



Virginia Amateur Sports, INC

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Virginia Commonwealth Games Announce 2021 Athletes of the Year

Virginia Amateur Sports, Inc (VAS) organizers of the Virginia Commonwealth Games at Liberty University, annual athletes of the year have been selected: Olivia Goodwin of Charlottesville was named Youth – Female Athlete of the Year, Brendan Whitfield of Forest was named Youth – Male Athlete of the Year, Rennie Hairston, Jr of Martinsville was named Adult – Male Athlete of the Year. These athletes were selected from the nominees in their category. Nominations are submitted online annually beginning around June and typically run through August (depending on National Congress of State Games deadlines).

Olivia was born with a congenital heart defect, she was born with an electrical problem and is currently on her third pacemaker. Many times she has been peaking in her swimming, only to need another heart surgery and end up out of the water for 6 months for recovery. Then, it takes her another 6 months to get back to her pre-op weight and performance, needless to say this frustrates her. She understands that her heart condition is her story and she owns it, but never uses it as an excuse. She continues to swim even though she understands that she physically doesn't have what it takes for now, the water is her happy place. She believes that one day, she will place in an event. Her heart and toughness is inspiring, she dreams big and has grit. Olivia swims for the pure pleasure of being in the water and her love of the sport. Swimming has given her discipline, organization, and time management skills - all key to being successful in life. It has also taught her sportsmanship, teamwork, and how to be humble. Her younger sisters are beginning to do well in swimming and Olivia cheers them on. She's not jealous, she doesn't get mad, nor does she blame her heart or ask why she ended up with a pacemaker. Olivia's triumphs are not on the awards podium, they are completing a 500M Free exactly a year after heart surgery, completing an 800M Free even though she knew should would finish in last place, they are looking at the scoreboard and seeing that she finished. Olivia Goodwin embodies the spirit and drive of competition - always striving for excellence, no matter what obstacle may be in the way.

Brendan earned seven gold medals in the 2021 Long Course Swimming meet. He is an incredibly hard working young man, spending hours training both inside the pool and out. According to his teammates and their parents, he is humble, kind, considerate and supportive of his fellow swimmers and those he coaches. One of his teammates, recently said, "Brendan is a phenomenal swimmer, but he never brags! He's a great kid". One of his former teammates contributed – *"While his athletic success is easily shown by the countless accomplishments he has achieved, it's not every day you see someone as gifted and talented as Brendan also be as humble as he is. Just recently I was talking to Brendan, congratulating him on some of his achievements, and I asked him why he decided to swim and why he continues to swim. He didn't say because it was because he wanted to win more races, go to bigger meets, or win more awards, he said simply because he has fun swimming - he started competitive swimming because he loved the sport, and that's the same reason he continues to swim. As an athlete myself, I can say from experience that it is very easy to get caught up in the sport and forget why you decided to start swimming in the first place. I believe Brendan has the mindset of an elite athlete, which is going to help push him to reach a level of swimming he might not even know he's capable of. I'm truly excited to continue watching Brendan throughout his swimming career to see all that he achieves."* He has a 4.0 GPA and will be named to the Scholastic All American Swim Team this fall. He is focused and determined, and is very close to the 2020 Olympic Qualifying Time Standards in several events. At a mere 16, Brendan became the 2021 Virginia State LC State Champion in the 100 Fly, 100 & 200 Backstroke events and competed at the USA Swimming National meet in Greensboro (Aug 3-7, 2021).

Rennie earned a gold medal, in Track & Field at the 2021 Games. Rennie is described as a "hard working motivated person a lot of people look up to him and want to be successful like him."

These athletes were nominated to represent Virginia in the running for National Congress of State Games Athletes of the Year and those winners will be announced in late September.

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About the Virginia Commonwealth Games at Liberty University: Modeled after the Olympics, the Virginia Commonwealth Games welcomes athletes regardless of age or skill level. The Games embody the values of participation, sportsmanship and healthy living amongst residents of Virginia and surrounding eligible states. The rights holder for the event is **Virginia Amateur Sports** (VAS). VAS has been organizing the event for 31 years and it is truly a grassroots effort that relies on the dedication of thousands of volunteers and support from local sponsors and organizations across the Commonwealth. VAS is a member of the National Congress of State Games.

About the National Congress of State Games: The National Congress of State Games (NCSG) is a membership organization comprised of over 30 Summer State Games and 10 Winter State Games organizations and a member of the United States Olympic Committee's Multi Sports Organizational Council. The mission of the NCSG is to support State Games member organizations in the promotion of health, fitness and character building through Olympic – style competitions and physical activities.

The NCSG is also the rights holder of the State Games of America, an Olympic-style event featuring competition between State Games medal winners (gold, silver, bronze) from across the nation.

For more information on the Games, including images for download, visit: www.CommonwealthGames.org/news

Member of the National Congress of State Games—learn more at www.stategames.org



Olivia Goodwin



Brendan Whitfield



Rennie Hairston, Jr.

**2021 VA
Commonwealth Games
at Liberty University –
Athletes of the Year!**

