



Myron “MJ” Amey and Cameron Nelsen Named 2023-24 CalHOPE Courage Award Winners

Student-Athletes to be Recognized by The Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being on May 1 at the Sacramento State Capitol

SACRAMENTO – MAY 1, 2024 —**Cameron Nelsen**, a freshman volleyball player for Antelope Valley College, and **Myron “MJ” Amey**, a junior guard for the **San Jose State University** basketball team, have been selected as the recipients of the **2023-24 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. Amey and Nelsen were selected as the two honorees, from 15 student-athletes honored this year, whose personal journeys best reflect the award criteria.

They will be honored during the *Move Your Body Calm Your Mind Day* celebration on May 1 at the State Capitol in Sacramento by distinguished members of the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being, including First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi, and former Oakland A’s pitching ace Dave Stewart. Additionally, \$2,000 will be donated in each of their names to support mental health services at their schools. This brings the total donation to mental health services this year to \$20,000.

Here’s a closer look at Amey and Nelsen’s inspiring personal stories:

Myron “MJ” Amey – Basketball, San Jose State

Myron "MJ" Amey's journey is a story of athletic triumph and a testament to resilience in the face of profound mental health challenges. Despite averaging 27 points per game as a senior at Vacaville High School, MJ did not receive a Division I scholarship offer. At the same time, he experienced the passing of his beloved uncle Bobby, leaving MJ stricken with grief and unresolved emotions as COVID-19 restrictions prevented a proper funeral.

To continue his basketball dream, MJ traveled 2,600 miles to Scotland Preparatory School in Pennsylvania. He led the school’s league in scoring, but was still not rewarded with a Division I scholarship offer. Committed to making his Division I dream a reality, he worked as a food delivery driver to earn money to travel to a college showcase in Phoenix. His impressive performance earned him a scholarship offer from San Jose State.

Following a freshman campaign in which he averaged 9.5 points per game, he underwent foot surgery. It was then that the loss of basketball and the emotions from the death of his uncle spiraled, and MJ found himself in a dark place. He began self-harm and attempted to take his own life. Despite being treated and released from a behavioral health center, he would continue to harm himself before finally agreeing to see a therapist. With her guidance, he began journaling and finding comfort and acceptance.

When his 2022-23 season was cut short after just nine games due to an ankle injury, he worried he would once again be unable to accept life without basketball. Instead, he leaned into his love of music and expressed his feelings in a rap song. Then he attended a Black Student-Athlete Summit and built connections with people outside of basketball. These experiences inspired him to create a TikTok account ([@win a day wit MJ](#)) to share his story and discuss mental wellness.

MJ entered the 2023-24 season both physically and mentally fit, which showed on the court. He played in all 32 games and led the Spartans in scoring at 15.7 points per game, including a season high of 30 versus Boise State in January 2024. Following the season, he entered the transfer portal, and on April 22 announced he would transfer to Loyola Marymount University.

“I felt like everything I had was because of basketball, so when I was injured, I didn’t know what to do and felt alone,” said MJ. “I would feel so bad if somebody I love had to go through what I went through. I hope that by speaking out about mental health, I can help others to seek help.”

Cameron “Cami” Nelsen, Volleyball, Antelope Valley College

Cami Nelsen's journey is one marked by resilience and triumph over formidable challenges. Diagnosed with Stage 2 chronic kidney disease at age 6, she struggled with increasing anxiety about her health, compounding existing mental health issues. Cami suffered from anemia during middle school, forcing her to give up soccer and increasing her anxiety and depression, resulting in self-harm. Admitted to the intensive care unit for emergency blood transfusions in eighth grade, Cami's physical health improved, but her mental struggles continued.

Transitioning from soccer to volleyball offered a fresh start, and she committed to the new sport, aspiring to play at the college level. However, COVID-19 led to an unforeseen battle—a rapid onset of an eating disorder rooted in trauma, social media, and genetics. A diagnosis of Anorexia Nervosa led to a year of hospitalizations, often in isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Motivated by her love of volleyball, Cami's recovery journey took a new turn post-treatment when she faced the challenge of a knee injury. During this time when she was unable to play volleyball, the native of Quartz Hills turned to advocacy. She founded "The RecoverED Project," a 501c3 nonprofit supporting those in eating disorder recovery. Concurrently, she participated in the "Dove Self-Esteem Project," contributing to a viral commercial about eating disorders that garnered more than 10 million views on Instagram and earned an Emmy award nomination. This visibility led to her speaking during a congressional briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., with the Eating Disorders Coalition, advocating for mental health legislation.

By April 2023, Cami, cleared to return to volleyball, contacted Mark Cruz, Antelope Valley's volleyball coach, and tried out for the team. She earned a roster spot, realizing her lifelong goal of playing a college sport. In her freshman season, she appeared in 14 of the Marauders' 20 games and ranked second on the team with 78 sets and a .250 hitting percentage, while her 104 digs ranked fourth.

"I've learned over the past year or so that I must share my story and advocate for mental health because, one, it's healing for me and helps me turn my pain into purpose, and two, I've learned that healing loudly will prevent others from dying quietly," said Cami.

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](#), the Department of Health Care Services' (DHCS) crisis counseling and support resource; and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being. The honorees are selected by a panel of writers, editors, The Associated Press, and the College Sports Communicators.

This year's other honorees are: **Jennika Davis** (soccer, UC Irvine); **Jannah 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); **Lesown Hallums, Jr.** (basketball, University of the Pacific); **Cole Kitchen** (baseball, Santa Clara); **Julia Betti** (soccer, Sonoma State); **Darren Wong** (gymnastics, University of California, Berkeley) and **Marne Sullivan** (track, USC).

"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 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."

Previous CalHOPE Courage Award 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](#).

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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