

2025 Application for the Inspiration Award for Student-athletes presented by Piedmont Orthopedics by OrthoAtlanta.

Name

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Year in school

Senior

Nominated by Hayley Garner

Maggie is an all-around great person and a great athlete. She cheers her heart out for every team available, every season (football, competition, basketball, & Game Day). This summer, Maggie fainted while at a church camp and fractured her jaw in five places. Not only was her jaw wired shut for over a month, she could no longer do what she loved: cheer. But she was diligent in following her doctor's orders, still came to every practice, and FINALLY, after 3 months and many appointments, she was released to resume activities. We put her back on the mat immediately, and she has worked hard to re-learn the material (all while wearing a giant mouth guard). She could have chosen a completely different attitude and not worked hard to return, but she stayed so positive and so focused; and our team is much better with her as a part of it! Her resiliency is inspiring!

Margaret "Maggie" Norris

Inspiration Award nominee 2025

If you had asked me a few months ago why someone may nominate me for an Inspiration Award for Student-Athletes I would've talked about my experience on multiple sports teams. I would've written about being on the North Gwinnett High School varsity competition cheer team, varsity game day cheer team and varsity football spirit cheer team, as well as being a member of the varsity track & field team as a pole vaulter. I would've told you about competing at State with each of these teams and how it felt to be named a 6A Georgia State Champion last year with my game day cheer team. I would have written about being on competitive club teams outside of school for both cheer and pole vault, and how I manage my time, grades, relationships with family and friends, volunteering at church and being a leader in each of my activities. However, I had an experience this past summer that had a major impact on my life and my sports.

At the end of July, I was in Daytona, Florida with my church's high school ministry. I was so excited to be there as a senior for my final beach trip with my friends. As we were getting ready in our condo for the night's activities, I fainted, landing face-first with nothing to break my fall, but my chin. When I came to, I knew my chin was cut and a couple teeth were chipped. My leader thought I may have a concussion, so we headed to the emergency department. I was able to facetime my parents and they talked to the church nurse and leaders and began to make plans to bring me home. At the hospital, they ran lots of bloodwork to make sure I wasn't sick, did concussion testing, which I passed and sewed my chin back together. Even though my bottom teeth had shifted and I couldn't move my jaw correctly, the hospital released me to rejoin the church camp without doing any imaging. I was feeling pretty good and was able to stay for the rest of camp instead of coming home early. Thankfully, my parents talked to our dentist and after showing him pictures he put me on a liquid diet, then after further consideration upgraded me to a no-chew diet.

I had big plans when I returned home from camp to compete and PR in my final pole vault meet of the summer and to compete in the Georgia Cheerleader of the Year competition. I had been nominated to represent my high school for Georgia Cheerleader of the Year by my cheer coach and had made it to the Top 30! I had a great routine choreographed and a stunt group that would travel with me to Columbus for the competition.

At my dentist's direction my parents took me to see an oral surgeon so that I could be evaluated for any dislocations or fractures in my jaw. We were all praying that the ongoing

mobility issues in my jaw were from trauma and swelling that would take time to resolve. It was at that appointment, five days after my accident and five days before the Cheerleader of the Year competition, that we found out my lower jaw was broken in three places, and my right cheek bone was broken in two places. I was taken into surgery right away to wire my jaw shut for the next 2-4 weeks. He talked about how lucky I was to have been put on a no-chew diet because none of the bones were displaced and he was hopeful for a great recovery. He told me that I would be out of my sports for the next two to three months. I was devastated, but told my parents right away that, if allowed, I wanted to complete the Cheerleader of the Year competition.

I met with my coach and stunt group to rework my routine, removing all tumbling, stunts and jumps. I met with another coach to practice talking and answering interview questions while having my jaw wired shut. On the day of the competition, I competed knowing that I wouldn't be able to earn the points necessary to be named to the All-State team, or my goal which was to be named Georgia Cheerleader of the Year. I competed for myself, for my school and coaches, and for my family and friends that were all there supporting me. With my jaw wired shut, I led the crowd in a chant, then performed my routine, "marking" the skills that I was medically unable to perform. There were lots of tears, mainly from my parents and grandparents, as they were bursting with pride and heartbroken at the same time. I was proud of my performance, and after was approached by a really nice woman. She told me that my performance that day was the best show of sportsmanship and athleticism that she had ever seen and that everyone would remember what I had done. That is when I realized that this day is going to be an experience that I am going to pull from for the rest of my life.

All in all, I had my jaw wired shut for 4.5 weeks and was on a liquid diet for 10 weeks. I went to every team practice so that when I was finally medically released, I would be able to rejoin my teams. After 3 months, I was able to return to the mat to compete with the NGHS competition cheer team and a couple weeks later I returned to pole vault practice. Throughout this process I've been complimented on my boldness, perseverance, strength of body and character and mostly for having a positive attitude and outlook during a really hard experience. Would I want to go through something like this again? No! However, I know that I can face hard times and not be broken. I can take senior pictures with a closed mouth grin instead of my open smile. I can adapt and grow through adversity, and I can help others as they face hard times. Maybe that makes this experience all worth it in the end.

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"All Students Can Be Leaders"



NATHAN BALLANTINE
Principal

To whom this may concern,

This letter serves as a recommendation for Maggie Norris for the GHSA Inspiration Award.

I have had the privilege of coaching Maggie since her freshman year of high school on our competitive cheerleading team; she is a talented athlete who is an integral part of our entire cheerleading program, and it is my honor to write a recommendation for her after the difficult senior season she has had.

Coaching Maggie Norris for four years has been nothing but a joy! Besides a strong skillset, coaches hope for our athletes to bring great leadership skills, a positive attitude, and a strong work ethic to our program, and those three attributes are exactly who Maggie is every day.

The start of this season was no different. Maggie brings an energy to the competition mat that is unmatched. She did a great job at tryouts and worked extremely hard throughout June practices and choreography.

In July, we took a few weeks off from cheerleading, and Maggie went with her church to a camp in Florida. As I stated before, Maggie brings a lot of energy to cheerleading, and her church commitment is no different. She was a little overzealous during her church retreat, and unfortunately did not eat or drink enough one hot day, and she passed out. Not only did she pass out, but she landed directly on her face onto a hardwood floor.

Even though she was in a lot of pain and was taken to the ER by her church counselors, Maggie pleaded with her parents to allow her to finish her church trip. Her parents were not made aware as to how bad her injuries were, so they let her stay. When she got home two days later, the journey truly began: Maggie had severely broken her jaw in five places, shifted her teeth and jaw, and had to have her jaw wired shut for over a month.

To go from being a very active teenager who cheered on the competitive, spirit, and Game Day teams plus doing pole vault for the high school and a club team, to being completely sidelined from all activities and unable to eat solid foods was a heavy blow for Maggie. She was in constant pain, had many doctor's visits, endured painful wires digging into her gums, and experienced major weight loss due to a restricted diet; all of it took an emotional toll that tested her more than any of us expected.

And despite the heartache and mental weight that she carried missing out on many senior year activities, Maggie continued to show up. She showed up to every practice, every game, and every competition for three months. She even performed and interviewed at the GCCA Cheerleader of the Year competition in August even though she could barely speak and was unable to perform any of her skills. Her heart stayed committed to everything she was a part of, and for that reason, I nominated her for the Inspiration Award.

Oftentimes teenagers struggle immensely with injuries that take them out of the sport they love; and while this was also true for Maggie, she never once let the struggle win. Daily, she showed her teammates and the adults around her how to continue to stay engaged and dedicated even when times are tough.

I am SO proud of how she handled everything this season; and luckily, she was cleared to return right before Sectionals and State, so she was able to take the mat one last time. I could go on and on about Maggie as an amazing athlete, a strong student, and an exceptional teammate. I wholeheartedly recommend her for this prestigious recognition!

Hayley Garner
Head Competition Coach of North Gwinnett High School
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