college. She started the first nine games this season before an injury sidelined her for five games. She was able to return to the lineup and start the final three games. A psychology major, Shwayder plans to attend graduate school to become a therapist and to help those who also struggle with mental health issues. Toward that end, she has been a member of Active Minds, a mental health club on campus, and she has organized lacrosse 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.”

Jackson, a 6-foot-7-inch junior forward for the SFSU men’s basketball team, has had a challenging coast-to-coast journey since graduating from high school in 2017. After a successful freshman season at Cloud County Community College in Concordia, Kansas, he transferred to Long Beach State. However, after just eight games, an injury forced him to miss the remainder of the 2018-19 season. Then, after a series 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 during his freshman season, chose to help his family by transferring to West Virginia State University (WVSU) to be closer to home. The pandemic limited practice time and disrupted his attempts to travel between college and home. These travels were made more difficult because his mother and brother were at risk of becoming infected by COVID, forcing him to quarantine with a relative. By the time basketball practice resumed at WVSU, there was no longer a spot for him on the team. He spent the remainder of 2020 living in his car. He also attended open gyms hoping to earn a scholarship. When this proved unsuccessful, he sat out the season to work on his game and to deal with his mental wellness. He transferred in 2021 to SFSU, where he thrived. Forced to sit out the first half of the season because he was unable to track down his college transcripts in time for the regular season, he played the final 13 games for the Gators, averaging 5.9 points and 4.4 rebounds as a key contributor off the bench. 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 and to destigmatize mental health.

“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.”

From February through April, seven student-athletes at California colleges and universities were honored as CalHOPE Courage Award nominees and recognized for their inspirational journeys. A panel of voters from CalHOPE, the Governor’s Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being, CoSIDA, and The Associated Press chose Shwayder and Jackson as the two who best exemplify the mission of CalHOPE. Stories of all honorees are available at [CalHOPECourageAward.com](http://CalHOPECourageAward.com).

The other nominees include:

- **Peter Andrews, a sophomore baseball player at Butte College**, who fought through the death of his father and the challenges brought on by of COVID during his freshman year.
- **Chico State senior golfer Kelsey Blaylock**, who was unable to receive medical attention for Crohn’s and Ulcerative Colitis because her doctors and local hospitals were overwhelmed with COVID patients.
- **Johnny Buchanan, a freshman volleyball player at The Master’s University**, was forced to put his dreams of playing college volleyball on hold during COVID due to his lifelong battle with Cystic Fibrosis.
- **Julia Scoles, a graduate student and beach volleyball player from USC**, who battled the adverse effects of numerous concussions since 2016 that saw her transfer from North Carolina to Hawaii and finally to USC in 2020.
- **Alisha Wilson, a freshman at Academy of Art University**, who emerged from a gang-infested neighborhood and the California foster care system to thrive and star in both basketball and track

### **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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