



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

NEWS RELEASE

Alabama's Gabe Marsh Selected as 2023 National High School Spirit of Sport Award Recipient

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Chris Boone

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 14, 2023) — **Gabe Marsh**, a para-athlete swimmer from Guntersville High School in Alabama, has been selected the 2023 national recipient of the “National High School Spirit of Sport Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The “National High School Spirit of Sport Award” was created by the NFHS to recognize those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the spirit of sport that represent the core mission of education-based athletics.

Gabe Marsh was born with no legs and only one arm. After his birth mother gave him up, Gabe was adopted at four days of age by Ed and Ann Marsh, a couple that have worked with nearly 50 foster children in their ministry and adopted several with special needs.

Ann Marsh believed that the foster children in their ministry should be able to swim and provided swimming lessons in their family pool. However, even they didn't believe Gabe should be in the pool. When Gabe was three years old, Ann was working with other foster children in the pool and left Gabe poolside. Before she could stop him, he dove in the water and swam with one arm to her. From then on, it was clear Gabe belonged in the water.

Gabe began swimming competitively at age six and developed into one of the top para-athlete swimmers in Alabama, winning state titles at the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) State Championship and the Alabama Para Olympics.

A 2022 graduate of Guntersville High School, Gabe participated on the school's swimming team for four years, competing in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle events. He often would record faster times than able-bodied swimmers in competition.

Gabe has competed in various Paralympic events, including the Canada-US Games in 2017 and the 2018 National Championships. His goal is to qualify for the U.S. Paralympic Team for the 2024 Paralympics in Paris.

While at Guntersville, Gabe became known as "Mr. Journalism" for his work with the local newspaper and he hopes to become a motivational speaker.

"He's unintentionally been a hero to who knows how many," Guntersville teacher Matt Holaday told the AHSAA. "He's not trying to be a hero. He just loves living. He's one of the finest fellas I've ever known, not because he's overcome so much, but because he's just a good dude."

About the Award

In addition to the selection of Gabe Marsh as the national award recipient, the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee chose seven other individuals for section awards. Following are the 2023 National High School Spirit of Sport section winners:

Section 1 – Greg Kepic, student-athlete, Hunterdon (New Jersey) Central High School

Born three months premature, blind and with a hole in his heart, Kepic overcame long odds to eventually make the school's golf team as a junior. As a senior, Kepic helped his team to a state championship by recording an 85 at the state tournament.

Section 2 – Deven Jackson, student-athlete, Elliptsburg (Pennsylvania) West Perry High School

Given less than a 10 percent chance to survive after contracting bacterial meningitis at age eight, Jackson endured multiple surgeries and the loss of both legs below the knee to excel as a wrestler in high school. He earned two fourth-place finishes at the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association state wrestling meet and won 121 matches in his career.

Section 3 – Gabe Marsh, Guntersville (Alabama) High School School

Section 4 – Jacob Bush, student-athlete, Mishawaka (Indiana) High School

In 2020, Bush suffered severe injuries in a motorcycle accident that killed his father, Jeremy. After spending four days in a coma, Bush recovered to join his Mishawaka teammates on the football field as a junior in 2021 and continue his involvement with the Special Olympics.

Section 5 – Luke Klassen, student-athlete, Mountain Lake (Minnesota) High School

Klassen was diagnosed with germ cell cancer in June 2022 and endured surgery, setbacks and chemotherapy through September. However, he never stopped running and returned to the Mountain Lake cross country team in the fall to compete in his senior season.

Section 6 – Uvalde (Texas) High School football team

Still reeling from the school shooting at Robb Elementary in May 2022 that claimed 21 lives, the Uvalde High School football team helped unite and uplift the community by completing a thrilling victory in the first home game the following fall. The team, which won just two games the year before, won five games and qualified for the state tournament.

Section 7 – Alejandro Cervantes, student-athlete, Brentwood (California) Heritage High School

Cervantes, who is legally blind and only sees shadows and bright colors, nonetheless competes on the Heritage High School track and field team in the Unified 100-meter dash and Unified long jump. As a sophomore, Cervantes wanted to try a more challenging event and learned to run the 100-meter hurdles.

Section 8 – Malad (Idaho) High School baseball team

Malad's athletic director and principal noticed that the opposing team from Soda Springs High School was broadcasting the game to a mother of one of the Soda Springs players, who was watching the game from a hospital in Colorado. After learning the mother was paralyzed from a tragic accident, the Malad baseball team organized fundraisers and presented the family with a \$1,000 check.

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee composed of state association staff members. While the national winner will be recognized June 28 at the NFHS

Summer Meeting in Seattle, Washington, the section winners will be recognized within their respective states and will receive awards before the end of the current school year.

The National High School Spirit of Sport Award was started in 2008. The previous national award recipients follow:

2008 – Tammy Dufford, cheerleading coach, Evergreen (Colorado) High School, and Megan Bomgaars, cheerleader, Evergreen (Colorado) High School

2009 – Dakota Dana, student-athlete, Afton (Wyoming) Star Valley High School

2010 – Tori Clark, student-athlete, Roselle (Illinois) Lake Park High School

2011 – New Kensington (Pennsylvania) Valley High School Softball Team and Umpire Bill Dithrich

2012 – Jacob Goldberg, student-athlete, Fort Lauderdale (Florida) Pine Crest High School

2013 – Magoffin County High School, Salyersville, Kentucky, and Logan County High School, Russellville, Kentucky

2014 – Zach Pickett, student-athlete, Shingle Springs (California) Ponderosa High School

2015 – Grace Cummings, student-athlete, Madison (Connecticut) High School

2016 – Ashley Carson, student-athlete, Ord (Nebraska) High School

2017 – Danny Lilya, student-athlete, Moose Lake (Minnesota) High School

2018 – Marissa Walker, student-athlete, Waterford (Connecticut) High School

2019 – Amanda Merrell, student-athlete, Huntingtown (Maryland) High School

2020 – Noah Lambrecht, student-athlete, McCool-Junction (Nebraska) High School

2021 – Hayden Holton, student-athlete, Elmore County (Alabama) High School

2022 – The Wyatt Family, Medina (Tennessee) South Gibson High School

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the

high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,500 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.6 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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