



# Giant Steps Awards

Embargoed Until  
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## 2009 NATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETE DAY GIANT STEPS AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED

**Orlando, FL** – April 6, 2009 marks the 22nd celebration of National STUDENT-Athlete Day and the announcement of the 2009 Giant Steps Award Winners. National STUDENT-Athlete Day, created by the National Consortium for Academics and Sports (NCAS), is designed to honor the hard work and dedication of high school and college student-athletes nationwide who have excelled in the classroom and on the playing field, while having made significant contributions to their schools and communities. Since 1997, over 2.6 million student-athletes have been honored with award certificates for their outstanding achievements.

As part of the National STUDENT-Athlete Day celebration, nominations made from all over the country are accepted for the annual Giant Steps Awards that are given to individuals who exemplify the meaning of National STUDENT-Athlete Day, who use sport to make positive social change, and who help student-athletes succeed on all aspects of their lives. The awards are not limited to student-athletes but aim to honor professional athletes, athletics administrators, civic leaders, coaches, parents, organizations and other individuals who exemplify the ideals of balancing academics, athletics, life pursuits and giving back to the community through the spirit of athletics.

This year's Giant Steps Award winners will be honored on Tuesday, October 27 at the NCAS Banquet in Orlando, FL and include:

### ***Mallory Holtman and Liz Wallace, Courageous Student-Athletes - Females***

Holtman and Wallace, two softball players from Central Washington University, showed the world just what sportsmanship and camaraderie are all about. During a double header, Sara Tucholsky, a senior player for the opposing team Western Oregon, hit her first career homerun. With two players on base and ready to score, Sara realized that on her way around first she had not touched the bag. As she went back to tag up her knee buckled under her leaving her crawling back to first base unable to complete her remaining run around the bases.

Had anyone from the Western Oregon team touched Tucholsky she would have been called out. If they sent in a runner for her, the home run would be null and void and would only count as a single. But Central Washington's Mallory Holtman had another idea. She asked if it would be legal if her team helped Tucholsky around the bases to which the umpires said agreed would not break any rules. So Holtman, a powerful first baseman, and her teammate Liz Wallace, who plays shortstop, got together and carried Tucholsky around the bases so she could complete the homerun she earned.

When asked, Holtman said that Sara had earned that homerun. The ball went over the fence and they wanted to make sure she got it. Western Oregon went on to sweep the double-header, that run helping to win the second game.

### ***Jake Madonia, Courageous Student-Athlete – Male***

Jake Madonia has not only made a tremendous impact on the University at Buffalo as an outstanding student-athlete, but as a leader to his friends and teammates even while going through a major personal health crisis.

Madonia went to the doctor to have a cyst removed from his foot only to discover a week later that he had a rare type of cancer called Synovial Sarcoma. The tumor was the size of a baseball. As a member of the Buffalo Track & Field Team this had a profound affect on his ability to compete in the sport he loved, and on him personally as he had to deal with his initial diagnosis and treatment.

Before his surgery, Madonia kept working hard to accomplish his athletic goals. He tried out for the Empire State Games, in both the shot put and the discus. He won the discus and placed second in the shot put. He accomplished all this while going through chemotherapy and having already lost 20 pounds. However, because of the Games were during his surgery after which he was scheduled for radiation, he gave up his place in the competition.



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Within two weeks of his surgery Madonia was back in the weight room working out in order to keep his upper body strong. The surgeon was able to save his foot, however, he did lose all of the bone to his middle toe and part of the next toe. While continuing to work out four days per week and continuing to attend all his classes, the radiation he was receiving started taking its toll on him.

Through continuous hard work and resiliency, Madonia returned to competition two years after his surgery and treatment to win the shot put throw at 55'2" - just one foot under the best throw he'd ever had.

Throughout the entire time of his surgery and treatment, Madonia made every practice whether it was in a wheelchair, on crutches or, eventually, on his own two feet. He is the captain of his team and leads by example. He is a member of S.A.A.C. and participates in Habitat for Humanity and other community service projects.

## **Ron Hunter, Coach**

Ron Hunter, Head Basketball Coach at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis started a national phenomenon when he coached barefoot to show his support and raise awareness for the charity Samaritan's Feet.

January 2009 marked the one-year anniversary of Coach Hunter leading his team from the sidelines with bare feet. After learning that 300 million children were unable to afford shoes worldwide, he knew he had to do something. And while he says that he is sometimes known more as the barefoot coach instead of the basketball coach, he doesn't take that lightly.

Last season, Hunter was able to gather more than 200,000 pairs of shoes and \$30,000 and yet, he still felt unsatisfied at the end of the day. After traveling to Peru with some of his basketball players to personally deliver the shoes, he saw that the need for shoes was so great that they often had to drive away not having been able to meet the demands. Now his goal is to raise one million pairs.

Coach Hunter is in his fifteenth year as Head Basketball Coach at IUPUI and has taken the program so far that it is now a household name. He has also made community an important aspect for the team.

Hunter serves as a member of the Division I Basketball Academic Enhancement Group, as appointed by NCAA President Myles Brand and is also on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC).

## **Adam Bender, Barrier Breaker**

Adam Bender's story inspires people of all ages and backgrounds. It motivates people to challenge their own assumptions about what is possible and teaches others to never let their circumstances be an excuse for not trying to reach their goals and achieve their dreams.

Nine-year-old Adam has overcome tremendous challenges every day of his young life. Born with a cancerous tumor on his left leg, he endured treatment for much of the first year of his life before eventually having his leg amputated at the hip at age one.

As he grew older, Adam developed an interest in sports. Like many children he dreamed of competing in team sports. Despite his physical challenge, he developed a skill level in soccer, football and baseball that has enabled him to not only play but to make critical plays to help his team win games.

Adam's journey to involvement in mainstream youth team sports has not been easy. Not only has he had to be incredibly persistent in learning how to increase his skill level but he has had to overcome some resistance to, and criticism of, his participation. The idea of Adam playing in competitive team sports alongside children without disabilities has been threatening to some. He hopes to soon start an organization dedicated to increasing the participation of physically challenged children in mainstream youth sports.

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Adam Bender plays sports today for his own personal enjoyment and challenge. He expects no accommodation for his physical challenges while on the playing field, and his teammates and opponents compete with him as intensely and as fiercely as they would if he had two legs. In the way he competes, Adam makes a loud statement to the world as to what children with physical challenges can do if only given a chance and a place to play. And Adam's example is a lesson to all to never to let one's circumstances and excuses interfere with pursuing one's dreams.

## **Sonny Hill, Civic Leader**

Sonny "Mr. Basketball" Hill has dedicated his life to youth basketball in the city of Philadelphia. For nearly 40 years, Hill's basketball leagues have been an outlet for the inner-city community of Philadelphia, where he serves as an influential leader.

In 1968, Hill founded the "Sonny Hill Community Involvement League" which continues to provide youth with discipline, guidance and direction. The league runs each year with divisions ranging from middle school through adult. He has received an honorary doctorate from Temple University and was named one of the "100 Most Influential Minorities in Sports" by Sports Illustrated. Hill has also served as an executive advisor for Peter Luukko, President and CEO of the Wachovia Complex and worked television broadcasts for the 76ers in the 1970s. His leagues have provided thousands of kids an opportunity and his dedication and tireless efforts have led to Philadelphia becoming one of the best basketball cities in the country.

The 71-year-old, 5-foot-9 Hill, who had to deal with an NBA "quota" on black players when he played, never had the same opportunity as today's African-American players to play in the NBA. He did, however, have a great part in paving the way for other African-American players today.

While Hill's basketball exceptional on-the-court talent was on display in his college days and in the Eastern Basketball League, where most gifted black basketball players competed, it is off the court where Hill broke down long-locked doors. At CBS, he was the first black commentator for NBA games. "Ahead of his time," said Marc Narducci, longtime NBA reporter at the Philadelphia Inquirer. "The first analyst who actually dissected the game for viewers."

Hill, who has his own show every Sunday on WIP Sport Radio and serves as executive advisor for the Philadelphia 76ers, has presided over making Philadelphia a virtual basketball mecca, starting by co-founding the Charles Baker Memorial League, summer home of many of the NBA elite - from Wilt to Bill Bradley to Ray Allen - for nearly 50 years.

## **Kay Yow, A Hero Amongst Us**

There were moments of silence at men's and women's basketball games throughout the country recognizing the death of North Carolina State University Women's Basketball Coach Kay Yow who lost her battle with breast cancer after two decades.

When she announced that she was taking the rest of the season off in January 2009, the women's basketball world knew that her battle with cancer must have been at a critical stage. During the previous two decades she fought cancer she never pitied herself and never let herself be victimized by the disease. She was well respected and looked up to by her peers including Pat Summitt, Head Women's Basketball coach at Tennessee.

In her 38 year's of college coaching, 34 at N.C. State, Yow had a 737-344 record, four Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) titles, 20 NCAA bids and a 1998 Final Four appearance. She coached the U.S. women to the 1988 Olympic Gold and was a member of the Naismith and the Women's Basketball halls of fame.

However, Yow's legacy is the way she fought cancer - raising funds for research through the Kay Yow/Women's Basketball Coaches Association Cancer Fund and encouraging other sufferers through her approach to coaching and life. She always considered herself a perpetual student of the game and of life.

Yow will be missed not only at N.C. State, but throughout the entire basketball community.

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