

## **NYSPHSAA**

from: Joe Altieri

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### **NYSPHSAA ANNOUNCES SPIRIT OF SPORT AWARD WINNER AS CARMEN CONGELLI OF MARLBORO HIGH SCHOOL (IX)**

LATHAM, NY – The New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) has announced its first winner of the Spirit of Sport Award, an award that is part of the National Federation of State Associations (NFHS) national Spirit of Sport program. Carmen Congelli, a star softball player at Marlboro High School in Section IX, has been voted as the Spirit of Sport winner in New York State this year.

The award is intended for any coach, athletic administrator, trainer or student-athlete who exemplifies the ideals of the positive spirit of sport representing the core mission of education-based athletics. The award may be given in recognition of a specific activity or a challenging circumstance (adversity) that has impacted a school or community. Among additional qualifying criteria used are the student's GPA, the activities they are involved with, and their community involvement.

Congelli has been suffering from Stage IV rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare cancer of the soft tissue which results in a fast growing malignant tumor, since 2008. Doctors thought Congelli beat the cancer in November 2009 but it returned three months later. She is currently undergoing alternative treatments on Long Island.

The cancer, however, did not stop her from performing at a high level for the Marlboro softball team. Last spring, she hit .430 as the team's starting shortstop and for the second straight season she was named Mid-Hudson Athletic League (MHAL) Player of the Year despite traveling to Memorial Sloan-Kettering once a week during the season to get treatments for her illness. In fact, Congelli would leave as early as 4:30 am on treatment days to get to the city so she could return home in time for practice or a game. On the field, she helped lead Marlboro teams to Section IX championships in 2007 and 2009, and was named to the MHAL All-League team four times. While juggling treatments and carrying her team to highly successful seasons since 2007, she also maintained a 90.0 GPA since 8<sup>th</sup> grade—the same year she earned a spot on the varsity team. She also participated in soccer and basketball at Marlboro.

“Carmen exemplifies the passion for life that is fostered in part by her participation in high school athletics. That same passion contributes to her success as an outstanding high school athlete,” said Nina Van Erk, NYSPHSAA Executive Director. “She serves as an inspiration to her teammates, school community and all involved in high school athletics statewide.”

On December 14, 2010, Marlboro made Carmen one of four individuals in the school's history to retire her jersey number. Congelli had her #7 retired at halftime of a boys basketball game in a surprise ceremony that included Marlboro Athletic Director Jonnah O'Donnell who had hers retired after playing for the nationally ranked Dukes in the 1980's.

“I believe that Carmen is without a doubt above any person or athlete who exhibits not only the spirit of athletics but also the spirit of life,” said O'Donnell, who nominated Carmen for the award and was the catalyst in getting Congelli's #7 retired.

With Congelli winning NYSPHSAA's award, she will now be eligible for the NFHS national award which recognizes the winner this July at the NFHS national summer meeting. An eight-member national committee will determine the winner.

**Dana Ahrens, a field hockey and softball player at Massapequa High School (Section I), and Megan Ross, a volleyball player at Cicero-North Syracuse (Section III), were finalists for the NYSPHSAA award.**