



Nik Trapani of San Jose State and Elizabeth Fox of San Joaquin Delta College Recognized with CalHOPE Courage Award for October

SACRAMENTO – OCTOBER 26, 2023 — Two California college student-athletes — **Nike Trapani**, a senior outfielder on the **San Jose State University** baseball team, and **Elizabeth Fox**, a sophomore for the **San Joaquin Delta College** water polo squad – have been selected as the October recipients of the **CalHOPE Courage Award**.

The award, presented monthly since February 2022, honors student-athletes at California colleges and universities who have overcome the stress, anxiety, and mental trauma associated with personal hardships and adversity. In addition to being recognized by CalHOPE, \$1,000 will be donated in each of their names to support on-campus mental health services at their schools.

Here's a closer look at the inspiring personal stories of these two student-athletes recognized with the CalHOPE Courage Award for October.

Elizabeth Fox

Despite her love of water polo and her success in the sport, Elizabeth has struggled with self-confidence for as long as she can remember. Her self-doubt began in elementary school where she both struggled with her hearing and had a disability making it difficult for her to pronounce several sounds and words.

It was in playing water polo that she found her identity and gained self-confidence; however, that changed during her sophomore year when she was the lone player from her junior varsity squad promoted to varsity, leaving behind her friends and former teammates. The emergence of COVID-19 left her feeling further isolated, unable to participate in her sport or connect with friends. She was back in the pool for her senior year, but still not where she wanted to be emotionally.

When she arrived at San Joaquin Delta College in 2022, she had a breakthrough when she shared with Coach Nathan Varosh her prior and ongoing struggles and challenges with self-confidence. Coach Varosh began identifying fun ways to engage Elizabeth and restore her

confidence. For example, when he notices her struggling, he challenges her to “fight” or arm wrestle. This brings out her competitive side and restores her belief in herself.

Despite her personal challenges during her freshman year, Elizabeth was an essential player for the San Joaquin Delta Mustangs, scoring six goals and five assists. So far during her sophomore year, playing in just 12 of 17 games due to a concussion, she has scored 12 goals and six assists and recorded nine steals.

“Within the past year, I have noticed a dramatic improvement in my self-confidence, which has allowed me to heal and improve my performance both in the classroom and in the pool, where I am really enjoying playing at the collegiate level,” explained Elizabeth. “Coach Varosh and Coach Taitum Herrington have created a caring environment in which we check in on each other every week to keep our pool deck positive.”

As a result of the positive impact of coaching on her life, Elizabeth’s educational and athletic journey continues. She plans to transfer next year to a four-year university, complete her degree in history, and become a teacher and coach.

Nik Trapani

When Nik Trapani made the jump from Loyola High School in Los Angeles to play Division I baseball at San Jose State, it was a dream come true. But when the injuries piled up and he was unable to prove himself, doubt set in. His Spartan career has been fraught with challenges, including multiple injuries that have plagued him. As a result, Nik has been limited to just 105 at bats and 57 games since first arriving on campus in 2018.

He suffered through bilateral patella tears in both knees from 2019-2021, which forced him to undergo surgery and sit out the 2022 season. When he returned the following season, he was limited to just 81 at bats as his injury worsened. He underwent another surgery last summer to repair his knee. Currently rehabbing, he is planning on being in the opening day lineup in February 2024.

Sitting out the entire 2022 season was mentally challenging for Nik. He took the courageous step to see a therapist and discovered his family had a history of anxiety. Understanding that people close to him suffered the same affliction made him feel less alone and encouraged him to continue therapy to develop strategies to improve his mental health.

Despite his many challenges, Nik was an offensive force for the Spartans last season when they captured their first-ever Mountain West Conference championship and became the first Spartan team in more than 20 years to advance go to the NCAA Regional Tournament. Nik started every game in both the conference tournament and NCAA Stanford Regional.

“My journey at San Jose State hasn’t been easy. Even last year when I was playing regularly, I was in pain every day,” explained Nik. “However, the perspective I have gained from my

experience and therapy has allowed me to develop an appreciation for playing baseball that I used to take for granted. I certainly understand that none of this is possible without my family and girlfriend who have supported me, teammates who have pushed me, coaches who have led me, and especially my trainer, Karter Lang, who has been with me every step of the way.”

About the CalHOPE Courage Award

The monthly CalHOPE Courage Award is presented by the College Sports Communicators (formerly CoSIDA), in association with The Associated Press; [CalHOPE](#), DHCS’ crisis counseling and support resource; and the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being.

“CalHOPE is honored to continue recognizing student-athletes statewide who have overcome their challenges to perform their best as both scholars and athletes,” said **Autumn Boylan, Deputy Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships for the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)**, which oversees CalHOPE. “CalHOPE’s purpose is to build community resilience 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, all will be inspired.”

At the end of the school year, two of the student-athletes will be selected as the CalHOPE Courage Award winners. The previous winners were: **2023 - Anysa and Amaya Gray** (soccer, U.C. Berkeley) and **Nigel Wilson** (basketball, Pasadena City College); **2022 - Julia Schwayder** (lacrosse, Occidental College) and **Breyon Jackson** (basketball, San Francisco State).

Stories about all CalHOPE Courage Award honorees are available at [CalHOPECourageAward.org](#) and via social media at [@CalHOPE_Courage](#).

Sports information directors at all colleges and universities in California are encouraged to nominate deserving intercollegiate student-athletes through March 2024 at [CalHOPECourageAward.org](#). The honorees will be selected by a panel of writers, editors, The Associated Press, and the College Sports Communicators.

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), accessing the [live chat](#) feature, or visiting [www.calhope.org](#).

College Sports Communicators: The 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.

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