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Waldner Nominated for NCAA Woman of the Year Award

JULY 15TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

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The nominees for the prestigious NCAA Woman of the Year Award were announced Tuesday, and Mississippi State was represented by two student-athletes in Jordan Danberry from women's basketball and **MaKayla Waldner** from soccer.

Waldner is a 2020 graduate of Mississippi State University and has accepted a position at Mclaurin Aerospace in Huntsville, Alabama. She is a Dexter native and a 2016 of Dexter High School. She is the daughter of Kim Waldner and Bob Waldner.

Rooted in Title IX, the NCAA Woman of the Year Award was established in 1991 to recognize graduating female student-athletes who have exhausted their eligibility and distinguished themselves in academics, athletics, service and leadership throughout their collegiate careers.

Danberry transferred to Mississippi State as a sophomore in search of the opportunity to better her career both in the classroom and on the court. As a junior, she earned the Elite 90 Award for highest GPA among players in the Final Four while helping the Bulldogs advance to a second national championship game. In December of 2018, she earned her bachelor's degree in Business Economics. Boasting opportunities to work for the NSA following graduation, Danberry turned down the opportunity to instead pursue her dream of obtaining her MBA.

With her eligibility seemingly exhausted, Mississippi State appealed and fought to get Danberry an additional year of eligibility due to losing a year after transferring. State won the appeal, allowing Danberry to earn her master's degree while also competing for one final season on the hardwood. As a graduate guard, she earned All-SEC honors and was one of the nation's top defenders. She also became very involved in the Starkville community, coordinating a mentoring program for female youth to help with personal and professional development.

With two degrees from Mississippi State University, Danberry is now working to create a sports apparel line for children and has aspirations to own her own business one day.

Waldner has been a game-changer for Mississippi State soccer since her freshman season in 2016. Ever since she joined the squad, the team has won six or more games each season, made the NCAA Tournament for the first time, and ended a 15-year Conference Tournament drought. The Missouri native finished her Bulldog Soccer career with her name littered throughout the record book, being the No. 2 in career shots (201), goals (28), and multi-goal games (6), along with being tied for third in points (59). She started every game she played in for three-straight seasons, broke the school record for single-season game-winning goals with five in 2017 and holds the record for career game-winners with 11 overall. Her senior season, the Bulldogs were undefeated when Waldner scored, going 6-0-2 in such matches. Waldner finished the regular season ranked fifth in the Southeastern Conference with 10 goals, leading all SEC midfielders in the category. She served her team as captain in her final campaign.

With such prowess comes much celebration, and Waldner has earned many accolades for her performance on and off the pitch. Named All-SEC First Team her senior year, she was just the fourth Bulldog to earn the honor. In her final season she was also named SEC Co-Scholar Athlete of the Year and was MSU's nominee for the H. Boyd McWhorter Postgraduate Scholarship. The mechanical engineering graduate was named to the SEC's Academic Honor Roll all four years and was named to the United Soccer Coaches' Scholar All-South Region Second Team in 2019. Along with her academic honor, she was named to the United Soccer Coaches' All-Southeast Region Second Team for 2019 as well as the SEC Community Service Team for her volunteerism in and around Starkville.

Conference offices will select up to two nominees each from their pool of member school nominees. All nominees who compete in a sport not sponsored by their school's primary conference, as well as associate conference nominees and independent nominees, will be considered by a selection committee. Then, the Woman of the Year selection committee, made up of representatives from the NCAA membership, will choose the Top 30 honorees — 10 from each division.

From the Top 30, the Woman of the Year selection committee will determine the top three honorees in each division and announce nine finalists. The NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics then will choose the 2020 NCAA Woman of the Year, who will be named this fall.

Preposted from Mississippi State University.

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