



Brett Johnson of the University of California, Berkeley and Gabbie Silva of California State University, Dominguez Hills Recognized with CalHOPE Courage Award

SACRAMENTO – JANUARY 9, 2024 — Two California college student-athletes, **Brett Johnson**, a fifth-year defensive tackle for the **University of California, Berkeley** football team, and **Gabbie Silva**, a redshirt junior defensive specialist on the **California State University, Dominguez Hills** volleyball team, have been selected as the December 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.

Gabbie Silva

Gabrielle “Gabbie” Silva embarked on her academic journey at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) in the challenging landscape of fall 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite facing the unusual circumstance of remote learning from her home in Union City, California for her first year, Gabbie exhibited remarkable academic prowess. The presence of her family and friends provided a crucial support system, aiding her through the isolation resulting from the pandemic.

Upon her return to campus for in-person classes in 2021, a discernible melancholy shadowed Gabbie. While she continued to excel academically, those close to her noticed an underlying sadness, not present the previous year.

During the subsequent summer, Gabbie took a courageous step by reaching out to Kisha Calbert, CSUDH student academic success coordinator, to share the mental health challenges she was facing. Torn between loyalty to the team and coaches and a diminishing passion for the game, Gabbie tearfully informed her coach of her decision to step away from volleyball. The overwhelming combination of travel, practices, and teammates had taken a toll, with her mind spinning and thoughts turning dark. Recognizing the need for change, she sought support from the

school's sports psychologist, Dr. Lupe Herrera, and joined support groups to navigate the difficult terrain.

In her pursuit of a fresh start, Gabbie also transitioned from majoring in art to graphic design, and she embraced an internship with the campus communications office. Last fall, Gabbie made a triumphant return to the volleyball team, viewing the team environment as a safe space to express her feelings. Ms. Calbert continued to offer Gabbie support, emphasizing Gabbie's continued involvement in campus therapy programs, and championing available mental health initiatives.

On the volleyball court this season, in 13 matches, Gabbie began to return to the form that made her a rising star as a redshirt freshman, when she led the team with 293 digs and displayed a .934 reception percentage in 21 matches.

Reflecting on her journey, Gabbie shared, "I've learned how important it is to ask for help and surround myself with a strong support system I can rely upon. I now know there is no shame in reaching out to my loved ones about the mental health issues I struggle with. Asking for help is one of the most courageous things I could have done for myself. I'm glad I was able to be vulnerable and ask for and receive the help I needed."

Brett Johnson

On December 5, 2020, Brett Johnson played the final game of his second season for the California Golden Bears. Many college football insiders anticipated a bright future for the 6-foot-5-inch, 290-pound defensive lineman. In his first two seasons, he played in all 17 games, recording 46 tackles, 5.5 tackles for loss, 3.5 sacks, and one fumble recovery at a position for which stats rarely tell the entire story.

Little did anyone know that it would be another 1,001 days before the Phoenix native would play in another college football game. Just before the team's 2021 spring game, Johnson suffered a serious hip injury in an automobile accident that would cost him the entire season. Following a year of intensive recovery and rehabilitation of his hip and just weeks before the start of the 2022 campaign, Johnson would be injured again, this time suffering a torn ACL during a training camp that caused him to miss all of 2022.

"I was able to handle the two injuries by pivoting my attention with relative ease," Johnson said. "I found myself with more time and freedom to explore life outside of football that I otherwise would not have had. The greatest gift I gained from these injuries was being able to become closer with my friends in Berkeley. These are the people who supported me through everything and made sure I was mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in line. I stayed above water on the mental side very well during the hip injury and rehab. The nature of that injury and everything that went into it gave me a larger perspective on my mortality, so I was just thankful to be alive. The ACL injury, while being a relatively easy injury compared to the hip, brought a lot more mental and emotional hardship due to the compounding of the hip injury along with other factors in my personal life that were sources of struggle. While those mental and physical struggles were not easy to deal with, it made it so much sweeter when I came back to the field."

Johnson returned to action for the 2023 season opener at North Texas on September 2, 2023, and, remarkably, went on to start all 12 games for Cal during a 2023 season that culminated with a berth in the Radiance Technologies Independence Bowl versus Texas Tech (Cal was defeated 34-14). He recorded 23 tackles, 0.5 sacks, 0.5 tackles for loss, one pass breakup, and one fumble recovery on his way to earning national semifinalist recognition for AP Comeback Player of the Year.

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. This year's honorees include **Jennika Davis** (soccer, UC Irvine); **Elizabeth Fox** (water polo, Delta College); **Jannah Loggins** (soccer, San Jose State); **Nik Trapani** (baseball, San Jose State); **Megan Janikowski** (soccer, Cal Poly Humboldt); and **Jamel Pink** (football, Reedley College).

"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); and **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 navigate during times of crisis. 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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