



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:00 AM Pacific**  
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## **89<sup>th</sup> Annual Sports Star of the Year Awards to Recognize Championships, Major Events, and Iconic Washington Figures**

**2014 Super Bowl Champion Seahawks, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seattle Storm championship, Megan Rapinoe retirement part of annual celebration alongside Honorees Larry Stone and Guyle Fielder for Sports Star of the Year Awards Show presented by Microsoft**

SEATTLE – The Seattle Sports Commission announced the initial lineup of award honorees and a special celebration of Washington sports following a year packed with major accomplishments.

The annual awards show and gala, commonly referred to as “Washington’s ESPYs,” has expanded from a newspaper byline turned awards banquet to a red-carpet gala complete with a Hollywood-esque Media Row buzzing with live interviews, a Champions Gallery of trophies and memorabilia to catch the eye of any Washington sports fan, and a fully-produced awards show that brings the best of Washington sports’ past and present together.

"The Sports Star of the Year Awards is an evening to celebrate the power of sports in our community," said Microsoft VP Strategic Partnerships Jeff Hansen. "Microsoft is honored to partner with the Seattle Sports Commission to further enhance the social and economic impact of world-class sporting events in our region."

For the 89<sup>th</sup> iteration, athletic achievements of 2023 will be emphasized in the Sports Star and Sports Story Awards, to be announced in early January, as will milestones that catapulted Washington sports into global headlines. "It was an incredible year to be a sports fan in Seattle," said Seattle Sports Commission President and CEO Beth Knox. "From MLB All-Star Week and NCAA Women’s Basketball Super Regionals to the culmination of Megan Rapinoe’s career with the Reign, we plan to draw the energy and atmosphere into one giant sports party for our community."

Several championship teams will be featured in this year’s event, including the Seahawks 2014 Super Bowl win, the Storm’s first WNBA victory (2004), and a program-wide recognition as Seattle Sounders FC enters its 50<sup>th</sup> season.

With a dedication to reporting hometown stories and history with the event that dates back to the 1950s, KING 5 will air this year's event. "KING 5 is delighted to be a part of Sports Star," said Christy Moreno, KING 5 President and General Manager. "With the 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympics on the horizon, we’ll be working with the Sports Commission to recognize the past, present and future of Washington sports and continue our tradition of exceptional sports reporting."

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Sports Star celebrates the holistic footprint of our local sports culture with several Honoree Award categories that recognize front office staff, storytellers behind the camera, and the organizations and individuals inspiring the future.

## **89th Annual Sports Star of the Year Awards Show Honoree Award Recipients**

**Royal Brougham Sports Legend, Guyle Fielder** | Ice hockey great spent 15 of his 22 years with the Seattle Totems

**Keith Jackson Media Excellence, Larry Stone** | Long-tenured Seattle Times sports columnist retired in 2023

**Wayne Gittinger Inspirational Youth, Olivia Vitello** | Young softball enthusiast inspires others with her “I can. And I will” mantra while navigating an incurable genetic disease

**Sports Equity and Inclusion Award, Rise Above** | Using sport to build confidence and empower Native youth

Honorees and Award recipients are selected by the Sports Star Nominations Committee, composed of local sports historians, media, and industry colleagues. Extended Honoree bios are below, and a full list of this year’s nominees and award recipients will be shared on social media and [seattlesports.org](http://seattlesports.org).

### **Royal Brougham Sports Legend Award – Guyle Fielder**

Guyle Fielder is one of ice hockey’s greats. The former center holds career records in minor league hockey, where he logged most of his 1,597 games, 1,574 assists, 463 goals, and 2,037 points playing in the Western Hockey League from 1952 to 1973. As the first and only American professional hockey player to score over 2,000 points and the fourth-most leading scorer in pro ice hockey, Fielder resides with Gretzky, Jágr, and Howe in contention for the greatest of all time.

Fielder learned to play hockey in the farmlands of Saskatchewan with a 25-cent stick and frozen horse manure for a puck. A scout picked him out in 1952, and after a stint with the Red Wings during the 1953 Stanley Cup playoffs, fate realigned him to Seattle and the Western Hockey League. A six-time WHL MVP, three-time most gentlemanly player, and nine-time WHL leading scorer, “Golden Guyle” was beloved by fans and teammates alike. Of his 22 years in professional hockey, 15 were in Seattle, helping the Seattle Totems to five WHL finals and championships in 1959, 1967, and 1968.

In 2022, the Seattle Kraken created the Guyle Fielder Award as the first-ever player award for the franchise, which recognizes a player for outstanding sportsmanship and leadership.

### **Keith Jackson Media Excellence Award – Larry Stone**

For nearly 50 years, Larry Stone has been one of the most trusted voices in sports, with the deserved familiarity and respect of his peers, readers, and the very sports teams he has covered in his 27 years at the Seattle Times. Stone began his post-college newspaper career with the Yakima Herald-Republic in 1979 and expanded his reach across the West Coast before landing at The Times in 1996. Just one year later, his love of baseball positioned him as a must-read across the league.

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Look no further than Stone's bio as a sportswriter offering *insight, wisdom, opinion, analysis - and hopefully some humor - regarding the wide world of sports*, for the snapshot of his influence on Washington sports culture.

While Stone has covered and helped dole out countless sports awards, he has also been a recipient – with a multitude of Associated Press Sports Editors writing awards and was thrice named Washington's Sportswriter of the Year by the National Sports Media Association.

Setting his pen (and laptop) down following his 2023 retirement announcement, the many friends Stone beget during his tenure will surely miss that wit and wisdom in the press box.

### **Sports Equity and Inclusion Award – Rise Above**

Founded in 2015 by Native hoops legend Jaci McCormack, Rise Above uses basketball as the draw to engage Native youth in building the skills and resilience to overcome their circumstances and write their own futures.

Rise Above offers a variety of programs including sports, education, financial literacy, prevention skills and mentorship, designed to spark change in people's lives. With the help of partners including over 30 tribes, investors, prevention advocates, sports legends, and Hollywood stars, Rise Above has served over 10,000 kids in the past 8 years in the Pacific Northwest.

As the CEO of Rise Above, Jaci leads the organization in its mission to empower youth. In 2022, Jaci presented at the White House Conference on Hunger Nutrition, and Health, and was recently appointed by Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell to serve on Seattle's first Indigenous Advisory Council.

Jaci fell in love with basketball growing up on the Nez Perce Reservation, where she earned a scholarship and sunk the buzzer-beating shot to help her alma mater win the 2005 NCAA Tournament. Her story of hard work and hope is the subject of an upcoming film, and her drive to give back through the sport that gave so much to her is the ultimate success story. From its inception, Rise Above has helped others to take pride in their stories by highlighting those who have come before.

### **Wayne Gittinger Inspirational Youth Award presented by Seattle Children's – Olivia Vitello**

When Olivia Vitello went in for her six-year wellness visit in 2018, her pediatrician was concerned that she was falling off the growth chart. She recommended Olivia see a neurologist at Seattle Children's.

After many referrals and tests, doctors determined a diagnosis: a rare genetic disorder called Morquio. Olivia's condition requires a lifelong treatment plan of weekly enzyme infusions, which are four hours long and come with considerable out-of-pocket costs. Olivia had to make a plan to overcome her severe needle phobia each week in order to receive her medicine, and that's how she and her mom came up with the mantra: "I can. And I will."

Despite the hurdles that come with an incurable disease, Olivia is an active 7<sup>th</sup> grader with a heart to pay it forward and the spirit of an impassioned sports fanatic. Her love of softball, particularly of the UW Husky variety, sustained her through eight surgeries and more than 200 infusions to-date. But it's Olivia and her mom's life mantra that has inspired her family to create the annual *I Can And I Will Run* fundraiser that helps them, and others, put one foot in front of the other.

**The Seattle Sports Commission (SSC)** is committed to making Seattle a world-class sports community by creating opportunities that bring the world to the Pacific Northwest. The SSC seeks to strengthen social and economic impact, encourage generational engagement in athletics, and bolster pride in our communities. Go to [seattlesports.org](http://seattlesports.org) to learn more about the SSC. [LINK TO PRESS KIT HERE](#)