



Chilliwack Trailblazer Earns Best of BC Award

Media Advisory – February 11, 2025 – (Vancouver, BC)

Ihor Verys knew he was in for the challenge of a lifetime when he received his invitation to take part in the 2024 Barkley Marathons. The invitation-only ultrarunning event is infamous for many reasons – few participants ever finish the 100-mile event and those who have a chance to complete the five-loop journey must do so in under 60 hours.

There are also navigational challenges – there is no set trail so runners must make their way through brush and fen, up severe inclines and steep descents, without the help of GPS or phone guidance systems. It is no wonder Barkley is revered and reviled in the hearts and minds of all those who have taken part in the mysterious race in rural Tennessee.

“When I got invited, I was super excited at first, then it was all a bit scary because the odds are completely against you,” says Chilliwack’s Verys. “The probability of finishing is maybe one per cent. Mentally, that plays jokes on you. But if you do your homework and put your heart and mind to something you can accomplish everything.”

Verys took that positive mindset with him to Tennessee and accomplished the near-impossible – finishing the gruelling test in 58 hours, 44 minutes and 59 seconds to become the first Canadian to finish, and win, the event.

So it is that 30-year-old Verys will be honoured with the Best of BC Award at the 57th B.C. Athlete of the Year Awards March 6 at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. The Best of B.C. Award is presented annually to an individual or team deemed to have best represented the province in national or international competition, in a professional or amateur sport.

In 2015 Ukrainian-born Verys travelled to Manitoba on a student visa and attended Assiniboine College in Brandon. He moved to Chilliwack in 2021, working as a commercial insurance account manager at HUB International. Confessing he disliked running while growing up in Ukraine, he began to embrace the simple sport as a means of combatting stress that can come with making a new life in a new land.

“Running started out as a mental health tool and it is still my main mechanism for dealing with stress and anxiety,” he explains, noting his family in Ukraine did not own a car so the necessity of walking many kilometres each day likely served to cement a base level of fitness that would later serve him well as an ultramarathoner.

He dabbled in half marathons, then marathons, and discovered the world of ultrarunning after Covid-19 necessitated a move to the safer solitude of running trails.

“On the trails I met some likeminded people who told me there were distances longer than marathons,” he says. “That’s how I discovered the world of ultrarunning – where you can go for hundreds of miles,

over multiple days and nights. Then I got to wondering are they special people or can I be one of them? So I dove down that wormhole to explore all the beauties of ultrarunning.”

A second-place finish at the 2023 Bigs Backyard Ultra World Championships and victory in the Canadian Death Race likely earned Verys a coveted and elusive invitation to the 2024 Barkley Marathons. During the race he was able to push through sleeplessness and fatigue. But a last loop case of trench foot nearly ended his Barkley aspirations.

“There was blistering on the bottom of my feet, my soles pretty much flaked off,” he says. “At the last loop I was changing my socks and the race director saw my feet and told my crew: ‘There’s no way he’s going to finish.’ I figured I had come that far; I might as well suck it up for a few more hours. It took me 12 hours to finish that loop.”

Despite his historic finish, Verys took home little more than a great deal of personal satisfaction. There are no trophies or medals given at the end of the punishing race.

“You get a high five,” he laughs. “And you get bragging rights for the rest of your life. And you get the record of actually finishing the race put into the history books of ultrarunning.”

The B.C. Athlete of the Year Awards is a Sport BC annual event celebrating the accomplishments of the province’s best athletes, coaches, teams and officials.

Athlete of the Year Awards’ Tickets available here: <https://sportbcregistration.com/registration>