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NJCAA Announces Winners of Prestigious Plarski, Rowlands and Graber Awards

**Three NJCAA student-athletes recognized for superior academic and athletic achievements for 2010-11**View this release online at [*www.njcaa.org/newsArticle.cfm?articleId=14868*](http://www.njcaa.org/newsArticle.cfm?articleId=14868)

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. -- The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), based in Colorado Springs, Colo., is proud to release the names of this year’s winners of three prestigious awards. The 2010-2011 winners of the Lea Plarski, David Rowlands and Betty Jo Graber Awards represent the best of the NJCAA and embody the passion and triumph of the two-year college student-athlete.

The Lea Plarski Award is given annually by NJCAA Headquarters to the student-athlete who exemplifies sportsmanship, leadership, and community service and academic excellence, coupled with athletic ability and achievement. The 2011 recipient of the award is Bevill State Community College (Ala.) cross country runner **Abby Barnett** who maintained a 4.0 GPA while playing a pivotal role within her local community.

The David Rowlands Award is presented annually to a male NJCAA student-athlete that displays hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in athletics. The 2011 recipient of the Rowlands Award is Central Arizona College baseball player **Keenyn Walker** who led the NJCAA Division I ranks in stolen bases this year and was recently selected in the first-round in the MLB Draft by the Chicago White Sox.

The Betty Jo Graber Award is presented annually to the top female student-athlete in the NJCAA that best exhibits hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in competition. The 2011 winner of the Graber Award is golfer **Mitsuki Katahira** of Daytona State College (Fla.). Katahira took top medalist honors the past two seasons at the NJCAA Women’s Golf Championship and is currently ranked as the second-best women’s amateur golfer in the world according to the World Amateur Golf Rankings.

Additional information on each award winner is below as well as further descriptions of each award.

*NOTE: In order to be considered for any of the three awards, student-athletes must be nominated by their respective NJCAA Athletic Director.*
2011 NJCAA Lea Plarski Award - Abby Barnett
The National Junior College Athletic Association is pleased to honor Abby Barnett of Bevill State Community College (Ala.) with the 2011 NJCAA Lea Plarski Award. The Plarski Award is awarded annually by NJCAA Headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo., to the student-athlete who exemplifies sportsmanship, leadership, and community service and academic excellence, coupled with athletic ability and achievement.

Barnett was a leader on and off the cross country course while attending Bevill State the past two years and made quite an impact on the Jasper, Ala., campus.

Out of high school she did not consider attending a community college until the financial realities of higher education caught her attention. Her athletic talents caught the eye of Bevill State track and cross country head coach Chad Balentine and Barnett was offered an athletic scholarship despite never participating in track or cross country in high school.

“When a scholarship offer to run cross country came along from Bevill State I then reconsidered attending a community college,” said Barnett. “My high school didn’t even offer those programs. I had participated in other sports and was captain of both my volleyball and basketball teams. This (scholarship offer) opened my eyes to how important community colleges really are to students in many different situations. I was attracted not only to the low cost but to the athletic opportunity too.”

Despite being a novice in the sport, Barnett excelled in cross country from the moment she put on a Bevill State uniform. As a freshman she won the Region 22 Women’s Cross Country individual title and then placed seventh as a sophomore, which helped Bevill State a to a runner-up finish in 2010.

Barnett also qualified and competed in both the 800 meters and one mile run at the 2010 and 2011 NJCAA Indoor Track & Field Championships.

Away from athletics, Barnett played key roles within Bevill State campus organizations and outside community groups. Shortly after her arrival on campus she formed a bible study group in her dorm that soon turned into an academic support and peer mentoring network. Group members, through shared experiences and discussions, soon helped each other achieve their goals in and outside the classroom.

“A huge benefit of the group was that first generation college students received motivation to achieve academically,” said Barnett. “As everyone shared their academic difficulties, I set up tutoring sessions and group study times. This was more critical after an established tutoring program on campus lost funding. When they (group members) saw that others were willing to give up their time to help them they began to care more about their academic performance.”

Barnett also incorporated trips to various ministry and volunteer events into the bible study group that helped encourage fellowship and positive experiences.

“Our togetherness, in spite of our different backgrounds, was tremendous,” she added. “I have learned so much through this experience and as a result I am now planning a career in health and wellness and it is my desire to continue to positively impact the physical and spiritual aspects of life for others.”

While maintaining a 4.0 GPA in General Studies, Barnett also played a vital role in the local community by assisting in the building of a wheel chair ramp in addition to providing lawn care service to a local disabled family in Jasper. She also served as a volunteer swim coach for the Jasper Sharks, which is a swim program that caters to the needs of disabled individuals.

In late April of 2011 the state of Alabama suffered tremendous damage from a tornado outbreak and the storms particularly affected communities which are part of the Bevill State service area. Within days of the disaster, Barnett organized a team of volunteers who aided families in Cordova with debris removal. She not only hauled trees to the road for cleanup crews but also assisted families in collecting displaced valuables after their homes were destroyed.

“Abby has a tremendous heart for the well-being of others regardless of age or physical abilities,” explained Bevill State Athletic Director Dr. Russell Howton. “She also displays a sense of giving back for the betterment of the community. She has been an outstanding ambassador for our college and athletic program the past two years and truly exemplifies the outstanding characteristics on which the Lea Plarski Award is based. She is the epitome of what every NJCAA student-athlete should strive to be.”

In May of 2011, Barnett received here Associates in Science degree with a 4.0 GPA and gave the commencement address during the BVCC graduation ceremonies. She was named to the 2011 All-Alabama Academic Team by the Alabama Region Phi Theta Kappa and also earned the NJCAA Pinnacle Award for Academic Excellence this June.

Barnett will continue her academic endeavors at Troy University where she will pursue a degree in the school’s exercise, health and nutrition management program. She will also continue competing in the sport of cross country at Troy.

**ABOUT the NJCAA LEA PLARSKI AWARD**
The NJCAA’s Lea Plarski Award is handed out annually in the name of former NJCAA President Lea Plarski as recognition of her tremendous service to the NJCAA and two-year college athletics.

The former director of athletics at St. Louis Community College/Florissant Valley, Plarski helped to establish the Women’s Division of the NJCAA in 1975. She served as Vice-President for Women from 1975 to 1990 when she made NJCAA history as the first female ever elected to the office of President, a position she held from 1990 through 1996. In honor of her numerous accomplishments, as well as her undeniable dedication to the student-athlete, the NJCAA Lea Plarski Award was created. Since 1995, the award has been presented to an NJCAA student-athlete who exemplifies sportsmanship, leadership, community service, academic excellence, athletic ability and achievements – qualities that were the cornerstones of the Plarski “era”.
2011 NJCAA David Rowlands Award – Keenyn WalkerBaseball standout Keenyn Walker of Central Arizona College is the 2011 NJCAA David Rowlands Male Student-Athlete of the Year. The David Rowlands Award is given annually to a male NJCAA student-athlete that displays hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in community college athletics. The 6-foot-3, 190-pound outfielder from Salt Lake City, Utah is the fifth baseball player to receive the award.

Walker helped lead the Vaqueros to the 2011 NJCAA Division I World Series Championship Game, where they came up short 6-4 via a walk-off two run home run in the 10th inning to Navarro College (Texas). This was Central Arizona College’s best performance in NJCAA DI World Series since 2002, when the Vaqueros won the National Championship.

Known for his excellent speed, Walker led all of NJCAA DI baseball in stolen bases with 70 for the season. Even further, he had the second most runs scored among the NJCAA DI ranks with 84. He had an on-base percentage of .509 and a batting average of .412 in 238 at-bats. His 98 hits ranked second in the NJCAA as was his 10 triples. He also ranked in the Top 25 nationally with 59 RBI’s.

“His dedication to work hard and doing things right made him a very good baseball player---one that learned the importance of how to act both on and off the field,” said Central Arizona College head baseball coach Jon Wente. “He has meant so much to our baseball program both on and off the field the past two years.”

Along with earning First-Team Region 1 honors, Walker finished his final season for the Vaqueros as a NJCAA DI First-Team All-American and as the Arizona Community College Athletic Conference Player of the Year. His 1.000 fielding percentage for the season also landed him on the 2011 NJCAA Division I Rawlings Gold Glove Team.

The switch-hitter was just recently drafted as a first round compensation pick for the Chicago White Sox, who selected him 47th overall in the 2011 MLB Draft, making him the 21st highest selection straight from an NJCAA program in the history of the MLB June First-Year Player Draft. This is the third time Walker has been drafted, as the Chicago Cubs selected him in the 16th round in 2009 and the Philadelphia Phillies drafted him in the 38th round in 2010. Walker recently signed a professional contract with the White Sox and is currently playing in the Pioneer League (Advanced Rookie League) in Montana for the Great Falls Voyagers. He made his pro debut on July 10th and hit a double in his first at-bat.

**ABOUT the NJCAA DAVID ROWLANDS AWARD**David Rowlands was an active member of the NJCAA from 1972 to 1988. He was a regional director during that time and from 1975 to 1988 was the chair of the NJCAA baseball committee. Rowlands, a baseball coach at Truman College (Chicago, Ill.), served on the NJCAA gymnastics, golf, executive and eligibility committees. Rowlands was the perfect model of hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in community college athletics. This award is given annually to the NJCAA Student-Athlete that best exhibits these traits.

2011 NJCAA Betty Jo Graber Award – Mitsuki Katahira
The NJCAA is proud to announce Mitsuki Katahira of Daytona State College (Fla.), as the 2011 NJCAA Betty Jo Graber Female Student-Athlete of the Year. The Betty Jo Graber Award is awarded annually to the top female student-athlete in the NJCAA that best exhibits hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in competition. Katahira is the second golfer to receive the Betty Jo Graber Award.

In her second season with Daytona State, the Kanagawa, Japan native did not finish lower than second place in tournament play. Katahira won nine of eleven tournaments in 2011 and was listed as the top female amateur player when the first rankings were released by World Amateur Golf Ranking system (she is currently ranked No. 2 as of July 14, 2011). Katahira also finished second among all collegiate women golfers in the Golfstat Cup Standings for this season. Her average round score was 71.10 and she shot under par in eight tournaments.

The two-time NJCAA First-Team All-American led the Falcons to two straight NJCAA Women’s Golf Championships, while also claiming two individual medalist titles in the process. She is the NJCAA record holder for the lowest individual three round total (211 in 2010) and lowest individual round score (64 in 2010) in NJCAA Women’s Golf Championship play. Even further, Katahira is also part of two NJCAA team records: lowest round score (280 in 2010) and lowest three-round team total (869 in 2010).

“Mitsuki is an outstanding athlete, student and person,” said Daytona State women’s golf head coach Laura Brown. “She has an incredible work ethic and is a great role model for other student-athletes.”

Katahira plans to go through LPGA Qualifying School, which begins with Stage I qualifying in late July. If she advances through all three stages of the qualifying school, Katahira will have her LPGA Tour membership established by the end of December.

**ABOUT the NJCAA BETTY JO GRABER AWARD**Betty Jo Graber spent 35 years advancing opportunities for women in NJCAA athletics. Along with a successful basketball coaching career at Weatherford College, Texas, she was also the Region 5 Women’s Director, the NJCAA Women’s Basketball Committee Chair and a founding member of the NJCAA Women’s Division. Graber was a member of the inaugural class inducted into the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame in Tennessee. Graber was the perfect model of hard work, discipline, ethics and excellence in community college athletics. This award is given annually to the NJCAA Student-Athlete that best exhibits these traits.

**ABOUT the NJCAA**The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) is the governing body of two-year college athletics, offering endless athletic and academic opportunities to college students. It is the second largest national intercollegiate athletic organization in the United States with over 500 member schools in 43 states. Each year nearly 60,000 student-athletes compete in one of 28 different sports and the organization sponsors 48 national championship events and nine football bowl games each year. For more visit [www.njcaa.org](http://www.njcaa.org/).

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| **NJCAA LEA PLARSKI AWARD WINNERS** |
| **Year** | **Winner** | **Sport(s)** | **College; City, State** |
| 1995-1996 | John Combs | Basketball | Lees College; Jackson, Ky. |
| Amy Parker | Basketball/Slow Pitch Softball | Jones County Junior College; Ellisville, Miss. |
| 1996-1997 | George Russell Sanders | Football | Jones County Junior College; Ellisville, Miss. |
| Amy Lucas | Tennis | Middle Georgia College; Cochran, Ga. |
| 1997-1998 | Douglas Bates | Baseball | Pensacola Junior College; Pensacola, Fla. |
| Terra Sarnacki-Royer | Cross Country/Track/Swimming | SUNY-Cobleskill; Cobleskill, N.Y. |
| 1998-1999  | Sarah Wood | Soccer | St. Louis Community College-Meramec; St. Louis, Mo. |
| 1999-2000 | Larry Scheller | Soccer | Belleville Area Community College; Belleville, Ill. |
| 2000-2001 | Mindy Madewell | Basketball | Connors State College; Warner, Okla. |
| 2001-2002 | Jermaine Harris | Football | Georgia Military College; Milledgeville, Ga. |
| 2002-2003 | Melanie Mendrop | Soccer | Hinds Community College; Raymond, Miss. |
| 2003-2004 | Theresa Berry | Volleyball | Bevill State Community College-Fayette; Fayette Ala. |
| 2004-2005 | Kayla Shaul | Golf | Daytona Beach Community College; Daytona Beach, Fla. |
| 2005-2006 | Patrick Lepper | Basketball | John Wood Community College; Quincy, Ill. |
| 2006-2007 | Angela Verbeelen | Softball | Florida Community College; Jacksonville, Fla. |
| 2007-2008 | Christopher Glaze | Baseball | Jones County Junior College; Ellisville, Miss. |
| 2008-2009 | Geofrey Kalanzi | Soccer | Dakota County Technical College; Rosemount, Minn. |
| 2009-2010 | Jocelyn Fischer | Tennis | Adirondack Community College; Queensbury, N.Y. |
| 2010-2011 | Abby Barnett | Cross Country | Bevill State Community College; Jasper, Ala. |

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| **NJCAA DAVID ROWLANDS AWARD WINNERS** |
| **Year** | **Winner** | **Sport(s)** | **College; City, State** |
| 1992-1993  | Mike Worley | Basketball  | Coffeyville Community College; Coffeyville, Kan. |
| 1993-1994  | Eddie Samuel | Basketball  | Pensacola Junior College; Pensacola, Fla. |
| 1994-1995 | Joe Michael Robertson | Football  | Jones County Junior College; Ellisville, Miss. |
| 1995-1996  | Doug Thompson | Baseball  | Mississippi Gulf Coast CC; Perkinston, Miss. |
| 1996-1997  | William Gladness | Basketball  | Carl Albert State College; Poteau, Okla. |
| 1997-1998  | Shawn Marion | Basketball  | Vincennes University; Vincennes, Ind. |
| 1998-1999  | Anthony Evans | Basketball  | Neosho County CC; Chanute, Kan. |
| 1999-2000  | Mario Toledo | Tennis  | Georgia Perimeter College; Decatur, Ga. |
| 2000-2001  | Marc Dunn | Football  | Ricks College; Rexburg, Idaho |
| 2001-2002  | Cory Patton | Baseball  | Seward County Community College; Liberal, Kan. |
| 2002-2003  | Filiberto Rivera | Basketball  | Southeastern Community College; West Burlington, Iowa |
| 2003-2004  | Larry Kendrick | Football  | Pearl River Community College; Poplarville, Miss. |
| 2004-2005 | Michael Murray | Baseball | Meridian Community College; Meridian, Miss. |
| 2005-2006 | Brian Flores | Baseball | New Mexico Junior College; Hobbs, N.M. |
| 2006-2007 | Cody Jamieson | Lacrosse | Onondaga Community College; Syracuse, N.Y. |
| 2007-2008 | Devron Bostick | Basketball | Southwestern Illinois College; Belleville, Ill. |
| 2008-2009 | Chris Mason | Cross Country/Track & Field | SUNY – Delhi; Delhi, N.Y. |
| 2009-2010 | Ricardo Ratliffe  | Basketball | College of Central Florida; Ocala, Fla. |
| 2010-2011 | Keenyn Walker | Baseball | Central Arizona College; Coolidge, Ariz. |

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| **NJCAA BETTY JO GRABER AWARD WINNERS** |
| **Year** | **Winner** | **Sport(s)** | **College; City, State** |
| 1992-1993  | Carey Burton | Volleyball  | Barton County Community College; Great Bend, Kan. |
| 1993-1994  | Nema Corey | Slow Pitch Softball  | Meridian Community College; Meridian, Miss. |
| 1994-1995  | Kay Mannebach | Cross Country & Track  | Colby Community College; Colby, Kan. |
| 1995-1996  | Tricia Ferrin | Basketball  | Utah Valley State College; Orem, Utah |
| 1996-1997  | Nicole Weed,  | Softball | Daytona Beach Community College; Daytona Beach, Fla. |
| 1997-1998  | Kaunda Kay Williams | Basketball  | Gulf Coast Community College; Panama City, Fla. |
| 1998-1999 | Yalika "Boo" Barnes | Basketball  | Trinity Valley Community College; Athens, Texas |
| 1999-2000  | Devra Viekant | Cross Country & Track  | Utah Valley State College; Orem, Utah |
| 2000-2001  | Stephanie Martin | Volleyball  | College of Southern Idaho; Twin Falls, Idaho |
| 2001-2002  | Yuliana Perez | Track & Field  | Pima Community College; Tucson, Ariz. |
| 2002-2003  | Natashia Morehead | Basketball  | Gulf Coast Community College; Panama City, Fla. |
| 2003-2004  | Heidi Brooks | Basketball & Softball  | Corning Community College; Corning, N.Y. |
| 2004-2005  | Chelsie Mesa | Softball  | Phoenix College; Phoenix, Ariz. |
| 2005-2006  | Sally Kipyego | Track & Field | South Plains College; Levelland, Texas |
| 2006-2007  | Kristina Jenkins | Bowling | Hudson Valley Community College; Troy, N.Y. |
| 2007-2008 | Lindsey Palmer | Softball | Salt Lake Community College; Salt Lake City, Utah |
| 2008-2009 | Nicole Race | Golf | Redlands Community College; El Reno, Okla. |
| 2009-2010 | Kelly Closse | Track & Field | South Plains College; LevelLand, Texas |
| 2010-2011 | Mitsuki Katahira | Golf | Daytona State College; Daytona Beach, Fla. |