

2013-2014 Bruins Scholarship Recipients



Maya Okamoto

She is petite and unfailingly polite, but Maya Okamoto projects a huge presence as a leader wherever she goes: on the basketball court, at school and throughout the community.

The Flintridge Preparatory School senior is praised by Coach Jayme Kiyomura Chan as the “heart and soul” of her varsity

basketball team who leads by example through hard work, enthusiasm and the grit to rebound from a painful knee injury. Maya is a four-year varsity player and team captain this year who has been showered with awards, including CIF Southern Section All-CIF team, Prep League All-League first team, Glendale News-Press All-Area second team and three-time Prep MVP. She also played varsity volleyball and softball.

Prep science teacher Heather Clark lauds Maya as a “dream student” who served as her senior leader in chemistry to tutor her peers. Clark says Maya is gifted with patience, kindness and an “uncanny ability to explain concepts to others,” along with critical thinking and problem-solving skills that made her one of her brightest students ever. Her unweighted 3.78 GPA has landed her on the Dean’s List and in the California Scholarship Federation since freshman year; she was also an Advanced Placement Scholar with Distinction.

The daughter of Susie and Curtis Okamoto, Maya has also been an active volunteer. She has headed up Prep’s food pantry, served on the athletic counsel on leadership, volunteered at the Special Olympics in Pasadena, tutored at the Boys and Girls Club and helped coach at Practice Makes Perfect basketball camp. This year, she served as senior class vice-president and executive committee member.

She is a lifelong Bruin, playing on the Gold Girls since first grade and volunteering at PeeWee clinic and other events. Her idea for the Bruins is to start a youth group of older students to socialize, network and engage in outreach projects with younger players. Social activities could range from pickup games to clean-up days combined with meals as a way to build Bruin unity, loyalty and deeper family-like ties, she says.

The multi-talented scholar athlete is headed to Carleton College in Minnesota, where she plans to play basketball and, she says, push herself to grow through experiences outside her comfort zone. As for a major, “I am unabashedly, incredibly undecided,” she writes.



Kyler Lee

How inspiring is Kyler Lee? According to Mark Keppel High counselor Ha Linh Matsuo, her 8-year-old son began imitating him after seeing him play once - pretending to make a shot, then announcing, "Kyler Lee with a three!" Kyler is now one of the boy's favorite basketball players – alongside the likes of Chris Paul and LeBron James.

Kyler's athletic gifts are indeed awe-inspiring. A Bruins baller since first grade, Kyler made first team Rio Hondo League and team MVP in his first season with South Pasadena High after transferring there this year. Previously at Keppel, he was selected Almont League MVP as a junior and first team as a sophomore. He made the Pasadena Star News All-Area first team last year and the elite North-South basketball team for three years.

Despite his achievements, those who know Kyler laud his humility, unselfishness and what Keppel JV Coach Danny Woo called his "team-first approach." Matsuo told her son there was much more to Kyler than his basketball prowess: "I shared with my son that Kyler was not only a good basketball player, but he also was a good student, and a good person who is modest and humble about all of his accomplishments."

The son of Stephanie and Addison Lee, Kyler plans to major in Business at California State Fullerton.

Kyler has also volunteered at animal shelters with Students Against Animal Cruelty, a recycling program at Evergreen Church, a Pine Tree Park beautification project, a fundraising run to support genetic retina disease awareness through the Gavin R. Stevens Foundation and other community activities.

As a Bruin, Kyler has served as a coach at the annual PeeWee clinic for children and other volunteer duties. His suggestion to the Bruins organization is to launch a program to identify and train high school athletes to serve as coaches for young players. He would also like to see the Bruins find another practice facility so the organization can further grow and give neighborhood youth more exposure to basketball.

Ariana Abo

Ariana Abo is an A student, an accomplished athlete, a student body leader and an active community volunteer. But the senior at Bonita High School is as praised for her personal qualities as for her sterling resume.



“Ariana is the most caring and compassionate player that we have in any women’s program today,” wrote Darren Baumunk, Bonita’s activities and athletic director. “She is the type of player and person that is willing to put everyone else first.”

The daughter of Eric Abo and Shelly Abo, Ari is a lifelong Bruin who has played with the Gold Girls since 2005. Her early start in basketball eventually led her to seven years of club ball and accolades as a four-year high school player. A varsity captain, Ari made the Hacienda All-League first team as a junior and senior and the second team as a sophomore. She also won Bonita’s Coach’s Award and Scholar Athlete Award. This year, she was selected for the San Gabriel Valley Tribune All-Star team.

And Ari will soon be playing for Occidental College, where she has committed to attend in the fall. She plans to major in chemistry and minor in psychology.

Ari has been equally busy off court as ASB Commissioner of Athletics and member of other school clubs. For her senior project, she volunteered at the San Dimas Animal Hospital and has also helped out at the Habitat for Humanity, SurfRider Foundation and Keiro Senior HealthCare.

Despite her heavy schedule of athletics and activities, Ari has maintained a 4.29 weighted GPA and is a four-year member of the California Scholastic Federation. Brandie De Lang, her AP literature teacher, called Ari a “devoted, kindhearted and dedicated” student who “works hard, balances activities and school spirit.”

For the Bruins, Ari has served as an aide to the Elite coaching staff and helped out at Pee Wee clinics and the Pasadena Buddhist Temple’s annual sukiyaki dinner. A change she would like to see in the Bruins program would be to allow greater ethnic diversity among prep players to better sustain teams, since high school students get busy and have less time for basketball.