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Contact: Julie Shields – Event Coordinator, National Congress of State Games
P: (616)-608-1845 events@stategames.org

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF STATE GAMES ANNOUNCED 2021 ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Grand Rapids, Mich., September 15, 2021 – Officials with the National Congress of State Games (NCSG) announced the 2021 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 2021, 30 State Games organizations awarded Athletes of the Year and submitted their nominations for the national award.

The 2021 Athletes of the Year are:

- Adult Female: Rachel Lee – Archery FITA – Okemos, MI
- Adult Male: Brady O'Donnell – Soccer – Newburyport, MA
- Youth Female: Olivia Goodwin – Swimming – Charlottesville, VA
- Youth Male: Cooper Conner – Soccer – Wiggins, MS

The 2021 recipients will be recognized at the NCSG Annual Symposium and TEAMS Conference and Expo on Wednesday, September 29th, in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Rachel Lee, 18, found her love of archery starting in middle school and has never looked back. The Okemos, Michigan native was able to join the Junior Olympic Archery Development Program at the Demmer Center on Michigan State University's campus to hone her skills and grow as an athlete. She consistently has come in the top three in competition, most recently placing second at the Indoor Archery competition for the Meijer State Games of Michigan and second in the Outdoor Archery competition. Rachel has also been able to attain her Level 1 Certification through USA Archery. She proved tough and dedicated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as well, creating a smaller sized archery target stand to practice in her basement. In addition to her archery accolades and success, Rachel is a fantastic teammate and excels in the classroom. She is consistently helping and cheering on her teammates and has the competitiveness to win but the compassion to support others, even those she is competing against. In school, she has a 4.0 GPA and plans to attend Columbia University in the fall of 2021 and compete on their Women's Archery team.

Brady O'Donnell, 18, has not had an easy track to soccer success. When he was born, Brady was diagnosed with a very rare syndrome and was told he would likely never walk or talk. When he was younger, Children's Hospital Boston named him their Children's Miracle Network Champion, which is the face in the state for children treated at children's hospitals. These ambassadors spend their year advocating for the charitable need of children's hospitals across North America. By age 3, Brady endured several surgical procedures to remove precancerous lesions and has overcome a brain abnormality and legal blindness in his left eye to thrive as a student-athlete. He made the varsity team in Newburyport, Massachusetts as a freshman. As a junior, he became captain, led the team in scoring, and was second in overall points for his conference. In the most recent Bay State Games showcase, Brady scored every goal for the Northeast Team. In addition to his soccer prowess and perseverance, Brady has excelled academically as well. He was inducted into National Honor Society last year and has made honor roll every semester of high school, garnering an impressive 4.3 grade point average. Outside of playing soccer, Brady volunteers to coach players aged 3-5 with Newburyport Youth Soccer and 5th-8th graders with Elite Week. He also volunteers every Christmas to distribute free Christmas trees to area families in need. Since was little, he has also been a snow angel, shoveling and raking for his next-door neighbor who is in her 90s.

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Olivia Goodwin, 11, swims for the absolute love of the sport. Being in the pool is not something she takes for granted, as she was born with a congenital heart defect. Olivia, a Charlottesville, Virginia native, is already on her third pacemaker, causing consistency in the pool to be challenging. Oftentimes, she had been peaking in her swimming only to need heart surgery and end up out of the water for six months. Following surgery, it takes her about another six months to get back to her pre-operation weight and performance level. Overall, it can be very frustrating for someone who simply wants to swim and train. Olivia understands that her medical issues are part of her story, but she never uses it as an excuse. She continues to swim, work hard, and believes that one day she will place in an event. The sport of swimming has also given her discipline, organization, and time management skills; all of which are keys to being a successful adult. It has also taught her sportsmanship, teamwork, and how to be humble. This is visible as Olivia attends her younger sisters swim meets and as they do well and succeed. Olivia cheers them on and does not dwell on the fact that she has a pacemaker and they do not. Olivia's triumphs are not awards on the podium; they are completing a 500-meter freestyle exactly a year after heart surgery and competing in events even though she knew she would come in last place. Olivia embodies the spirit and drive of competition and always strives for excellence, no matter what obstacles may be in the way.

Cooper Conner, 12, embodies the ideals of grit and honor. The Wiggins, Mississippi soccer player faced a devastating situation prior to his first soccer game at the State Games of Mississippi this year. His dad had suffered a massive heart attack on the field. Cooper went to the hospital and came back to stay with his coach and team while his dad was in surgery. Despite his worry about his father, Cooper said "I know my dad would want me to play and I can't let my coach or teammates down." Cooper did play that Saturday and unfortunately, his dad did pass that afternoon. After hearing and digesting the awful news, Cooper said he wanted to stay and play the Sunday games in honor of his father. His coach found "His courage... remarkable. He even made a goal during the Sunday game from a penalty kick." Cooper's resilience was also tested in March of 2020 when he fractured his ankle during a game. He was in a wheelchair, then crutches before he could walk again. He came back faster and stronger, playing with his team in August 2020. While Cooper is impressive on the field, off the field he is an even better teammate and son.

The NCSG has awarded Athletes of the Year since 1994.

Previous Athlete of the Year award winners include:

- **2020:** Youth: Male – Reese Stevenson – Swimming – Harvard, MA, Female: Teagan Dymek – Volleyball – Osterville, MA. Adult: Male – Kevan Hueftle – Track & Field – Eustis, NE, Female – Ashlynn Moore– Track & Field – Roanoke, VA.
- **2019:** Youth: Male – Peter Thompson – Swimming – Billings, MT, Female: Aubriella Hairston – Ninja Challenge – Rainsville, AL. Adult: Male – Michael Gallardo – Track & Field – Los Angeles, CA, Female: Bonnie Coleman – Multi-Sport – Albuquerque, NM.
- **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.
- 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 Meijer State Games of Michigan: The Meijer State Games of Michigan, a West Michigan Sports Commission signature event, is an Olympic-style, multi-sport event(s) that welcomes athletes regardless of age or ability level. The games embody the values of participation, sportsmanship, and healthy living among the residents of Michigan. Since 2010, Meijer State Games of Michigan has hosted over 65,000+ athletes. The Meijer State Games of Michigan has also contributed over \$25 million in estimated economic impact to cities throughout Michigan.

About the Bay State Games: The Massachusetts Amateur Sports Foundation is a non-profit organization with the primary function of organizing the Bay State Summer and Winter Games. These programs attract more than 7,000 athletes from the State of Massachusetts, who compete in over 30 different sports. Summer Games begin with statewide tryouts in June and conclude with Sports competitions held in Eastern and Central Massachusetts throughout July. The Bay State Winter Games are annual held in the Berkshire Region of Massachusetts and attract athletes in figure skating, ice hockey, and curling. In addition to the Summer and Winter Games, the Bay State Games also organizes a number of enrichment programs including the Future Leaders Scholarship program, the Kristian Rose Memorial Scholarship, the Adopt an Athlete Program, the High School Ambassador Program, a Sports Medicine Symposium, Athlete of the Year Award, and the Bay State Games Hall of Fame.

About the Virginia Commonwealth Games: Going into its 32nd year, Commonwealth Games is open to all ages and skill levels. From archery to wrestling, this event offers sports competition venues for 55+ different Olympic and Pan American sports. More than 4,400 athletes competed in 29 sports in the first Games. More recently, in 2018, the Games hosted nearly 10,000 athletes competing in 54 individual and team sports, used over 80 sporting venues, and worked with more than 1,200 volunteers. This multi-sport festival is supported by a grassroots volunteer network, businesses, and governments of Central Virginia. The Games have an estimate \$2 million economic impact. More than 240,000 athletes, their families plus spectators have participated during the past 29 years. The success of the Games is immeasurable, in today's semantics - priceless.

About the State Games of Mississippi: The State Games of Mississippi is a privately sponsored, non-profit organization that promotes amateur athletics and healthy lifestyles for Mississippians of all ages and abilities. The State Games of Mississippi began in 1992 with 1,200 athletes competing in 12 sports. In 2021, 41 sports will again attract amateur athletes from across the state for top competition. Since the inaugural State Games of Mississippi in 1991, more than 70,000 athletes from more than 350 Mississippi communities have participated in the Games. In 2012, more than 5,000 athletes participated in 34 sports with the help of 500 volunteers.