



## PRESS RELEASE

### 2019 Heroes of Sport – Challenged Athletes Foundation Commemorates 25th Anniversary with Largest Grant Distribution Ever

- CAF to make 3,260 individual grants for adaptive sports equipment, training and competition expenses
- \$4.8 million in funding awarded to individuals with physical challenges across 103 different sports

SAN DIEGO – March 27, 2019 – The **Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF)**, which has helped thousands of athletes with physical challenges gain access to sports, will cap off its year-long 25th anniversary celebration in memorable fashion with its largest annual grant distribution in history.

CAF will make 3,260 individual grants to provide more support for adaptive sports equipment, training and competition expenses to individuals with physical challenges of all ages and levels. More than \$4.8 million in funding will be awarded to athletes from all 50 states and 42 countries across 103 different sports and activities. Without this critical funding, participation in sports would be unattainable due to insurance practices that rarely cover these items and the high cost of adaptive equipment required to get in the game.

“This 2019 grant distribution is a major milestone for the foundation and for all our athletes, supporters and friends, without whom we could not have established this incredible community that has positively impacted so many lives,” noted Chief Executive Director **Virginia Tinley**. “The Heroes of Sport campaign champions the common spirit that all athletes share. Heroes of Sport know the time and sacrifice it takes to realize dreams. They share a belief that sports make us whole and we support our heroes in pursuing their athletic goals with the right equipment, community, coaching and programs. Our 2019 team of grant recipients are the best reflection of this message.”

Kicking off the Heroes of Sport campaign, NFL quarterback **Drew Brees**, professional golfer **Michelle Wie**, NBA Legend **Kobe Bryant** and U.S. Olympian **Allyson Felix**; shined a light on the accomplishments of CAF ambassador athletes including wheelchair basketball Paralympic gold medalist **Megan Blunk**, high school quarterback **Alex Ruiz**, World Blind Golf Champion **Jeremy Poincenot** and Paralympic track athlete **Scout Bassett**. The campaign has propelled awareness for CAF’s transformational programs and world-wide activities.

CAF’s programs include funding grants for adaptive sports equipment, training and competition expenses, camps + clinics, Operation Rebound (for injured veterans and first responders) and mentorship opportunities. The heroes of sport in this year’s historic grant distribution represent 103 different sports and activities including track & field, adaptive fitness training, blind surfing, wheelchair rugby, equestrian, sled hockey and more.

“25 years ago, our goal was to help one person and to see where it’s come from to now supporting 3,260 people in 42 countries around the world is unbelievable,” said **Bob Babbitt**, CAF Co-Founder and Chief Storyteller. “Celebrating the Heroes of Sport is about helping people realize their full potential in the face of adversity and circumstances beyond their control. Sports are the platform to help someone live their best life and that’s why we are so committed to providing access to not only equipment, but a supportive athletic community around the world.”

Through the generosity of partners such as **Össur**, **YMCA**, **Vesco Metal Craft**, **Box Wheelchairs**, **Top End**, **Melrose Wheelchairs**, **J & L Pie Company** and **Eagle Sportschairs**. CAF is able to provide support, products, and services to grant recipients. For more information about CAF and its programs, visit [challengedathletes.org](http://challengedathletes.org).

## 2019 Grant Distribution Facts and Figures

- 103 sports
- 50 states + Puerto Rico
- 42 countries
- Youngest grant recipient- Age 4
- Oldest grant recipient- Age 77
- 29% under age of 18
- 39% are first-time grant recipients
- 35% are female
- 65% are male

## Income breakdown

- 65% of households earn income between \$20K-\$50K/year
- 40% of households earn under \$20K/year

## Breakdown by Disability

- 22% Amputee
- 15% Paraplegic
- 14% Spina Bfida
- 13% Visually Impaired
- 11% Cerebral Palsy
- 5% Quadriplegic
- 5% Limb Difference
- 2% Polio
- 2% Muscular Dystrophy
- 11% Other

## Heroes of Sport Athlete Spotlights:

**Name:** Shelby Keeland. Denton, TX

**Grant:** Rugby Wheelchair

**Bio:** Shelby is a lifelong athlete and new father. The movie "Murderball" gave him hope after a sudden car accident and spinal cord injury threatened to take the full life he once knew. Shelby threw himself into wheelchair rugby right after rehab and he has since found himself again through sport. A CAF grant will allow Shelby to return his borrowed chair and excel in his own, custom fitted rugby chair.

**Disability:** Quadriplegia

**Name:** Christina Kouros. Cape Elizabeth, ME

**Grant:** Racing Wheelchair

**Bio:** Christina has never let anything stop her, including her congenital limb difference. As a freshman in high school, she was tired of being the "Team Manager", so she lobbied for a law change that would allow her to earn points for her school's track and field team in wheelchair racing. Ever determined, Christina is working towards her teaching credential and has picked up a passion for Nordic Skiing. Her CAF grant will allow her to continue racing, defying all laws and limitations.

**Disability:** Amputee

**Name:** James Hunt. Canisteo, NY

**Grant:** Golf Competition Expenses

**Bio:** James is a nightclub DJ, a substitute teacher, a hunter and fisherman, a former high school baseball player, and now, a golfer. He does all of this while missing all four limbs. James was recently featured as the spotlight story on The Golf Channel's Emmy Award nominated feature, "Limitless". James' first-ever CAF grant will open the door to golf competitions around the country.

**Disability:** Amputee

**Name:** Meredith Koch. Roslindale, MA

**Grant:** National Competition Expenses for Swimming

**Bio:** Swimming has been life-saving for Meredith, a former runner and operating room Clinical Specialist. At the promising and healthy age of 24, Meredith never expected to become the patient. She was crushed by a piano that fell out of a pickup truck, leaving her with a spinal cord injury that resulted in paraplegia. Meredith found her way to a CAF swim clinic in Boston and discovered her new athletic calling to swimming. This CAF grant for competition expenses will allow Meredith to train for her goal to make the US Paralympic swim team.

**Disability:** Paraplegia

**Name:** Rylan Rios-Delgado. Walden, NY

**Grant:** Basketball Wheelchair

**Bio:** Rylan is a big brother, a good student, and a kind-hearted yet competitive wheelchair basketball player and surfer. In his 6-years of life, Rylan has beat the odds at every turn while living with Spina Bifida. Rylan is the youngest athlete at his local adaptive sports club and his CAF grant for a new basketball wheelchair will help him keep up with the big boys and continue to excel on and off the court.

**Disability:** Spina Bifida

**Name:** Easton Gonzalez. Bradenton, FL

**Grant:** WCMX Chair

**Bio:** Easton is a second grader who comes alive with confidence when he's shredding at the local skate parks. Easton was born with Spina Bifida and is using his unique perspective to promote change. He is the face behind a nation-wide project to build three inclusive playgrounds – the first one being in his hometown. Easton embodies CAF's mission and will use his very own WCMX chair to continue developing and thriving in a sport he loves.

**Disability:** Spina Bifida

**Name:** Hoda Mohamed. Mansoura, Egypt

**Grant:** Racing wheelchair

**Bio:** Hoda is using her passion for wheelchair racing to break down barriers in every way. Born with Polio, Hoda dabbled in adaptive sports, but nothing captured her heart more than the male-dominated sport of wheelchair racing. Last year, Hoda impressively placed 2nd and 3rd in multiple races against her male competitors. A CAF grant for a new racing chair will allow Hoda to carry on her dream of representing Egypt on the world's stage.

**Disability:** Polio

**Name:** Keith Harris. League City, TX

**Grant:** Coaching/Training Expenses for Baseball

**Bio:** 10-year-old Keith has a determination and drive that far surpasses his young age. Keith was born missing his right hand, and despite hesitations from his parents, he was bound and determined to play baseball. Soon enough, Keith had earned his spot as a first baseman and become one of the best batters in the league. He even played first base and pitcher for the American All Star Little League team. A CAF grant will ensure that Keith has the coaching he needs to continue playing baseball.

**Disability:** Limb Deficiencies

### **About the Challenged Athletes Foundation**

The Challenged Athletes Foundation® (CAF) is a world leader in helping people with physical challenges lead active, healthy lifestyles. CAF believes that participation in physical activity at any level increases self-esteem, encourages independence and enhances quality of life. Since 1994, more than \$100 million has been raised and over 26,000 funding requests from people with physical challenges in all 50 states and 70 countries have been satisfied. Additionally, CAF's outreach efforts impact another 60,000 individuals each year. Whether it's a \$2,500 grant for a handcycle, helping underwrite a carbon fiber running foot not covered by insurance, or arranging enthusiastic encouragement from a mentor who has triumphed over a similar challenge, CAF's mission is clear: give opportunities and support to those with the desire to live active, athletic lifestyles. To learn more, visit [challengedathletes.org](http://challengedathletes.org) or call 858-866-0959.

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