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NATIONAL CONGRESS OF STATE GAMES ANNOUNCED 2022 ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Grand Rapids, Mich., October 12, 2022 – Officials with the National Congress of State Games (NCSG) announced the 2022 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 2022, 29 State Games organizations awarded Athletes of the Year and submitted their nominations for the national award.

The 2022 Athletes of the Year are:

- Adult Female: Winifred “Winkie” LaForce – Pickleball – Chapel Hill, NC
- Adult Male: Buck Wood – Pickleball – Minden, NE
- Youth Female: Erika Blanchard – FootGolf – Norton, MA
- Youth Male: Delmace Mayo – Para Track & Field – Jamaica Plain, MA

The 2022 recipients will be recognized at the NCSG Annual Symposium and TEAMS Conference and Expo on Wednesday, October 26th, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Winifred “Winkie” LaForce, 75, did not start playing the sport of pickleball until later in life. She did, however, have a deep connection with North Carolina Amateur Sports (NCAS) and the BODYARMOR State Games of North Carolina. Winkie started working for NCAS back in 1985 and was part of the staff that put on not only the 1987 US Olympic Festival in North Carolina but also the first ever State Games of North Carolina in 1986. She has continued to keep up with the staff over the years, which makes her participation, and success, in the pickleball tournament even more fitting. The entire NCAS staff is overjoyed to see her on the court enjoying the event and sport. Winkie recently had her hip replaced, but that will not stop her to continue to play. She has plans for more medals and more pickleball at the 2023 BODYARMOR State Games of North Carolina. In addition to tournament play, Winkie is a vital part of the pickleball community and provides lessons with both adult and youth players. Winkie’s story truly has come full circle, but there is much more to be written.

Buck Wood, 64, like many others, became hooked the first time he played pickleball eight years ago. A friend asked him to play in the Nebraska Senior Games and he has been a true “pickleballer” ever since. Buck thoroughly enjoys his time on the court and makes it know, oftentimes delivering some classic one-liners and remarks to his partner and opponents. Everyone at the end of the game found that they were laughing the entire time, a testament to the player and person Buck is. As a middle school math teacher in Minden, Nebraska, Buck has his summers free to play as much pickleball as possible. In addition to battling opponents on the court, Buck also battles Parkinson’s Disease, a central nervous system disorder that affects movement and can cause tremors. He says pickleball is the best medicine he has found to fight off the symptoms of Parkinson’s and so he plays as much as 7 hours some days. Buck has now competed in the Cornhusker State Games for six years and treats every chance to play pickleball as a gift and a reward.

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Erika Blanchard, 17, seems to be involved in every sport possible. A rising senior at Southeastern Regional Vocational High School, Erika has competed in soccer, track and field, surfing, futsal, and FootGolf over the last 12 years. She has participated in every Bay State Games FootGolf competition since the sport was added in 2019, winning a silver medal her first year and back-to-back golds in 2021 and 2022. When not playing sports, Erika is eager to help others, especially those with epilepsy, including coordinating a yearly training session for her soccer team with the Epilepsy Foundation and helping spearhead an Epilepsy Awareness Day at her school, which focused on increasing awareness among students and staff. In addition to what is listed previously, Erika volunteers at the Epilepsy Foundation of New England, Brockton Charity Guild Food Drive, is on the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) Student Athletic Advisory Board, and is a Bay State Games High School Ambassador. Erika was named MIAA Rookie of the Year in 2019 and a Commonwealth of Massachusetts House of Representatives Scholar Recognition Recipient. In her upcoming senior soccer season, she will serve as team captain. According to her high school soccer coach, “Erika is undoubtedly a courageous and brave young woman; with a drive to succeed both on and off the field. She is passionate about the development of skills and feels that the participation in sports is very important for young adults.” Outside of school and sports, Erika is a driven student-athlete, working full time every other week as a medical assistant student at her co-op at Pediatric Associates of Brockton and parttime as a barista. There is no doubt Erika’s drive to succeed while also assisting and empowering others makes her a true role model and exemplifies the State Games spirit.

Delmace Mayo, 16, is a thriving and successful para athlete. Delmace has competed in Bay State Games in the Para Track & Field meet for two years and is undefeated. In 2022, he won three gold medals, breaking the meet record in each of his events. Shortly after the 2022 Bay State Games meet, Delmace went to the Move United Sport Junior National Championships in Denver, CO and came home with a seven gold medals (1500M, 800M, 400M, 100M, discus, javelin, and shot put) and one silver medal (Universal Relay). Sports 'N Spokes Magazine named Delmace Junior Athlete of the Year following his performance at the meet. Delmace was born in Haiti, was adopted at the age of four, and moved to Boston. A student at Boston Green Academy in Brighton, he competes on the Brighton High School track & field team. As a freshman, he was named Boston Public Schools Male Track Athlete of the Year. Delmace earned Adaptive Sports USA High School All-American honors in 2021 for the 100M. Outside of track & field, Delmace also competed in wheelchair basketball, sled hockey, and wheelchair motocross. He competed in Wheelchair Motocross World Championships three times, earning a silver medal and two gold. In addition, he has raised thousands of dollars for the Challenged Athletes Foundation, an organization aimed at providing support, opportunities, and hope to individuals with physical challenge so they can pursue. Delmace has a go-getter attitude and a heart to match it, making him an athlete that will be competing for medals for years to come.

The NCSG has awarded Athletes of the Year since 1994.

For a 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 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 Cornhusker State Games: The first Cornhusker State Games in 1985 offered 19 sports and attracted 4,000 participants. In 2022, the Cornhusker State Games attracted 9,245 participants in more than 70 competitive and participation sports. Participants came from 95 counties; the oldest official participant was 90 years, the youngest was 11 months. The 2015 State Games of America, which replaced the 2015 Cornhusker State Games, attracted 15,244 participants from 47 different states, plus Washington D.C. The oldest official participant was 89 years and the youngest was 9 months. The Cornhusker State Games is part of the Nebraska Sports Council, which puts on additional events such as the Omaha Corporate Games, Lincoln Corporate Games, Pumpkin Run, and more.

About the BODYARMOR State Games of North Carolina: North Carolina Amateur Sports (NCAS) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization established in 1983 to host the first sanctioned State Games of North Carolina in 1986 and the U.S. Olympic Festival-'87. Today, it operates with the goal of promoting health and wellness for all ages and skill levels through organizing best-in-class sporting events that enrich the quality of life and enhance economic well-being of North Carolina communities. NCAS hosts the BODYARMOR State Games of North Carolina, Cycle North Carolina "Mountains to the Coast" Bicycle Tour, Cycle North Carolina Coastal Ride and Cycle North Carolina Mountain Ride. Staffed by three permanent, full-time employees, NCAS has a 13-member Board of Directors. NCAS' success is attributed to the hundreds of volunteers who support the State Games and Cycle North Carolina. NCAS receives financial support from corporate sponsors, individual donors and event revenues.