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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati Selects Hon’essty James as 2026 “Youth of the Year”

CINCINNATI, Ohio (February 26, 2026) – The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati has named Hon’essty James as its 2026 Youth of the Year following an inspiring evening of speeches and celebration held February 24 at the Handlebar Club inside Great American Ball Park.

James, a Senior at Western Hills High School and member of the Western & Southern Youth Workforce Center, earned the organization’s highest youth honor after delivering a powerful speech highlighting what she has overcome in life and how Boys & Girls Clubs has been a constant in her life, lifting her up and providing her with skills needed to excel in life.

“The Boys & Girls Clubs gave me something I will forever cherish, my confidence,” James shared. “Today, people can look at me and not understand what’s below the surface, because my confidence radiates throughout the room and I make sure of it.”

The Youth of the Year program recognizes teens for academic success, leadership, service to Club and community, moral character, life goals and public speaking ability. This year, finalists included: Anela Cooley, Aster Gilmore, Braylon Griffin, Destinee Bryant, Hon’essty James and Jaevion Robertson.

As Youth of the Year, James receives a scholarship of \$20,000 to support post-high school educational and career opportunities. At the event, BGCGC provided a total of \$36,000 in scholarships amongst the six Youth of the Year finalists.

In total, six outstanding teens competed in the 2026 competition, each delivering a personal speech before a panel of judges and an audience of community leaders, supporters and family members.

“These young people embody the very best of our Clubs,” said Bill Bresser, CEO of BGCGC. “Youth of the Year is about recognizing teens who lead by example, persevere through challenges and inspire others through their actions and words.”



The Youth of the Year program is a signature Boys & Girls Clubs of America initiative and the highest recognition a Club member can achieve. James will now advance to compete at the state level, with the opportunity to progress to the national competition.

This year, the evening was host to the largest attendance ever for the event, numbering 150 guests, highlighting the impact of Boys & Girls Clubs programming across Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

For more information about the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati, visit www.bgcg.org. To watch all of James' speech, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6m9tCpzt6s>.

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About the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati

For more than 85 years, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati has been dedicated to providing a safe, supportive and enriching environment for local youth. Through academic support, mentorship and career-readiness programs, BGCGC empowers young people to reach their full potential as productive, caring and responsible citizens.