

2025 Application for the Inspiration Award for Principals, Coaches, ADs, and Community Supporters

Name

Jessie Arnold

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High School with which you are associated.

Harlem High School

What do you do for this school?

English Teacher and Cheerleading Coach

Nominated by Rodney Holder

She has been battling breast cancer for the last two years and she hasn't missed anything. Her composure, strength and fight is off the charts and what she is pouring into our cheer girls and school is amazing. She is so bold, strong and loving even when life is not that way towards her. Jessie is amazing

My name is Jessie Arnold, and I am the AP Language and Composition teacher and one of the cheerleading coaches at Harlem High School. I am truly humbled and honored to have been nominated for the GHSA Inspiration Award. I have coached cheerleading at Harlem High School for the past five years, five years as the JV Football Cheerleading coach, and three years as a co-coach for our Game Day Competition squad. It truly has been a blessing to be a part of this program and coach alongside a best friend, and to not only coach amazing athletes, but to have the privilege to mold and impact young ladies on their journey into adulthood.

During the summer of 2024, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer that had metastasized to my liver. As one can imagine, this news came as a complete shock and was utterly devastating. Not only did I have two small children, but I was only 35 years old. Part of my extreme denial was feeling the strong desire to maintain all normalcy. I craved the basic day-to-day of my everyday life. I remember telling my best friend and co-coach, "I just want to go to work and go to cheerleading practice." It sounded outlandish to say when we both knew the difficult road ahead, but that's just what I did. Yes, I had to miss school for chemotherapy appointments, scans, and utter exhaustion, but I did everything in my power to keep my life business as usual. I did this not only for myself, but for my students, my cheerleaders, and for my own children. This diagnosis was life-altering for me, and I was fully aware of the impact it would have on those who were a part of my everyday life as well. It was important to me to maintain normalcy for everyone, as to not cause worry and stress on those who loved me. I wore a Cold-Cap during chemotherapy to preserve a bulk of my hair. I tattooed my eyebrows on to ensure that my face stayed somewhat the same. I needed to look like myself, so I could be myself in the classroom, on the mat, and in my home. I needed to be present to show my squad, my students, and my own children that it is possible to do hard things. It is possible to be brave and scared at the same time. It is possible to adapt, overcome, and remain graceful, even in the midst of total anger and confusion. Since my diagnosis, I have since undergone chemotherapy, a double mastectomy, and reconstruction. Throughout this, while I did miss my fair share of school after surgery, I never missed a game, nor did I never miss a competition, and I am so very blessed that I didn't have to.

I know it sounds like I did all of this for other people...for the kids and my family. This is partially true, as this was the initial goal. However, I am convinced and can say with absolute certainty that if it weren't for the kids, my job, my co-workers, my best friend, my family, my husband, and my own babies, paired with the mighty hands of God, I would have never been able to be this tough. I wouldn't have been able to maintain such a positive headspace. I would have never had the courage, nor the willpower to bounce back as quickly as I did. I'm not quite sure I am the inspiration here, as I am the one who stands in complete awe by the love and support that I received from my entire community. Harlem inspired me, both mentally and physically, to overcome my situation, and I truly needed them more than they needed me.

I am proud to say that during this particularly rough season, our Game Day Competition squad placed 6th in state for the 3A division, and it was only our second year competing. To end a great season, I also co-coached Team Georgia for the News Channel 6 Border Bowl Game with my best friend and co-coach, Kayla Schnitzler, as well, and what an honor and experience to have gotten to coach so many amazing athletes from the CSRA. It was a busy year full of appointments and procedures, but it was also a year full of blessings. It was a blessing to “ring the bell” surrounded by so many students and athletes who came to surprise me at the cancer center in the middle of a school day. It was a blessing to watch my squad of girls overcome big emotions due to my diagnosis with the grace and support of one another. It was a blessing to see my school and community “pink out” our stadium in honor of not just me, but so many others who have been in my shoes. True beauty and blessings come from ashes.

I currently receive immunotherapy infusions, but I am doing well and currently free of “active disease”...a true miracle and blessing! I firmly believe that teaching and coaching through this entire process has helped me remain hopeful, positive, determined, and supported. I am truly honored and humbled to have been nominated for such a special award, and I am only an inspiration because of all of the love that inspired me.

November 1, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my absolute pleasure to write this letter for Jessie Arnold, a remarkable educator, coach, and friend whose strength and dedication inspire each and everyone around her. Over the years I have had the privilege and pleasure of knowing Jessie not only as a dear friend, but also a colleague whose commitment to her students and her athletes never wavers, even in the face of one of life's most challenging battles.

During her courageous battle against breast cancer throughout the 2024-2025 season, Jessie continued pouring her heart into teaching and coaching. Her dedication to her cheerleaders on Thursday and Friday nights and competition Saturdays remained unmatched, even on the hard days of treatment when she didn't feel like herself at all. She showed up for her students and her cheerleaders with the same energy, enthusiasm, and compassion that define her every single day. Her resilience and positivity became a lesson far beyond the classroom or the cheer mat. She showed our kids at Harlem what true courage, perseverance, and grace looked like.

As a teacher, Jessie goes above and beyond to create a classroom environment where every student feels seen, supported, and capable of success. As a cheerleading coach, she instills teamwork, leadership, and confidence in her athletes. She helps them grow not only in skill but most importantly in character. Her ability to motivate and uplift others even while facing adversity, is truly extraordinary. Throughout our last season our cheerleading squad adopted the belief that "even in fear, we can still be brave." Coach Arnold was the living, breathing embodiment of living out this truth.

It is an honor to recommend Jessie Arnold for the GHSA Inspiration Award. She represents the best of what it means to be an educator, coach, friend, and human being. Her journey and continued dedication are a testament to her unwavering spirit and the profound impact she has on our community here in Harlem, Georgia. She continues to inspire everyone around her through strength, humility, and heart, and I can think of no one more deserving of this recognition.

With Deep Appreciation and Kindest Regards,

Kayla Schnitzler
Harlem High School
Varsity Cheerleading Coach
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