

SIUE's Diekema Earns Prestigious OVC Scholar-Athlete Award

by Eric Hess

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BRENTWOOD, Tenn. – Two-time Ohio Valley Conference Defender of the Year [Matea Diekema](#) has been selected to receive the prestigious Scholar-Athlete Award for 2023-24. The award is the highest individual honor that can be earned by OVC student-athletes and is given annually to three men and three women student-athletes for their accomplishments in both the classroom and athletic arena, and because of their leadership qualities.

The six winners were selected from a group of finalists by a vote of OVC Faculty Athletics Representatives. Honorees must have performed athletically with distinction,

earned at least a 3.5 grade-point average and conducted themselves in a manner which has brought credit to the student-athlete, his or her institution, intercollegiate athletics and the OVC. The award is based on academic and athletic criteria/accomplishments achieved during the 2022-23 school year.

The other 2023-24 Ohio Valley Conference Scholar-Athlete winners are Peyton Calitri of Tennessee Tech (baseball), Logan Lommel of Western Illinois (cross country/track & field), Dylan Mott of UT Martin (volleyball/beach volleyball), Ryley Preece of Morehead State (baseball) and Yao Giada Zhou of Tennessee Tech (soccer).

Diekema is a defender for the SIUE women's soccer team, served as a team captain and has helped her team to OVC Tournament Championships in each of her first three seasons (Spring 2021, 2021 and 2022). In 2022 she was named the OVC Defender of the Year; that season she started 18 matches and played over 1500 minutes and also scored a pair of goals. She repeated as Defender of the Year in 2023 in leading a defense that recorded four shutouts in the regular season and held opponents to 0.78 goals per game. In the classroom she has a 4.0 grade point average in public health.

She has earned a trio of OVC Academic Medal of Honor awards, been named to the SIUE Dean's List and earned the SIUE Outstanding Undergraduate Student in Public Health award while being in the Honors Program. Away from school she has volunteered for Kids Food Basket, a non-profit focused on increasing healthy food access to children and families. She interned with the City of St. Louis Department of Health and the Bond County Health Department.

Below are bios of the other five honorees.

Peyton Calitri – Calitri is a pitcher on the Tennessee Tech baseball team. A season ago he made 16 appearances, winning four games and striking out 45 in 54.2 innings of work. In two years with the team he has a 2-0 record and 2.08 E.R.A. in OVC Tournament contests. In the classroom he has a 4.0 grade point average in mechanical engineering. He has twice earned the OVC Academic Medal of Honor while earning four nods to the Tennessee Tech Dean's List. He is a member of the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society, the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He has also helped with various youth instructional camps.

Logan Lommel – Lommel competes for the Western Illinois cross country and track & field teams, focusing on the mile and 3000-meter steeplechase events in track and field. On the cross country course he established school records in the 8K and 10K during the 2022 season. On the track he is the WIU record holder in the 1500 meters and the steeplechase. In the classroom he earned a 3.938 undergraduate grade point average, graduating with a degree in History Education. He is currently working on a master's

degree in history and has a 4.00 GPA in graduate courses. He has been named a History Department Scholar and was nominated as a WIU Lincoln Laureate. He is also a member of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and regularly volunteers at his local church.

Dylan Mott – Mott competes as a libero for the UT Martin indoor volleyball team and plays on the No. 1 pairs squad for the Skyhawks beach volleyball program. A year ago she helped UTM to the volleyball regular season championship and has been a part of the beach volleyball program that has won the last two OVC Tournament titles. She has earned a pair of first-team beach volleyball honors, and was the 2022 OVC Beach Volleyball Freshman of the Year. In the classroom she has a 4.0 grade point average in management-sport business. She has earned a trio of OVC Academic Medal of Honor awards and is a three-time selection to the UTM Athletic Director's Honor Roll. She is a member of the National Society of Leadership & Success and the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). She has assisted with Relay For Life and university food drives among other activities.

Ryley Preece – Preece is an outfielder for the Morehead State baseball team that captured the 2023 OVC Regular Season Championship. Last season he was named the OVC Player of the Year after hitting .335 with 73 hits, 21 home runs, 53 RBI and 21 stolen bases in 56 games. He also earned All-Midwest Region honors after being credited with the only 20 home run/20 stolen base season in program history. In the classroom he has a 3.793 grade point average in exercise science. He has been named to the Morehead State Dean's List in six consecutive semesters and is a three-time OVC Commissioner's Honor Roll selection. He is a member of the Herron Leadership Organization and has participated in the Special Olympics Parade and helped raise money for men's mental health awareness along with his teammates.

Yao Giada Zhou – Giada Zhou has been a key part of the Tennessee Tech women's soccer program that claimed back-to-back OVC Regular Season Championships (2022, 2023). In 2022 she was named the OVC Midfielder of the Year after starting 17 matches and scoring two game-winning goals. She repeated that honor in 2023, after leading the OVC in goals (7) and points (20) and sharing the top spot in assists (6), during the regular season. In the classroom she has a 4.0 grade point average in finance. She has been earned the OVC Academic Medal of Honor and been named to the OVC Commissioner's Honor roll multiple times, as well as making the TTU Dean's List every semester. She was also named to the United Soccer Coaches All-Region Scholar Team. She has served as treasurer of the International Students Club, worked as a biology tutor, volunteered with Windows on the World and Habitat for Humanity. She has volunteered as a translator at Upper Cumberland Ear Nose and Throat and completed an internship with Porsche Cars North America in the controlling/finance department.

Other nominees for the Scholar-Athlete Award were: Deveon Bryant of Tennessee State (football), Nicolas Fares of UT Martin (rifle), Rachel Kaufman of Eastern Illinois (softball), Alondrah Rodriguez of Tennessee State (volleyball), Chad Strickland of Eastern Illinois (football) and Colleen Swift of Morehead State (soccer).