

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE  
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



## NEWS RELEASE

### **NFHS Selects Maryland, South Carolina Students, Teacher as Recipients of National High School Spirit of Sport, Heart of the Arts Awards**

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: John Gillis

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 12, 2019) — **Amanda Merrell**, a student-athlete at Huntingtown (Maryland) High School, has been selected the 2019 national recipient of the “National High School Spirit of Sport Award,” and **LaRaine Fess**, drama teacher at Beaufort (South Carolina) High School and the **Beaufort High School Theatre Students** have been selected the 2019 national recipients of the “National High School Heart of the Arts Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

#### **SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD**

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.

Born a healthy 10½-pound baby and the third of four girls, Amanda Merrell’s young life developed like that of a normal toddler’s. That all changed at the age of three when her parents John and Suzanne spotted a bruise-like lump the diameter of a lemon on her upper left calf. Since Amanda was an active baby, her parents and doctors thought it was nothing serious. The doctors x-rayed her on the Friday before Fourth of July, and the Merrells received a call the following day that she was to see an oncologist at the Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

The doctors there initially told the Merrells that there was nothing routine about the lump. A few days later, Amanda was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma – a rare cancerous tumor that grows in bones or in soft tissue around bones that occurs more commonly among older children and adolescents.

Amanda then went through six rounds of chemotherapy. To be certain that the cancer had left her body, the doctors said she needed more than just chemotherapy. On November 1, 2004, Amanda's left leg was amputated through her knee and she was fitted with a prosthetic leg. Altogether, she went through 14 rounds of chemotherapy.

Since that time, she has been getting a new prosthetic once or twice a year as she continues to grow. She owns a second one that she uses for non-running activities.

Outside of classwork in high school, Amanda has played field hockey, lacrosse and basketball, which is her main sport. She participates in fundraising events to raise awareness for patients going through similar experiences. However, sports is what drives her, and her dream is to play college basketball. "Sports is literally my everything," Amanda said.

When she shoots a basketball, instead of setting both feet like most players, she puts her right leg in front of her body and shoots only with that leg. When she runs, she kicks out her left leg sideways as if she's drawing a circle with her foot.

As a sophomore, Amanda was the junior varsity team's leading scorer at just under 10 points per game. Through her on-court play and off-court demeanor, Amanda is a true inspiration to everyone at Huntingtown High School and within the community. She never complains about her situation; rather, she walks around the school wearing a big smile. During basketball games when she isn't playing, she's the biggest cheerleader in the gym for her teammates. Her love for basketball can't be measured, but the spirit that she brings to the school and to the community will never be replaced.

### **About the Award**

In addition to the selection of Amanda Merrell as the national award recipient, the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee chose six individuals and two groups for section awards. Following are the 2019 National High School Spirit of Sport section winners:

Section 1 – Alana Bochanis, student-athlete, Westbrook (Connecticut) High School

Section 2 – Amanda Merrell, student-athlete, Huntingtown (Maryland) High School

Section 3 – Zoe Portis, former student-athlete, Montgomery, Alabama

Section 4 – Searra Inman, student-athlete, Niles (Michigan) Brandywine High School

Section 5 – Desiree Parmenter, girls soccer coach, Harrisburg (South Dakota) High School

Section 6 – Forney (Texas) High School Softball Team

Section 7 – Forest Lake (California) Christian School

Section 8 – Kayla Bolnick, student-athlete, Wilsonville (Oregon) High School

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 29 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, 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. Including this year, 12 individuals and three teams have been chosen national award recipients.

The previous 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

## **HEART OF THE ARTS AWARD**

The National High School Heart of the Arts Award was created by the NFHS to recognize those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the positive heart of the arts that represent the core mission of

education-based activities. This is the fifth year that the National High School Heart of the Arts Award has been offered.

For the past 21 years, LaRaine Fess has been an educator, including the past 14 years as the theatre teacher at Beaufort (South Carolina) High School. She has been a seven-time “Teacher of the Year” nominee.

In her position as a teacher, Fess has used that platform to reach out to students in her district and to teach them about bullying. She has written two original plays for her theatre students.

In 2013, Fess’ then-third grade son was bullied on a school bus. Devastated by the event, Fess asked her students the following question: “Is bullying still an issue in school?”

Overwhelmingly, her students started sharing situations in which they had been a victim, a bystander and even a bully. After “Ripping off the Band-Aid,” Fess and her theatre classes made a promise to one another and to themselves to take a stand against bullying. They made a pact to never be a bully, a victim or a bystander. They promised that “When they would see something, they would say something.” With that promise in place, seven years later, more than 300 theatre students have been part of the solution as they have performed for more than 7,000 students.

Fess’ goal is to keep performing and talking so students will know what to do when they see bullying and what to do when they are a victim. Their positions were “If we stay quiet, then the bullies win. We are the only school in the state with an inhouse performance on such an important topic. Most districts bring in speakers to talk about this issue. Beaufort County allows its students to teach their peers about bullying.”

In 2017, they presented some of the show for the National High School League Convention in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Dr. Akil E. Ross, Sr., Chapin (South Carolina) High School principal at the time and National Principal of the Year, saw a few scenes and asked if they could come to Chapin and perform for the entire school of approximately 1,300 students. Two years later, they presented to high school athletes and athletic directors at the Leadership Convention in Columbia, South Carolina.

During 2016, 2017 and 2018, Fess and her theatre students were recognized by the Beaufort County Council for their work to take a stand against bullying. The Beaufort County Council proudly gave them a declaration of “Anti-Bully Month” last October.

Since 2012, the Rotary of Low Country has been a very active partner with Beaufort High School Theatre to help them take a stand against bullying. It has supported them in presenting programs at conventions in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; and Baltimore, Maryland. In

addition, they work together to get out the message to all sixth-graders in the district. In 2017, Fess received the Paul Harris Fellow Award from the Rotary of Low Country.

### **About the Award**

In addition to the selection of LaRaine Fess and the Beaufort High School Theatre Department as the national award recipients, the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee chose seven individuals and two groups for section awards. Following are the 2019 National High School Heart of the Arts section winners:

Section 1 – Nathanael Batson, student, Fairfield (Maine) Lawrence High School

Section 2 – Kayla Scott, student, Charlottesville (Virginia) Monticello High School

Section 3 – LaRaine Fess, drama teacher at Beaufort (South Carolina) High School and the Beaufort High School Theatre Department

Section 4 – Johnathon Giesecke, student, Belvidere (Illinois) North High School

Section 5 – Waseca (Minnesota) High School Theatre Department

Section 6 – Dayton Thomas, student, Mabank (Texas) High School

Section 7 – Tristan McMichael, student, Quincy (California) High School

Section 8 – Emma Lawless, student, Canby (Oregon) High School

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The National High School Heart of the Arts Award was started in 2014. Including this year, six individuals, one band and one theatre group have been chosen national award recipients.

The previous award recipients follow:

2014 – Leia Schwartz, student-athlete/performing arts student, Miami (Florida) Coral Reef High School

2015 – Ethan Gray, performing arts student, Chicago (Illinois) St. Rita of Cascia High School

2016 – Midland City (Alabama) Dale County High School Marching Band and Band Director Sherri Miller

2017 – Josephine Ross, student, St. Paul (Minnesota) Benilde-St. Margaret’s High School

2018 – Cecelia Egan, student, Riverside (Rhode Island) St. Mary Academy-Bay

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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 fine arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine 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 7.9 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, 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](http://www.nfhs.org).

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