

2020 USA Racquetball Annual Awards Closed Captioning

MIKE WEDEL: Welcome everyone to the 2020 USA Racquetball Virtual Awards ceremony. We're very excited to host this celebration in this new virtual format. These awards mean a lot to our sport; it's essential to make sure these individuals are recognized. We're all very disappointed that we're not able to hold the ceremony in person. I, for one, was looking forward to National Singles being back in Texas this year. We're working hard on the schedule and locations for the next year and will have those announcements coming out soon.

I want to thank the Hall of Fame Committee and all of the hard work they've put together to put the ceremony and awards together. A special thanks to Chairman Jim Hiser for his leadership and dedication to this important committee.

Thank you to the USA Racquetball staff for all of their hard work putting this celebration together. I also want to thank the Board of Directors for their support and work during this difficult time. This truly is a time for everyone to work together to move our sport forward. Let's all just Rally Together.

For tonight's ceremony, we will begin with our Junior awards, then our Collegiate awards, then we'll finish off with our Adult awards.

Now, it's time to begin! To present our Junior awards, I'd like to introduce USA Racquetball's Junior Head Coach, Charlie Pratt.

CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you Mike. And thank you to USA Racquetball for putting this together, and congratulations to all the award recipients. Well deserved!

The USA Junior Team consists of two teams: The Esprit Team which is 10U and 12U, and the World Cup Team which is 14U, 16U and 18U. Each year, we name a male and female athlete from – as well as a sportsman – a male and female athlete from the Esprit and a male and female from the World Cup, as well as a sportsmanship award. I am thrilled and honored to help present these awards alongside our amazing Team Trainer and Coach, Jody Nance, and our always amazing Esprit Coach, Jen Meyer. The three of us are very honored to be here.

To start this off, I'd like to turn it over to Jen Meyer, to present the Esprit Female Athlete of the Year. Jen.

JEN MEYER: Thank you Charlie. It is my privilege to announce the Esprit Female Athlete of the Year award. And this athlete has earned and won gold in both Singles and Doubles in Oregon at Junior Nationals this last year and then she went on to represent Team USA in Costa Rica at our World Championships, where she won a bronze medal in Doubles, as well as a gold medal in Singles. She is one of those kiddos that you will always see a smile off of the court. But on the court, she has a very fierce fist pump, and I definitely love I don't have to be on the receiving end of that. She has [inaudible] which has allowed her the successes that she has earned up to

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this point. I know there will be any more in her future. So, without further ado, our Esprit Female Athlete of the Year this year is Sonya Shetty.

SONYA SHETTY: Thank you. So, I'd just like to thank my family and friends who have supported me and have been able to bring me to where I am today by taking me to all my training lessons, and for being my biggest cheerleaders in life. I'd also like to thank my coaches and my USA coaches for leading me and trying to show me the right way and how to guide myself on the court. And I would also like to thank the people back home who have also supported me and trained me, like Coach Anwar and Pablo. I would also like to thank my Doubles partner who has been with me the past three years and has brought me to great lengths.

CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you very much Sonya, and congratulations once again. Well deserved! Now to present the Esprit Male Athlete of the Year is Jody Nance. Jody.

JODY NANCE: Hi and thank you. When we think about giving awards to our athletes, we think about their outstanding athletic ability and accomplishments. Nathan Rykhus has that! At Nationals, he won both Singles and Doubles in his 10U age division. But that's not all that makes Nathan special; he has a great incredible work ethic in his practices, and he has a great mindset at tournaments. And this is not only true in his athletic abilities, but also in his scholastic abilities. He recently received an award for outstanding academia at his school.

Unfortunately, in a practice just a few weeks before the World Championships, Nathan twisted his ankle doing footwork drills. He sustained a fracture and was unable to compete at the World Championships. As coaches, we were incredibly disappointed, because we knew he had the potential to be a World Champion. Nathan Rykhus you are world champion in our minds, and we are sure you that you have many championships in the years to come. It is my true pleasure on giving Nathan Rykhus the Male Esprit Cup this year.

NATHAN RYKHUS: First of all, I'd like to thank all of the Team USA Coaches: Charlie, Rene'e, Cheryl, Robbie, Jen, Jody and everyone else involved in the program. I'd also like to thank Pat and Dave Ellis for introducing me to the Racquetball community and John Ellis, Jose Diaz, Jesse Serna and my parents for coaching me through this racquetball journey. There are many more people that have helped me achieve my goals who I have not named, but I'd like to express my thanks to them. Again, thank you.

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CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you Nathan and congratulations. I'd also just like to say... Yeah, we were all pretty bummed with what happened to you before Worlds, but we know you're going to bounce back and are looking forward that much more to seeing you back on the court. So, congratulations!

It is now my honor to present the Male World Cup Athlete of the Year. This athlete won gold in 14U Singles at Junior Nationals and followed it up with two silvers at the World Championships in Costa Rica. There is a significance to those silver medals as one of them was in 16 and under. One of our athletes, Andrew Gleason, suffered a shoulder injury in the pool play rounds and was forced to retire from the tournament. We were given a chance to replace Andrew in Doubles and the only person available was Nikhil Prasad.

Nikhil stepped up big time for his team, competing with Timmy Hansen in 16 Doubles, competing against players three years older than Nikhil. But Nikhil was not afraid of the challenge! They had an incredible semifinal victory over Mexico, coming back from 8-1 in the tiebreaker to win 11-8. This great victory, however, did not come without great sacrifice. The next morning, Nikhil played his 14U Singles final. It was clear from the beginning that fatigue was a factor, and despite giving everything he had, Nikhil fell short in the tiebreaker, taking the silver medal. Nikhil, we greatly appreciate you stepping up for the Team. We are very proud of our accomplishments, but we are very proud of the person you are and the way you represent the Team. As a coach, I couldn't ask for anything more. It is my honor to present the Male World Cup Athlete of the Year to Nikhil Prasad.

NIKHIL PRASAD: Thank you Charlie. First off, I want to take a second to thank all the people behind this award: USA Racquetball, the Team USA Coaches, the players, my personal coaches, my family – anyone who spent the time to help me grow as a player and a person. I hope this award can show to those who supported me along the way that the time they spent on me did not go to waste and I hope that I can do many more things as a part of Team USA. Thank you.

CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you Nikhil. And I would just like to add, despite it being quite the sacrifice from Nikhil, he was more than willing to step up and play a second division at Doubles. More than willing!

Now to present the Female World Cup Athlete of the Year is Jody Nance. Jody.

JODY NANCE: Thank you. Well when I was told I only had one minute to talk about Heather Mahoney, I thought to myself, "Oh my!" I had already written a five-minute speech in which I felt like I didn't even say enough about this outstanding young lady. At Nationals, she played

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Singles in the 14U and also played Singles and Doubles in the 16U. She won her 14U division and got second both Singles and Doubles in the 16U divisions.

I think about Heather, what comes to mind is true grit. After being carted off the soccer field the weekend prior to the World Championships with an injury to a hip that she had surgery on after winning the 12U World Championships, I wasn't sure that this would be her year. But this girl took every piece of advice as far as taking care of herself with rest and ice and taping, and then she mentally and physically properly prepared for each and every match.

She had a grueling semifinal, where she won an 11-9 tiebreaker. After, I went up to try and help her off the court, because her hip was hurting, she told me, "No! I don't want anybody to know I'm hurt." The next day, she showed up to her finals and won in two straight. Her focus and surmounting desire and determination to win is what makes Heather a true champion. I'm so proud to be giving Female World Cup Athlete of the Year to Heather Mahoney.

HEATHER MAHONEY: Thank you so much for having me here today. It's such an honor to receive this award. I'd like to thank my parents for all they do for me; my coach Brian Dixon who's gotten me where I am today. I'd also like to thank all the Team USA Coaches: Coach Charlie for all he's done for the Junior Team, Coach Robbie and Jen who helped coach me to win my final match at the Worlds in Costa Rica, and finally Coach Jody, who not only keeps me taped up on the outside, but helps me find my inner strength and keeps me focus. And also, a shout out to my sponsors Head Penn and Rollout. So, thank you again.

CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you, Heather. Congratulations once again. I will now to turn it over to Jen Meyer to present the sportsmanship award. Jen.

JEN MEYER: Thank you, Charlie. The sportsmanship award, personally I feel, is one of the most prestigious awards that we are able to give, because it doesn't just encompass racquetball accomplishments and abilities, but it encompasses who these athletes are as a whole person. We are very fortunate that Team USA we have, and in our USA Racquetball community, this is always a hard decision, because we have a lot of athletes that deserve this. This year, the award goes to Alea Guiraud. And she is a 10U esprit athlete who played at Nationals and then also represented Team USA at the World Championships in Costa Rica. She ended up taking third in Doubles at Worlds and also second in the girls red division in 10U. Those are her racquetball accomplishments, but as far as the sportsmanship part goes, there was not day that I ever saw at both Junior Nationals and Worlds, that she was not cheering everybody on outside the court. She was first one to say, "Who's playing next?" and wanting to watch. She was definitely a gym rat; she wanted to be there all the time, which I loved. But it was even more of a privilege to be able to coach her while she was on the court, because no matter the score, she was fighting and doing her best every single step of the way. And that shows that tenacity and that grit, but

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it also shows the life skills that she has at such a young age that I feel like I get to learn from. All of these athletes get to give me something. Alea I really appreciate you teaching and coaching me along the way. She's one of those kiddos that always has positive attitude. She's going to be cheering and smiling; you will never miss her. And I look forward to the many more successes she has in life. Congratulations Alea!

ALEA GUIRAUD: I want to thank USA Racquetball for this award. I also want to thank the coaches, Coach Jen, Jody and Charlie for the support through this racquetball. As my first time doing Worlds so it was kinda of – it was hard. But they helped me along through this. So, thank you.

CHARLIE PRATT: Thank you, Alea. Yeah, well deserved on that award. It was a pleasure watching you at Worlds, and I hope that there's more to come. So, congratulations.

I want to thank all of the athletes here, as well as the ones watching at home. On behalf of the coaches and USA Racquetball, thank you so much for your dedication and enthusiasm for this game. We're all very, very proud of you. So, thank you. I will now turn it back over to Mike Wedel. Mike.

MIKE WEDEL: Thank you, Charlie. Congratulations to all the Junior athletes. I just love hearing the stories behind the awards. It's amazing what work you've done and the accomplishments you've made so far. Just keep up the great work and I certainly look forward to seeing you in many more of these award ceremonies as we go along. Thank you very much and congratulations.

Alright, next we have the Collegiate awards. The first award we're going to give in that category is the National Collegiate Coach of the Year. It's Sara Moulton from BYU.

SARA MOULTON: I want to thank USA Racquetball and everyone who made this award possible. I feel really grateful and honored for it. I also want to recognize, first and foremost, that there are no coaches awards without incredible collegiate athletes. I want to say a special thank you to the BYU Team, as well as of the collegiate athletes out there. They are incredible! They've worked hard this season in particular and unfortunately weren't able to play in the National Championship, but they really are so successful in my mind in everything they do and how much they love the game. I am just so grateful to be a part of that community. I'm grateful also for the coaches I work with, the coaches I've had in my life who have blessed me, not only in racquetball, but throughout my life and recognize the impact that they've had on me. I have complete confidence this next year, those collegiate athletes are going to come back better and stronger and even more determined to play this season, and I'm excited for that, and look forward to seeing you again. And thank you again for this honor.

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MIKE WEDEL: Aight, congratulations Sara! And now, the winner of the Collegiate Lifetime Contribution Award. This award is for a gentleman that has been coaching at Baldwin Wallace in Ohio for over 35 years. We're very proud to award the Collegiate Lifetime Contribution award to Dr. Tim Miller.

DR. TIM MILLER: I want to thank the United States Racquetball Association for all their support for the collegiate program, the Coaches Council for all the coaches time and effort at Nationals and Regionals. I want to thank God, through Christ, for Him giving me the ability to work with young people and teach them for over 35 years, to be able to work with young people teaching them racquetball. I want to my family, Francine, Justin and Autumn, for all their support during the time while I was away coaching and travelling. I want to especially recognize Baldwin Wallace University for all the support they've given our teams and our programs financially, allowing us to play in regionals and Nationals every year for over 30-some year. I want to thank E-Force who is my sponsor for 30 years. I want to thank Tom Travers, because he was my mentor and my coach, and taught me everything there is to know about racquetball. And finally, I want to thank the thousands of players that have went through the Baldwin Wallace program, through the United States Racquetball Association program and through the Mid-East Racquetball Conference that we host. Thank you very much! I'm very humbled. Thank you.

MIKE WEDEL: Congratulations Tim. And most of all, thank you so very much for all of your dedication. It's amazing the number of players you've touched in your 35 years of coaching. We all really appreciate it; thank you. Congratulations to Sara and Tim both.

OK. Our first award in the adult category is the Peggy Steding Female Age Group award. This award is for an outstanding female athlete age 35 and older. It is selected based on her performance for the preceding year. I am very pleased to present this award, again, to Cindy Tilbury.

CINDY TILBURY: I'd like to congratulate all of the other winners in their categories for their outstanding performances. It's just amazing, especially the Juniors. I love that you love that you love my sport and are keeping it alive. I'd also like to thank my sweetie, Rick, for taking me to all the tournaments and loving the sport as much as I do. It's just been a great partnership and I'm really grateful to him. Especially in the pandemic time, I appreciate the sport more than ever.

One of the things I do off the court is manage the National Masters Racquetball Association for the 40+ crowd. And I would like to invite anybody that's watching to consider playing one of the first tournaments we hope that will happen after the restrictions are lifted and that will be July 30th – August 2nd in Laurel, Maryland. I hope you'll all be able to join us and play four days of great racquetball. One other thing I'd also like to suggest is anybody listening out there, maybe

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just get a coach. You can always improve your game a couple points a game and pretty soon you're beating the people that you might not have beaten last year. So, go look up and find a great coach and go work with that person and improve your game. Racquetball is much more fun when you're playing it well! Thanks a lot. Thanks for this great award USA.

MIKE WEDEL: And now the winner of our Bud Muehleisen Male Age Group award. This award is for an outstanding male athlete, age 35 and over. It is selected based on his performance from the preceding year. I am pleased to present this award this year to Keith Minor. Keith is not able to join us this evening. So, I will be accepting the award on his behalf and makes sure that he receives it. Congratulations Keith.

Now for our President's - Presidential Award. This award is presented to the state president who has exhibited outstanding organizational performance in their state. Connecticut has been such a wonderful part of the USA Racquetball family. We are excited to present this award to both Trudi Angiollo and Glen Gitterman.

TRUDI ANGIOLLO: Thank you so very much for this honor. Glen and I are so thrilled to receive this award. We could have not made this happen without our team of Betsy Keating, Matt Zalegowski, Linda Gitterman and North Haven Health and Racquet Club. We started working together a couple of years ago to reestablish CRA. They had no tournaments in the past five years, so we knew we had an uphill battle. We grew every tournament and have now had a waiting list for the past three tournaments. We so enjoy doing what we do and hope to continue making players have fun playing the game that we love so much.

GLEN GITTERMAN: First, I want to thank the nominating committee and the USA Racquetball Board for choosing me and Trudi as Co-Presidents of the Year. It's a completely unexpected award, because when you do something that you're passionate about and love doing, you don't do it for any accolades. Speaking for myself, I do it, because I love the sport and I love the ability to compete and get my adrenaline going at the age of 63. I thoroughly enjoy to various tournaments throughout New England and New York, competing, making new acquaintances and building new friendships. As well as Trudi, I would like to thank Matt Zalegowski for encouraging my participation and all of his assistance with the Connecticut Racquetball Association, Betsy Keating for her assistance with the CRA, and my wife, Linda, for allowing me to follow my passion and for sharing the ride with me. Thank you, USA Racquetball! I appreciate it.

MIKE WEDEL: Alright. Trudi, Glen, congratulations. Keep up the great work! We really appreciate all the work you two have done in the great state of Connecticut.

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And now, the next award is for the John Halverson Fair Play award. This award recognizes the athlete who experienced an exceptional gesture of fair play during the year, or for an athlete who has consistently demonstrated a spirit of fair play during their sport career.

I am very pleased to present this award to Jeremy Dixon.

JEREMY DIXON: Thanks, Mike. I just want to start off by thanking Dr. Tim Miller, who has been my coach at Baldwin Wallace University for the last four years and for nominating me for this award. He's really been an influential person in my life over the past four years, not only on the court, but off as well. Without his help, along with the University's, I wouldn't have been able to play in all of the tournaments I wanted to, so especially thank you to them. I'd also like to thank Jim Winterton and Thomas Carter for their guidance the past few seasons. My game wouldn't be nearly where it is without them. I really owe my success to them. I'd also like to thank my family and friends who supported me, no matter what, through this journey. And lastly, I'd like to thank my sponsors Head Penn, Laser Fiber, and Lotto Elite for providing me with equipment.

MIKE WEDEL: Congratulations, Jeremy. Fair play award is truly something you should be proud of. It's one I'm always thrilled to hand out. Alright, the Joe Sobek Outstanding Contribution award. This award is based on outstanding commitment to the sport of racquetball. It is with my great pleasure to award this to Mike Lippitt.

MIKE LIPPITT: I'd like to thank USA Racquetball for this distinguished award. It means a great deal to me. Quite honestly, the award should go to the Reaching Your Dream Foundation which was started more than five years ago by a couple of friends and myself to ensure career opportunities for the next generation of young, international men and women racquetball players. Our goal was to help players develop personally and professionally, both on and off the court and in life. And literally, to date, we have provided that help for over 150 players, while adding a major junior racquetball component called Fitness Forever through the help of Dave, Pat and John Ellis, and Jody Nance, and Steve Cook and others in the Stockton area, along with many others including the Warigon family in Maryland. Specifically, I'd like to thank the incredible, dedicated volunteers who have given so much to make RYDF the success it is today. Starting with our Executive Committee, our President John Dalisky, our Treasurers over the years, Carlos Contreras and Kathy Cruz, members Freddy Flores, Mike Manoske and especially the hardest working member of our team, Kim Randolph. In addition, I'd like to thank our Board members – there's 15 of them – who are a group of men and women who simply loved racquetball and were also close friends, and still love to play. And finally, we had very special support and brain power from two individuals from start through now including Alfredo "Freddie" Ramirez and Tim Baghurst. So, thank you very much.

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MIKE WEDEL: Thank you very much Mike. Very deserving. Congratulations on the award. Our last two awards are the Female and Male Athletes of the Year. We are so excited about these two athletes, as they've been fantastic representatives of our sport for many years. These two athletes are both very hard working and deserving of this 2020 title. It is my great pleasure to award this year's Female Athlete of the Year to Hollie Scott.

HOLLIE SCOTT: Thanks Mike. I'd just like to thank everyone at home supporting me and following me through the journey in racquetball, the wins and the losses. I like to call them lesson, 'cause you know, they got me to my National title and this award. Also, thanks to my sponsors Gearbox, Ashaway, Formula Flow, Reaching Your Dream Foundation. Thanks, Mike; you're the best! You totally deserve that award. Even though I'm like super bummed that I can't compete at Worlds and Pan Ams, I'm just happy to be part of the Team again. And I can finally wear my USA gear; that's sweet! So, thanks for the award USA Racquetball and see you all at the US OPEN, hopefully, and stay healthy. Go Team USA!

MIKE WEDEL: That's a great job. Congratulations Hollie. Finally, it's my pleasure to award this year's Male Athlete of the Year to Jake Bredenbeck.

JAKE BREDENBECK: First of all, it's an honor win this award. It's pretty special to me, personally. So, thank you to USA Racquetball and anyone who is able to help put on the events and keep racquetball alive. I'd like to thank my sponsor Head, Beast Made Clothing, and a special thanks to Keith Minor who helps me on and off the court. I'd also like to thank my trainer Trevor Glomski at ETS here in Minnesota. And lastly, I have to thank my family: my mom, dad and brother, who are always there to support me no matter the situation and always keep pushing me to better. So, thanks to everyone who's made this possible.

MIKE WEDEL: Congratulations Jake! Well deserved. Thank you everyone and congratulations again to all of the winners. Very well deserved. And again, we really miss having the opportunity to be with all of you and celebrate in person, but I'm glad we were able to get together this way and celebrate your accomplishments and your achievements.

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our awards ceremony this evening. The awards meant a lot to our community and to our sport. We are very proud to hold this virtual awards ceremony. Thank you very much for taking the time in joining us. Please stay safe and have a great rest of your evening. We hope to see you all on the court very soon. Good night!