



# Zachary Clay Honoured with the Harry Jerome Comeback Award

**Media Advisory** – January 29, 2025 – (Vancouver, BC)

Zachary Clay was full of optimism when he began his floor routine at a 2015 international gymnastics event in Switzerland. At the time, the 20-year-old Abbotsford Twisters gymnast was looking to qualify for the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio.

An awkward landing on a double jump ended his Olympic aspirations and put his competitive future in jeopardy.

“My right knee ended up giving out and my knee bent backwards – what people have told me is it went back a 90-degree angle,” recalls Clay. “Apparently three people in the crowd fainted at the sight of it. It’s a good story I can tell now but during the moment it was not very pleasant.”

Clay suffered a fractured tibia and snapped his anterior cruciate ligament in the mishap, noting doctors who surveyed the damage described the bone fracture as “like a car had smashed into the bone.”

Fast forward several years and Clay’s story has taken a turn for the better after years of determination and perseverance in recovery. He competed in all six apparatus events as a member of the Canadian men’s team to the 2023 FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, where for the first time since 2008 Canada qualified a men’s team for the Olympic Games. At the 2024 Games in Paris Clay and his Canadian teammates again made history as the first Canadian men’s gymnastics team to qualify for the Olympic final.

Clay’s triumph over severe injury has earned him the Sport BC Harry Jerome Comeback Award, presented as part of the annual Sport BC Athlete of the Year awards. The honour is presented to an individual who returns to achieve success in sport after suffering a significant or unique setback. It is named in honour of the late, great sprinter Harry Jerome, who persevered through several injuries to earn a bronze medal at the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

Clay’s journey back from injury was neither short nor easy. After surgery, it would be two years of physiotherapy and rehabilitation, and many patient and frustrating days in the gym, before he returned to elite competition and began to find the form that once made him one of the best male gymnasts in Canada. In 2017 he won the senior national all-around title and took gold in pommel at the Pan Am championships, capping the comeback year by qualifying for the all-around grand final at the 2017 World Championships in Montreal.

“Prior to nationals the comeback had been difficult,” he says. “I was making a lot of mistakes, I wasn’t consistent, it was frustrating, and I had some doubts. But when I went to nationals things just started to click for me.”



Clay, now 29 and currently preparing for the 2025 competitive season, calls his Canadian team participation at the 2023 world championships and 2024 Paris Olympics “an honour and an amazing experience.” He also concedes the injuries he suffered in 2015 left a lasting, and at times even positive, legacy.

“That kind of thing never leaves you, my memory of that day is still pretty vivid,” he says. “I like to think the injury actually made me a better athlete in terms of the way I train and approach life – I learned never to take anything for granted.”

Clay’s comeback story will be celebrated at the 57th annual Sport BC Athlete of the Year Awards will be held March 6, 2025, at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.

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#### Athlete of the Year Awards

Thursday, March 6, 2025  
Fairmont Hotel Vancouver  
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