



## NEWS RELEASE

### **Valenzuela and McCarthy Recognized as 2025 I-SPARC Athletes of the Year**

Traditional Territory of the Quw'utsun (Cowichan) Tribes, Duncan B.C. (March 11, 2026) – The Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (I-SPARC) is proud to announce the recipients of its Athletes of the Year awards presented at Sport BC's 58th Annual Athlete of the Year Awards held March 5, 2026.

Presented in partnership with Sport BC, these awards celebrate the province's most outstanding Indigenous athletes, highlighting their excellence in sport and dedication to their communities. This initiative represents a deepening collaboration between I-SPARC and Sport BC, reinforcing their shared commitment to reconciliation through sport.

I-SPARC's 2025 Female Athlete of the Year was awarded to Shalaya Valenzuela. Shalaya grew up in Abbotsford, B.C. and is a member of the Tseshah First Nation. She made history in 2024 as a member of Team Canada at the 2024 Summer Olympics, earning a silver medal in Rugby Sevens and becoming the first Indigenous woman in Canada to win Olympic silver in the sport of Rugby. Shalaya competed in 23 matches during the 2024/25 World Rugby Sevens Series season, helping Canada secure a third-place World Championship finish. At the varsity level, she led the undefeated UBC Thunderbirds to a Canada West title and the program's first national championship, earning Back of the Year honours. Shalaya exemplifies high performance, resilience, and leadership while proudly representing her community on the world stage.

Fynn McCarthy was named I-SPARC's 2025 Male Athlete of the Year following an impressive 2025 campaign. Fynn continues to establish himself as one of Canada's premier middle blockers on the international stage. In 2024, he represented Canada at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and competed in the Volleyball Nations League, anchoring the national team at the net with poise and consistency. Professionally, he captured the 2024/25 CEV Challenge Cup title and earned gold in Poland's top professional league, the PlusLiga. A former U SPORTS national champion with

the UBC Thunderbirds, Fynn has also earned multiple international medals with Canada and was recognized with the Bitove Indigenous Athlete Award. His continued excellence, leadership, and pride in representing both Canada and the Indigenous community define his impact on and off the court. Fynn grew up in Lake Country, B.C. and is a citizen of Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC).

Another highlight to Sport BC's Annual Athlete of the Year Awards was the recognition of I-SPARC's President Corinne McKay receiving the prestigious President's Award. This award recognizes Sport BC members volunteers for their long-standing contributions to their communities across BC. Upon I-SPARC's incorporation, Corinne served as a founding Board member and inaugural President, guiding the organization through its formative years by establishing strong governance, strategic direction, and a vision grounded in Indigenous values. This leadership that has continued through two terms as the organization has grown in scope and impact. Long before her involvement with I-SPARC, Corinne emerged as a community sport leader and coach throughout Northwest BC, supporting Nisga'a youth basketball.

"We are incredibly proud to celebrate Shalaya and Fynn, whose achievements on the national and international stage inspire the next generation of Indigenous athletes," said Rick Brant, I-SPARC CEO. "We are equally honoured to recognize Corinne for her distinguished leadership and the impact she's had on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous youth through sport."

Sport BC President and CEO Rob Newman shared, "Sport BC is proud our member organization I-SPARC has once again chosen our Athlete of the Year Awards to shine a spotlight on their exceptional I-SPARC Male and Female Athlete of the Year recipients. No doubt, the inclusion of their stories makes our event better and we look forward to celebrating their inspiring accomplishments together."

Sport BC has developed a series of videos highlighting the accomplishments of [Shalaya](#) and [Fynn](#), along with all the evening's recipients. These athletes will also be recognized as Athlete of Year Recipients at a devoted wing within the BC Sports Hall of Fame.

I-SPARC is proud to stand alongside Sport BC in celebrating British Columbia's top Indigenous athletes and looks forward to strengthening this partnership in the years ahead.

## **About the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council**

The Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council (I-SPARC) is a provincial organization established with the purpose of improving the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples by supporting and encouraging physically active individuals, families, and communities. The programs and services delivered by I-SPARC are designed to build capacity and increase access to sport, physical activity, and recreation in First Nations communities, Métis Chartered Communities, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, schools, and other delivery agencies throughout British Columbia.

For more information, please visit: [www.isparc.ca](http://www.isparc.ca)

## **About Sport BC and the Athlete of the Year Awards**

Sport BC believes in the power of sport and is committed to building stronger communities through positive sport experiences. Our goal is to enhance and support sport participation in British Columbia ensuring everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Sport BC leads provincial recognition in sport with its signature events the Athlete of the Year Awards, the Presidents' Awards, and the Community Sport Hero Awards. Through our KidSport BC, BC Amateur Sport Fund, and BC Women & Sport programs, along with our services Sport BC Insurance, and Payroll and Group Benefits; Sport BC supports our seventy plus member organizations. Keep up to date @SportBC

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