

**34th Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day**  
**Historic leaders in Minnesota sports to be honored**  
**Wednesday, February 5, 2020 – 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 Sarah Graves, [sgraves@macalester.edu](mailto:sgraves@macalester.edu), 612-382-1873  
Visit us at [www.ngwsd-mn.com](http://www.ngwsd-mn.com)

Some of Minnesota's most inspiring and influential athletes, coaches and sport leaders will be recognized Wednesday, February 5, 2020 at the 34th Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day. The awards ceremony, held at the Minnesota History Center, is hosted in conjunction with the 34th-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 2020 ceremony will honor 17 individuals, groups or programs. Award recipients are nominated by schools, community organizations, recreation centers, and sports organizations. All are invited to attend this special event at no cost. Details about each award winner are below.



**Marie Berg Teaching Excellence Award - Berniece Carlin - Fosston, Minn.-** Berniece Carlin is an original pioneer in Minnesota girls' sports. Starting with her teaching years in Fosston in 1955, Carlin worked with the Girls Athletic Association (GAA) – the only outlet for extracurricular physical activity and sports for girls until 1970. The GAA was intramural, meaning girls could only compete against other girls from Fosston. In 1970, the GAA expanded to extra-mural, allowing teams to play limited competitions against other schools. With Carlin's assistance, the school's first track and field program started in 1969, and she later started the girls' basketball program in 1971. She coached both until they went interscholastic as she wanted to concentrate on one sport. Carlin started the volleyball program in 1972, and coached until 1981. In that time Fosston won four out five regional tournaments it competed in, and took third at state in 1977. Carlin taught in the Fosston School District for 32 years until she retired in 1988. She was inducted into the Minnesota Volleyball Coaches Hall of Fame in 1996, the Fosston Athletic Hall of Fame in 2018 and won a Breaking Barriers Award at NGWSD 2008.



**Minnesota Legacy Award - Gabe Grunewald -** Gabe Grunewald's athletic accomplishments are as extensive as they are impressive. The challenges that came with each milestone are what made these accomplishments all the more impressive. While competing for the University of Minnesota in 2009, Grunewald found out that she had adenoid cystic carcinoma. The next day, she ran what was then her fastest 1500-meter time. After graduating in 2010 she became a professional runner, competing around the world while receiving aggressive chemotherapy treatments and operations to remove tumors. In 2012, Grunewald missed qualifying for the Olympics by a single spot. In 2013, she became the 11th - fastest female 1500 runner in American history after posting a time of 4 minutes, 1.48 seconds. In 2014, she won the US indoor national 3000-meter title. Grunewald never hid her surgery scars, and used her racing – and her diagnosis – to raise awareness for her rare disease. She started the Brave Like Gabe foundation to raise money for research and to help cancer survivors live active lives. Grunewald's husband, Justin has continued her work after her death in June 2019.



**Minnesota Legacy Award - Dr. Belmar Gunderson -** The University of Minnesota has long had successful athletic programs, and the university's success on the women's side is thanks to Dr. Belmar Gunderson. Dr. Gunderson came to the U of M in 1961 as an instructor in the Department of Physical Education for Women. When she arrived, the budget for sports clubs was \$5.67. During her 17-year tenure, Minnesota initiated 10 women's varsity sports. The first year the U funded women's sports programs was 1971, and the budget was \$5,000. In 1972-73, thanks to Dr. Gunderson, that budget increased to \$10,000. Before she got to Minnesota, Dr. Gunderson was a top-ranked tennis player. She competed at Wimbledon four times, and played at the U.S. Nationals for 10 years, reaching a ranking as high as No. 11. She has been inducted into the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University of Minnesota, ITA and USTA Northern Section hall of fames.



**Kwame McDonald Media Award - Lea B. Olsen, Minneapolis, Minn. -** As the popularity of the WNBA continues to rise, so does the need for female analysts and reporters to broadcast those games to fans around Minnesota, and around the country. In Minnesota, Lea B. Olsen has spent much of her career filling that need - a dream come true for the former Gopher. Olsen begins her 10th season as the Minnesota Lynx color analyst on Fox Sports North in 2019-20 and also works the sidelines for the Minnesota Timberwolves. Olsen has spent five seasons working on ESPN's WNBA broadcasts. Olsen also serves as the TV analyst for the MSHSL girls' high school basketball tournament, and the host for the MSHSL boys' high school basketball tournament. In her collegiate playing days, Olsen was a tri-captain for the Minnesota Gopher women's basketball program, and received the Patty Berg Award, the FastBreak award and Coaches award. In 2016, Olsen founded a nonprofit *Rethink the Win* - which helps ensure young athletes have a positive experience in sports.



**Kwame McDonald Media Award - Jane Helmke - St. Paul, Minn.** For 35 years, Jane Helmke was a name synonymous with KARE 11 and Twin Cities' girls' and women's sports. Helmke started with KARE (formerly WTCN) as an intern her senior year in college. She was hired as a part-time production assistant in 1983, and in 1985 she became the sports producer and the fill-in sunrise sports anchor – the first female sportscaster in a Twin Cities newscast. Over the next three decades, Helmke earned numerous state, regional and national awards for her work. Helmke's love of sports goes beyond broadcasting. She was the starting second base player for Augsburg College for three seasons, including a 13th-place finish nationally in 1982. She helped promote Augsburg women's athletics through the college's sports information office and as a writer for the Augsburg Now. Following graduation, she helped develop the Augsburg Women's Athletic Club for alumni, and was one of the first woman to serve on the Augsburg A-Club board when women were finally allowed to join.



**Wilma Rudolph Award - Ana Younker Zimmermann - St. Paul, Minn** – Ana Younker Zimmermann was recognized last year as one of the top female athletes in the St. Paul area, and joined 42 other young women as they received the Athena Award for their athletic accomplishments. That in itself is a high honor, and for Younker Zimmermann it is even more special and more impressive as she was born without arms. She uses her toes and the edges of her feet to do most activities. A graduate of Humboldt High School, Younker Zimmermann discovered adapted sports, and competed in soccer, softball and bowling throughout her high school career. She also maintained nearly a 4.0 GPA at Humboldt. Not only was Younker Zimmermann, who was born in Haiti and brought to the United States when she was three, recognized with the Athena Award, when the Minnesota Twins were looking for an inspirational athlete to throw out the first pitch at an April ballgame – she got the call. Using an adapted softball, she flicked the ball with her foot over home plate.



**Special Merit Award - Jill Wahman - St. Cloud, Minn.** - Even before Title IX was passed, Jill Wahman made sure young athletes had the opportunity to compete in gymnastics. In the late 60s, Wahman started the first after-school gymnastics program for high school students in Ivanhoe, Minn. In the 1970s she moved to St. Cloud and started the first community education gymnastics program there, and worked with instructors and staff – that she recruited – to form a curriculum for various levels. When Wahman started in the 1970s, there were two four-woman groups of officials. Now, the group has 32 women and is known as the Central Minnesota Gymnastics Judges Association. Wahman led the group as director and scheduling secretary until 2014. Wahman also served as the gymnastics representative to the MSHSL Officials’ Advisory Committee from 1997-2000, the MSHSL Rules Clinician from the 1990s until 2000, and judged the MSHSL state gymnastics meet for more than 20 years.



**Special Merit Award - Justice Margaret Chutich - Minneapolis, Minn.** - Margaret Chutich – an Associate Justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court – has spent a lifetime working as a champion of girls and women in sport. Justice Chutich played on the boys’ high school tennis team at Anoka until a girls’ state tournament was created, and she took second in the first-ever Minnesota State High School League girls’ tennis tournament as a junior before winning it as a senior. She won a Big10 singles title at the University of Minnesota, and helped the Gophers to three AIAW national tournament berths. After graduation, Justice Chutich served on the Advisory Council for Women’s Athletics at the U of M, and she and her spouse donated funds to support female athletes at Minnesota’s Student Athletic Center for Excellence. They also established a scholarship in women’s sports to support full-time undergraduate female student-athletes.



**Special Merit Awards - Nancy Manderfeld - Eden Prairie** - Early in Nancy Manderfeld’s life, she gravitated toward leadership roles which helped shape her career to influence and inspire others in teaching, coaching girls’ sports and in business. She was the president of her senior high school class, president of the Waterville-Elysian Teachers’ Union and president of the Executive Women’s Golf Association. Over an eight-year span, she has coached JV volleyball, junior high basketball and served as the head track and field and softball coach. Following that, for ten years she officiated junior high and high school basketball, community college and Division III women’s basketball, and officiated high school volleyball for five years. She was the first female public address announcer for the both the Edina girls’ basketball team, the MSHSL girls’ basketball state tournament and the University of Minnesota women’s basketball team. In

1990, Manderfeld took a position as the Executive Secretary for Region 6AA with the MSHSL - a position she has held for almost 30 years. She is currently the only female in that capacity.



**Minnesota Milestone Award - Maddy Freking, Andover, Minn. and Krissy Wendell** - Twenty-five years separate Maddy Freking and Krissy Wendell on the playing field, but the two are forever connected after making history on the baseball diamond. In 1994, Wendell became the fifth girl to play in the Little League Baseball World Series, and the first from Minnesota. In the summer of 2019, Freking followed in Wendell’s footsteps. She became the 19th girl to play in the LLWS and the second girl from Minnesota to play on Little League’s biggest stage. Wendell was the first girl to start at catcher, and Freking served as Coon Rapids-Andover’s starting second base player. Wendell went on to become the first female LLBWS graduate to earn a spot in the Little League Hall of Excellence. In 2000, she won Minnesota’s Ms. Hockey award, and in 2004 she won the Patty Kazmier Award after



an impressive career at the University of Minnesota. She was inducted into the US Hockey Hall of Fame in December 2019.



**Breaking Barriers Award - Augsburg University Women’s Wrestling - Minneapolis, Minn.** has long been a pioneer in women’s athletics, and continued that tradition earlier this year when it announced it would create the only women’s wrestling team in Minnesota starting in the 2019-20 school year. In 1995, Augsburg was the first college or university in the Midwest to sponsor a varsity women’s hockey team, and in 2014 the school became the first collegiate institution in Minnesota to sponsor varsity women’s lacrosse. The additions have come thanks to the support of athletic director Jeff Swenson and with the backing of Augsburg President Dr. Paul Pribbenow. As well as being a pioneer in the state of Minnesota, Augsburg is also a pioneer in the

NCAA. The university is one of just six NCAA Division III schools to offer women’s wrestling at the varsity level, with five others adding the sport this year.



**Breaking Barrier - Todd Dingmann - St. Cloud, Minn.** When Todd Dingmann started coaching youth softball in the St. Cloud area in 2010, he noticed a lack of opportunities for girls to compete. In the years since, he has worked tirelessly to make sure girls have the opportunity to play softball at all levels. Dingmann started coaching softball with the Waite Park Babe Ruth program in 2010. At that time, there was only in-house softball in the program. He joined the Waite Park Babe Ruth board in 2011, and in 2012 he started travel softball in the Waite Park program with two 12U teams. He also organized teams to participate in a fall softball league in 2015. Since then, the travel program has grown to 12 teams ranging from 8U to 16U and the number of participants playing softball in Waite Park has almost doubled. In addition to his work with Waite Park softball, Dingmann has coached in the St. Cloud Area Youth Basketball Association girl’s programs for many years. He serves on the SCAYBA board, and uses his connections to find opportunities for girl’s teams – his and others – to play at the Target Center and at halftime of area high schools and colleges.



**Breaking Barriers - Gwen Garber - Milaca, Minn.** When reflecting on her career, Gwen Garber said she hopes she has helped numerous girls become confident and successful through sports. As the longest-tenured female coach in the Milaca School District, she has reached many young athletes – through her work in athletics. For more than 30 years, Garber has coached all levels of volleyball, seventh-grade through JV basketball and varsity track and field, and still serves as the JV volleyball coach and head track and field coach at Milaca. Garber qualified for Minnesota’s Class A state track meet each year from 1981-83, and was inducted into the Pierz High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2000. In 2013, she coached the Milaca girls’ track team to the Section 5A title, the co-Class A state title and was named the Section 5A Girls’ Track Coach of the Year. Along with her coaching duties, she also teaches social studies at the Milaca Public Schools.



**Breaking Barriers - Granny Basketball - Faribault, Wanamingo, Minn.** Prior to the passage of Title IX in 1972, women didn't have many opportunities to compete in high school athletics. Two basketball teams in southern Minnesota are giving women who grew up pre-Title IX the opportunity to compete. The Wanamingo Bulldogs and Faribault Hot Shots are Minnesota's two Granny Basketball teams. The two teams – whose only rule is that the women on the team must be over the age of 50 – play each other frequently, as well as teams from Iowa. They play four eight-minute quarters, and only forwards are allowed to shoot the ball, and players cannot run or jump. Underhand shots – 'granny' shots – are worth three points, other field goals are worth two points and a free throw is still worth one point. The Faribault and Wanamingo teams scrimmage each other frequently, and the teams are always looking for more members so that they can compete in the Minnesota Senior Games and, someday, qualify for the National Senior Games. The Granny teams offer women the opportunity for competition, camaraderie and, for some, their first chance to play on a competitive basketball team.



**Breaking Barriers - Subversive Sirens - Minneapolis, Minn.** In 2014, Signe Harriday was in Cleveland watching the Gay Games, and was inspired to give it a try. After some convincing – and realizing that the next Gay Games were in Paris – she and friend Suzy Messerole started perusing the Games' website for a potential sport, and so the Subversive Sirens synchronized swimming team was born. The team now has six full-time members and is a competitive synchro team committed to Black Liberation, equity in aquatic sports, body positivity in athleticism and queer visibility. In their debut at the 2018 Gay Games, the Sirens won a gold medal for their free combo routine, and Harriday and Messerole won a silver medal for their duet performance. Their routine for the 2019 International LGBTQ+ Athletics (IGLA) Championships in New York City honored transgender activist Sylvia Rivera and the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. They again won gold for their free combo, and Harriday and Messerole won silver for their duet. As well as training and competing, the Sirens are a team on a mission to spread the joy of synchronized swimming as a liberation practice. They host monthly splashes to allow community members to try synchro with the team in a welcoming environment, and they continually try to create opportunities for everyone to engage with and experience synchro in this healing way. Their next major competition is the 2021 IGLA Championships in Utah.



**Breaking Barriers - Jane Voss - Bloomington, Minn.** From starting girl's athletic programs in the 1970s to serving as a public address announcer for girl's and boy's high school athletics, Jane Voss has long been an advocate for girls in sports, and a role model for all young athletes. Voss started the girls' athletic programs at Mazeppa High School in 1973, and served as the school's first girls' varsity basketball, volleyball and track coaches, as well as cheerleading, pep club and girls' recreation association advisor. She moved to the Eden Prairie High School in 1980 and continued to coach both volleyball and softball while also working with the Athena Award Committee, the EP Schools Gender Equity Committee and the Region 6AA Executive Committee. Voss was also the tournament director for sections 2AA and 6AA softball. After retiring from coaching, she started announcing both boys' and girls' sports at the high school. She has worked as an announcer at the volleyball state tournament since 1997 and the girls' basketball state tournament since 2000, and started announcing boys'

basketball in 2017.



**Breaking Barriers - Dr. Karla Wolford - Moorhead, Minn.** - Lifting weights and working out can be therapeutic for some, and Karla Wolford has made her gym not only a therapeutic space, but a safe space where women can come and work on a better version of themselves. Wolford started running Elevate Human Potential (EHP) Crossfit five years ago, and has built it into a place where women of all ages can come to build their muscles as well as their confidence and self-worth. She created a program for female athletes ages 13-17 to realize what healthy really looks like, and she also created a Women's Empowerment Scholarship that allows women who have been in abusive relationships or victims of sexual assault to gain confidence in themselves. When she's not helping women get strong, Wolford and EHP have raised \$70,000 through events such as Barbells and Brews Brawl, Row-a-Thon and the Women's Empowerment Event. She uses her talent as an athlete to help women around her get stronger physically and mentally, and is a role model for women of all ages.

###