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NATIONAL CONGRESS OF STATE GAMES ANNOUNCED 2019 ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Grand Rapids, Mich., October 21, 2019 – Officials with the National Congress of State Games (NCSG) announced the 2019 Athletes of the Year. A youth female, youth male, adult female and adult male athlete are chosen as Athlete of the Year. Athletes are nominated after winning Athlete of the Year at their local State Games. In 2019, 31 State Games organizations awarded Athletes of the Year and submitted their nominations for the national award.

The 2019 Athletes of the Year are:

- Adult Female: Bonnie Coleman – Multi-Sport – Albuquerque, NM
- Adult Male: Michael Gallardo – Track & Field – Los Angeles, CA
- Youth Female: Aubriella Hairston – Ninja Challenge – Rainsville, AL
- Youth Male: Peter Thompson – Multi-Sport – Billings, MT

The 2019 recipients will be recognized at the NCSG Annual Symposium and TEAMS Conference and Expo on Wednesday, November 13th in Anaheim, CA.

Bonnie Coleman, 65, has been participating in the New Mexico Games since 2009 when she first started in swimming. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 1982 Coleman's participation in her sports has helped delay the progress of her MS. Despite being paralyzed below the knees from MS, she swims in three to four events a year and is undefeated in her swimming events. In 2016, tried a new event in the Games when she participated in track and field. She did discus, javelin, and shotput. In 2018, Coleman earned six gold medals for the 50 freestyle, 50 backstroke, 100 freestyle, discus, javelin, and shot put. Coleman first learned about the Games by volunteering for Games. She knows she can't overdo it due to MS but does not use the disease as a crutch and wants to compete just like everybody else. She was able to compete in the 2019 State Games of America in Lynchburg, Virginia and earned four gold medals and two silver medals in six events, a testament to her tenacity and spirit. Outside of the Games, she is President of the Sandoval County Senior Olympics and Vice President of Silver Gloves, a softball organization for senior women. She also participates in the Senior Games as an athlete and volunteer.

Michael Gallardo, 35, is a decorated Para athlete who is dedicated to his sport. He enlisted in the United States Army after graduating high school. Michael was on his first combat tour in Iraq in January 2007, when he sustained a severe injury to his right leg after two IEDs simultaneously detonated beneath his truck. After nine months of intensive physical therapy, he decided to amputate his leg below the knee in order to be able to live the active lifestyle he wanted. Gallardo received a Purple Heart for his service. He won gold at the 2019 California State Games in Master Men's Javelin throw. In 2019 his accomplishments also include medaling at the Bydgoszcz Grand Prix in Poland and Arizona Grand Prix. He is ranked 4th overall in World Rankings for Men's Javelin F64 class. Gallardo is currently in Texas training for the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

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Aubriella Hairston, 12, first became involved in Ninja in December 2018 after finding a gym in Huntsville. She previously did gymnastics, where she is a five-time state champion and was on the state championship team for two years (Level 2 and Level 5). She started gymnastics to help build strength and to one day compete on American Ninja Warrior. When American Ninja Warrior Junior premiered, she decided to focus more on Ninja. Hairston has been competing in the 13 and under category, despite being eligible for the 11 and under category. She competed in her first ever Ninja Challenge competition and won gold. She then went to the 2019 State Games of America, where she won gold again and was ranked 14th overall for all divisions. She qualified for the world Ninja Competition in Minnesota and placed 24th out of a field of over 100 girls. Hairston loves the sportsmanship in the Ninja community and often cheers on her competitors when they get stuck on the course, encouraging them to keep going even if it means they beat her time. She carries this attitude with her in every aspect of life. She is in the Beta Club which is an academic excellence club at her school requiring her to maintain an A/B average. Hairston also helps do mission projects in her community.

Peter Thompson, 16, has competed in 5K Road Race, Triathlon and Swimming at the Big Sky State Games. Thompson has recently qualified for the 2020 Olympic Trials, after competing at the Long Course Junior National Championships in Palo Alto, CA. The swim time breaks the Montana Open State Record in the mile; he is the fastest male swimmer ever in Montana in the mile. It also ranks 46th All Time in the USA Swimming 15-16 Age Group. Thompson began swimming at a young age with the Billings Aquatic Club Stingrays and first got involved in the Big Sky State Games with the 5K Road Race, where he medaled. Thompson then did the triathlon event with his mother and later did the swimming event. He has been involved in the Big Sky State Games for eight years and has earned 14 medals in the past five years. In 2019 he was the overall winner for the Open Water Swim Mile. As a sophomore in high school, he competed at the USA Swimming Open Water National Championships and raced himself into earning a spot on the USA Swimming National Junior Team for Team USA. This year he also competed at USA Swimming Junior National Championships, placing 6th in the nation in the 1650 Yard Freestyle. Peter holds seven Montana State Records as the fastest swimmer ever in the 15-16 Age Group for multiple events. He is one of the top 20 Swimming recruits in the nation for his sophomore class this year. Peter currently holds 13 Billings Aquatic Club Team Records in multiple age groups 13-14 & 15-16 (his current age group).

The NCSG has awarded Athletes of the Year since 1994.

Previous Athlete of the Year award winners include:

- **2018:** Youth: Male – Adin Fetibegovic – Taekwondo – Shelby Township, MI, Female: Maycee Peacher – Wrestling – Omaha, NE. Adult: Male – Chad Lorenz – Track & Field – Beloit, KS, Female – Sharon Harris – Multi-Sport – Billings, MT.
- **2017:** Youth: Male – Daylin Toms – Wrestling – Cool Ridge, WV, Female: Hailey Poole – Multi-sport – Worden, MT. Adult: Male – Dave Winslow – Bowling – Billings, MT, Female – Dorian McMenemy – Swimming – Northboro, MA.
- **2016:** Youth: Male – Sabastian Harsh – Wrestling – Scottsbluff, NE, Female: Collette & Elyse Levens – Multi-sport – Lake Orion, MI. Adult: Male – Don “Boomer” McCrea – Multi-sport – Portland, OR, Female – Janet Brady – Track & Field – Canton, MI.
- **2015:** Youth: Danika Osman – Swimming - Missouri, Female: Andrea Weiss – Badminton – New Mexico, Male: Josh Majerus – Wrestling – Nebraska
- For complete list of previous winners please visit www.stategames.org/aoy

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About the National Congress of State Games: The National Congress of State Games (NCSG) is a membership organization comprised of over 30 Summer State Games and 10 Winter State Games organizations and a member of the United States Olympic Committee's Multi Sport Organizational Council. The mission of the NCSG is to support State Games member organizations in the promotion of health, fitness and character building through Olympic-Style competitions and physical activities.

About the New Mexico Games: The New Mexico Games offers statewide sports competition for New Mexico's athletes. The New Mexico Games was first introduced to the state in 1989. Today, over 4,500 athletes participate in 20+ sports at the Olympic-style sports festival during from May-November. The Games are recognized and encouraged by the United States Olympic Committee and state winners get invited to the Biannual State Games of America. The mission of the New Mexico Games is to have individuals from throughout New Mexico compete, forming new and lasting relationships.

About the California State Games: California State Games (CSG) is a multi-sport festival of Olympic-style competition for California's amateur athletes of all ages and abilities. State Games is a community-based member of the United States Olympic Committee. In addition to our Summer State Games, we host the California Winter Games, with Figure Skating, Ice Hockey, and Roller Skating. CSG provides all Californians with a wholesome avenue for positive personal development through sports and physical activity. Additionally, a network of administrators and volunteers are established throughout California to further the development of amateur athletic programs. The California State Games is a non-profit organization founded 28 years ago and its mission is to promote and nurture the health, education, and competitive spirit of residents of California by managing a quality amateur sports event that encourages participation and provides an Olympic experience.

About the Alabama State Games: The Inaugural Alabama State Games competition in 1983 was held in Auburn, Alabama and featured 600 athletes competing in four different sports. In 2012, ASF Foundation's 30th Anniversary State Games showcased more than 6,000 athletes competing in 25 different sports and over 100 sporting events, making in the state's largest annual multi-sport event for youth and adults.

About the Big Sky State Games: The Big Sky State Games is located in Billings, Montana. The Big Sky State Games has grown since the inaugural year in 1986 when 3,376 athletes participated in 12 sports, to 10,000 athletes competing in 35 sports last year. During the past thirty-one years over 300,000 athletes from over 250 Montana communities have participated in the Games. The Big Sky State Games rank number one in the nation in per capita participation.