

30th Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day
22 athletes and sports leaders to be recognized
Wednesday, February 3 – 12 p.m. at the Minnesota History Center

Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day is organized by the Minnesota Coalition of Women in Athletic Leadership
For more information about the event and day of media assistance, contact Sara Eisenhauer – smeisenhauer@stcate.edu or 651-690-6994
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Some of Minnesota's most inspiring and influential student-athletes, coaches and athletic leaders will be recognized at an award ceremony on Wednesday, February 3, at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. The award ceremony will be conducted in conjunction with the 30th-annual National Girls and Women in Sports Day, a nation-wide celebration recognizing the accomplishments of individuals in the promotion and advancement of girls' and women's sports. The 2016 ceremony will be honoring 22 individuals, groups or programs who will receive awards in seven separate categories. Award recipients are nominated by schools, community organizations, recreation centers, and amateur and professional sports organizations. All are invited to attend this special event. Details about award winners are below.

The Marie Berg Award for Excellence in Education – Cheryl King, Anoka, Champlin Park and Park High Schools. As a teacher and coach since the 1970's, Cheryl King has impacted the lives of thousands of young people both in the classroom and on their respective playing surfaces. King graduated from Augsburg College in the pre-Title IX era, where she was a member of the fabled Auggiettes basketball team and also played golf, volleyball, badminton and gymnastics. King began her teaching career at Anoka High School in 1971 where she coached tennis and track and field. Over 16 years, her tennis squads won two state consolation titles, while her 1981 and 1982 track and field squads won state championship titles. King is a firm believer that, "It doesn't matter whether they win or lose, it's how they play the game." King also went on to coach at Champlin Park and Park Cottage Grove High Schools. She has served on the board of the Tennis Coaches Association including serving as president. King was named the Minnesota State Coach of the Year in track and field in 1982 and in tennis in 1990. She is a member of both the Minnesota Tennis Coaches Hall of Fame and the Augsburg College Hall of Fame. King is a member of a senior women's softball team and has participated in eight National Senior Games, most recently in 2015.

The Kwame McDonald Media Award – Anne Abicht, St. Cloud State University. In July 2015, Anne Abicht retired after a distinguished 30-year career as the Director of Athletic Media Relations at St. Cloud State University where she spent countless hours promoting the accomplishments of her student-athletes. Abicht was only the fifth individual – and first woman – to hold this position at St. Cloud where she oversaw the communications and media relations of a 23-sport intercollegiate athletics program, including NCAA Division I programs in men's and women's ice hockey. In her role she supervised full-time staff, graduate assistants, student assistants, interns and numerous volunteers. During her tenure at St. Cloud State, the athletics department moved its men's ice hockey program to NCAA Division I and added women's sports in ice hockey, soccer and Nordic ski. She has been a leader in her professional organization, CoSIDA, serving on the Board of Directors and serving on several regional and national committees. She served as the press officer for the U.S. Olympic Men's Hockey Team at the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France. For many years she worked closely with campus and athletic staff members to plan and promote annual events and programs to celebrate National Girls and Women in Sport Day. She has mentored numerous young women in the sports information field who went on to careers in athletic communications. Outside of her professional career, she spent nearly 20 years as a volunteer with the Central Minnesota American Red Cross giving back to her community. Abicht has received numerous awards throughout her career including being inducted into the St. Cloud State and CoSIDA Hall of Fames, as well as receiving the North Central Conference Legacy Award.

The Wilma Rudolph Award for Courage and Inspiration – Alexis Shifflett, US Paralympic Volleyball. A current student at the University of Central Oklahoma, Alexis Shifflett is a member of the US Women's Paralympic Volleyball team where she is currently sponsored by Dicks Sporting Goods. In paralympic volleyball, Shifflett has earned four medals, which include gold at the Zonal Championships, Moscow Cup Tournament and the Para Pan American Games as well as a silver at the 2014 World Championship. Before earning success at the international level, Shifflett earned respect in the Waseca community as an integral part of the high school volleyball team. Shifflett – who was born with a condition that left one of her legs shorter than the other – has never let having a prosthetic leg slow her down. Her continued perseverance throughout life led Shifflett to a successful high school playing career at Waseca and an opportunity to represent the United States in sitting volleyball. According to Shifflett, her most important contribution to the development of girls and women is to demonstrate that there is always a will and a way. She says, "It takes lots of motivation, but if you can believe it, you can achieve it. It all comes with a positive mind set." In addition to her playing career, Shifflett also coaches youth volleyball at the 11-year old age group.

Special Merit Award – Kathy Fredricksen, Moose Lake High School. A health and physical education teacher, coach and athletic director for more than 30 years at Moose Lake High School, Kathy Fredricksen has impacted the lives of thousands of young people through the promotion of physical activity. As a volleyball coach, Fredricksen accumulated more than 500 wins, three state championships and one state runner-up finish. She served as president of both the Minnesota Volleyball Coaches Association and the Minnesota Coaches Association for Girls' Sports. She has been a member of the Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors and served on the Region 7A committee for many years. She feels, "blessed to have been in the right place at the right time. Truly, a Dream Job! I enjoyed all the years and appreciate what the women of the past, the present, and future are doing for the young women in our lives." Fredricksen is a member of the Volleyball Coaches Hall of Fame, the Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame as well as the Minnesota Interscholastic Athletic Directors Association Hall of Fame and in 2013 received the National Distinguished Service Award.

Special Merit Award – Barbara Knutson, Mankato and Mankato West High Schools. During a 30-year career as a teacher, coach and advisor at Mankato and Mankato West High Schools, Barbara Knutson was a pioneer in creating and promoting opportunities for girl's activities. She served as chairperson and department head of physical education, while developing and coaching the girls' sports program. She coached softball, volleyball and track and field at Mankato, while advising cheerleading, synchronized swimming and a performance dance group. Knutson was actively involved in the Minnesota Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, including serving as president and president-elect. She is also a current CPR instructor. As a Winona State graduate in the Pre-Title IX era, Knutson served as president of the women's physical education club and women's recreation association and was named student athletic director. She has served on numerous committees and has received multiple prestigious honors, including being inducted into the Winona State Hall of Fame, Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame and the Lake City Hall of Fame. Knutson lists her most important contribution to the development of girls sports as, "an on-going enthusiasm for involving first in activities and sports – and helping them grow in their involvement from the beginning of competitive athletic opportunities."

Special Merit Award – Joan Paulson, Forest Lake Area Schools.

The achievements of Joan Paulson as a teacher, coach and athlete are nothing short of remarkable. Paulson spent the majority of her 30-plus-years professional career in the Forest Lake Area Schools where she taught, coached, officiated and announced events. She coached volleyball, basketball, softball and track and field during her tenure as well as serving as the G.A.A. and cheerleading advisor. She was a member of AAHPER as well as the coaching associations of her respective sports. She achieved over 1,000 coaching victories and coached numerous student-athletes to all-conference, all-region and all-state honors. As an athlete, Paulson was an outstanding softball player, starring on various team throughout the state. She participated in 10 national tournaments, earning All-American honors and being inducted into the ASA Minnesota Softball Hall of Fame. Paulson is also a member of the Forest Lake Athletic Hall of Fame, the Mankato State Hall of Distinction, the Steele County Hall of Fame and the Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame. Paulson stated that, "Thanks to Title IX, coaches and female athletes were able to transition from the G.A.A. program to competitive interscholastic sports for girls and women." Paulson was amazed and thrilled to create an environment that was successful for the athletes and was also able to mentor many young coaches.

Special Merit Award – Jeannie Thoren, Women's Skiing.

Prior to the mid-1980s, when it came to snow skiing, women skied on men's skis. Jeannie Thoren was a pioneer and decided that needed to change. In 1986 she built the first woman's ski, called Fame, in Austria for the Blizzard Ski Company and this was the beginning of the development of women's skis and ski boots. She developed The Thoren Theory, where the mantra is "Women are not small Men." She literally forced all ski companies worldwide to take notice of women's different biomechanical needs and build gear accordingly. Thoren went on to become an expert at fitting women's skis and boots, she conducted numerous seminars and clinics on snow ski equipment and owned her own Ski shop for women in Vail, Colorado. Thoren has been recognized for her pioneering efforts by numerous organizations including being named Marvelous Minnesota Woman, the Carson White Golden Quill Award for outstanding contribution to the Advancement of Snowsports as well as being inducted into the National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in 2014.

Minnesota Legacy Award – Eleanor 'Ele' Hansen, Carleton College.

When Eleanor Hansen arrived at Carleton College in 1952, female students didn't have a gymnasium. Instead, when they exercised, studied dance or took indoor physical education classes, they navigated the pillars in a basement of an old dormitory. Hansen, who took over the women's physical education department, helped change all that. Known around Carleton as "Ele," she passed away in 2013 at the age of 92 in Northfield, where she was known for her feistiness, fairness and love for sports and life. Hansen helped transform the women's physical education department at Carleton into a full-fledged athletics department, pushed for construction of the Cowling Recreation Center for women, helped promote Title IX before it became law in 1972, trained women's sports coaches from around the region and coached women's softball and cross country until her retirement in 1986. In the early days, Hansen made the most of the basement and the campus outdoor space, organizing horseback riding, cross-country skiing, ice skating and archery, among other things. But she pushed for female students to get their own gym. In 1962, Hansen gave the president of the college an ultimatum — either build a gym for women or Hansen would leave. Cowling Recreation Center, which became known as the Women's Gym, was built in 1965. Hansen also developed a sprawling intramurals program at the college, and in the summers trained coaches of women's sports from around the Midwest. She was the definition of a pioneer for girls' and women's opportunities in health physical education and recreation.

Minnesota Milestone Award – Minnesota Lynx.

The Minnesota Lynx, led by Head Coach Cheryl Reeve, claimed the 2015 WNBA Championship and in doing so marked a milestone for all current Minnesota professional sports teams winning their third championship. The Lynx finished the year with a 25-9 record and their fourth-consecutive postseason appearance. Since taking over as Lynx head coach, Reeve owns a career 118-52 record, the most coaching wins in franchise history. Under Reeve's tutelage, Minnesota became the first team in league history to string together four consecutive 25-plus-win seasons. The Lynx finished as WNBA champions in 2011 and 2013 and made trips to the WNBA Finals in three consecutive seasons (2011-13). Minnesota's 105 regular season wins over the last four seasons match Los Angeles (1999-2002) for the best four-year aggregate win total in WNBA history. Since taking over in 2010, Reeve's .694 winning percentage ranks first in league history, one of just three coaches to win at least 60 percent of their games. Reeve was named the WNBA Coach of the Year after leading Minnesota to a league-best 27-7 regular season record in 2011. The Lynx made a 14-game improvement from 2010, marking the second-largest single-season win increase in WNBA history.

Breaking Barriers Award – Shelly Boyum-Breen, Foundation IX, Children's Books Author.

Shelly Boyum-Breen has dedicated her life to improving girls' sports opportunities. She began as a physical educator and coach at both Anoka High School and Augsburg College. Then, Boyum-Breen began working with the Lynx, Timberwolves and the WNBA before starting Foundation IX – a non-profit geared toward providing opportunities for girls in sport and fitness. Once Foundation IX merged with the Ann Bancroft Foundation, Boyum-Breen created the "Shelly Bean the Sports Queen" children's book series that encourages young girls to play sports. Through Shelly Bean, Boyum-Breen teaches young girls to be determined and reward themselves with success.

Breaking Barriers Award – Jan Eifealdt, Ortonville Public Schools.

Klatt helped start a softball program within the league with over 160 girls signed up the first year. Klatt's vision has helped develop hundreds of young softball players and rejuvenate the high school team which Klatt now coaches. Many girls have had tremendous opportunities to play softball and succeed at the collegiate level because of Klatt's hard work and positive leadership.

Breaking Barriers Award – Bob Kuehl, Mound Westonka community. Before girls can go on to become successful high school and college athletes, they need an opportunity to develop skills. In the Mound Westonka volleyball community, those opportunities wouldn't exist without the hard work of Bob Kuehl. For eight years he has served as the seventh grade volleyball coach. In his role, Kuehl maintains high expectations on the court of his players while encouraging their involvement in other sports and the community. Additionally, Kuehl started the local Junior Olympic program where he spends his time scheduling tournaments and volunteering as a coach. With Kuehl's direction, the program has grown to three teams in just one year.

Breaking Barriers Award – John C. Legeros, Mound Westonka community. John C. Legeros may not have known much about lacrosse when he started a girls program in Westonka in 2003 so his daughters could play. However, he did what he could to learn the sport so he could coach the team. Additionally, Legeros found facilities, scheduled games, purchased equipment and arranged transportation so the girls could compete. In 2009, Legeros finally convinced the school board to add the sport which he continued to coach until 2015. Though he has retired, Legeros is now working to start a middle school girls lacrosse program so more girls have an opportunity to learn and play the sport.

Breaking Barriers Award – Erin Lind, Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. After a successful basketball career at Southwest Minnesota State University, Erin Lind followed her passion for women's sports to administration. A barrier breaker, Lind is one of just three NCAA Division II conference commissioners – a role she assumed with the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference in 2014 after 11 years as associate commissioner. While at the NSIC, Lind has served on countless regional advisory committees and the NCAA Championships committee, and has presented at the NCAA National Convention. Lind became the first recipient of SMSU's GOLD award given to individuals making significant impact in their profession 10 years after graduation.

Breaking Barriers Award – Jackie Lindsay, Crookston High School. For over 30 years, no coach at Crookston High School was more impactful on the lives of young women than Jackie Lindsay. Beginning in 1985, Lindsay has served as an assistant with the girls' basketball, volleyball and softball programs that all saw great success. Though she was an assistant in name, Lindsay left her impact through her ability to help coaches learn to lead girls. She encouraged positivity, encouragement and relationship-building in her coaching philosophy. Though Lindsay no longer coaches, she continues to work with the special education department at Crookston and volunteers her time assisting in the athletics department.

Breaking Barriers Award – Annette Margarit, Academy of Holy Angels. From the time she arrived at the Academy of Holy Angels, Annette Margarit immediately began making her mark. Not only did she teach social studies, but she served as head basketball coach from 1977-1984. In 1983 she started the girls' soccer program and within a year led the team to the state tournament, coached the state all-star team and became president of the Minnesota Girls' High School Soccer Coaches Association. Later Margarit served as a volunteer attorney for the Association after completing law school. In 1996, Margarit received the Angels Award for outstanding contributions to Holy Angels and society.

Breaking Barriers Award – Minnesota Women's Soccer League. In 1978, the Minnesota Women's Soccer League began with just a few teams filling a void for women who wanted an opportunity to compete in soccer. Now, 37 years later, the league has grown to accommodate six divisions with over 50 teams allowing women of all ages and skill levels to play competitively all year round. Additionally, the league puts on introductory skill clinics for new players and holds an annual charity tournament staffed by volunteer players to benefit non-profit organizations that support women. Though many join the MWSL to play soccer, they become part of a supportive community of empowered women.

Breaking Barriers Award – Bonnie Jean Moren, Bloomington Public Schools. During the implementation of Title IX, Bonnie Jean Moren became an advocate for girls with disabilities to play sport alongside boys. As an adapted physical education teacher at Bloomington Public Schools, Moren included her students in sport inside and outside of the classroom in activities such as skiing, swimming, track and field and Special Olympics. Moren catered to the needs of each of her students. Many have played on teams and found their lifelong enjoyment because of Moren's encouragement and dedication to equity for all in sport. In addition to her work with adapted PE, Moren also coached Special Olympics teams and high school gymnastics and synchronized swimming.

Breaking Barriers Award – Wayne Olson, Glenville High School. For 41 years, Glenville High School was fortunate enough to have a man who devoted his career to improving opportunities for girls in sport. Wayne Olson spent 28 years as the activity director, 22 as the community education director and 12 years as head softball coach. Olson started the softball team in 1980 and finished his coaching career with a 141-39 record that included six undefeated seasons. He also stepped in as adviser for cheerleading and student council and even coached J.V. girls' basketball. Olson is looked upon most fondly for his ability to step into any role when needed and his encouraging attitude toward all students.

Breaking Barriers Award – Jody Redman, Minnesota State High School League. Jody Redman is described by her nominator as a "passionate and innovative leader" as Associate Director of the Minnesota State High School League. Redman has dedicated her career to the intentional growth and development of students through education-based athletic and activity programs. Redman has produced extensive curriculum including the "Why We Play" program to bring the focus back to the purpose of high school sport in Minnesota. She has also spoken at numerous national conferences and leadership seminars regarding her work. Currently, Redman administers the Minnesota Coaches Education Program for over 500 member schools and oversees many sports sponsored by the High School League.

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