

WHS pair named National Merit semifinalists

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Eric Byun and Sam Laurin will advance in competition for \$33 million in scholarship opportunities

Approximately 16,000 high school students were honored as National Merit semifinalists this month, including two seniors from Wilsonville High School. Eric Byun and Sam Laurin will continue in the competition for some 7,600 National Merit scholarships worth about \$33 million.



Photo Credit: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: KATE HOOTS - Eric Byun, left, and Sam Laurin were named National Merit semifinalists this month. The two WHS seniors are eligible to compete for \$33 million in scholarships made available to semifinalists who become finalists.

To qualify as semifinalists, each of them was among the 1.4 million high school juniors nationwide who took the Preliminary SAT/National Merit qualifying test last year. About 90 percent of semifinalists are expected to attain finalist standing, and more than half of the finalists will win a National Merit scholarship and be named Merit Scholars.

Here's a little information about the semifinalists from Wilsonville:

Byun: Heading for research career

Eric Byun's favorite classes in school are any that have to do with math or science.

"I prefer these systems I can understand," he said. "I'm terrible at rote memorization; I don't remember what I had for breakfast."

His interest in those areas is leading him toward engineering in college. He is interviewing with what he calls his dream schools, including MIT and Cal Tech, and he expects to work in a tech field.

"I want to work at the forefront of research," he said. "There's nothing I'd rather do than make new things."

The son of Korean immigrants, Byun admires his parents' willingness to start anew.

"Without knowing a word of English, my dad came over to pursue his dreams in art," he said. "They're amazing people."

His own dreams include music. He participates in band at WHS, performing in the jazz and symphonic bands as well as the musical pit during the school's dramatic productions. He participates in the school's Science Bowl and is a member of Link Crew, and he is working on an ISEF project for the school district's science fair, working on a team with fellow National Merit honoree, Sam Laurin.

In his spare time, Byun volunteers as a coach for the middle school's Math Olympiad team and tutors other students. He also enjoys playing video games, reading and writing.

Being named a National Merit semifinalist means a lot to him, he said.

"It's encouraging," he said. "Scholarships and college applications are good, too."

Laurin: Honored to represent WHS

Sam Laurin's interest in math and science is matched by his interest in music. Two of his favorite classes in school are AP chemistry and calculus.

"I like learning things and actually applying them to situations," he said. "If I can understand the logic or reason behind something, I will learn it better."

His musical interests are varied. He plays the mandolin, ukulele, piano, fiddle and drums. He was regional champion on Scottish fiddle and was invited to a national competition in Pennsylvania. He teaches drums and fiddle to children at Youth Music Project in West Linn, and he also volunteers with Chess for Success at Boeckman Creek Primary School, tutors and works with TOP Soccer. He is working with fellow honoree Eric Byun on a science fair project involving cancer research.

Laurin's college destination is yet to be determined, although he has identified three top choices; Yale, Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania. He hopes to study either business management or chemical engineering — or both. He has definite plans to match each potential major.

"If in business, I would like to be able to see the whole of the company and be a part of the larger decisions regarding the business," he said. "If chemical engineering, I would want to advance the forefront of research in my area of work beyond what it is at when I start."

Laurin is a second-generation Chinese-American. Both his parents attended Stanford University, and his older sister attends Whitman College. Being recognized as a National Merit semifinalist is a meaningful achievement for him.

"I'm appreciative of the opportunity to represent Wilsonville High School, and I'm honored to be singled out for my hard work," he said.

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