



Capital District



Sports Women of the Year

2026

Capital District Sports
Women of the Year
Awards Gala

August 3, 2026
GE Theatre at Proctors
7:00 PM



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IFC	Miller Printing
1	Contents and Credits
	Krause's Homemade Candy
2	Goldilocks Promos
3	Welcome Letter /
	CDSWOY Board / Harrison Huntley
4	Bhusri Family
5	Meet Lelya Bhusri
6	Bochette Family / Perkins Recycling
7	Meet Lainey Bochette
8	Collier-Fisher Family /
	Lake George Boosters / Colonie Girls Basketball
9	Meet Mycah Collier-Fisher
10	Hoblock Family
11	Meet Peyton Hoblock
12	Hoffman Family
13	Meet Olivia Hoffman
14	Howlan Family / Schalmont High School
15	Meet Brooke Howlan
16	Hudson Valley Community College
17	Meet Gabriella Kholstinin
18	Knapik Family /
	Despairis Grandparents / Hoffman Grandparents
19	Meet Addisyn Knapik
20	O'Rourke Family / Siena University
21	Meet Mattingly O'Rourke
22	Rainville Family
23	Meet Sarah Rainville
24	Shaker Boosters / Scotia-Glenville Boosters /
	Cambridge Boosters

25	Meet Lillian Steward
26	Toleman Family
27	Meet Bridgit Toleman
28	University at Albany / Colonie Flag Football
29	Meet Shynelle Woroniuk
30	Tonight's Performer – Angelina Valente
31	Tonight's Guest Speaker – Christine Brennan
32	Previous Guest Speakers
33	Richbell Capital
34	Five Towers Media
35	Previous CDSWOY Recipients
36	Previous CDSWOY Recipients
	All-Time School Recipients
37	2025 CDSWOY Photo Gallery
38	Columbia High School
39	Burnt Hills – Ballston Lake High School
40	Christina Primero Photography
IBC	Stewart's Shops
OBC	Cannakneads Private Dining Services

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As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our great nation, we can only imagine being in the room with the Founding Fathers. Imagine the discussion, the ideas flowing, the “what ifs,” the questions upon questions and thus the answers upon answers. Good thing they met in person instead of on zoom, don’t you think?

Yet, what about mothers and wives? Sisters and daughters? Maybe they were not in the room. But, no doubt, they provided the input, thoughts, strength and support that the Fathers needed, even at a time when women back then were not provided opportunities that we see today.

They also were the strength and support for this “great experiment.” Throughout the history of this country, there have been remarkable women who are legendary for what they did at their time and, unbeknownst to them at the time, what they provided for women in the future.

Harriet Tubman. Susan B. Anthony. Jane Addams. Martha Washington. Abigail Adams. Rosa Parks. And, in the beginning, there was Sacagawea.

“Everything I do is for my people.”

A guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark Expedition, this teenager contributed invaluable knowledge of the land and native cultures while traveling thousands of miles in unknown territory with an infant on her back, in an expedition that blazed a trail for our understanding of the future United States.

In the world of sports, we also have had pioneers for women. Billie Jean King revolutionized tennis and gender equality, defeating Bobby Riggs in the “Battle of the Sexes” and advocating for equal prize money and LGBTQ+ rights. Babe Didrikson Zaharias excelled in three sports and in the Olympics, breaking gender stereotypes and paving the way for women in sports. Alice Coachman was the first Black woman to win an Olympic gold medal in 1948, symbolizing progress during a time of racial and gender discrimination.

Speaking of pioneers, I am honored that we have a women’s sports pioneer serving as our virtual guest speaker for our Awards Gala. Christine Brennan was the first female sports reporter at the Miami Herald and the first woman to cover the Washington NFL beat for The Washington Post. She is a columnist for USA Today, commentator for ABC News, CNN, PBS NewsHour and NPR, and a best-selling author. You can read more about Christine on Page 31 of this magazine. I appreciate her time and her inspirational thoughts for our honorees.

It is so breathtaking to look at the fiber of our flag and know that these and many other women played such important roles in the fiber of our country.

So tonight, we will recognize 13 remarkable young women who have made impacts of their own in their communities, in their classrooms, and in the playing arena. If Billie or Babe or Alice could be here with us at Proctors, they would marvel at the achievements of our special ladies. They join many other stars in our CDSWOY family. And although they have high expectations for themselves, and yet exceed those expectations, they do it with their hearts thinking of their families, their teammates, their community members. As Sacagawea once said...

“Everything I do is for my people.”

We the people, thank you so much.

Sincerely,



Eric McDowell
President, CDSWOY



Harrison Huntley
Feature Writer



Marisa Jacques
Spectrum News 1
Tonight’s MC



Alissa Collins



Clare Howard



Anna Jankovic



Eric McDowell



Sara McDowell



Brendon Phillips



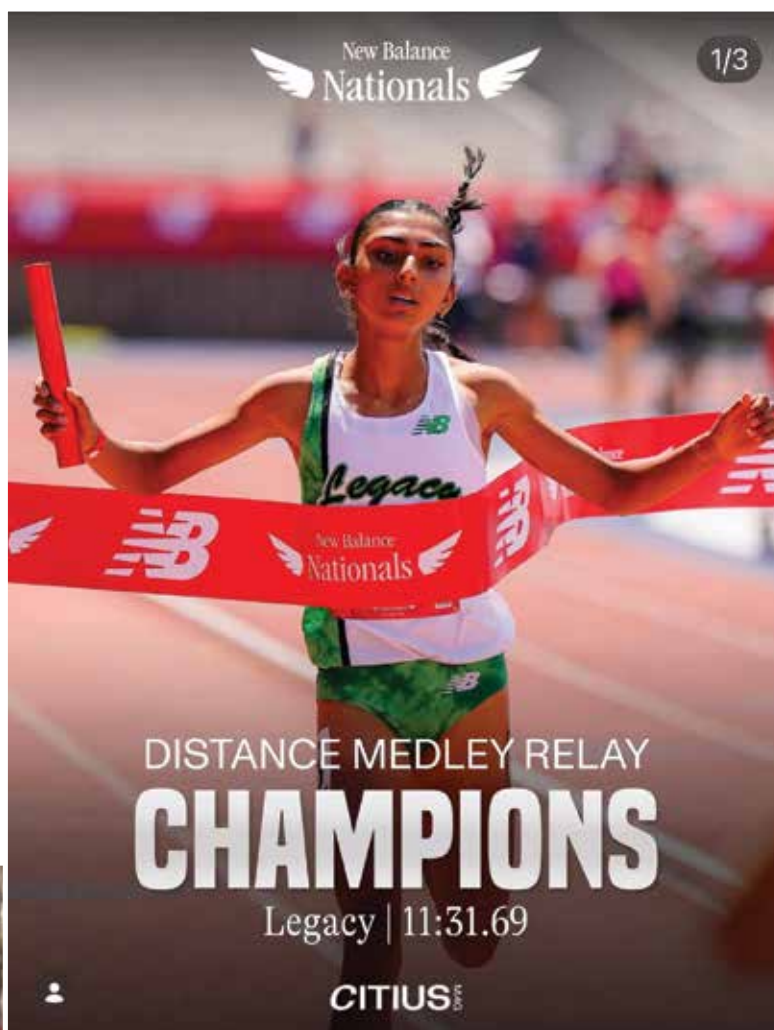
CONGRATULATIONS, LEYLA!

Today we celebrate not only your remarkable achievements, but the person you have become.

Your dedication, perseverance, humility, and kindness have inspired everyone who has had the privilege of watching your journey. We are incredibly proud of all that you have accomplished and even more excited for everything that lies ahead.

May you continue to chase your dreams with the same passion and determination that brought you here.

With all our love,
Mom, Dad, & Amaar



HS – Cross Country | Track & Field**2026****Leyla Bhusri**
Shenendehowa High School

Until 2020, Leyla Bhusri was a softball player. The seventh grader had played softball for eight years and didn't have any reason to think that would change. Of course, a global pandemic changed a lot for everyone. For Bhusri, it wound up being a humble beginning to an extraordinary running career.

"I started running during COVID when everything was shut down, just on my treadmill," she said. "I had an app that helped you work up to running a 5K. I did that for a while, and I liked the routine of it and the feeling afterward, so I stuck with it."

After a friend invited her to join the school's summer running club, one thing led to another, and Bhusri found herself becoming a distance runner.

"It's definitely not anything I would have ever imagined myself doing when I look back to when I was younger and playing softball," she said. "But I'm really grateful for everything running has given me, including the opportunities and friendships."

Bhusri has made the most of the opportunities she's been given. She was named the New York State Gatorade Cross Country Runner of the Year after winning the league, section, state, and federation titles this past fall. On the track, she has been named an All-American four times, won a state and national championship, and set a Section 2 record along with several school records.

"Leyla has transformed herself and our team through her dedication, big goals, tough, hard-working mentality, and gracious attitude," said Rob Cloutier, Bhusri's Cross Country and Track coach. "Despite her outstanding accolades, Leyla is a humble and conscientious young lady."

That humility becomes evident when you consider her team's championships, which Bhusri says are her proudest accomplishments. She led Shenendehowa Central to league, section, state, and federation championships this past fall and helped her squad bring home a national championship in the distance medley relay at the Nike Outdoor Nationals.

"It means a lot more when you have a group of girls doing it with you and accomplishing a goal you all work toward every single day," she said.

"We've pretty much all grown up together, from the seniors who started in

eighth grade to the younger kids who came onto the team later. I've been with them for my whole running career, so it's really cool to watch everybody grow in their own way."

This fall, Bhusri will join an extremely competitive Notre Dame program that has won the last four Great Lakes Region championships in a row. She says her mindset is what brings her success and why she feels like she can compete with the best of the best.

"Practice and training teach you how to handle pain and what to do when you're uncomfortable," Bhusri said. "So I rely on my training and know that racing is the fun part, where I get to see what I can do."

Despite being one of the fastest individuals at Shenendehowa, Bhusri still takes time to slow down and make others feel included. She took part in the Best Buddies program, which pairs general education students and students with disabilities in fun and enriching activities.

"I went to the meetings and did activities with a lot of different people," Bhusri said. "Kids with learning disabilities got a good chance to meet new people, do activities, and have fun, and it was really fun for me too. A lot of my friends did it, and it's just a really big community. The people who run the club are amazing, so I'm glad I got to be part of it."

Bhusri said being part of the CDSWOY Class of 2026 makes her grateful for everyone who has supported her along the way.

"It means so much," she said. "It reminds me of all the work I put in and everyone around me who supported me. It makes me super grateful for all my coaches, teammates, and family, because I would never have been able to do any of this without them. I'm also really grateful for the running community in general."

"Beyond statistics and awards, Leyla represents everything this honor is intended to celebrate," said Shenendehowa Central Athletic Director Lucas LaBarre. "She is humble, disciplined, resilient, and deeply respected by her peers, coaches, teachers, and teammates. She leads by example through her work ethic, positivity, and willingness to support those around her."

Congratulations, Lainey!

We're so proud of you and all your accomplishments!

GO BULLS!



LOVE,
MOM, DUDO AND CALLIE



Congratulations Brigid Toleman!



Don't toss it, Perkins it!



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HS – Basketball, Softball, Volleyball**2026****Lainey Bochette**
Hoosick Valley High School

The daughter of two coaches, Lainey Bochette can't remember a time when sports weren't present in her life. Her dad, a football, basketball, and softball coach at Hoosick Valley, has since moved on to coach softball at Russell Sage, but her mom still coaches at Hoosick Valley. As you might expect, Bochette has good memories of growing up in the Hoosick Valley athletic program.

"It was great. I would go to their practices and help out," she said. "They'd let me watch their team meetings for football. I loved being around the older kids."

With all the time spent around the program, it's only fitting that Bochette would become one of the most accomplished athletes the school has ever seen. A three-sport captain, Bochette played a total of 16 varsity seasons across four sports. A natural leader, Bochette says she has led by example as a captain throughout high school.

"I work hard and always try to give my best effort in everything," she said. "A lot of the girls respect how I hustle and go after everything. I also bring everyone in when times are hard and tell them, 'We'll be fine. We've got it.' I feel like I'm a very calm and level-headed person, so it's good for the team to have someone they can rely on who is consistently there and supportive."

"Her talent is evident, but what truly separates her is her dedication to improving every day, her strong understanding of the game, and her ability to rise to the moment in high-pressure situations," said Blake Bochette, Hoosick Valley Head Softball Coach and Lainey's mom. "She makes those around her better, and her presence on the team has had a lasting impact both on and off the field."

Bochette has the individual stats to solidify herself as a leader on the field. In softball, she earned 1st Team Wasaren League All-Star honors three times and was recognized as a Section 2 All-Star and a 518 Futures All-Star. In volleyball, Bochette accumulated more than 800 assists, over 400 digs, more than 200 aces, and over 150 kills while being named First Team All-Star twice. Along with an all-star honorable mention in basketball, Bochette even played golf in her senior season.

"From the moment she stepped onto the varsity court, it was evident that Lainey possessed a rare combination of athleticism, competitive drive, and volleyball intelligence," said Dr. Sara Pipino, Head Volleyball Coach. "I trust her completely—not only to give relentless effort and refuse to let a ball fall without a fight, but also to uplift and encourage the teammates around her."

Her success at the school she grew up in represents a full-circle moment for Bochette. From being the coach's young daughter on the sidelines to leading the Hawks in multiple sports, Bochette now pays it forward by working with younger girls in her community.

"It's really cool that now I get to be the leader and the oldest one, when I used to be the little kid looking up to all these girls," she said. "Now I have younger girls looking up to me. It's kind of crazy, but it's rewarding to see how much of a difference I can make on the team compared to what I was watching when I was five."

"What truly sets Lainey apart is her commitment to the next generation," said Hoosick Valley Athletic Director Benjamin Capeless. "She has dedicated countless hours to mentoring youth girls for the Hoosick Valley Athletic Association and instructing younger members of the Capital District Fusion Travel Softball Organization, promoting confidence and skill development in young athletes."

Bochette's softball career will continue at the University of Buffalo next season, where she plans to study exercise science and become a physical therapist. As she enters this next chapter, Bochette takes pride in the work she's put in to stay at the top of her game on the field and in the classroom.

"Being recognized as part of the 2026 CDSWOY class is amazing and a great accomplishment. I've always worked so hard across all three sports," she said. "Over my high school career, I've had friends and teammates quit sports because it got to be too much for them. Winning this award really proves that never giving up and persevering through everything pays off in the long run."

Congrats Mykah!

We are so incredibly proud of all that you have achieved academically and athletically. We are most proud of your character, your leadership, and your fierce passion for everything you do. Congratulations on this well-deserved honor! We can't wait to watch your next 4 years! -Moms, Brayden & your entire fan club!

"A generational athlete and team leader" -Coach Kohls

"She is always the best athlete on the basketball court" -Coach Bennett

"Her legacy as both an athlete and a teammate will have a lasting impact on Lakers track & field" -Track Coaches

Congratulations, OLIVIA HOFFMAN!

WOLF PACK COLONIE

GIRLS VARSITY BASKETBALL
25-26

Congratulations, Olivia, on being named to the Capital District Sports **Women of the Year Class of 2026!** Your dedication, leadership, and success both on the court and in the classroom make you truly deserving of this honor.

We are incredibly proud of you and can't wait to see all that you'll accomplish next.

Congratulations from your
COLONIE GIRLS BASKETBALL FAMILY!

CAPITAL DISTRICT SPORTS WOMEN OF THE YEAR CAPITAL DISTRICT

MYKAH COLLIER-FISHER

CONGRATS MYKAH!

THE LG ATHLETIC BOOSTER CLUB IS PROUD OF YOU!

LG

Mykah Collier-Fisher

Lake George High School



No one has to explain to Mykah Collier-Fisher what it means to work as a team. Outside of her three sports, numerous community service projects, and school clubs, Collier-Fisher is also a volunteer firefighter. Named for her uncle Mike, who lost his life fighting fires, and the granddaughter of a fire commissioner and an EMT, Collier-Fisher says growing up around first responders made her want to get involved despite her busy schedule.

"I haven't unfortunately been able to make many fire calls because it's hard with sports and school," she said. "It involves a lot of communication, trusting people, listening to whoever is in charge, and doing what needs to be done."

Any athlete would tell you that the same communication, trust, teamwork, and execution needed to be a firefighter also make for a great teammate. It's no wonder that Collier-Fisher was chosen by her coaches to be the captain of her soccer, basketball, and track teams.

"This selection as a three-sport captain was based on her ability to communicate effectively, not just with her peers, but also with the coaching staff, alongside her commitment to leading by example," said Lake George Athletic Director Kyle Manny. "She embodies the ideal of a 'triple-impact competitor,' continually seeking to make herself, her teammates, and the game better each and every day."

In addition to leading her teams as captain, she also earned all-league honors in all three sports. Collier-Fisher was the top sprinter in the league her junior year, a first-team league all-star in basketball her senior year, and a first-team league all-star in soccer during her final three years of school, along with an all-state recognition her senior year.

"All-state was the award I appreciated the most because I was the first person in my school to get that honor for soccer," she said. "It made me really happy to be recognized at such a high level."

While soccer eventually became her main sport, Collier-Fisher continued to take part in basketball and track. With more and more high school athletes specializing in one sport, her coaches appreciate her continued commitment to her other sports.

"Mykah decided that it was important to help turn the basketball program around and so played her junior and senior year," said Jeff Bennett, Lake George Varsity Basketball Coach. "In doing so, the program went from four to 12 to 17 wins. Not possible without her skills and leadership."

"Mykah has been a key contributor to two sectional championship teams, helping elevate our program through her performances and leadership," said Kevin Burrall, Lake George Varsity Track Coach. "As a team captain, she leads by example every day, setting the standard for work ethic, accountability, and perseverance. Younger athletes naturally look to her as a role model, not only because of her athletic success, but because of the way she carries herself with humility, discipline, and respect."

Collier-Fisher says she puts a big emphasis on team chemistry, which is why she ultimately decided to continue her soccer career at Utica University, where she says the team dynamic is second to none.

"I was debating between continuing soccer in college or going to a bigger school and not playing," she said. "Then I came back and spent the night with the team, and they were just the nicest, most welcoming people. They seemed really close, kind of like my current soccer team. That made me feel like I was going to love it there and have that same sense of family again."

Being a part of the CDSWOY Class of 2026 means a lot to Collier-Fisher, who says she's proud to be recognized as one of many great athletes in the area.

"It is truly an honor to receive this award, and I am so honored to have been one of the few female athletes recognized out of such a competitive area."



Peyton, congratulations on this amazing milestone. To say we are proud of the incredible young woman you are and continue to be is an understatement.

Both on and off the court and course you amaze us every day. We look forward to watching your next journey ... Sky's the limit for you.

We love you. Mom, Dad, and Jack

Peyton Hoblock

Shaker High School



Basketball was one of Peyton Hoblock's first loves. She says she remembers her first season of basketball all the way back in second grade at the Ciccotti Center. Though she has always enjoyed playing the sport, Hoblock says it was the friends she made through basketball that kept her around.

"Some of my closest friends came from basketball," she said. "One of my closest friends has been with me since about third grade, and we still work out and practice together. Most of them were with me through my last AAU season last year, and we had been playing together since about third or fourth grade."

With a strong core of longtime friends, Hoblock and Shaker High School put together a special season in her final year at the school. The Blue Bison took home the suburban council, sectional, and regional championships.

Hoblock was named to the New York State Sportswriters Association All-State Team, Class AAA, Eighth Team. She was awarded the Suburban Scholastic Council Excellence in Leadership Award and New York State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreational and Dance (Capital Zone) Leadership Award, representing Shaker in both.

"It was a lot of hard work," Hoblock said. "It started in the offseason with everyone working together. A lot of people came together, put our ideas together, and became successful over the last couple of years. It was really good to see, and bittersweet once it ended."

That says nothing of Hoblock's individual accomplishments. She has garnered two-time WNYT-TV basketball all-star and two-time Section 2 All-Tournament Team selections, along with a Section 2 tournament MVP honor.

"She has always had a natural skillset and athletic ability, and she has always had her height advantage," said Jaimee Shipley, Shaker Varsity Basketball Coach. "Even with that advantage, natural talent, and athleticism, Peyton worked hard every day, in season, preseason, and out of season, for four years to improve. She had a goal to be a Division 1 player, and nothing was going to stop her. She spent countless hours working on her craft and in the weight room to get stronger and more explosive. Before her junior year was over, she had more than a dozen Division 1 offers."

As crazy as it sounds, Hoblock had even bigger ambitions than just playing Division 1 basketball. She also sought to choose a school that would challenge her academically just like Division 1 basketball would. She chose Dartmouth.

"I chose Dartmouth obviously because of the academics, you can't beat that," she said. "But it was really the coaching staff and the girls that I fell in love with. It felt like a great place for me to be. The coach is so supportive, and you can tell she really loves the girls."

Support is something that matters to Hoblock. When she was a part of the Section II Athletic Advisory Council, she heard from students at other schools about their athletic advisory councils.

"I wanted to implement a student voice in the athletic department," Hoblock said. "We do things in the athletic department like official appreciation, help out with banquets such as the unified banquet, and assist with banners. We kind of go throughout the athletic department and help the students and coaches as best we can."

"Peyton approached me with a thoughtful proposal to establish the Shaker High Athletic Advisory Council," said Sean Colfer, Shaker's Athletic Director. "Through her initiative, vision, and persistence, this organization has become a meaningful voice for student-athletes in our school. Peyton has led the council with purpose and empathy, organizing monthly meetings, coordinating community service events and recognitions for officials, and spearheading initiatives that support athletes across all programs. Her leadership in this space reflects a maturity and selflessness that is truly uncommon."

Hoblock's support of athletes goes even beyond the walls of Shaker High School. She's involved in coaching youth programs and clinics, just like the ones she and her friends were a part of when they were younger.

"It's really great seeing the younger kids, especially because I remember being nervous around the older girls when they coached me," Hoblock said. "They're really great kids, and I love seeing that and knowing I was there once too. It's a little bittersweet, but the girls are just awesome. I think my favorite part is coaching those camps in the summer and seeing the girls really grow throughout the years."

While Peyton Hoblock may be the name going into the CDSWOY Class of 2026, she is quick to recognize all the people who helped her get here.

"It is such an honor," she said. "When I heard, my parents and I were just blown away. I want to thank the council for nominating me for this award. It's really great to see all my hard work pay off. I definitely wouldn't be here without my teammates and my coaches."

"I, for one, could not be prouder of all she's accomplished in 18 short years," Coach Shipley said. "I am excited to see what's next for her and am even more proud of her strong, positive character. We need more Peyton Hoblocks in this world."

Congratulations

OLIVIA HOFFMAN

To our Olivia, congratulations on this well-deserved honor! We are endlessly proud of the young woman you have become. Your unwavering dedication and hard work in your sports, academics, family, and your community inspire us every day. We love you!

Love, Mom, Dad, Natalie, and Gabriella

Olivia Hoffman
Colonie High School

Olivia Hoffman says she comes from a basketball family. Her father played at NYU, her uncles played basketball, and her grandfather even coached after he stopped playing. But the Hoffmans are also exceptional tennis players.

"My first sport was tennis," Hoffman said. "My dad was a high school coach when I was born, and he coached at Schenectady. I've probably been playing since I was about three. That has always been my first love."

Being around basketball and tennis for as long as she can remember, it's easy to see why Hoffman became a standout two-sport athlete at Colonie High School. She helped Colonie capture two sectional championships and a sectional runner-up finish in 2025-26. She was named 5th Team All State and First Team All-League in 2025-26.

"I can confidently say that she is one of the most dedicated, disciplined, and driven student-athletes I have ever worked with," said Heather DiBiase, varsity basketball coach at Colonie. "On the court, Olivia consistently demonstrates exceptional skill, basketball IQ, and leadership. Beyond statistics, Olivia elevates those around her, leading by example through effort, accountability, and composure in high-pressure situations."

Out on the tennis courts, it's the same story. Hoffman played #1 singles for Colonie all five years and compiled 56 total wins at #1 singles.

"Olivia is what I call an 'Apex' level tennis player, meaning that she was so dominant that she was like a barometer that measured and affected the performance of the entire team," said Bill MacDonald, Colonie tennis coach. "Olivia always played very well and had that rare championship quality of always being a threat to win every match she played, regardless of the skill level of her opponent."

But during her senior year, Hoffman finally said "yes" to Colonie's flag football coach's request to come out for the team.

"The coach asked me multiple times to join the team because he thought I'd be a great addition," she said. "I had only really played it before in school-run events like powder puff, but I knew I could contribute in a way that would hopefully be beneficial, so I decided to take that shot this year."

As it turns out, Coach Jason Wagner was right. Hoffman was indeed a great addition to the Colonie flag football team. As a receiver, she caught 80 passes for 1,047 yards and 11 touchdowns. On the other side of the ball, as safety, she had 17 tackles, seven interceptions with multiple passes broken up. Hoffman said she enjoyed the chance to try a new sport in her final year of high school.

"There was less pressure on myself to be perfect because I was really learning things for the first time," she said. "I was allowed to be inquisitive and just enjoy what was happening in the moment. The team was so sup-

portive of me coming in and playing a new sport, and a bunch of girls were in the same boat as me, just athletic kids learning something new. So, it was a really positive environment and super fun to be part of."

"Olivia is a standout basketball player who decided to come out and play flag football during her senior year," said Coach Wagner. "She could have chosen not to play at all, or she could have used it simply as an opportunity to spend time with friends and have fun. However, as I have had the pleasure of learning over the past four months, that is simply not in Olivia's DNA. She immersed herself in the playbook and quickly became an extension of the coaching staff, helping to teach other players offensive concepts and defensive schemes."

From being an extension of the coaching staff on the football field to being an actual coach in youth basketball, Hoffman says she enjoys giving back to the youth program she came up in.

"Honestly, coaching has been one of my favorite experiences as a high schooler," she said. "Not only do I get to help girls who might be unsure of themselves or teach them something that brings me a lot of joy, but it really is a full-circle moment. They find love and support in the same things that I do. We've always had a group of younger girls at our basketball games who want to come watch their coaches, not just me but the other girls who volunteer with me too. It really brings the community together, and I feel very lucky to have built that bond with a lot of those younger players."

Hoffman will continue her basketball career next season at Daemen University, where she plans to take on a difficult major in pursuit of helping more people someday.

"I plan on studying biochemistry in hopes that one day, after all the schooling is done, I can become a biomedical engineer," she said. "I really have a passion not only for helping people, but also for discovering things."

For Hoffman, being part of the CDSWOY class of 2026 represents a rare recognition of the full body of work taken on by a multi-sport athlete like herself.

"This award meant a lot to me because it's not very often that I see multi-sport athletes get recognition," she said. "A lot of the really exceptional athletes at my school, and at other schools in the Capital District, focus on just one thing. That means they get extra repetitions in one sport, while athletes like me have to spread themselves out more and make sacrifices. So having athletes who make those sacrifices get recognized in this way is really special."



Congratulations Brooke

We are so proud of you !!!

*Thank you for letting us be a
part of your journey.*

Love,

Mom, Sean,

Grandma and Grandpa



*Congratulations,
Brooke!*

**We are so proud of all your
accomplishments and the
pride you always showed in
representing Schalmont.**

A true Sabre in every way.

Best wishes, Brooke!



Brooke Howlan
Schalmont High School



Growing up in a sports family and as the daughter of an athlete, Brooke Howlan said she was first inspired to take up sports by her mom. With a mom who was a former bowler, softball player, and volleyball player, Howlan remembers hours of backyard lessons. But she'll never forget her mom's unwavering support on game days.

"I'd say she coached me a lot at home, and she also cheered me on at games," she said. "She wouldn't try to overcoach during games and would let my coaches handle that, and then she'd help me at home with anything my coach told me to work on."

On the diamond, Howlan says she loves being in the circle. This much is obvious, with her 36 career varsity pitching wins and 399 career strikeouts for Schalmont. Her senior season featured a 1.11 ERA, and she hit over .400 in each of her last three seasons, including .404 this past spring. She says that even at a young age, she said pitching appealed to her.

"It was really exciting, and it gave me an adrenaline rush," she said. "I liked having the power of controlling the tempo on the field. What also led me to pitching was my mom because she was a pitcher growing up too."

Next year, Howlan will suit up for Utica University's softball team under the guidance of Head Coach Rinae Olsen, who is also a Schalmont alum. Howlan says Coach Olsen was a big reason why she chose to play at Utica.

"The whole coaching staff and all the girls were very welcoming," she said.

Howlan has taken every opportunity to be a welcoming presence to younger girls in her community. She mentors and organizes local fundraising events for the United States Bowling Congress, helps with Schalmont's freshman orientation, and helps with clinics put on by the Guilderland Girls Softball program. Howlan says being a part of these events reminds her where she came from.

"It's so fun watching them grow because it feels like I was just there," she said. "It's really fun to watch them, and it's almost like watching myself."

This year, Schalmont's softball program started a new initiative that saw the varsity team work with the JV and Modified players. Her coach, Kaley Brindisi, was impressed with the way Howlan took it upon herself to help younger players get better.

"Brooke embraced this leadership role immediately," Brindisi said. "She didn't just show up to work with the modified team; she arrived with drills planned and designed to develop the pitching skills of our younger athletes. Watching her volunteer her time to teach, encourage, and inspire the next generation of players has been incredibly rewarding."

Hugo McGroty, Schalmont Girls Varsity Bowling Coach, also recognized Howlan's ability to help others improve.

"Brooke has been the captain the last two years and has always led by example, being prepared for each match herself," he said. "In a tough match this year, Brooke explained to her teammates how to make an adjustment that resulted in a win that day. She always has a positive attitude and is willing to do extra practice to help her be the best team player she can be."

Howlan will continue to make an impact on the next generation of student-athletes as she plans to study adolescent education and math at Utica. After school, she says she hopes to be a teacher and coach.

"I really like being able to help kids," Howlan said. "I really like math, and I really like softball, so I want to help them grow. I want more people to have an interest in math because I feel like a lot of people don't like math as much. I also want to give back in the same way others helped me."

Being named to the CDSWOY class is, according to Howlan, a testament to all the effort she's given over the years.

"This award means a lot to me because it feels like a lot of my work paid off," she said. "A lot of the coaches who helped me, along with my teammates, really pushed me to be where I am today. I'm just thankful for all of them."

CAPITAL DISTRICT
**SPORTS WOMEN
OF THE YEAR**

GABRIELLA KHOLSTININ



Congratulations, Gabby!
From HVCC Athletics

College - Volleyball

2026

Gabriella Kholstinin **Hudson Valley Community College**



If you asked Gabriella Kholstinin about volleyball in the summer of 2024, she would've told you her career was over. After starting her collegiate career at a different school in Brooklyn, Kholstinin said she realized she wanted to come back home. But a week before tryouts at her new school, Hudson Valley Community College, a friend convinced her to try out for the team.

"I honestly didn't really know much about Hudson Valley and the volleyball program before I joined the team," she said. "When I did join the team, though, I saw that we had some talent, and I thought we were going to be good. We did pretty well that first season. I didn't really know what to expect regarding what we were going to accomplish because I didn't know anything about our conference or our region. I didn't know anything about those schools. We ended up doing pretty good."

"Pretty good" might be too modest. This season, Kholstinin became HVCC's all-time assists leader with 1,249. She set the program's single season record for assists with 549 the previous year, then broke it with 700 this year. With that, she became the first HVCC volleyball player ever to be named an NJCAA All-American.

"Her talent, volleyball IQ, and relentless work ethic helped her become the all-time assists leader in Hudson Valley Community College history," said HVCC Head Volleyball Coach Therese DeCan. "It's a reflection not only of her athletic ability, but of her consistency, discipline, and commitment to team success."

Kholstinin led her team to plenty of success as well. The Vikings finished 26-2 overall, posted a perfect regular season, won HVCC's first conference title since 1995, and captured the school's first-ever region III championship. That success forced Kholstinin to face one of her biggest fears. The NJCAA DIII Volleyball Championship was scheduled to take place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which is at least a 16-hour drive from Troy. Faced with an almost inevitable flight, Kholstinin had a choice to make.

"When we were told that we were getting on a plane, I was super nervous because one of my biggest fears is flying," she said.

It was her coach, Therese DeCan, whom she credits with helping her face her fears, and so much more.

"She helped me with so many things," Kholstinin said. "She was plotting ways that we could drive to Cedar Rapids. I ended up getting over it and

going on the plane, but she's been a super big help with everything: volleyball, but also academics and personal aspects of life."

"Gabriella's influence on Hudson Valley Community College extends far beyond statistics and accolades," said Director of Athletics Justin Hoyt. "She helped establish a winning culture, elevated the expectations of our program, and positioned HVCC volleyball as a regional and national contender."

"Beyond athletics, Gabriella possesses the intelligence, maturity, and humility needed to thrive in every environment," DeCan said. "She consistently stands up for what she believes in while encouraging and supporting those around her to do the same. Her steady pursuit of excellence is grounded in responsibility, integrity, and respect. Gabriella willingly serves others, volunteers when needed, and demonstrates kindness and generosity without seeking recognition in return."

One way Kholstinin has served others was with the Capital City Rescue Mission. Inspired by seeing people in difficult situations while living in Brooklyn, Kholstinin took action in Albany and volunteered to make lunch for those in need.

"It was really good to actually help with that instead of just being a viewer," she said. "We also got a little tour of the rescue mission where they stay. It was eye-opening and created a different perspective on things."

Kholstinin will be staying nearby for her next step in life when she transfers to UAlbany in the fall to pursue a degree in business. She already has a head start on her career, as she is currently interning in the Office of State Comptroller.

"I'm not 100% sure what I want to do when I graduate," Kholstinin said. "But I want to see whether I'd like to be a state worker. Either way, it's a good opportunity to put on my resume for other opportunities as well."

Being named to CDSWOY 2026 was quite the surprise for Kholstinin.

"I was honestly kind of in shock," she said. "But I'm super proud of myself, and I feel like I worked super hard to get it. I was super happy that our Athletic Director at Hudson Valley, nominated me for it. I just feel super proud and accomplished, and I feel like all my hard work has paid off."

Congratulations Addisyn!



We are so proud of all your accomplishments on and off the field. Your hard work, dedication, and determination has all paid off. We are so excited for your next chapter at Binghamton!! Congratulations! We love you! Mom and Dad



Capital District
Sports Women of the Year

Congratulations Olivia!

To our beautiful granddaughter:
Always remember how much you are loved, how far you have come and how bright your future is. The world awaits you.

We Love You
Grandma and Grandpa DeGasperis

Capital District
Sports Women of the Year

Congratulations

OLIVIA

You make us incredibly proud in everything that you do. You continue to amaze us with your hard work, dedication and kind heart.

All our love,
Grandma & Grandpa Hoffman

Capital District
Sports Women of the Year

HS – Field Hockey / Softball**2026****Addisyn Knapik**
Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School

Addisyn Knapik grew up at the ballfield. She remembers running after foul balls and climbing on top of the dugout while cheering on her older brother and sister as they played baseball and softball. As much fun as that was, Knapik longed for her chance to play the game herself. Her parents signed her up for softball as soon as she was old enough.

On the field, Knapik played all over the diamond but settled in at shortstop early in her career. “I like how smooth and creative you can be at shortstop,” she said. “I’m right behind the pitcher, so I’m very connected to and involved in the game. Being able to dive for balls, lay out, and turn double plays brings a lot of energy. I feel like shortstop is the position where you can bring the most energy and make some crazy plays from the furthest distance from first. It’s by far my favorite position, and I’m happiest there.”

“Addisyn has been our starting shortstop on the varsity softball team since eighth grade—an accomplishment that speaks volumes about her talent, composure, and work ethic at such a young age,” added Head Softball Coach Caitlyn McDaniel.

Around the same time she started playing softball, Knapik also began playing field hockey with the Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake youth program. She couldn’t have known at the time, but Knapik would be playing with a special group of players on this team. As she completed her career at BHBL, she was part of a field hockey team that captured three state titles.

“A big group of us were on JV together as eighth and ninth graders, and we had all played youth together,” Knapik said. “There were about six of us in that same group.”

Knapik was especially impressed with the 2025 squad, which she called “the most dominant team I’ve been on.”

“The team chemistry was insane,” she said. “We were all on the same page and worked as one unit. Being able to play with those girls I grew up with is an awesome feeling, and it shows how much bonding off the field can improve your performance on the field.”

Knowing what it meant to win as a team, Knapik was asked to play just about every position in field hockey.

“I started in eighth grade as a right back, then played left back, center forward, left mid, and this year I was center back,” she said. “When I played forward, that was probably the most fun year of field hockey. But at the beginning of this year, my coach told me we needed a strong defense to win and that she trusted me back there. I knew I had a role to fill, and I was happy going in at center back. Our team was so good that I didn’t really see the ball as much.”

As everyone knows, defensive players rarely get the same glory as their offensive counterparts, which is one reason Knapik was so honored to be

named all-state this past season. As a center back, she was named first-team all-state for the first time in her career.

“That one was special for me in a different way,” she said. “I wasn’t like some of the other girls who were going to play in college or who were the main scorers, so that one was special for sure.”

“Addisyn has a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to whatever she pours her heart into,” added Field Hockey Head Coach Kelly Vrooman.

Though she’ll be hanging up her stick, Knapik’s athletic career is far from over. In the fall, Knapik will start at Binghamton University, where she’ll be a part of the softball team. As someone who’s played on some spectacular teams in her career, it’s not surprising that team chemistry was one of the reasons she chose Binghamton.

“The first time I went to their camp, I could tell how strong the team dynamic was and how much of a family they are,” Knapik said. “The coaches were a very big reason I felt so comfortable making that decision so early. They’re also ranked as one of the best SUNY schools, and that was reassuring because it’s definitely a school I would go to even if I didn’t play softball. When you go there, it’s a beautiful campus, and their softball field is gorgeous. It checked every single box for me.”

An honor student and ranked sixth in her graduating class, Knapik will continue to challenge herself in the classroom at Binghamton as she pursues a degree in engineering.

“I love problem-solving, creating new ideas, and working with people,” she said. “So, when I was looking at majors, engineering felt like a no-brainer. I want to pursue something where I’m problem-solving every day and using those math and science skills to come up with new ideas, innovations, or ways to make things easier for people. I want to make a real impact on others and on what people use.”

Being named to the CDSWOY 2026 class is an amazing feeling for Knapik.

“When I found out on the call, I was smiling from ear to ear the whole time. It’s such an honorable way to end my high school career. I really appreciate everyone—my athletic director and my coaches—who vouched for me and put my name in, as well as everyone involved in selecting the recipient. I had read about this award, and one of my teammates won it last year, so I know how special it is. It’s also special when you go to school or to the store and people come up and congratulate you. It’s just an amazing feeling, and I’m so honored that I was chosen for it.”



Mattingly

We are incredibly proud
of you!

Keep on:
Loving deeply
Playing hard
Never settling

With love,
Mom, Dad, Allie & JP



Congratulates Mattingly O'Rourke



**2026 Capital District Sports
Women of the Year Honoree**



Capital District Sports Women of the Year

Mattingly O'Rourke **Siena University**



Mattingly O'Rourke ran her first race at 8 years old. It was a Turkey Trot mile with her dad, but she says that was where her love for running began.

"That's where it started," O'Rourke said. "From there, I started doing more road races and field day in elementary school and then worked my way up. When I got to middle school, I really wanted to join the track team. We didn't have a modified team at the time, so in eighth grade I ended up trying out and made varsity by the end of the season."

O'Rourke's household is full of runners. Her father, Jeffrey, helped get her into running, and her sister Allie, a fellow CDSWOY recipient, runs at Penn State. As you can imagine, the sibling rivalry pushed both girls to improve their times.

"Since we're siblings, we're naturally competitive with each other," Mattingly said. "It also gave me motivation, because we could push each other. It wasn't just about who was faster, but about how we each wanted to perform. We were able to support each other, and even though we were very different as runners and teammates, we both had things we could learn from one another."

By the end of high school, O'Rourke had fallen in love with running. Though she had the desire to continue competing at the collegiate level, there were other factors that drew her to Siena University, where she didn't have a scholarship offer, meaning she'd have to walk on to the team there.

"I was already looking at Siena for academics," O'Rourke said. "My aunt had gone there before me, and I really wanted to go to a school that had the Franciscan or Catholic value system I kind of grew up with, because my faith is a huge part of who I am. When I learned more about the coaching staff and the team environment, that also stood out to me. I didn't meet the team until after I had committed, but I knew I wanted to work hard for a team that I thought would feel like family."

O'Rourke quickly established herself as one of the hardest-working athletes on campus. Driven by a desire to prove her dedication to her new teammates, O'Rourke went the extra mile to show up early, work hard, and perform her best on race day, when it mattered most. Her hard work was evident in her results.

From a walk-on simply trying to make the team, O'Rourke improved every year of her career at Siena. Her freshman year, she finished 105th at the MAAC Cross Country Championship and mostly ran relays in track. Her junior year, she ran a personal-best in the 800m at the MAAC Championships, the third-fastest time in Siena history, and placed fourth at both the indoor and outdoor MAAC Track Championships. Her senior year, she finished 38th at the MAAC Cross Country Championship after dropping more than four minutes off her 6K time.

"Our team unanimously voted Mattingly a captain her senior year," said Elizabeth DeBole, Head Cross Country and Track coach at Siena. "She is respected by other coaches throughout the conference and always shows support for her competitors—she says it actually helps her pre-race anxiety to view competitors as friends who are there to help her get better. What a great way to view those around you!"

O'Rourke says she's passionate about helping women around her be the best they can be. She recently got involved with an organization called Mom Starts Here that helps moms in need in a variety of ways.

"I'm really passionate about women in a lot of different spaces, especially women's health," said O'Rourke. "Mom Starts Here is an organization that supports moms in need, whether that's through counseling, baby items, food, or other resources. That was something I had wanted to get involved with for a long time, so I was really glad to connect with it this year."

"Mattingly O'Rourke is a role model in every sense," said John D'Argenio, Vice President/Director of Athletics at Siena. "She is respected by teammates, coaches, and peers alike, not only for her accolades, but for her leadership, kindness, and unwavering commitment to excellence. Siena University has been incredibly fortunate to have Mattingly as a cornerstone of our athletic and academic communities."

The Schenectady native stayed local to attend Siena, and she plans to stay in the area for her next step, working at Proctors Collaborative.

"When I accepted my job there, it really felt like coming home in a way," said O'Rourke. "I used to do my dance recitals there growing up, so now getting to give back to the community through my work feels very tied to who I am and to the service-oriented mindset I have."

While many students travel to schools across the state, country, and even the world to pursue athletic or academic dreams, O'Rourke has spent her life as part of the same area. She says she's often wondered if it was the right decision to stay so close to home, but being part of a loving community has made everything worth it.

"Winning this award makes me feel like that choice was worth it," she said. "It was worth not going far away and instead staying in this community. It was worth being an active role model for the women in this community that I've met and worked with. It was worth all the time and hours spent building and helping in the community in every way I could. I'm really proud of the things I've done, and it feels very honoring to receive this award knowing I could have gone far away for school but instead chose to stay here and do this kind of work. I'm very grateful because it always seems like God puts me in the right place and where I need to be at the right time."



Congratulations Sarah!!

*We are so very proud of you and all of your
accomplishments both academically and athletically!
We are so excited for your next chapter at U of R!!*

Go Yellowjackets 🐝

Love you,

Dad, Mom, Emma, Frankie, Kyra, Evan & Mully

Sarah Rainville **Columbia High School**



When Sarah Rainville committed to the University of Rochester, it solidified the Rainville family as a truly elite athletic family. Her older sister was a collegiate volleyball player, while her two older brothers played collegiate basketball. With all this talent in one house, you can probably guess how Sarah got interested in sports.

"My family is a really big basketball family. I was kind of just born into it," she said. "I grew up watching my older siblings play, and that made me want to play too."

Rainville finished her senior year with 1,311 points (3rd all-time at Columbia) on her way to several honors. She was named 1st Team All-State, Times Union 1st Team All-Star, WNYT-TV All Star for the second time, and Suburban Council Player of the Year. From her early days playing in East Greenbush to becoming the captain of the Columbia High School varsity team, it's always been hard work that has set Rainville apart.

"Sarah stepped up in a major way her senior year, making everyone feel part of our team and by being the hardest worker at practice," said Shawn Wyman, Columbia's Varsity Basketball coach. "Her hard work over the past several years has paid off in so many ways, but this year she really broke out and showed everyone how good she has become."

That hard work extended outside of the gym for Rainville as well. She excelled on the lacrosse field too, with 107 career points, including 65 goals and 42 assists. Rainville put together a spectacular senior season with 58 points, 32 goals, and 26 assists, along with 75 ground balls, 17 caused turnovers, and 16 draw controls.

"Her ability to impact every aspect of the game demonstrates her versatility and complete understanding of the sport," said Columbia Varsity Lacrosse Coach Kurt Randall. "Her offensive production, combined with her defensive effort and leadership, has made her one of the most respected and dependable players in our program."

In addition to her individual play, Rainville helped her team put together a special season in her junior year. Alongside many of the same girls she had played with since she started lacrosse, the Blue Devils captured the Section 2 and Regional Championships and reached the state semifinals.

"I've played with a lot of the same girls since second grade, when I started," said Rainville. "It was great to see our growth as a program and as players as we kept moving to the next level."

"Sarah represents everything positive about high school athletics — leadership, humility, resilience, sportsmanship, and commitment to excellence," said Randall. "Whether competing in lacrosse or representing our school in her other sports, Sarah consistently elevates those around her."

Rainville certainly elevated her teammates at Columbia, but outside of school, she works to elevate players who are a little younger than she is. As a product of the East Greenbush Girls Basketball Association, Rainville gives back to the program as a volunteer.

"I really love working with little kids," she said. "It's great to be able to teach them what you know and see the smile on their faces. That was probably one of my favorite things I've done. I grew up playing in that program, so it's definitely a full-circle moment because I know I was one of those girls too. I want to be the mentor to them that I always wanted when I was younger."

As Rainville continues her athletic career at Rochester, she'll also begin working toward accomplishing her next goal of becoming a physical therapist. The daughter of an athletic trainer, Rainville credits her mom with getting her interested in this career path.

"She would always talk to me about maybe becoming a PT and about that whole field," she said. "I also started working at a physical therapy office, and just being in that environment made me want to pursue it more."

Inspired by her former teammates, Rainville says she appreciates being part of the CDSWOY Class of 2026 because it means her hard work did not go unnoticed.

"It's such a great honor," she said. "One of my teammates, Olivia Landy, won it last year, so just knowing that I can be someone like her is really honorable to me. I think it also shows that the work I've put in is being recognized, and I'm really grateful for that."

**Congratulations
Lillian!**



**From the Scotia-Glenville Athletic
Department and All Sports Booster Club**



@CDSWOY



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**CONGRATULATIONS
PEYTON!**



SHAKER ALL SPORT BOOSTER CLUB

IS

PROUD OF YOU!



CAMBRIDGE BOOSTER CLUB

★ PROUDLY ★

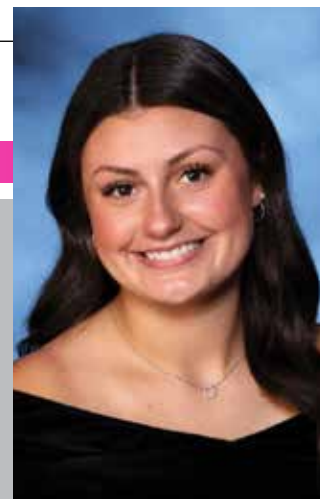
**CONGRATULATES
BRIGID
TOLEMAN**

FOR BEING SELECTED AS ONE OF THE

**CAPITAL DISTRICT
SPORTS WOMEN
OF THE YEAR
2026**

YOUR COMMITMENT, CHARACTER, AND DRIVE
INSPIRE OUR TEAM AND COMMUNITY.

★ WE'RE ALL CHEERING FOR YOU, BRIGID! ★

HS – Cheerleading | Field Hockey | Track & Field**2026****Lillian Steward**
Scotia-Glenville High School

It's not unusual for a high school athlete to play three sports. Some athletes might even play a fourth sport, but Lillian Steward is one of the rare high school athletes who competed in five different sports in the same year.

"It was kind of all over the place, if I'm being honest," she said. "In the fall, for field hockey I'd have practice from 3:00 to 4:30 and then cheer from 4:30 to 6:00. I also had field hockey games on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so I had to miss those cheer practices. But my coaches knew that going in, and we had already talked about it. In the winter, I had track every day from 3:00 to 5:00 and cheer every day from 5:00 to 7:00. So, I had practice from 3:00 to 7:00 every day."

"As a dual-sport athlete, Lillian gave her full effort to every team she represented," said Sophia Iwan, Steward's cheerleading coach. "No matter the season or the demands placed on her schedule, she approached each sport with the same determination, discipline, and commitment to improving herself and supporting her teammates. It is rare to see an athlete demonstrate that level of dedication across multiple programs."

That dedication brought about success for Steward and the teams she played on. She was named a first-team all-star after leading the team with seven assists and scoring eight goals. Her fall and winter cheer teams won sectional championships, while Steward won Foothills championships in indoor weight throw and outdoor discus.

"Beyond the medals, records, and accolades, Lillian represents the very best qualities of a student-athlete," said Steward's track & field coach Benjamin Tunison. "She leads through her work ethic, inspires others through her perseverance, and competes with integrity and pride."

Despite playing five sports and posting a 3.9 GPA, Steward somehow still found time to volunteer and help her peers. She helped with a program called Power of Peace that's through the Youth Voices Center. As an officer of the group, she helped lead a group where students could share their difficulties in a safe space.

"I usually describe it to friends as something like a therapy group, but it was really much more than that," Steward said. "You sit in a circle, talk about what you were going through, and learn how different everyone's experiences were. People would offer support and suggestions for how to handle

problems at home or in life. It was a safe space where everyone could feel heard and feel like they belonged."

It's clear that Steward has a passion for helping her fellow students. She said that being part of a smaller school like Scotia-Glenville made it easier to connect with her teammates and classmates.

"I think it started when I was younger because I was one of the stronger athletes, and I learned early on that girls would look up to me," she said. "They would come to me to learn new things or get help with technique. Part of that made me feel special because I could give back to the program while I was still part of it. I could help younger athletes, and even athletes my age or older than me. I feel like I became known as someone you could always go to for help in different sports."

Steward will join the St. John Fisher track & field program this fall. While she's excited about continuing her athletic career at the collegiate level, her desire to help others remains top of mind. Steward will be majoring in nursing with a goal of becoming a labor and delivery nurse and, eventually, a midwife.

"I chose St. John Fisher because they have a really strong nursing program," she said. "I know college is mainly about academics and your major, and that was important to me. But once I spoke with the coach at Fisher, Coach (Geoffrey) Grambo, I just knew it felt like home."

When she found out she was part of the CDSWOY class of 2026, Steward said she was honored to have her work in athletics, academics, and service recognized at the same time.

"What means the most to me is that it's not just an award for being a good athlete," she said. "It feels like a well-rounded award. It recognizes the little things I've been doing since I was younger, like volunteer work, academics, and sports, all together. Usually, people get recognized separately for being a good student, a good athlete, or for their volunteer work. This felt like being recognized for all of that in one award, and that makes me really proud of myself."

Congratulations Brigid Toleman!


We are so proud of
who you are and
everything that you
have achieved.


We will always be
your biggest fans,
cheering you on
every step of
the way!

 *Keep
smiling!*

*Love you,
Dad, Mom,
James, and the
White Elephants*


and Bruce too!



Brigid Toleman
Cambridge High School

Brigid Toleman only started playing golf because of an injury. After playing field hockey in eighth and ninth grade, Toleman wound up needing hip surgery. She took up golf the following year, and the rest is history. As an individual sport, Toleman says golf has taught her valuable life skills.

"I think it really helps with leadership because it's only about you," she said. "You're the one playing the sport, and you don't have teammates around you in the same way as in team sports. It helps with your physical and mental health because you realize that you can only change by improving yourself. You have to practice on your own, and you can't rely on your team. I think that's a really important mindset that golf helps build."

Toleman certainly improved herself, especially when it came to her golf game. This season, she became the first-ever girl in Cambridge's history to qualify for and play in the Section 2 Girls Golf Sectionals, finishing in the upper half of the field. Toleman's coaches say her dedication and hard work helped her reach these heights.

"While most may have given up on a fall sport, Brigid threw herself into anything her physical therapist approved, and luckily for us, that was golf," said Bruce Sausville, Head Golf Coach. "Throughout her years on the golf team, and as the only female, she encouraged others to join and work to improve their game. Her commitment to growth inspires her teammates to raise their own standards and give their best effort."

With no girls team at Cambridge Central, Toleman competed by herself in girls golf competitions. Cambridge does have a men's team, which Toleman not only earned her way onto but also captained during her junior and senior years.

"I think I'm really good at helping my teammates and speaking up," she said. "If anyone ever needs me, they can always rely on me. I'm accountable, and I think I'm a good leader as a captain."

A two-sport captain, Toleman also led Cambridge's varsity basketball team. But that wasn't the only basketball team she was a part of. Instead of playing another season of softball, Toleman decided to spend her senior spring coaching the unified basketball team.

"Going to unified really warmed my heart," she said. "I'm really glad I was able to join this year because it's so heartwarming to have kids with special abilities be able to play basketball. Everyone is so supportive, and they just love the game. It really blesses my heart and makes me feel so warm to be able to coach those kids and play with them."

"In a program dedicated to breaking down barriers for athletes with disabilities, Brigid's natural empathy, patience, and leadership shine brightly," said Athletic Director Andrew J. Lapitsky. "She is the epitome of what Unified sports represent, ensuring every teammate feels valued, included, and celebrated."

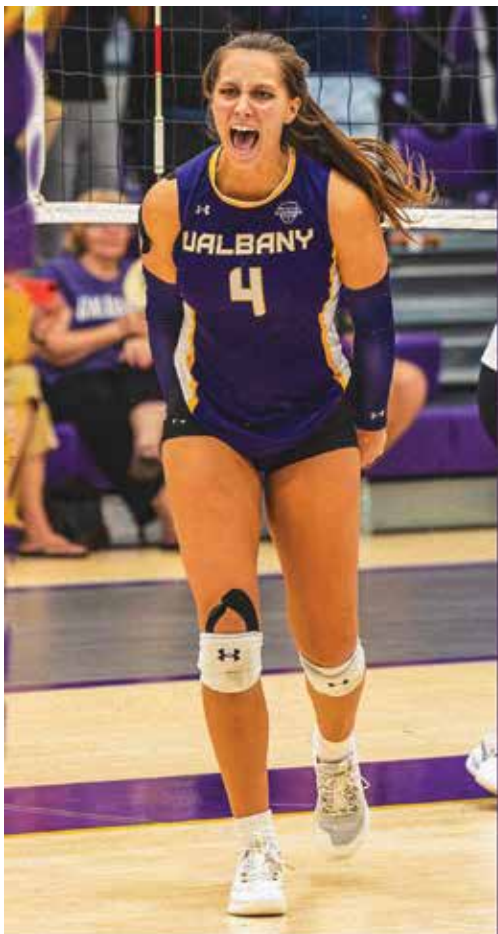
Toleman was also involved with Divided Sky Recovery Center's annual fun run, supporting their addiction recovery program in Vermont. She said that helping with registration and handing out medals was a way she could help others improve their resilience.

"I think that helped me realize I want to be part of improving people's physical and emotional well-being and changing lives," Toleman said.

From this desire to help others, and from her own personal experience with injuries, Toleman has chosen to study exercise science at High Point University with the goal of becoming a physical therapist.

"After eight months of physical therapy, and even before that when I had Sever's disease in my foot and had to wear a boot for a while, I spent a lot of my life in physical therapy," she said. "The physical therapists were the best, and they always pushed me to be better. That really made me want to do the same by helping athletes recover through the healing process and change their lives."

According to Toleman, winning this award is proof that her hard work didn't go unnoticed. "It makes me very proud," she said. "Through all my accomplishments in golf, basketball, softball, and in the community, it feels like everything paid off. I was so honored to receive this award. I honestly never thought I'd get it, and it's truly an honor. It makes me very proud of everything I've accomplished in my life."



CONGRATULATIONS

SHYNELLE WORONIUK

Capital District Sports Women of the Year

Collegiate Award Recipient

FROM ALBANY ATHLETICS

WKNOW

Congratulations

OLIVIA HOFFMAN

CAPITAL DISTRICT SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR



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in your future!

FROM YOUR
COLONIE FLAG FOOTBALL
Program

College – Volleyball

2026

Shynelle Woroniuk **University at Albany**



Shynelle Woroniuk's first visit to Albany came the day she moved in to attend UAlbany. Unlike most college recruits, Woroniuk never took a visit to the school, and the Red Deer, Alberta, native had never so much as visited the region.

"I was recruited during COVID, so my coaches had to take me around campus on a little Zoom tour and explain the area that way," said Woroniuk. "Other than researching online, I didn't really get the chance to come see Albany in person before arriving. Once I got here, though, I found the area really nice, and it reminded me a little bit of home because there are lots of trees and lots of places to escape into nature."

In addition to taking her on virtual tours of UAlbany and the surrounding area, Coach Josh Pickers made a bold decision to offer Woroniuk despite a torn ACL. That show of faith spoke volumes to her and made Woroniuk confident in her decision to go to school so far away from home.

"I wanted to be honest with coaches during recruiting and tell them I had suffered that injury," she said. "I had a lot of offers, but I'll never forget the call I had with Coach Pickers. He basically told me not to worry and that they would make it work. They were my very last call of the whole process, and I was really grateful that he took a risk by still signing me to the team."

Coach Pickers' decision to offer Woroniuk despite her injury paid off in a big way. Woroniuk finished her career at UAlbany as a two-time First Team All-America East selection, a two-time All-Conference Tournament Team selection, and an America East Woman of the Year finalist. In her senior year, she surpassed 1,000 career kills (finishing with 1,075) while posting double-digit kills in all but three matches. Along with all her individual accomplishments, Pickers says it's Woroniuk's leadership that set her apart and made her a clear choice as a team captain for four years.

"Shynelle has served as a Division I team captain, a role earned through the respect of her teammates and coaching staff throughout most of her time on the team," Pickers said. "She leads with a rare combination of accountability, empathy, and competitive drive. Whether in practice, competition, or the day-to-day demands of collegiate athletics, she consistently sets the standard for preparation, discipline, and resilience. Her leadership is not defined by words alone, but by her actions—she is the athlete others turn to in moments of challenge, and the one who elevates the performance and confidence of those around her."

"Shynelle is a great communicator and displays maturity and integrity beyond her years," said UAlbany Director of Athletics Mark Benson. "Her volleyball recognitions and statistics will speak for themselves, but I do not want her character to be overlooked. She has made significant contributions to the University at Albany as a student and earned the upmost respect from her teammates, coaches, and the athletic administration. I expect her to succeed in any area that she may pursue."

Woroniuk is working to make sure her volleyball career doesn't end here. She's actively pursuing opportunities to play professional volleyball as she spends the summer at her family's lake house in British Columbia. But whenever it comes time to end her volleyball career, Woroniuk says she's excited to use the leadership skills she gained at UAlbany.

"I graduated this year from UAlbany with a master's in human resource information systems. Before that, I also graduated from UAlbany with a degree in marketing and management," she said. "I've definitely discovered a new love for management while at UAlbany. I'm interested in figuring out how to use that moving forward, whether that's in coaching, starting a business, or something in human resources."

No matter what she does from here, Woroniuk says she will have great memories of her time here. After finishing her volleyball career this past fall, she's spent the remainder of her time in college enjoying the area.

"One thing that felt unique was how connected the area is, with Albany, Troy, Schenectady, and Latham all feeling like parts of one larger place," she said. "I've really enjoyed exploring the area, especially more recently when I've had more time outside of being a student-athlete. Thatcher Park is amazing; I love that place."

Of all the awards and honors she's received, Woroniuk says being part of the CDSWOY class of 2026 might be the most meaningful.

"This award means a lot to me," she said. "It feels like such a great way to wrap up my career at UAlbany and my graduation. It gave purpose to trying so hard in school and athletics while balancing everything at the same time."

music provided by:

ANGELINA VALENTE

Thank you to CDSWOY for having me back this year! And congrats to all of the women being represented. You're all such incredible humans and I'm honored to be here to celebrate you tonight.



*find
more
here*

Christine Brennan, national sports columnist, a commentator, a best-selling author and a nationally known speaker, is the virtual guest speaker for the 2026 Capital District Sports Women of the Year Awards Gala on August 3.

An award-winning national sports columnist for USA Today, a commentator for CNN, ABC News, PBS NewsHour and NPR, Brennan is a New York Times best-selling author. Named one of the country's top 10 sports columnists three times by the Associated Press Sports Editors, she has covered the last 22 Olympic Games, summer and winter.

In March 2020, Brennan was named the winner of the prestigious Red Smith Award, presented annually to a person who has made "major contributions to sports journalism."

"In the 250th anniversary of our nation, it is extremely fitting to have a pioneer for women in journalism address our 2026 recipients," said Eric McDowell, CDSWOY President. "Christine has eloquently described and written about some of the nation's biggest sporting events as well as issues outside of the playing arena. We are so proud to present a legendary figure in sports journalism to our 2026 honorees."

Brennan was the first woman sportswriter at The Miami Herald in 1981 and the first woman to cover Washington's NFL team as a staff writer at The Washington Post in 1985. She was the first president of the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM) and started a scholarship-internship program that has supported more than 200 female students over the past two decades.

Brennan is the author of eight books. Her 2025 portrait of Caitlin Clark, *On Her Game*, debuted at No. 2 on the New York Times best seller list. Her 2006 sports memoir, *Best Seat in the House*, is the only father-daughter memoir written by a sports journalist. Her 1996 national best-seller, *Inside Edge*, was named one of the top 100 sports books of all-time by Sports Illustrated.

She is a leading voice on some of the most controversial and important issues in sports. Her USA Today column in April 2002 on Augusta National Golf Club triggered the national debate on the club's lack of female members. In December 2002, Sports Illustrated's Golf Plus

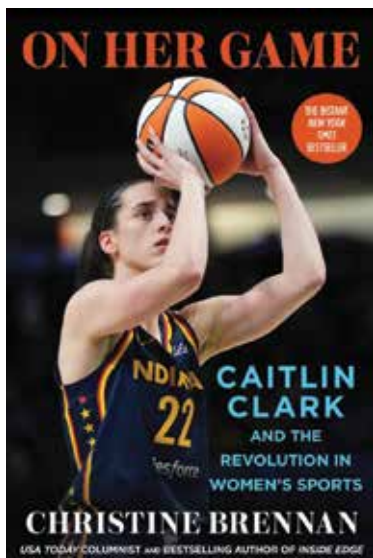


section named her one of golf's 12 heroes of the year. In August 2012, Brennan broke the news that Augusta National was admitting its first two women members. She also broke the story of the pairs figure skating scandal at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics and the Russian judging scandal at the 2014 Sochi Games.

Brennan earned undergraduate and master's degrees in journalism from Northwestern University. She is a member of the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame, Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism Hall of Achievement, Northwestern's Athletic Hall of Fame and the Washington, D.C. Sports Hall of Fame. She has received honorary degrees from Tiffin (Ohio) University and the University of Toledo. She is a member of Northwestern's Board of Trustees and a national trustee at the University of Toledo.

Among Brennan's honors, she was named the 1993 Capital Press Women's "Woman of Achievement;" named the University of North Carolina's 2002 Reed Sarratt Distinguished Lecturer; won the U.S. Sports Academy's Ronald Reagan Award in 2002; won the Jake Wade Award from the College Sports Information Directors of America in 2003;





won AWSM's Pioneer Award in 2004 and Service Award in 2016; was named Woman of the Year by WISE (Women in Sports and Events) in 2005; received the inaugural Women's Sports Foundation Billie Award for journalism in 2006; won Chi Omega's 2006 Woman of Achievement Award; won the 2006 Northwestern University Alumnae Award; won Northwestern University's Alumni Service Award in 2007; received Yale University's Kiphuth Medal in 2013 and was named the 2013 Ralph McGill Lecturer at the University of Georgia.

for Women in Sports Media. A longtime advocate for women in sports journalism, she started AWSM's scholarship-internship program for female journalism students, which has now honored 200 students. She funds two of the scholarships, which are named after her late parents. In 2023, she came back to AWSM's leadership as chair of the board.



Both the NCAA and the Women's Sports Foundation honored her in celebrations for the 40th anniversary of Title IX in 2012.

In 1988, Brennan was elected the first president of the Association

Previous CDSWOY Guest Speakers



2020
Chris Plonsky
University of Texas



2021
Tara VanDerveer
Stanford University



2022
Lindsey Jacobellis
Olympic Gold Medalist



2023
Jessica Mendoza
ESPN



2024
Lisa Bluder
University of Iowa



2025
Emma Baccellieri
Sports Illustrated



CONGRATULATIONS

PEYTON HOBLOCK

Capital District Sports Women of the Year

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Previous CDSWOY Award Recipients



2025 Grand Recipients: Grace Dobrzynski, Siena University and Alivia Landy, Columbia High School.

2025 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Grace Dobrzynski, Siena University

2025 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Alivia Landy, Columbia High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2025:

Jessica Baeckmann, Cairo-Durham High School

Kayla Beaudoin, Tamarac High School

Morgan Brewer, Academy of the Holy Names

Rachel Chen, Shenendehowa High School

Moira Collins, Hudson Valley Community College

Mira Ginsburg, Shaker High School

Annabelle Goyette, Lansingburgh High School

Keeley Kristel, Scotia-Glenville High School

Larissa Lee, La Salle Institute

Leah Madore, Russell Sage College

Allie O'Rourke, Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School

Ava Poupard, University at Albany



2023 Grand Recipients: Hannah Price of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Kara Bacon of Warrensburg High School

2023 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Hannah Price, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

2023 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Kara Bacon, Warrensburg High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2023:

Amanda Chambers, University at Albany

Emma Crahan, Fonda-Fultonville High School

Rylee Dunbar, Corinth High School

Isabella Franchi, Colonie High School

Rachael Frazier, Maple Hill High School

Emily Frost, Tamarac High School

Addyson Galuski, Waterford-Halfmoon High School

Kayla Grant, Lake George High School

Zoey Lints, Schoharie High School

Olivia Lomascolo, Siena College

Grace O'Brien, Galway High School



2024 Grand Recipients: Katie Pascale, University at Albany and Ariana Dingley, Lansingburgh High School

2024 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Katie Pascale, University at Albany

2024 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Ariana Dingley, Lansingburgh High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2024:

Kate Ackerman, Maple Hill High School

Leonni Griffin, Shaker High School

Taylor Holohan, Averill Park High School

Carly King, Guilderland High School

Amber Kolpakas, Galway High School

Cassidy McClement, Waterford-Halfmoon High School

Isabella Miller, Fonda-Fultonville High School

Mackenna Roberson, Hoosick Falls High School

Talia Spenziero, Siena College

Amy Stevens, Russell Sage College

Kennedy Swedick, The Albany Academies



2022 Grand Recipients: Colleen Quaglia of The College of Saint Rose and Michelina Lombardi of Averill Park High School

2022 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Colleen Quaglia, The College of Saint Rose

2022 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Michelina Lombardi, Averill Park High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2022:

Brigid Duffy, Queensbury High School

Katie Falotico, University at Albany

Rebecca Hall, Maple Hill High School

Grace Heiting, Union College

Kelsey Meca, Mayfield High School

Zionna Perez-Tucker, Mohonasen High School

Carlie Rzeszotarski, Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School

Heather Schmidt, Niskayuna High School

Cameryn Shultes, Middleburgh High School

Ayaka Suesada, Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School

Sadie Tavares, Schuylerville High School



2021 Grand Recipients: Clare Howard of Taconic Hills High School and Hallie Klosterman of Russell Sage College



2020 Grand Recipients: Lydia Ware of Averill Park High School and Morgan Burchhardt of The College of Saint Rose

2021 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Hallie Klosterman, Russell Sage College

2021 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Clare Howard, Taconic Hills High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2021:

Naseyah Dix, Bryant & Stratton College

Phoebe Fox, Glens Falls High School

Riley Gibbons, Germantown High School

Jenna Hoffman, Maple Hill High School

Beth Irwin, Guilderland High School

Anna Jankovic, Averill Park High School

Sara Langworthy, Warrensburgh High School

Isabella Mancini, Galway High School

Madison Reyes, Mayfield High School

Kate Sherman, Mohonasen High School

Inaugural Class

2020 GRAND COLLEGIATE WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Morgan Burchhardt, The College of Saint Rose

2020 GRAND SCHOLASTIC WOMAN OF THE YEAR:

Lydia Ware, Averill Park High School

The other members of the CDSWOY Class of 2020:

Liz Brady, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Mackenzie Brown, Rensselaer High School

Amelia Canetto, Taconic Hills High School

Morgan Fish, Fort Edward High School

Megan Flynn, The Sage Colleges

Rachel Hunsicker, Lake George High School

Brytney Moore, Northville High School

Brooke Pickett, Stillwater High School

Makenzie Terrell, Middleburgh High School

Lauren Willis, South Glens Falls High School

Rachel Wnuk, Galway High School

CDSWOY All-Time School Recipients (90)

High Schools

Academy of the Holy Names - 1

Albany Academies - 1

Averill Park - 4

Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake - 3

Cairo-Durham - 1

Cambridge - 1

Colonie - 2

Columbia - 1

Corinth - 1

Fonda-Fultonville - 2

Fort Edward - 1

Galway - 4

Germantown - 1

Glens Falls - 1

Guilderland - 2

Hawthorne Valley Waldorf - 1

Hoosick Falls - 1

Hoosic Valley - 1

Lake George - 3

La Salle - 1

Lansingburgh - 2

Maple Hill - 4

Mayfield - 2

Middleburgh - 2

Mohonasen - 2

Niskayuna - 1

Northville - 1

Queensbury - 1

Rensselaer - 1

Schalmont - 1

Schoharie - 1

Schuylerville - 1

Scotia-Glenville - 2

Shaker - 3

Shenendehowa - 2

South Glens Falls - 1

Stillwater - 1

Taconic Hills - 2

Tamarac - 2

Warrensburgh - 2

Waterford-Halfmoon - 2

Colleges

University at Albany - 5

Bryant & Stratton Community College - 1

Hudson Valley Community College - 2

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute - 2

Russell Sage College - 4

The College of Saint Rose* - 2

Siena University - 4

Union College - 1

Includes 2026.

**This institution closed in 2024.*

2025 CDSWOY Awards Photo Gallery



The CDSWOY Class of 2025

Back row: Jessica Baeckmann, Kayla Beaudoin, Rachel Chen, Moira Collins, Katie Grace Dobrzynski, Mira Ginsburg, Keeley Kristel.

Front row: Annabelle Goyette, Alivia Landy, Larissa Lee, Leah Madore, Allie O'Rourke, Ava Poupard.

NOTE: Morgan Brewer of the Academy of the Holy Names was also selected.



Liz Bishop of CBS6 Albany received the Appreciation Award.



Moira Collins of Hudson Valley Community College.



Annabelle Goyette of Lansingburgh High School.



Jessica Baeckman of Cairo-Durham High School joined by family and friends.



Keeley Kristel of Scotia-Glenville High School with her family.

See the entire galleries of all previous events at CDSWOY.COM.
Photos by Christina Primero Photography.

CONGRATULATIONS SARAH RAINVILLE!



**COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL
ATHLETICS**

SARAH RAINVILLE

CAPITAL DISTRICT SPORTS WOMEN OF THE YEAR

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CLASS OF 2026!**

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