



Cole Kitchen of Santa Clara University and Julia Betti of Sonoma State University Recognized with CalHOPE Courage Award

SACRAMENTO – MARCH 19, 2024 — Two California college student-athletes, **Julia Betti**, a junior midfielder for the **Sonoma State University** soccer team, and **Cole Kitchen**, a graduate pitcher for the **Santa Clara University** baseball team, have been selected as the February 2024 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.

Cole will receive his CalHOPE Courage Award trophy from Dave Stewart - former Oakland A's pitching great and member of the Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being - during a pregame ceremony before the Broncos' March 22 game versus Portland State. Julia will receive her trophy during an on-campus ceremony later this month.

Here's a closer look at the inspiring personal stories of these two student-athletes:

Julia Betti, Sonoma State University, Soccer

Julia Betti's journey involves tragedy and triumph. At age 11, her world was forever changed when her 14-year-old sister, Jenna, tragically lost her life when she was struck by a train near the family's home in Martinez, California.

Losing her role model and best friend was devastating for Julia, a young girl with big dreams. With the support of her parents, she learned it was OK to feel the emotions of her loss, talk about it, and let herself grieve. Now ten years later, Julia is a strong and successful woman.

A year after her sister's death, Julia was encouraged by her parents to see a grief counselor. She did and learned valuable life skills, including journaling and communicating when facing challenges. Despite her loss, she's never gotten to the point of feeling alone in life.

"I'm so grateful I learned these lessons at such a young age because it led me to a place now where I feel strong enough to deal with other adverse situations in life," explains Julia. "I learned that speaking about your feelings isn't a sign of weakness, but a sign of wisdom, as only the strong seek help."

Her sister's dream of playing college soccer became Julia's. Following a decorated career at Alhambra High School, where she earned All-League Honorable Mention twice and the team Offensive MVP in her senior season, Julia chose to attend Sonoma State. In addition to the great curriculum and competitive soccer program, Julia felt the coaching staff there would create the ideal environment for her to succeed.

Though her freshman season was cancelled due to the pandemic, Julia has been a valued member of the soccer team for the past three seasons. She started 57 games, scored three goals, and added four assists while playing nearly 78 minutes per game. She was recognized as All-California Collegiate Athletic Association Honorable Mention in both 2022 and 2023.

Cole Kitchen, Santa Clara University, Baseball

Cole Kitchen faced a heartbreaking setback just before the start of the 2023 season. His younger brother, Cade, was hospitalized from an accidental drug overdose involving fentanyl.

Cole returned home to be with his family, but a short time later, Cade passed away. Cole was devastated, but this wasn't his first experience with death. Five years earlier, Cole's friend Jesse Esphorst (JE), a travel baseball teammate at the Garciaparra Baseball Group (GBG) and high school teammate at El Camino Real Charter, was killed in a car accident. Since that day, Cole has written JE10 on his cap and GBG has JE10 embroidered on all player hats as a tribute to Jesse.

To help with the emotional pain of his brother's death, Cole leaned on his family and the Santa Clara University sports psychology services. Other teammates, athletic department members, and friends shared their experiences with losing a sibling, helping Cole heal.

"I'm lucky to be surrounded by such a great support network at Santa Clara. Although time heals, this tragedy will never leave us," said Cole. "My family has tried to be very vocal to educate others about the circumstances that led to this tragedy. Last December, my father joined a Los Angeles police officer to give a presentation at my former high school on the dangers of fentanyl. We hope sharing our story can prevent other families from suffering."

Despite the emotional turmoil, Cole found solace and purpose on the baseball field.

Channeling his grief into focus and with a pin affixed to his hat in honor of Cade, he emerged as the staff pitching ace, leading the Broncos to their first West Coast Conference (WCC) Tournament title and first NCAA Tournament appearance in 26 years. The senior righthander led the team with 16 starts and 81.3 innings pitched and was second with 68 strikeouts.

Cole's excellence extends beyond the baseball field. He earned WCC All-Academic honorable mention honors, graduating last spring with a 3.5 GPA and a degree in bioengineering. He's currently enrolled in the master's degree program as he completes his final year of baseball eligibility.

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); **Jennah Loggins** (soccer, San Jose State); **Nik Trapani** (baseball, San Jose State); **Elizabeth Fox** (water polo, Delta College); **Megan Janikowski** (soccer, Cal Poly Humboldt); **Jamel Pink** (football, Reedley College); **Brett Johnson** (football, University of California, Berkeley); **Gabbie Silva** (volleyball, California State University, Dominguez Hills); **Cameron Nelsen** (volleyball, Antelope Valley College); and **Lesown Hallums, Jr.** (basketball, University of the Pacific).

“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 at 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](https://twitter.com/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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