

Sports Commission names Courage Award winner

BY ROB SULLIVAN

The Fairfield County Sports Commission have awarded two of its most prestigious awards, the Chelsea Cohen Courage Award and the Special Olympics Sports Person of the Year. Both will be presented at the Commission's 5th annual Sports Night awards dinner, Monday, Oct. 19 at the Hyatt Regency Greenwich at 6 pm.

This year's Courage Award winner is James Hilaire, a soccer goalie at the University of New Haven who suffered a traumatic head injury during a match in September. The Cohen Award is sponsored by the Forever Young Foundation, the charitable giving entity of Greenwich native and NFL Hall of Famer Steve Young.

The Special Olympics Award recipient is Mark Kurimai, the founder and local coordinator for the Norwalk Special Olympics program. This award, created jointly by the Commission and its sponsor Patriot National Bank, goes to the person who consistently works to further the mission of Special Olympics in Fairfield County.

In 2006, the Commission created the Chelsea Cohen Courage Award, named after the late Cohen, a former Norwalk High soccer star who was the Commission's first Courage Award recipient in 2005. She passed away in Aug. 2006 after a courageous bout with a rare form of cancer of the nervous system. The award recognizes the person in the sports community who has shown inspirational strength in battling life-altering obstacles.

"For the second straight year, having the Forever Young Founda-

tion play a role in helping tell the story of the Chelsea Cohen Courage Award and its winner is very rewarding," said Young. "It seems very fitting that this year's recipient is another soccer player like Chelsea, and that James epitomizes many of her same qualities in fighting through his traumatic injury. Their stories need to be recognized, as they will help inspire others to battle similar obstacles in their lives."

Hilaire, who attended Stamford High School and Norwalk Community College before playing at UNH, was involved in a violent collision in a game at Merrimack on Sept 28. An opposing player's knee smashed into Hilaire's skull, causing a vein to rupture inside his skull and broke his jaw. He was in a coma for eight days. While he was in critical condition, a blood clot developed in his lung. Through diligent rehabilitation, he has made miraculous recovery and now has about 50% use of his right arm and hand.

In Hilaire's name, Forever Young and the FCSC will make a donation of \$2,000 to the Chelsea Cohen Memorial Foundation, which was started by Cohen's parents Barbara Rittner and Larry Cohen. The Cohen Foundation's goal is to fund HOPE (Helping Open Possibilities for Excellence), which will support young athletes who need financial assistance to reach their athletic goals. The fund also is raising money for research to help find a cure for CNS Sarcoma, the rare cancer that took Chelsea's life.

Last year's Courage

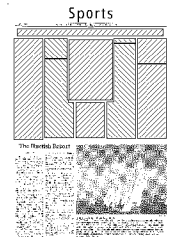
Award was presented to Mike Myers-Keitt, a Norwalk native and Fairfield Prep graduate, who now attends Monmouth University on a basketball scholarship. Jason Maiella, a standout baseball player at Sacred Heart University, was the first winner of the award in Cohen's name in 2006. In 2007, John Tartaglio, a Milford resident and recent Fairfield University graduate, won the award.

The Special Olympics Award was started in 2007. Its first winner was Trumbull's Nancy Dennin, a longtime volunteer for Special Olympics Connecticut since 1985 and in 1999

she was inducted into the Special Olympics CT Hall of Fame as Family of the Year. Last year the award went to Garry Ciccone, the head of the Greenwich program.

Kurimai founded the Norwalk Special Olympics program in 1980 and has been running it the past 29 years. He built the program from 12 athletes in the first year to 30 athletes, 20 Unified Partners and a host of volunteers. In 1999, he received a Coach of the Year award from Connecticut Special Olympics and his team received Best Local Program recognition.

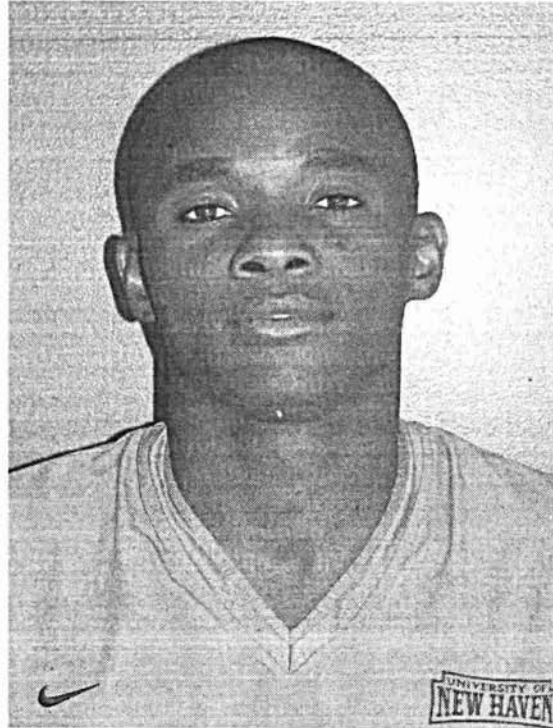
Special Olympics are the world's largest program of sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Their programs provide the athletes with continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience



joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. Participation is open to all individuals eight years of age or older. Special Olympics have local programs in 15 Fairfield County communities and the Southwest Region has nearly 2,000 athletes. For more information, visit www.soct.org.

Forever Young Foundation is a non-profit, public 501(c) (3) organization whose mission is to pass on hope and resources for the development, strength, and education of children. Each year, through the efforts and vision of Steve Young, thousands of seriously ill, underprivileged, and at risk children are given therapeutic, academic, and athletic opportunities they would otherwise never receive. For more information, visit www.foreveryoung.org.

The Fairfield County Sports Commission is a 501c (3) non-profit organization that promotes fitness and an active lifestyle, and personal development through sports.



James Hilaire