



March 11, 2010

For Immediate Release

## **2010 V Foundation Comeback Award Finalists Announced** ***Award presented by The V Foundation for Cancer Research and ESPN***

**Cary, N.C.** -- The V Foundation for Cancer Research has announced the finalists for the tenth annual **V Foundation Comeback Award**. The award is presented in conjunction with ESPN and the recipient will be announced March 30 during ESPN's basketball coverage.

The finalists are: **D'Andre Bell**, *Georgia Tech*; **Dallas Blocker**, *Youngstown State*; **Brianna Culbertson**, *Denver*; **Kelvin Davis**, *San Diego State*; **Kelsey Griffin**, *Nebraska*; **Sanchez Hughley**, *Florida Atlantic*; **Thomas Kleinschnitz**, *Franciscan University of Steubenville*; **Kristen Lucci**, *Waynesburg*; and **Dana Pernell Smith II**, *Longwood*.

The annual award is open to men and women collegiate basketball student-athletes in all divisions. It is awarded to an individual or a team who has accomplished a personal triumph in the face of true adversity, be it in health, life or moral dilemma. Student-athletes are nominated by their athletics department representative. With a great show of respect, San Diego State's **Kelvin Davis** was nominated by BYU Head Coach **Dave Rose**, marking the first time a student-athlete was nominated by the coach of an opposing team. Both Davis and Rose are cancer survivors.

The award is presented in memory of **Jim Valvano**, the late basketball coach and ESPN commentator, whose personal battle with cancer inspired the creation of The V Foundation. In his memorable speech at ESPN's inaugural ESPY Awards announcing the creation of The V Foundation, Valvano's "*Don't Give Up. . . Don't Ever Give Up!*"® motto created a legacy from which the Comeback Award was created.

"We continue to be amazed at the strength and resilience of the student-athletes who are nominated for The V Foundation Comeback Award," said V Foundation CEO **Nick Valvano**. "These young people are outstanding student-athletes who have faced adversity and challenges with determination and strength."

"This is the tenth anniversary of the award, and, once again, the nominees capture the 'Never Give Up' spirit of The V Foundation," Valvano continued. "I would be honored to have my brother's name remembered with each and every one of them."

The 2010 recipient will be selected by a six-member sub-committee of The V Foundation Board of Directors. Past recipients of the award are: **Katie Douglas**, *Purdue* (2001); **Kristin Koetsier**, *Western Michigan* (2002); **Justin Allen**, *Arizona State* (2003); **Jamie Carey**, *Texas* (2004); **Kayla Burt**, *Washington* (2005); **Grant Dykstra**, *Western Washington* (2006); the **United States Military Academy Women's Basketball Team** (2007); **Nicole Hester**, *Drexel* (2008); **Tiffara Steward**, *Farmingdale State* (2009).

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### **The V Foundation for Cancer Research**

The V Foundation for Cancer Research was founded in 1993 by ESPN and the late Jim Valvano, legendary North Carolina State basketball coach and ESPN commentator. Since 1993, The Foundation has raised more than \$90 million to fund cancer research grants nationwide. The Foundation awards 100 percent of all new direct cash donations and net proceeds of events directly to cancer research and related programs and has received seven consecutive top 4-star ratings from Charity Navigator. For more information on The V Foundation or to make a donation, please visit [www.jimmyv.org](http://www.jimmyv.org).

### **2010 V Foundation Comeback Award Finalists**

**D'Andre Bell, SR, Georgia Tech** – Prior to the beginning of pre-season practice in October 2008, D'Andre was diagnosed with spinal stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal cord. In December of 2008 D'Andre underwent surgery to correct the problem, a necessary procedure to prevent future paralyzing injury. He returned to school in January of 2009 to complete his academic requirements for graduation. In May of 2009 D'Andre received a bachelor's degree in Management. That summer he was cleared to play basketball again. He returned to the court in the fall, remains a team captain and has started every game of his senior year. During D'Andre's four-year career he started every game but four as a Yellow Jacket. He has averaged better than six points and 2.5 rebounds per game in his last two years. D'Andre is currently pursuing a second undergraduate degree and made the Dean's List in the spring of 2006 and 2007. He was also the recipient of the ACC Top Six for Service during the 2008-09 school year for his dedication to his community.

**Dallas Blocker, SR, Youngstown State University** – During a road trip to Chicago in February of 2009, his junior season, Dallas began to feel discomfort in his abdominal region. After returning home and following a multitude of tests, he was diagnosed with testicular cancer on February 10, 2009. He returned to his hometown, Topeka, Kansas, and missed the final seven games of the 2008-09 season. After two surgeries to remove both testicles, Dallas returned to Youngstown and underwent chemotherapy. This did not, however, stop Dallas, as he continued his workout regime during chemotherapy, first walking then shooting baskets and light weight training. After his second round of treatment, Dallas caught the flu and was hospitalized. In September of 2009 he was given a clean bill of health. At the time of nomination, he had played in 21 games with 19 starts. This season Dallas set career single-game highs in rebounding (11), assists (7) and blocks (4).

**Brianna Culberson, JR, University of Denver** – In Brianna's first two seasons at the University of Denver she battled unexplained fainting spells, hypoglycemia and a knee injury. During her first season back from injury, her father, Larry Culberson, suffered an unexpected heart arrhythmia and seizure in December of 2008. Once he was transported to the hospital Brianna's father slipped into a coma that lasted for over two weeks. Brianna has taken every opportunity possible to return home to be there for her father and family. Mr. Culberson was also recently diagnosed with Leukemia, slowing down his rehabilitation process. This season has been a struggle but Brianna did not let it affect her game. The Jefferson City native has been a consistent performer, finishing in double-figures in 21 of 22 games. She has also led the Pioneers in points five times, rebounds six times and assists three times.

**Kelvin Davis, SR, San Diego State University** - In Kelvin's first season with San Diego State he was one of the team's top point contributors. Towards the end of the season his numbers dropped and shortly after it ended he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He began chemotherapy treatment during the summer, meaning that in the fall Kelvin would miss significant practice time due to radiation therapy. However, despite his appointments, he managed to rush over and finish practice with his teammates as if he were in perfect health. The mere fact that he chose to continue playing rather than to take a medical waiver is amazing. Kelvin was back on the court playing with his team in the 2008-09 season. He has displayed determination, strength of character and endurance under circumstances where most could not. Kelvin is an exceptional example of a young man, who, while dealing with an enormous obstacle has chosen to face it with the greatest of attitudes.

**Kelsey Griffin, SR, University of Nebraska** – In 2005 Kelsey joined the University of Nebraska's basketball program and at the end of the season was named the Big 12 Freshman of the Year by the Dallas Morning News. A breathing condition that caused similar symptoms to asthma limited her playing time her sophomore season. Just when she thought she had conquered her breathing condition, Kelsey suffered a cracked rib in Nebraska's exhibition finale. She played with this cracked rib the entire 2007-08

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season. Midway through her junior year she was dealt an emotional blow with the discovery that her father had been diagnosed with cancer. In 2008-09 Kelsey was forced to the sideline due to a left foot injury that required two surgeries. She returned to the court in the summer of 2009 and has led Nebraska to the most successful season in school history. A candidate for the Wade Trophy, Naismith Trophy and Wooden Award, Kelsey is averaging 19.4 points and 9.9 rebounds per game. She volunteers often in her community and was a member of the 2007 Big 12 Winter Good Works Team. She carries a 3.5 GPA and is a two-time first-team academic All-Big 12 selection.

**Sanchez Hughley, JR, Florida Atlantic University** – Throughout his career, Sanchez has endured various issues both physical and otherwise. Originally signed by Matt Doherty, Sanchez came to Florida Atlantic University in Rex Walters' first year as head coach. Early in his freshman season, Sanchez tore his labrum and was red-shirted for the remainder of the season. He returned to the team for the 2007-08 season as a red-shirt freshman and averaged 6.4 points and 2.1 rebounds, including a then career high 14 points against eventual national champion Kansas. Shortly after the season ended Sanchez was diagnosed with a blood clot in his right lung. This diagnosis resulted in the removal of one third of his lung and could have ended his career. After having to sit out the entire 2008-09 season, Sanchez was cleared to return to the court and has been a mainstay in Coach Mike Jarvis' starting lineup, averaging 9.4 points and 4.7 rebounds, with two double-doubles including a career high 19 points and 11 rebounds.

**Thomas Kleinschitz, JR, Franciscan University of Steubenville** – Franciscan University was the perfect fit for Thomas, with rugby and basketball teams, he was set to play his favorite sports. He never expected that one favorite sport would nearly cost him his sight. During the last rugby match of the season, Thomas hurt his eye in what seemed like a typical rugby collision – he actually suffered an eye fracture. In a second tackle, Thomas collided head-to-head with a fellow teammate and unknowingly split his head. He was carried off the field and rushed to the hospital once referees noticed something was awry. Two skull fractures, five fractures around his right orbital and an acute hematoma later, the doctors decided to let Thomas' bones heal on their own to prevent surgery. He was told that it would be a minimum of a year before he could play sports again, with the possibility of never doing so again. Thomas was later cleared to play basketball for the spring semester of 2010 and is currently averaging 12.5 points and 5.2 rebounds per game.

**Kristen Lucci, SR, Waynesburg University** – Kristen's sophomore season 2007-08 was going well, as she established a starting position for Waynesburg. She was a standout on the court, and also in the classroom, named to the Presidents' Athletic Conference Academic Honor Roll, requiring a semester GPA of at least 3.60. Kristen began to have constant headaches that affected her performance on and off the court, becoming more noticeably severe when she played the game. In July of 2008, Kristen was diagnosed with Type 1 Arnold Chiari Malformation, a condition that caused her cerebellum to grow down into her spinal canal. On December 15, 2008 Kristen underwent Chiari decompression surgery which encompassed having a piece of skull and C1 vertebrae removed. She returned to school shortly after Christmas break but endured a minor set-back in February that hospitalized her until March. Since then Kristen has suffered no ill effects and returned to the court for the 2009-10 season. She currently ranks second on the team in assists and provides invaluable leadership as one of two seniors on the squad.

**Dana Pernel Smith II, SR, Longwood University** – A month after signing with Longwood University, still a senior in high school, Dana tore his right ACL, the first of his three knee injuries. This injury caused Dana to miss the majority of his freshman season at Longwood. A second season-ending knee injury came just three games into the 2006-07 season when he tweaked his knee resulting in a torn menisci. Ten games into the 2007-08 season, Dana tore his left ACL, causing more surgery, rehabilitation, and sitting on the sideline. Dana didn't let his injuries defeat him. He graduated with a degree in Sociology in May of 2008 and is currently finishing coursework to receive a second degree in May of this year. Instead of getting discouraged by his many injuries, Dana chose to stay positive and keep fighting. He has been playing the past two seasons at full strength as the leading scorer and rebounder in an emerging Division I program.

