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Sam Kramer of Fairfield University and Eli Thomas of the University of Connecticut Named Hartford HealthCare Connecticut Courage Award Winners

Courageous student-athletes honored at ceremonies today with Rebecca Lobo

HARTFORD, Conn. – FEB. 10, 2020— The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), in association with Hartford HealthCare, Connecticut’s most comprehensive healthcare network, have selected **Sam Kramer**, a senior point guard for **Fairfield University’s** women’s basketball team, and **Eli Thomas**, a senior and a former member of the **University of Connecticut** football team, as recipients of the **Hartford HealthCare Connecticut Courage Award**. At a pair of ceremonies today, the program’s ambassador, Rebecca Lobo, presented each of the honorees with a plaque and their schools with a \$1,250 donation to the general scholarship funds in their names to help future students achieve their dreams.

Each month, two inspiring student-athletes who have demonstrated courage in the face of adversity—such as overcoming injury, illness or other challenges—are recognized as **Hartford HealthCare Connecticut Courage Award Winners**. A panel of writers, editors and sports information directors from CoSIDA, AP and *College Hoops Illustrated*, as well as Ms. Lobo, select the honorees. Hartford HealthCare will donate a total of \$15,000 to the general scholarship funds for the student-athletes being honored throughout the year.

Previous winners this year have included: **Taylor Herd**, a senior guard on the **Quinnipiac University** women’s basketball team; **Chris Liggio**, a senior running back for the **University of New Haven** football team; **Samara Johnson**, a member of the **Eastern Connecticut State University** cross-country and track & field teams; and **Ace McAlister**, a member of the **Trinity College** cross-country and track & field teams.

Kramer, a 5-foot, 6-inch native of Bernardsville, N.J., lost her father in December 2018—right in the middle of the basketball season—after his very sudden battle with hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH), an illness rare in adults, in which the body produces too many

activated immune cells, which led to non-Hodgkin's T-cell lymphoma. After missing two games, Kramer returned to the starting line-up and from her return through the end of the season she led the MAAC in 3-point percentage. She also led the conference with an average of 36.6 minutes played per conference game while posting 7.3 points, 3.6 assists and 2.9 rebounds per game on the season. Three months after her father's passing, on the eve of the 2018-19 MAAC Tournament, she shared the experience of coping with her father's death in a touching [ESPNW essay](#). As a captain for the Stags this season, the two-time MAAC All-Academic Team member, who has a major in Marketing and a minor in Management, is averaging a career-high 9.9 points, 3.6 assists and 3.2 rebounds per game. She currently stands ninth all-time for the Stags with 136 career 3-pointers in 110 career games.

Thomas' college football journey has truly been a profile in courage and perseverance. In 2017, he transferred to UConn from Lackawanna Junior College, where his career was limited to just four games in 2015. He sat out the entire 2014 season after his first serious knee injury required surgery. Then in 2016, he was forced to undergo another knee surgery, wiping out that season. Following a season of rehab, he transferred to UConn in 2017, but before arriving at Storrs, Conn., he suffered another knee injury and was forced to sit out the season with his third ACL surgery. Healthy in 2018, the 6-foot-1, 220-pound Elmira, N.Y., native immediately cracked the Huskies line-up, playing in five games at linebacker and starting one and recording 11 tackles, one sack and a forced fumble. Then, on October 10, right before he was to participate in a work-out, Thomas suffered a stroke. He spent 10 days in the hospital, and another week in a rehab facility, regaining his physical strength and mobility. He moved into his brother's house for a few months to work every day with his sister-in-law, a speech therapist. By the start of the 2019 school year he was back on campus, but despite the remarkable recovery, his playing career was over. Regardless, he was selected as a team captain in 2019 and throughout the season worked out and travelled with the team. His commitment to the program earned him the Alumni Award, presented to a senior who is the manifestation of the ultimate team player. He is currently on track to earn his degree in Applied Resource Economics.

"Hartford HealthCare is excited to recognize these two remarkable young student-athletes, who despite setbacks, have overcome challenges to continue to perform their best as both scholars and athletes," says Jeffrey A. Flaks, president and chief executive officer of Hartford HealthCare. "Our organization's purpose is to help people live their healthiest lives, and both Sam and Eli's courageous stories of recovery and perseverance are an inspiration to all."

Sports information directors at all colleges and universities in Connecticut can nominate deserving male and female intercollegiate student-athletes through March 30, 2020, at HartfordHealthCareCourageAward.com.

"We thank Hartford HealthCare for helping us create a platform to share the personal stories of courage for student-athletes at colleges and universities throughout Connecticut," says Doug Vance, executive director of CoSIDA. "We hope the stories of the personal challenges that these remarkable young men and women have battled can inspire other young people to show courage in the face of adversity in their own lives."

As the **Hartford HealthCare Courage Award Ambassador**, Ms. Lobo will attend award ceremonies with several of the honorees and help raise awareness for their inspiring stories of courage. Ms. Lobo retired in 2003, is a member of the National Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, the Naismith National Basketball Hall of Fame and the CoSIDA Academic All-America Hall of Fame. She has served on the Board of Directors for Hartford Hospital, where she was born. She currently works as a television analyst, author and motivational speaker and lives in Connecticut with her husband and their four children.

About Hartford HealthCare: With 30,000 colleagues and total operating revenue of \$4.3 billion, Hartford HealthCare has cultivated a strong, unified culture of accountability and innovation. Its care-delivery system, with more than 360 locations serving 185 towns and cities, includes two tertiary-level teaching hospitals, an acute-care community teaching hospital, an acute-care hospital and trauma center, three community hospitals, the state's most extensive behavioral health network, a large multispecialty physician group, a clinical care organization, a regional home care system, an array of senior care services, and a large physical therapy and rehabilitation network. Hartford HealthCare's unique, system-wide Institute Model offers a single, high standard of care in crucial specialties at hospital and ambulatory sites across Connecticut. The institutes include: Cancer, Heart and Vascular, Ayer Neuroscience, Orthopedics and Tallwood Urology. Visit Hartford HealthCare at www.hartfordhealthcare.org.

About CoSIDA (College Sports Information Directors of America): CoSIDA was founded in 1957 and is a 3,000+ member national organization comprised of the sports public relations, media relations and communications/information professionals throughout all levels of collegiate athletics in the United States and Canada. The organization is the second oldest management association in intercollegiate athletics. For more than 60 years, CoSIDA has recognized student-athletes as part of its Academic All-America awards program. The Hartford HealthCare Courage Award is the third CoSIDA award specifically for student-athletes. Approximately 5,000 student-athletes are recognized each year for their excellence in the classroom and in competition. To learn more, visit cosida.com.

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