



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Florida Region of USA Volleyball Announces Class of 2020 Regional Award Winners

The Florida Region of USA Volleyball announces the winners for their 19th annual awards program.

Eustis, FL – June 1, 2020 – The Florida Region of USA Volleyball is proud to recognize some outstanding members for their hard work and commitment to further the sport of volleyball. Many thankless hours go into coaching a team, running a club, attending clinics, getting certified, planning events and improving the region every year. In the past, the Florida Region has presented the awards listed below at their annual Awards Ceremony, however as everyone practices social distancing, it is important that these individuals are recognized for their achievements. This year the Florida Region of USA Volleyball is awarding twenty (20) awards to members across the state of Florida.

Below is a list of the 2020 Award Recipients:

- **Ben Jordan Golden Whistle Award (Outstanding Adult Referee)** – Joe Donnelly (Saint Petersburg, FL)
- **Ashley Morrison Award (Outstanding Junior Referee)** – Taylor Gilman (Oviedo, FL)
- **Outstanding Junior Scorer Award** – Shay Pfendler (Wellington, FL)
- **Outstanding Junior Officiating Team Award** – Quest 16 Teresa (Brandon, FL)
- **Most Improved Juniors Club Award** – Cape Coast Volleyball Club (Cocoa, FL)
- **Outstanding Male Coach Award** – Tony Gaetan (Winter Garden, FL)
- **Outstanding Female Coach Award** – Joy VanDyke (Boynton Beach, FL)
- **Outstanding Club Director Award** – Courtney and Mark Draper (Saint Petersburg, FL)
- **Outstanding Parent Award** – Julie Ferguson (Venice, FL)
- **Outstanding Service Award** – Jeremy Edge (Weston, FL)
- **Norelli Family Extra Mile Award** – Sam Cibrone (Saint Pete Beach, FL)
- **Ernest Langford Pioneer Award** – Chris Seilkop (Deland, FL)
- **Ernest Langford Pioneer Award** – Mark Equizi (Salem, OH)
- **Ernest Langford Pioneer Award** – Chris Halliday (Ocoee, FL)
- **Meritorious Service Award** – Sue Wainio (Lakewood Ranch, FL)
- **Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassador Award** – Hector Negron (Orlando, FL)
- **Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassador Award** – Carlos La Torre (Miami, FL)
- **Honorary Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee** – John Kessel (Colorado Springs, CO)
- **Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee** – Mark Equizi (Salem, OH)
- **Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee** – Chris Halliday (Ocoee, FL)

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The Executive Director of the Florida Region, **Steve Bishop**, commented, "It is a great honor to recognize this year's award winners. They are a special group! Their hard work and dedication to our sport is noteworthy and laudable. Our region is so fortunate to have so many outstanding nominees each year. As the selection committee reviews the nominations, we are reminded of exactly what makes our region so unique and why we are continually successful at the national level. On behalf of our staff, board of directors and our 14,500+ members it is my distinct honor to induct the Class of 2020 for their tireless efforts to the sport of volleyball and to our volleyball family here in the Florida Region. Please join me in celebrating each award winner on their upcoming respective day during the month of June."

Learn more about each of our award recipients:

Joe Donnelly – Ben Jordan Golden Whistle Award (Outstanding Adult Official)

The Ben Jordan Golden Whistle Award is presented to a Florida Region adult official who has been recognized by their peers as an outstanding individual. This person typically displays a high level of professionalism on and off the court, has extensive knowledge of the game and rules, and is of utmost moral character. Joe has been a dedicated referee, player and parent within the Florida Region for many years. He has conducted clinics, earned his National Referee rating and is a great mentor to other officials. The Florida Region Official's Coordinator, **Sue Wainio**, spoke highly of Joe saying, "Though Joe nearly lost his arms in an accident years ago, he has worked hard to be able to come back. He's dependable and has a good knowledge of the rules/game, with a quick wit and good demeanor with players."

Taylor Gilman – Ashley Morrison Award (Outstanding Junior Referee)

The Ashley Morrison Award is presented to a junior referee who has been recognized by their teammates, coaches or adult officials. The recipient should display a very high knowledge of the game and rules. Though the season was cut short due to COVID-19, the Florida Region Official's Coordinator, **Sue Wainio**, quickly noticed Taylor's officiating skills and work ethic. A fun fact about Taylor, is that her mom got her officials certificate at the same time!

Shay Pfendler – Outstanding Junior Scorer Award

Shay was nominated for this award by one of our adult officials, **Dan Walker**. In his nomination, Dan stated, "I would like to nominate Shay Pfendler from Wellington Volleyball for an outstanding junior scorer. Her knowledge of the scoresheet is very good and makes our job as an official a lot better knowing the scoresheet is in good hands and that the match is flowing smoothly." Shay stood out among the other nominees in this category because she was the only one who was nominated by an official rather than a coach or club director. Officials work with a lot of different athletes at many different tournaments so for an official to take time out of their day to nominate someone for this category, she must have stood out! It is important to note that Shay is in her third season and is only thirteen years old!

Quest 16 Teresa – Outstanding Junior Officiating Team Award

It speaks volumes anytime an official takes the time to nominate a team or player for their performance. Florida Region Official, **Steven Dalton**, commented, "I nominated this team because the score sheet was perfect, the line judges were involved in the match making great calls. The R2 called net and center line violations. I had this team as my work team twice. Both times it was the same. I had complete confidence in them. I could not have asked for any more. They were excellent." The Florida Region puts a lot of emphasis on junior referee education and they are proud of the Quest 16 Teresa/Kiki team for going above and beyond with their duties.

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Cape Coast Volleyball Club – Most Improved Juniors Club Award

The Florida Region of USA Volleyball has selected Cape Coast Volleyball Club as their 2020 Most Improved Juniors Club because of the growth in their beach volleyball program. Last season, they had 46 exclusive beach members, making them the largest beach volleyball program in the region. As the sport of beach volleyball has entered the collegiate scene, Cape Coast Volleyball Club has been able to educate their athletes about the opportunities to play in college and connect them with college coaches. It is to be noted that this is the first club to receive this honor due to their beach volleyball program as traditionally this award has been given to an indoor program.

Tony Gaetan – Outstanding Male Coach Award

The Florida Region Outstanding Male Coach Award is presented to someone who displays leadership, integrity and overall dedication to the growth of their athletes and the sport. Tony Gaetan currently coaches for Ocean Bay Volleyball Club and was selected as a training coach for the 2020 Team Florida Indoor High Performance program. Coach Gaetan has made a clear impact in his coaching career as 13 of the 28 nominations for this category were for him. One parent commented, “He puts in 110% to make sure his team is able to perform to the best of their abilities and inspire them to be the best that they can be to build a better future for themselves.” While another parent wrote, “Coach Tony has all of the qualities a coach needs to have. He is positive, enthusiastic, supportive, trusting, focused, goal-oriented, knowledgeable, observant, respectful, patient and a clear communicator. I feel very blessed to have Coach Tony as my son’s coach.”

Joy VanDyke – Outstanding Female Coach Award

The Florida Region Outstanding Female Coach Award is presented to someone who displays leadership, integrity and overall dedication to the growth of their athletes and the sport. Joy VanDyke has coached with Palm Beach Juniors for 13 years and has led multiple teams to the USAV Junior National Championships. **Hannah Heide**, a former player of Coach VanDyke’s wrote, “I played for Coach Joy during my 13’s travel season and now she has been my high school coach for 3 years and every single year she has led us to the state championships, we couldn’t have done it without her. I can’t describe to you how much this coach means to me and so many other players, she is who I aspire to be as a coach and as a person. There is no other coach more deserving of this award than Coach Joy VanDyke.” **Caitlyn Walters**, another athlete from Palm Beach Juniors, commented, “She always gives the best advice on what to do better. She puts in extra time with girls that aren’t even on her team to make us more talented players.”

Courtney and Mark Draper – Outstanding Club Director Award

The Florida Region Outstanding Club Director Award is presented to a club director who has been nominated their athletes, colleagues or other club members. Additionally, they are someone who displays leadership, integrity and an overall dedication to the growth of their club, their athletes and the sport. This year, the Florida Region has selected Courtney and Mark Draper from St. Pete Volleyball Club, as their Outstanding Club Directors. **Hugo Bobea**, a parent from St. Pete Volleyball Club wrote, “Courtney Draper is extremely passionate and dedicated to St. Pete Volleyball Club. You can see it in her eyes. She is always teaching players, coaches and parents in all aspects of this beautiful volleyball sport. She is so strong in character! She is one of those women that teach by talking, but most importantly by modeling. I am proud of her club, and the good reputation of all the girls, coaches and parents that are part of it. She deserves recognition.” While Courtney tackles the coaching and development aspect of the club, Mark oversees many of the behind the scenes responsibilities such as website management and design, tournament registration for all teams, equipment procurement, securing hotel accommodations, and he serves as the liaison to the Florida Region Volleyball Office.

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Julie Ferguson – Outstanding Parent Award

This award represents a parent or parents who have consistently gone above and beyond to set the highest standards of service for other parents across the region to emulate. The Florida Region staff first met Julie Ferguson at the 2019 AVCA Small College Beach Championships, where she had brought her daughters to volunteer. She went above and beyond the volunteer responsibilities and helped the officials by raking the courts when needed. From the moment she arrived at the facility, she had a charisma that was contagious and brightened the day of those around her.

Jeremy Edge – Outstanding Service Award

The Outstanding Service Award is presented to a Florida Region member who has been involved in an act or acts of service which greatly benefit the Region, their members and the overall goal of growing the sport. The Florida Region of USA Volleyball has selected Jeremy Edge as the recipient for this award because he is someone they can always count on to dedicate his time and energy to growing the sport of beach volleyball. **Kristin Stanley**, the Outdoor Events Coordinator at the Florida Region, stated, “Jeremy Edge is always the first person to volunteer his time for the Team Florida Beach High Performance program and our other beach events. He wants to help in any way he can simply because he loves the game so much that it is contagious.”

Sam Cibrone – Norelli Family Extra Mile Award

The Norelli Family Extra Mile Award is presented to the member who has gone the extra mile in order to benefit the region, their members and the overall goal of growing the sport. The Florida Region has selected Sam Cibrone as the recipient of this award for his commitment to growing the sport of beach volleyball here in Florida. Sam Cibrone is the owner of the Sunshine State Outdoor Volleyball Association (SSOVA), the longest running USA Volleyball beach tour in the state of Florida. Additionally, Sam Cibrone offered to donate his portable nets to the Florida Region’s “Think Outside the Gym” project. With schools shut down for the remainder of the school year, many volleyball clubs lost their practice space. The “The Think Outside the Gym” project is an initiative to get traditional indoor clubs to look at the possibility of practicing on grass fields or the beach. With the donation of Sam’s portable nets, the Florida Region will be able to help more clubs stay open and keep athletes playing volleyball.

Sue Wainio – Meritorious Service Award

The Meritorious Service Award is traditionally awarded to someone who has continuously displays acts of service to the region over an extended period of time. This year, the Florida Region has selected Sue Wainio as the recipient of this award for her 10 years of service as the region’s officials coordinator. She is responsible for assisting the Official’s Chair with managing the official’s division of the Florida Region of USA Volleyball which has over 200 members. Additionally, Sue works behind the scenes of the region’s junior officiating training courses, which is taken by more than 10,000 members. The Florida Region would like to thank her for her years of service and honor her work through this award.

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Carlos La Torre and Hector Negron – Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassador Award

This year, the Florida Region has announced that Carlos La Torre and Hector Negron will be added to the list of Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassadors. This title is given to someone who embodies the spirit of volleyball and has gone to great lengths to grow the sport. Carlos La Torre and Hector Negron founded The SpikeNet in 2016 with the goal of becoming the leading digital destination for volleyball content and real-time event coverage. These two men have worked diligently with the Florida Region of USA Volleyball, the International Volleyball Hall of Fame and various clubs across the state of Florida to create eye-catching content and to tell the story of each event. They follow the motto #GrowTheSport and strive to provide fans with a platform to follow the latest volleyball news.

Chris Seilkop – Ernest Langford Pioneer Award

The Ernest Langford Pioneer Award is given to someone who has embarked on a new initiative or program that has contributed to the growth of the sport. Chris Seilkop has played a key role in growing paravolley in the state of Florida and across the nation. Chris has represented the United States in four different Paralympic Games (1996, 2000, 2004, 2016). His first two Paralympics he played on the standing volleyball US Paralympic team. Then in 2004 and 2016 he was a part of the US sitting volleyball team. He has helped bring awareness of sitting volleyball to the Florida Region as he has been a part of the Team Florida Sitting All-Stars since it originated in 2015. Additionally, he has been at the lead of beach paravolley. In 2015, Chris was a part of the first three-man beach team USA Volleyball had ever sent to an international tournament, where the team earned a silver medal! This past year he won the gold medal at the World ParaVolley Beach World Series Pingtan Open.

John Kessel – Honorary Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee

John Kessel is a longtime friend of the Florida Region and has mentored many Florida coaches during his 35 years of working with USA Volleyball. His passion for teaching coaches is contagious and his unique ability to challenge even the most experienced coach in the room has made a positive impact on our sport. John has journeyed to the Florida Region regularly to coach at CAP clinics or lead roundtable coaching discussions. Additionally, he has traveled the world making a positive impact on athletes and coaches with his one-of-a-kind wit and charm. John will retire from USA Volleyball in 2020. Florida Region Executive Director, **Steve Bishop**, commented, "We will be indebted to him for making such a positive impact on the Florida Region and leaving a legacy for others to continue." Though he does not live in Florida, the Florida Region would like to present John Kessel with the highest honor offered and welcome him as an Honorary Member of the Florida Region Volleyball Hall of Fame, Class of 2020.

Chris Halliday and Mark Equizi – Ernest Langford Pioneer Award and Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductees

The Florida Region of USA Volleyball wants to recognize the work that Chris Halliday and Mark Equizi put in at the beginning to make boys volleyball in Florida what it is today. Chris and Mark founded Orlando Gold Volleyball Club in 1990. That same club now has five teams and 49 total players. However, their work expanded past that one club but sparked a movement to grow boys' volleyball across the state of Florida. The Florida Region has grown to over 600 junior male athletes. Though Mark has since moved to Ohio, Chris is still active in the volleyball community and coaches at Winter Park Volleyball Club, a juniors club founded by one of his old players. Florida Region Executive Director, **Steve Bishop**, commented, "Both Mark and Chris are truly pioneers here in the Florida Region. Together, they embarked on a new groundbreaking initiative 30 years ago that has since had a significant impact on the volleyball community in the Florida Region." That is why this year they are being honored with both the Ernest Langford Pioneer Award as well as being inducted in the Florida Region Hall of Fame.

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The Florida Region of USA Volleyball will be dedicating a day to each of the 2020 award recipients beginning on June 2, 2020. Those who are interested will be able to find the dedicated posts on their social media platforms (@floridaregion) as well as on the home page of their website (www.floridavolleyball.org). You can check out the schedule of posts below:

- June 2nd - Joe Donnelly (Ben Jordan Golden Whistle Award)
- June 3rd - Taylor Gilman (Ashley Morrison Award)
- June 4th - Shay Pfendler (Outstanding Junior Scorer Award)
- June 5th - Quest 16 Teresa/Kiki (Outstanding Junior Officiating Team Award)
- June 8th - Cape Coast Volleyball Club (Most Improved Juniors Club Award)
- June 9th - Tony Gaetan (Outstanding Male Coach Award)
- June 10th - Joy VanDyke (Outstanding Female Coach Award)
- June 11th - Courtney and Mark Draper (Outstanding Club Director Award)
- June 12th - Julie Ferguson (Outstanding Parent Award)
- June 15th - Jeremy Edge (Outstanding Service Award)
- June 16th - Sam Cibrone (Norelli Family Extra Mile Award)
- June 17th - Chris Seilkop (Ernest Langford Pioneer Award)
- June 18th - Sue Wainio (Meritorious Service Award)
- June 19th - Hector Negron (Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassador Award)
- June 22nd - Carlos La Torre (Bruce Perry Volleyball Ambassador Award)
- June 23rd - John Kessel (Honorary Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee)
- June 24th - Mark Equizi (Ernest Langford Pioneer Award & Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee)
- June 25th - Chris Halliday (Ernest Langford Pioneer Award & Florida Region Hall of Fame Inductee)

About Florida Region of USA Volleyball:

The Florida Region of USA Volleyball is a 501c3 non-profit that began operations in the 1960's and was officially incorporated in 1982 to promote the sport of volleyball and to create competitive playing opportunities for volleyball enthusiasts of all ages throughout the State of Florida. The Florida Region is one of the 40 regional volleyball associations under the umbrella of USA Volleyball and currently serves 14,500 members. Indoor and outdoor programming is available for adults, juniors, coaches and officials. The Florida Region of USA Volleyball is headquartered in Eustis, FL and manages the 21-court Hickory Point Beach Sand Volleyball Complex in Tavares, FL. Additional information on the Florida Region can be found at: www.FloridaVolleyball.org.

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