

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



# Wisconsin's Sydney Hilley Wins 2021 Senior CLASS Award for Women's Volleyball

**OVERLAND PARK, Kan. (December 15, 2021)** - Sydney Hilley from the University of Wisconsin has been selected as the 2021 Senior CLASS Award® winner in NCAA® Division I women's volleyball.

The award, chosen by a nationwide vote of Division I women's volleyball coaches, national volleyball media, and fans, is given annually to the most outstanding senior student-athlete in Division I women's volleyball.

An acronym for *Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School*®, the Senior CLASS Award focuses on the total student-athlete and encourages students to use their platform in athletics to make a positive impact as leaders in their communities. To be eligible for the award, a student-athlete must be classified as an NCAA Division I senior or graduate student and have notable achievements in four areas of excellence: classroom, community, character, and competition.

"I am honored to receive the Senior CLASS Award and want to thank everyone who felt I was deserving of receiving it," said Sydney Hilley, the second Badger to win the award. "It's funny looking back at how sure I was about my choice to go to Wisconsin when I committed in ninth grade. I thought I understood how great of a place it was. But my ninth-grade self had no way of knowing how perfect it was going to be for my five-year journey. After being on campus for about a week or so, my mom remembers a phone call where I told her I was so happy and that 'I found my people.' I still feel so strongly about that. Badger volleyball has brought the most amazing people and opportunities to my life."

Hailing from Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, Hilley put the country on notice during her first season as a Badger. She wasted no time becoming a mainstay in the lineup, starting every match and playing in 113 sets. Hilley was named to the Big Ten All-Freshman Team after notching 72 blocks, 228 digs, and an impressive 1,329 assists. Her mark of 11.76 assists per set were second-most in the Big Ten. The AVCA also named Hilley an All-America and Northeast Region honorable mention as she helped lead the Badgers to 22 wins on the season.

Hilley wasted no time capitalizing on her noteworthy freshman campaign. By way of starting every match, she tallied 74 kills, 79 blocks, 282 digs, and 1,402 assists as a sophomore. Hilley led the Big Ten and was fourth in the nation in assists per set (11.98) on the season. She was recognized as an All-Northeast

Region and second team All-American by the AVCA after the Badgers went 25-7. Hilley also earned first team All-Big Ten honors for the first time in her career.

Hilley continued to show improvement - even as an All-American. She notched 54 kills, 83 blocks, 255 digs, and 1,383 assists while playing in every match in her third season at Wisconsin. Hilley was named a first team All-American by both the AVCA and VolleyballMag.com for the first time in her career. She was also named the Big Ten Setter of the Year for the first time after leading the conference in assists per set (12.03) for the second consecutive season. The Badgers, who finished 27-7, made another run in the NCAA Tournament but ultimately fell short to the Stanford Cardinal in the National Championship.

Even in a shortened season, Hilley continued to rewrite the record-books. Leading Wisconsin to another Final Four berth and an 16-1 season, Hilley totaled 23 kills, 25 blocks, 131 digs, and 566 assists. She was a fixture in the Badgers' lineup for all but one match, missing the first of her career due to COVID-19 protocols. Hilley once again earned tremendous praise as she was named to the AVCA and VolleyballMag.com All-America first teams. She was also selected as the Big Ten Setter of the Year and received both an AVCA All-Northeast Region and All-Big Ten first team nod for the third consecutive year.

Electing to return to Wisconsin for a fifth season, Hilley has continued to garner individual acclaim while leading the Badgers to success. She was an AVCA All-Northeast Region selection for the fourth time after tallying 81 blocks, 294 digs, and 1,349 assists. Hilley, who leads the country in assists per set, was also named a first team All-American, the Big Ten Setter of the Year, and to the All-Big Ten first team once more. She will look to add to her totals when Wisconsin (29-3) takes on Louisville (32-0) tomorrow during the semi-finals of the NCAA Tournament.

Hilley, a four-time team captain for the Badgers, has had a career that will be remembered as one of the best ever. She is the new program record-holder for career assists with a staggering 6,029. Earning an All-America nod every season, Hilley has also totaled 274 kills, 340 blocks, and 1,190 digs to date.

In a way that not many can, Hilley has matched her triumphs on the court with her success in the classroom. She received her undergraduate degree last December while specializing in genetics and genomics. Hilley, who hopes to become a cancer researcher, is now a graduate student in applied biotechnology during her fifth year. She has been appropriately recognized for her diligence in her studies both regionally and nationally. Hilley was inducted into Chi Alpha Sigma, the national college athlete honor society, and was selected as a first team Academic All-American by CoSIDA three times. She is also a two-time Athletic Board Scholar, three-time Big Ten Distinguished Scholar, and four-time Academic All-Big Ten recipient.

Hilley has also made a concerted effort to leave Madison better than she found it. Even as she balanced an incredibly successful career on the court and in the classroom, Hilley volunteered 18 hours of

community service. She participated with the Special Olympics, Wish Upon a Badger, Randall Elementary Pen Pals, and the American Family Children's Hospital. Hilley was also involved in the Saturday Science program with local schools in the area.

"This is a tremendous honor for Sydney," said Kelly Sheffield, head coach of the Badgers. "She has had an unbelievable volleyball career here. She has also been a great ambassador for our sport and a great representative of our program and the University of Wisconsin. She has been a great role model to so many and will take her undergraduate degree in genetics & genomics and her graduate degree in applied biotechnology out into the world as she works in cancer research once her volleyball career is finished. Sydney is a shining example of a student-athlete and we are certainly proud of her."

"I have been surrounded by drive, gritty, like-minded teammates and coaches," said Hilley. "I've been a part of a program that strives for excellence in more ways than just on the volleyball court. The love and support from the Badger fans is special and unmatched. I will forever be grateful Kelly Sheffield saw something in me long ago and that he surrounded me with the best teammates and life-long friends I could have ever wanted."

"Sydney Hilley has had one of the most successful careers that we have had the pleasure of watching unfold," said Erik Miner, Executive Director of the Senior CLASS Award. "She has continued to set the bar for all student-athletes ever since she arrived in Madison five years ago. We are happy to offer our congratulations to Sydney and the University of Wisconsin for receiving this esteemed award."

For more information on all of the finalists, visit [SeniorCLASSAward.com](http://SeniorCLASSAward.com).

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## **2021 Senior CLASS Award Volleyball First Team All-Americans**

**Dani Drews**, Utah

**Sydney Hilley**, Wisconsin

**Kayla Lund**, Pittsburgh

**Jonni Parker**, Penn State

**Alli Stumler**, Kentucky

## **2021 Senior CLASS Award Volleyball Second Team All-Americans**

**Kennedy Eschenberg**, BYU

**Nicole Lennon**, Rice

**Mac May**, UCLA

**Dana Rettke**, Wisconsin

**Cortney VanLiew**, FGCU

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### **ABOUT THE AWARD**

An acronym for *Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School*, the Senior CLASS Award honors the attributes of senior student-athletes in four areas: community, classroom, character and competition. The award program is designed exclusively for college seniors who are utilizing their complete athletic eligibility, remaining committed to their university and pursuing the many rewards a senior season can bring. Premier Sports Management manages the award.

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