

Uplifting Athletes Announces Young Investigator Draft Class of 2022

*Nine Emerging Scientists Will Receive \$180,000 in Research Grants
as Sports and Science Team Up to Support the Rare Disease Community*

Philadelphia (Jan. 13, 2022)—[Uplifting Athletes](#), a nonprofit organization serving the Rare Disease Community, is proud to announce the selection of nine emerging scientists to its 2022 [Young Investigator Draft](#) Class. Each will be presented with a \$20,000 unrestricted grant to support their vital work in rare disease research, and celebrated with a level of fanfare typically reserved for elite athletes, when Uplifting Athletes hosts the fifth annual Young Investigator Draft presented by global biotherapies leader [CSL Behring](#). The event will be held on February 5, 2022, at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, and also livestreamed on Uplifting Athletes' website and social media channels for those who are unable to attend.

The Young Investigator Draft is inspired by the NFL Draft, but shifts the focus from the selection of emerging talent on the football field to recognizing the next generation of promising young medical researchers in the rare disease space. It is one of several signature initiatives created by Uplifting Athletes to raise awareness and research funding for rare diseases, which affect one in every 10 individuals in the US.

"Our Young Investigator Draft shines a spotlight on the critical need for rare disease research and honors emerging researchers who are making a difference," said Rob Long, Executive Director, Uplifting Athletes. "We believe these all-star scientists deserve to be lauded with the same excitement afforded to college and professional athletes, many of whom partner closely with us to support our mission."

Several of those athletes will be in attendance to honor the young scientists named to the 2022 Draft Class, which includes:

Researcher: **Wu Chen, PhD**

Category of Research: Rare Muscular and Neurological Diseases, Rare Genetic Disorders

Institution: Baylor College of Medicine

Nominated by: [STXBP1 Foundation](#)

Researcher: **Naomi Dirckx, PhD**

Category of Research: Rare Muscular and Neurological Diseases, Rare Genetic Disorders

Institution: The John Hopkins University School of Medicine

Nominated by: [TESS Research Foundation](#)

Researcher: **Karine Doiron, PhD**

Category of Research: Rare Muscular and Neurological Diseases, Rare Cancers, Rare Genetic Disorders

Institution: CHU Sainte-Justine Research Center, Université de Montréal

Nominated by: [TBRs Community](#)

Researcher: **Michael Gonzalez, PhD**

Category of Research: Rare Autoimmune Diseases, Rare Blood Disorders, Rare Cancers

Institution: University of Pennsylvania

Nominated by: [Castleman Disease Collaborative Network](#)

Researcher: **Gaurav Goyal, MD**
Category of Research: Rare Blood Disorders
Institution: University of Alabama at Birmingham
Nominated by: [ECD Global Alliance](#)

Researcher: **Sushant Kumar, PhD**
Category of Research: Rare Autoimmune Diseases, Rare Blood Disorders
Institution: University of Pennsylvania
Nominated by: [The Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation](#)

Researcher: **Shu-Yi Liao, MD, MPH, ScD**
Category of Research: Rare Autoimmune Diseases, Rare Genetic Disorders
Institution: National Jewish Health (Denver)
Nominated by: [Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research](#)

Researcher: **Maurizio Risolino, PhD**
Category of Research: Rare Blood Disorders, Rare Genetic Disorders
Institution: University of California, San Francisco
Nominated by: [T.E.A.M. 4 Travis \(Together Ending Asplenia Mortality\)](#)

Researcher: **Ji Zha, PhD**
Category of Research: Rare Cancers, Rare Blood Disorders, Rare Genetic Disorders
Institution: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Nominated by: [Team Telomere](#)

Grant submissions for the Young Investigator Draft are thoroughly evaluated by an expert panel of scientific advisors prior to the selection of each year's Draft Class. Every researcher is nominated by a patient advocacy organization (PAO) recognized by Uplifting Athletes as a priority partner, with grants equally co-funded by Uplifting Athletes and the nominating PAO.

Over the past four years, the Young Investigator Draft has awarded more than \$440,000 in grant funding to 25 rare disease researchers across North America. At the 2022 Draft, those numbers will rise to a total of \$620,000 in grants presented to 34 researchers. CSL Behring, the global leader in treating rare and serious diseases, has served as the title sponsor of the Draft since year one.

"Like Uplifting Athletes, CSL Behring is committed to advancing rare disease research," said Kevin Kovaleski, Vice President, Global Commercial Development, Transplant, CSL Behring. "Both of our organizations keep rare disease patients at the center of everything we do. And a crucial component of that is supporting innovative research. We're excited to join Uplifting Athletes once again in celebrating this next group of grant recipients."

In addition to honoring the next Draft Class, the 2022 Young Investigator Draft will also provide a forum to recognize the six newest members of Uplifting Athletes' Rare Disease Championship Team—an exemplary group of college football players who are leading the way in making a positive and lasting impact on the Rare Disease Community.

Uplifting Athletes' mission is fulfilled through the support of 26 collegiate chapters led by student-athletes, including 25 men's football teams and one women's soccer team, and

more than 80 ambassadors from across America's professional sports leagues, including representatives from the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB). All leverage their own powerful platforms to give voice to the 30 million Americans diagnosed with rare diseases, helping to raise awareness and fund critically needed research.

The audience at the 2022 Young Investigator Draft will include more than 60 student-athletes who lead Uplifting Athletes' collegiate chapters across the country. All will be visiting Philadelphia that weekend for the organization's Leadership Development Conference, a two-day gathering focused on transferable life skills, rare disease advocacy and leadership. This marks the first year the Conference will coincide with the Young Investigator Draft.

"We're excited that these student-athletes, who have dedicated themselves to our mission with such tremendous enthusiasm, will be able to see first-hand the impact of their support," said Long.

Long played college football at Syracuse University and was slated to be the top punter in the 2010 NFL Draft Class before he was diagnosed with anaplastic astrocytoma—a rare and aggressive brain tumor. He is here today because of science and remains passionately committed to helping others with rare diseases.

"During my own journey, I became keenly aware of the heroes going to battle for me—the rare disease researchers working tirelessly to save my life and the lives of others," said Long. "Uplifting Athletes is proud to support the nine brilliant young scientists comprising our 2022 Draft Class, and those who have come before them, in the search for new treatments—and potentially cures—for the 30 million Americans living with a rare disease."

For more information or to purchase tickets for the Uplifting Athletes 2022 Young Investigator Draft Presented by CSL Behring, please visit <https://yid.ticketbud.com/upliftingathletes>.

About Rare Diseases

A rare disease is defined as one that impacts fewer than 200,000 Americans annually. These diseases are often chronic, progressive, degenerative and life-threatening. Collectively, there are approximately 7,000 rare diseases affecting more than 30 million Americans—one in every 10 individuals. More than half are children, 30 percent of whom will not live to see their fifth birthday. Unfortunately, research for rare diseases is extremely limited due to the lack of financial incentive to develop and market new treatments for small populations.

About Uplifting Athletes

Uplifting Athletes aims to inspire the Rare Disease Community with hope through the power of sport. The nonprofit organization engages student and professional athletes in realizing the impact of using their own powerful platforms to give voice to the 30 million Americans diagnosed with rare diseases. With the support of 26 collegiate chapters led by student-athletes, including 25 men's football teams and one women's soccer team, and more than 80 ambassadors from across America's professional sports leagues, including representatives from the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB), Uplifting Athletes has raised more than \$5 million toward its mission since it was established in 2007. Programs include Rare Disease Awareness, Rare Disease Research, Uplifting

Leaders and Uplifting Experiences, with several signature initiatives falling under these banners. To learn more, visit upliftingathletes.org.

About CSL Behring

[CSL Behring](http://CSLBehring.com) is a global biopharmaceuticals leader driven by its promise to save lives. Focused on serving patients' needs by using the latest technologies, we discover, develop and deliver innovative therapies for people living with conditions in the immunology, hematology, cardiovascular and metabolic, respiratory, and transplant therapeutic areas. We use three strategic scientific platforms of plasma fractionation, recombinant protein technology, and cell and gene therapy to support continued innovation and continually refine ways in which products can address unmet medical needs and help patients lead full lives.

CSL Behring operates one of the world's largest plasma collection networks, CSL Plasma. The parent company, [CSL Limited](http://CSLLimited.com) (ASX:CSL;USOTC:CSLLY), headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, employs more than 25,000 people worldwide, and delivers its life-saving therapies to people in more than 100 countries. For inspiring stories about the promise of biotechnology, visit Vita CSLBehring.com/vita and follow us on [Twitter.com/CSLBehring](https://twitter.com/CSLBehring).

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