

2007 National High School Sophomore of the Year Finalists

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Here are the 25 finalists for 2007 National HIGH SCHOOL Sophomore of the Year. Once again, there were a ton of sophomores who had great high school campaigns. Look for these 25 and other outstanding sophomores like Erica Denney (Colorado), Tori Dixon (Minnesota), Nicole Smith (Tennessee), Sara Metroka (Indiana), Mary Cushman (New York), Ellen Mullins (Tennessee), Stacey Smith (New York) and Casey Read (New Jersey) when the Soph 79 list is released in a few weeks.

Before we reveal the finalists, a little about the process: Two months ago, we first asked coaches across the country to nominate worthy candidates and to supply statistics and a narrative in support. The requirements were steep: to be considered, a top sophomore had to make a "massive" impact on her high school team. "Massive" is a subjective term, but at a minimum required that she be a varsity starter and have stats that were among the team's best. Playing on a team that won a state title, advanced far in the state tournament and/or was nationally ranked was also helpful.

I received more than 200 nominations, from which the 25 finalists were selected. I want to stress that the recognition is based on HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT in 2007, not future collegiate success. What matters is the impact you had on your team and your state.

Next week, we will release the finalists for the Andi Collins Award to the nation's top senior setter and National Senior and Junior of the Year. Once the finalists are out, I will again solicit input from coaches across the country about who the top player in each class should be. Ultimately, however, I will make the call. I take the process of selecting the winner very seriously. Winners will be announced by January 30.

National Sophomore of the Year candidates

Hannah Allison, 5-10 S/OH, Siloam Springs (AR) – Perhaps the state's best player regardless of class, Allison again garnered First Team All State honors in leading the Panthers to another state 5A title. On the season, she had 380 assists, 297 kills, 85 blocks and 72 aces. And she was a team leader despite her tender years. Against eventual state finals opponent Greenwood, Siloam Springs was down 18-11 in Game 3 after splitting the first two sets, when coach Rose Cheek mentioned the possibility of a fifth set. "Coach, there will not be a Game 5 and we will not lose," she said calmly, before taking control of the game and the match to help the Panthers win in four.

Lindsay Biggs, 5-11 OH, Hayden (Topeka KS) – Biggs was a First Team All City and First Team All State selection after helping her team to the Kansas 4A title. She finished the year with 245 kills and was a back row force for the Wildcats. "One thing about Lindsay is that she rarely makes mistakes and when the competition is tough...she doesn't back down," said coach Jessica Farmer. "She can hit from every position and blocks well."

Morgan Broekhuis, 6-4 S/RS, Colorado Springs Christian School (Colorado Springs CO) – The Class 3A Player of the Year, Broekhuis led a Lion team that was supposed to be rebuilding to a fourth consecutive state title. Setting half the time, where she averaged four assists per game, Broekhuis also averaged more than four kills per game to lead her league by a wide margin. This elite lefty, who was MVP of the state tournament, has a chance to graduate two years

down the road with four state titles in hand.

Chanel Brown, 5-10 OH, Valley Christian (Chandler AZ) – Overlooked by PrepVolleyball.com last year as a freshman despite earning All State honors in Class 2A, Brown made an even louder statement in 2007. The 10-0 toucher amassed 620 kills (second on the team behind Senior Ace Alaina Bergsma), a team-leading 452 digs, 121 aces and 86 blocks for a team that reached the state semifinals. She again made the Arizona All-State team as well as the Phoenix Metro All-Region squad.

Ashley Edmond, 5-11 OH, Marquette Catholic (Michigan City IN) – One of Indiana’s best sophomores regardless of class, Edmond had a dream 2007, amassing well over 500 kills and 400 digs for the four-time defending Class A champion Blazers. Edmond, one of three amazing sophomores on the Marquette team, capped her year with 23 kills and 11 digs in the state final. She was First team All-State, All-Area MVP and All-conference MVP and showed how dominant she could be when playing injury-free.

Falyn Fonoimoana, 6-4 RS, Mira Costa (Manhattan Beach CA) – Fonoimoana started on last year’s Mira Costa team and played a supporting role in the Mustangs’ run to the national title. This year, despite playing with five senior starters, she dominated the court as Costa became the first school in PrepVolleyball.com history to repeat as national champs. No one brought more heat from the pins than Fono, who finished the year with 391 kills. The sophomore also showed off a deft touch in the back row with 190 digs, a lethal top spin jump serve and intimidating size on the block at the net. She “lost out” on Area Player of the Year to senior teammate Kendall Bateman, but won just about everything else: MVP at Torrey Pines, First Team All Area, CIF Southern Section Division I co-Player of the Year (with Bateman) and, finally, State Tournament MVP. It truly was a brilliant year for a brilliant player.

Natalie Hagglund, 5-8 OH/L, La Costa Canyon (Carlsbad CA) – Voted Palomar League Player of the Year ahead of stud junior teammate Katie Fuller and CIF Division I Player of the Year, Hagglund had a deep impact for the Mavericks, who were supposed to be rebuilding yet reloaded to win the San Diego Section and come within two wins of playing for the state Division I title. She finished the year with 159 kills, 334 digs and 68 aces and was a great passer in serve-receive. She also is the reigning Interscholastic Surfing Federation Champion for longboarders!

Emily Juhl, 5-9 OH, Sacred Heart (Louisville KY) – Despite facing off against several nationally-ranked opponents, Juhl was usually the most dominant player on the court, using her leaping ability and whip-like arm to score at will from the outside or the middle. She led the Valkyries in both kills and aces, recording 517 terminations (while hitting .476) and 122 spaders. Juhl also stuffed the stat sheet with 261 digs and 119 blocks. The only sophomore to make First Team All State, this youngster more than lived up to her namesake.

Maddie Martin, 6-1 OH, Plant (Tampa FL) – A youngster on a young Plant team, Martin filled a leadership role with distinction, helping the Panthers repeat their Class 5A state crown. She led the team in kills with 308, while adding 78 aces, 200 digs and 38 solo stuffs. Her effort paid off in First Team All County and First Team All State honors.

Megan Norton, 5-11 OH, Harvard-Westlake (North Hollywood CA) – A force on the left and in the back row, Norton helped a team loaded with 10 seniors win the California Division III title. Her virtuoso performance in the state final earned her state tournament MVP honors.

Alexis Olgard, 6-5 MB, Mead (Spokane WA) – The consensus best sophomore in the state, some say Olgard is the best player regardless of class, big talk considering that two big timers from the Evergreen State were among the nation’s top 50 recruits recently released. On a senior-dominated team, Olgard filled up the stat sheet for her one-loss team, which won the 4A title for the fifth consecutive year. She had 316 kills, 120 blocks, 59 aces and 109 digs and earned First Team All League and First Team All State honors.

Jazmine Orozco, 6-1 OH, Lakewood (CA) – MVP of the state tournament after leading Lakewood to its first-ever California Division I title, Orozco finished the year with 394 kills, tops on a loaded team, was second in blocks and third in aces and was a key contributor in the back row as well. Orozco was Press-Telegram Dream Team co-Player of the Year, First Team All League, Second Team All CIF-Southern Section Div. I and Lakewood Team MVP.

Christine Pinder, 5-9 OH, Buchholz (Gainesville FL) – A very twitchy player, the athletic Pinder led the state 6A champion Bobcats in kills and was second in digs playing on a senior-dominated team. She was at her best in the state tournament and earned Second-Team All State honors. Three Buchholz seniors were First Team selections.

Stephanie Preach, 5-8 S, Xavier Prep (Phoenix AZ) – Preach capped off a sensational season by recording 41 assists, 14 digs, 4 kills, 4 blocks and an ace in Xavier's state-championship victory over Mountain Pointe in Division 5A-I. She also had a triple double (49 assists, 13 kills and 13 digs) in a regular-season match and finished the year with 135 kills, 238 digs, 109 aces, 100 blocks and more than 1,000 assists. The southpaw was the only sophomore named First Team All State, a feat achieved only by one other player in Arizona volleyball history. She was also named the Desert Valley Region Player of the Year, the first sophomore ever to win this award. “Stephanie is one of the most complete volleyball players I have ever worked with skill wise and mentally,” said coach Tim McHale. “Her leadership and poise under pressure were the key cogs in our success this year.”

Lauren Rafdal, 6-2 OH, Brebeuf Jesuit (Indianapolis IN) – The first player at Brebeuf ever to eclipse 400 kills and 300 digs in a season, Rafdal led Brebeuf back to the state 3A Final Four after a one-year absence. Her fine play earned her First Team All County and First Team All State 3A honors. She also was Second Team All Super Team by the Indy Star.

Taylor Richard, 5-10 OH, Silverado (Henderson NV) – A double-double machine, Richard usually eclipsed 20 kills and 20 digs per match over the course of Silverado's 33-9 season. First Team All Sunrise division and the Skyhawks's Offensive Player of the Year, Richard led Silverado to the 4A state title in 2007.

Ariel Scott, 6-4 MB, Immaculate Heart Academy (Washington Township NJ) – Intimidating at the net, Scott emerged as the top offensive and blocking threat for New Jersey's best team, amassing 287 kills, 54 aces, 83 digs and 45 blocks. She was at her best at the Tournament of Champions, the five-team affair pitting all of the state champs, where her MVP turn pushed IHA to the championship. She was one of three sophomores to earn Second Team All State honors. “As far as potential goes, the sky is the limit for Ariel,” said IHA co-coach Mike DeCastro. “She could possibly be one of the best (if not the best) to have ever come out of New Jersey when she graduates.”

Amy Scullion, 5-11 OH, Salem (OH) – Scullion was a key reason Salem reached the state Final Four in Division II without a single blemish on its record. She had 20 kills and 10 digs in a five-set loss to eventual champ Toledo Central Catholic in the state semifinals, capping a year in which the 10-0 toucher had more than 300 kills and almost 200 digs. She was District I Player of the Year, Columbiana County Player of the Year and a Div. II First Team All-State selection.

Taylor Unroe, 5-7 OH, Burriss (Muncie IN) – First Team All Conference, First Team All Area and First Team All State, Unroe led the Owls in kills, digs and aces in 2007 and to another state title in Class 2A. “Taylor developed into a complete player this season,” said coach Steve Shondell. “She is a great competitor who rose to the occasion many times this season as the ‘go-to’ player for the Owls.”

Rachel Williams, 5-11 OH, Archbishop Mitty (San Jose CA) – On a balanced team that resided in the top 10 nationally for much of the year, Williams was the highlight reel on the pins for the Monarchs, the player teams game

planned for but had a tough time stopping. She finished the year with 280 blocks, was a key cog in her team reaching the California state finals for the fifth straight time and earned First Team All League and First Team All Mercury News honors. Williams also made the all-State Tournament Team and was Mercury News Sophomore of the Year.

Hannah Willms, 5-11 OH, Dike-New Hartford (Dike IA) – Willms put up massive numbers for the Wolverines, who advanced to the state Class 2A finals. She finished the year with more than 500 kills and also was a force on defense, both at the net and in the back row. She was named First Team All-Metro by the Waterloo-Cedar Valley Courier and was one of only two underclassmen on the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union's eight-player “Elite All-State Team.”

Chelsea Wintzinger, 5-7 S, Huntsville (AL) – For the third year in a row, Wintzinger quarterbacked Huntsville High to a state title and was named to the 6A State All-Tournament Team for the third consecutive time. Last year's National Freshman of the Year, Wintzinger led Huntsville with 1,448 assists and aces with 94. She also had 172 kills, 303 digs and 86 blocks, huge numbers for this tremendous athlete who knows how to win. Her effort was recognized with First Team All State and First Team All Metro honors.

Ashley Wittman, 6-0 OH, Shakopee (MN) – Shakopee had never been to the state tournament before 2007, but this sophomore not only led the Sabers there, she pushed the team all the way to the large-class state title! She finished the year with 425 kills (4.8 per game) and hit .400, all team highs. She also was second in blocks with 59, third in digs with 282 and a very accurate passer. One rival coach had this to say about her: “She keeps getting better and better. She's developed a plethora of shots, has incredible ball control skills and contributes to her team both in the front and back court. A rare, highly gifted all-around player. I saw her play this summer at the HP tournament in Florida against talented, older youth players and dominate.” One of two sophomores named First Team All State, Wittman also made the All State Tournament Team and was the only sophomore on the All Metro First Team.

Mali's Yoon, 5-9 S, Iolani (Honolulu HI) – Yoon stepped in for graduated four-year starter Kapua Kamana'o and led the Raiders to the state Division I final. In a state that plays best two out of three, Yoon averaged 23 assists per match and contributed at the net, on defense and behind the service line as well, amassing 133 kills, 112 blocks, 324 digs and 43 aces. A great decision maker, Yoon was the only sophomore and the only setter to be named First Team All State.

Lindsay Young, 6-0 MB, Berkeley Prep (Tampa FL) – A pre-season transfer pushed Young to the middle, a move she handled with ease and class. Against probably the toughest schedule in the state, Young led the Bucs in kills with 297, in blocks with 141 and was a primary passer for a team that lost to eventual champion Lake Highland in the Class 3A semifinals. Young earned All County honors from both local papers and was First Team All State as well. “I am sure if we had been able to keep Lindsay on the outside her stats would look even more impressive, but I don't think her contribution to our overall team success would have been as great,” said coach Randy Dagostino. “Lindsay was our physical leader on the court.”