

Brenda Villa – Individual (1)

Natalie Rodriguez – (Trojan WPC) Natalie is one of the first people who come to mind when I think about why I love coaching. A standout among the several dozen young athletes I have the privilege of working with as the age group girls' head coach for Trojan Water Polo Club, Natalie demonstrates an understanding of and true love for water polo that is unrivaled by her teammates and opponents of the same age. I have only been coaching Natalie since September 2021, but I knew from the first time I saw her in the pool that she was something special. Her athleticism, strength, and skill is evident as the primary two meter player and leading scorer on our team, but even more impressive is the dedication, humility, and leadership she brings to every practice and game. On a team where the vast majority of athletes identify as white (as do the coaches, myself included), administrative team, and club director), speak only English in their homes, and live and go to school together in the affluent South Bay communities adjacent to our pool, I wouldn't blame her one bit if she hung a bit in the background as one of only two Latina players on my team. Instead, Natalie quickly emerged as a leader both in and out of the pool and graciously accepted by request that she co-captain our team. Her pride in her Mexican heritage is apparent in the stories about her family traditions she entertains her teammates with, the food and recipes she shares, and the Spanish raps she writes and performs for us. Natalie's dedication to her sport is impressive for an athlete of any age, but especially for an 8th grader on a 14u team. She regularly seeks out opportunities to challenge herself and become a better water polo player. Both Natalie and her sister consider Brenda a role model and look up to her tremendously. Natalie attended one of her clinics in Commerce over winter break and out of everything she learned, she told me that the highlight was being in the pool with other young women of color. In my opinion, one of the areas where the water polo community is lacking is diversity in our sport. However, Natalie has not let that serve as a deterrent or a barrier in any way. On the contrary, she came and made space where there wasn't necessarily one before and continues to be an ambassador of this sport in her community the best possible way she can—simply by being great. By being herself.

Brenda Villa Award – Club (7)

West Hollywood Aquatics – West Hollywood Aquatics is one of the few water polo clubs who is welcoming to ALL individuals whether they are former water polo players or to any person over the age of 18 who would like to learn how to play this great sport of water polo. West Hollywood Aquatics Water Polo is welcoming, helps build community within and outside the organization, and has given players who identify or who are struggling with the queer culture an organization where they are welcomed no matter what skill level or struggles they may be facing in life. I joined the club in 2002 and still participate to this day. As I am one of the oldest participating members, I still enjoy coming out and playing. I may not be as competitive but I love the comraderies and knowing that I belong to a water polo club who is always welcoming no matter what! Diversity, and learning to understand each other is key to the success of this club. During the pandemic, we have welcomed many individuals from other clubs since we were one of the few clubs who managed to maintain some pool time at various facilities. Many new friendships and teachings were learned as West Hollywood Aquatics Water Polo welcomed these players into our club and as we shared stories with them about how the club was formed and some of the struggles we encountered being a queer water polo club and team. I have never been part of a water polo club that exhibits all of these fine qualities and really walks the talk when it comes to equity, diversity, and inclusion for ALL who have the love of the sport, no matter race, age, sexual orientation etc.

West Hollywood Aquatics

West Hollywood Aquatics – First LBGTQ aquatics team, founded in 1982

West Hollywood Aquatics – West Hollywood Aquatics was the first LBGTQ aquatics team in the world, founded in 1982. They have overcome homophobia securing pool time and the AIDS crisis to blossom into the most successful LBGTQ water polo club in the world, out of several dozen. Of the 8 Gay Games (originally called Gay Olympics but that upset the Olympic committee) that have had water polo, West Hollywood has won 5. Of the 25 International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics (IGLA) Water Polo Championships since 1988, West Hollywood has won 12.

West Hollywood Aquatics – WH2O has been around for decades with the express mandate of creating an inclusive space in the Water Polo world for LBGTQ+ athletes. Many of its members (including myself) joined the team after years of struggling to find a home in a sport that we once loved, reigniting an ongoing engagement with both the game and larger Water Polo community.

West Hollywood Aquatics – In my 57 years of being involved in competitive swimming and water polo the members of WeHo Aquatics are the most accepting, supportive and encouraging group of men and woman I have ever been involved with. Everyone is welcome with open arms. As a group they epitomize diversity, equity and inclusion.

West Hollywood Aquatics – In the first year of the Brenda Villa Award for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I would like to nominate West Hollywood Aquatics (WH2O) Masters water polo club. WH2O consists of swimming, water polo, and open water swimming, and currently has a roster of over 180 athletes from around the Southern California area. Over the years, the teams have included athletes of all abilities ranging from ex-Olympians to beginners. Everyone is welcome regardless of skill, age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability. WH2O grew out of a group of athletes training for Gay Games I in 1982. After returning from the Games, the participants started the West Hollywood Swim Club, which after including water polo was renamed West Hollywood Aquatics. At the time, these were the first openly gay Masters swimming and water polo club teams. The creation of WH2O was featured in the documentary film, *Light on the Water*, produced by Logo and released in 2018. This feature documentary film followed the teams' battle for acceptance: from their humble beginnings, to how these men and women have become a renowned force fighting injustice in the world of competitive sports. Over nearly 40 years and hundreds of athletes, WH2O water polo has consistently served as an inclusive space for LGBT athletes and allies, starting at a time when such a team was unheard of, and maintaining itself for decades. WH2O polo athletes range in age from 20s to 60s, include beginners and seasoned players, encompass LGBT+ athletes and allies, and represent several racial and ethnic groups. At its core, WH2O water polo embodies the USAWP stance that "diversity is the foundation of our strength." WH2O's Mission Statement states that the club is dedicated to, "providing an opportunity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) athletes and their allies to participate in aquatic sports programs as provided by the organization; and increasing the respect and recognition of those athletes throughout the LGBT and aquatics communities." WH2O is not only focused on sport, but over the years has also supported various social causes and consistently hosts events and social activities. Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, WH2O polo was able to continue socially distanced practices once pools reopened in late 2020, and has had full contact practices in 2021 once allowed by health departments and local pools. At a time when many LA-area pools were closed and other Masters teams shuttered, WH2O served as a welcoming venue for players, allowing drop-ins without membership requirements for any active USAWP registered players, and had practices throughout fall 2021 with 20-25 athletes per practice. WH2O serves as a paradigm that a team founded on the principles of diversity and inclusion can not only succeed, but thrive. WH2O recently restarted competing in Masters competition, most recently placing 4th in the Bob Nealy Memorial Tournament. Further, WH2O is one of the founding members of International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics (www.igla.org). The WH2O water polo team holds gold medals from many IGLA tournaments, most recently IGLA New York (2019) and Gay Games Paris (2018). Find out more at www.wh2o.org

Monte Nitzkowski Distinguished Men's Coaching Award – Elite (1)

Alex Rodriguez – (Foothill WPC) Rodriguez had a tall order to bring a Pomona-Pitzer men's water polo team who had not competed together since 2019 towards success. Although the Sagehens had an experienced group of seniors, no one could say they were trailblazers by any means. The Senior Class of 2021 had defeated Division I teams such as LMU and Santa Clara, but had never made a championship run. Rodriguez's team, however, remained undaunted by the task at hand. It is the commitment of these young men that Rodriguez gives his credit towards for great players make great coaches. Although he has accumulated a wide array of coaching experience, it is the dedication and determination of these young men that Rodriguez will always credit as his success. Rodriguez has spent 17 years fostering a culture of devotion and hard work which has earned not just a Division III Championship, but the consideration for the Monte Nitzkowski Award.

Sandy Nitta Distinguished Women's Coaching Award – Elite (0)

None

Bill Barnett Distinguished Men's Coaching Award – Scholastic (3)

Xavier Volgenau – (South Coast WPC) Xavier has a special connection with our boys. He actually coaches skills and tactics. He's patient, positive and demanding

Brian Flacks – (LA Premier, Harvard-Westlake School) Amazing coach who develops every single player on the team. The results he shows are extraordinarily. He dedicates himself fully to this sport and to the young men.

Kristin Rodriguez – (Foothill WPC, Alta Loma HS) At the beginning of the High School boy's water polo season, Rodriguez was tasked with coaching a Varsity Boys team for a new high school, Alta Loma. Although the team had previous success, no boys or girls water polo team at Alta Loma had won a CIF Championship. Throughout the season, ALHS experienced adjustments with a new head coach who brought a different coaching philosophy, as well as an all-female coaching staff. Nonetheless, ALHS qualified for the postseason, never surrendering more than seven goals a game. Rodriguez ultimately this boys team all way to the CIF Division III Championship, beating Thousand Oaks High School by a score of 12-7. She was subsequently named Division III Coach of the Year, but it should be noted that

Rodriguez continues to be a trailblazer for female coaches who are especially at the helm of boy's water polo programs. For your consideration, to bestow the Bill Barnett Award to Rodriguez is a statement of confidence not just in the status of boy's water polo, but for the female coaches who guide these boys towards becoming better men.

Doc Hunkler Distinguished Women's Coaching Award – Scholastic (3)

Linda Wright – (South Coast WPC, Rio Mesa HS) Linda is an amazing coach who establishes strong rapport with her players. She is an asset to both channel coast and coastal regions.

Jennifer Jamison – (Los Angeles Premier, Harvard-Westlake School) Jennifer Jamison has had the task of rebuilding a Harvard-Westlake's girls water polo program that was moved from Division II to Division I. Since her time as head coach, the team has made strong showings at high level high school tournaments en route to a playoff bid in the CIF-Southern Section. Although she has had a small team, the team has found success against high level opponents, some of which was doubted early on in the season. Although their run has yet to be decided, Jamison has a bright future with her team.

Gabriel Martinez – (Commerce Aquatics)

Ted Newland Distinguished Men's Coaching Award – Developmental (0)

None

Brent Bohlender Distinguished Women's Coaching Award – Developmental (1)

Jason Mills – (Shore Aquatics) Coached 12u Girls team to 4th Place (out of 29 teams) in the Championship Division at the 2021 JO's.

Bret Bernard Distinguished Referee Award – Elite (0)

None

Tom Hermstad Distinguished Referee Award – Scholastic (1)

German Lopez – (Route 66 Aquatics) He continues to sacrifice for the good of the sport, and is an outstanding official while still being a student of the game.

Aaron Chaney Distinguished Referee Award – Developmental (0)

None

Barbara Kalbus Distinguished Volunteer Award (2)

Backus Nahas – (South Coast WPC) Backus is knowledgeable and so positive with the boys. He helps create a special experience

Peggy McClintick – (LA Water Polo Club Administrator/Director of Operations) Past CCA Zone Board member/Treasurer and current Treasurer of the Coastal California Zone.

Dion Gray – Female Master of the Year (0)

Shelby Saling – SB 805 Water Polo Club – no record found

Bryan Weaver – Male Master of the Year (2)

Cam McBee – (Blue Thunder West) – 1st Place Men's 60+ at 2021 Masters Nationals – Masters All-American. Multiple Masters All-American. Has been playing Masters 25+ years, and was a member of UC Santa Barbara's only NCAA Championship team, in 1979.

Christopher Godfrey – Organizer of Coastal (Masters) Water Polo. A Masters club in the El Segundo – Manhattan Beach area.