

American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP) Announce 2023 ASPIRE Awards Recipients

Atlanta, October 23, 2023— The American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc. (AAASP) honored **43** key people and organizations on October 22nd for their outstanding contributions to support student athletes with physical disabilities to get “off the sidelines and into the game.” The Fifth Annual ASPIRE Awards Celebration, emceed by actor, writer and television personality **Patrick Cusick** with special guest speaker, **Aaron Golub**, the first ever, legally-blind Division I Athlete representing Tulane was held last night at Maggiano’s Little Italy in Atlanta, Georgia. **Adapted Sports Programs in Recreation and Education (ASPIRE) Award** recognizes the significant contributions of these individuals and organizations that have been central to the mission of making adapted sports programming available nationwide. Through these programs, student athletes with physical disabilities across the country reap the physical, social, emotional, and academic benefits of competitive athletics resulting in personal and social empowerment. AAASP received a record 59 nominations for the awards this year.

These prestigious awards were announced at the event by AAASP Executive Director, Tommie Storms, and GHSA Executive Director, Dr. Robin Hines.

The following were recipients of this year’s 2023 ASPIRE Awards:

ELI WOLFF AWARD FOR ADVOCACY:

GAEL (Georgia Association of Educational Leaders) Robert "Buddy" Costley, Executive Director, and **Dr. Zabrina Cannady**, President of GAEL

Ed Shaddix /Athletic Director (Retired), Gwinnett Heat, Gwinnett County Public Schools

COACH OF THE YEAR (Varsity):

Dr. Nicholas Griffin, West Georgia Wolverines, Troup County Schools

COACH OF THE YEAR (Junior Varsity):

Len Boudreaux, Gwinnett Heat, Gwinnett County Public Schools

OUTSTANDING PROGRAM AWARD (Community-Based) :

Miracle League of the Okefenokee, Ware County Recreation Department, Waycross, GA
Quality Living, Inc., (Ed Armstrong), Omaha Parks and Recreation, Omaha, NE

OUTSTANDING PROGRAM AWARD (SCHOOL-BASED):

Clayton Eagles, Clayton County Public Schools
Also honoring **Dr. Sheila Cook**, Area Coordinator; **Trina Smith**, Director of Special Education; **Coach Sebastian Tillman**, Mark Christmas, Clayton County Board of Education District 2, and **Marcia Payton Edwards**, Principal, Michelle Obama STEM Elementary Academy.

GAIL HENDRICK AWARD FOR VOLUNTEERISM:

Jeff Jones, Gwinnett Heat, Gwinnett County Public Schools

SENIOR ATHLETE OF THE YEAR:

Tadaisia Hillman, Clayton Eagles, Clayton County Public Schools

LESLIE SWEATMAN OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR:

Aron Young, AAASP League

MEDIA “HERO” AWARD:

Michael Leverett - Disability Connections, Macon, GA, Houston Sharks

MOST IMPROVED ATHLETE AWARD NOMINATIONS

King James McMurry, DeKalb Silver Streaks, DeKalb County Schools

POWER CHAIR ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Caleb Merriken, Muscogee Lions, Muscogee County School District

MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Dominique Epps, Muscogee Lions, Muscogee County School District

FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Taylor Nation, West GA Wolverines, Troup County Schools

MALE SCHOLAR ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Anthony Cuti, Houston Sharks, Houston County Schools

FEMALE SCHOLAR ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Kila-Ray Brown, Clayton Eagles, Clayton County Public Schools



**FOUNDERS' AWARD FOR CAREER ACHIEVEMENT OR
EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE**

Robyn Hootselle, AAASP Adapted Sports Director-GA

Michelle Masters, Executive Director of Adm. Services, Peach
County Schools, GA

Billy Mitchell, Partner/Senior Creative Director, MLT Creative,
Tucker, GA

Matt Albert, Art Director, MLT Creative, Tucker, GA

Thank you to the following 2023 AAASP ASPIRE Awards Sponsors: the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia High School Association, Vocal Video, MLT Creative, and the AAASP Board of Directors.

To learn more about the annual event, please visit: <https://adaptedsports.org/aaasp-aspire-awards/>.

The American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP), headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, is a not-for-profit association dedicated to developing interscholastic adapted sports programs in partnership with national, state, and local educational agencies. It represents a standardized approach to extracurricular adapted team sports and has developed one of the nation's most comprehensive school-based athletic programs for students with physical disabilities attending elementary, middle, and high school. For more information, please visit our website at <http://adaptedsports.org> or join our conversations on Twitter at: @AdaptedSports.

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Contacts:

Atlanta: Terri Grunduski, Grunduski Group – terri@grunduskigroup.com 404-226-7497

Donna Feazell, Grunduski Group – donna@grunduskigroup.com 404-290-1929