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Four Finalists Announced for 2023 Intercollegiate Tennis Association Sally Ride STEM Award



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From [Intercollegiate Tennis Association \(https://www.wearecollegetennis.com/\)](https://www.wearecollegetennis.com/)

May 25, 2023

TEMPE, AZ – The Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) is pleased to announce the four finalists of the 2023 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award as endowed by Tam O’Shaughnessy.

This year’s finalists include Anjali Devireddy (Johns Hopkins), McKenzie Ferrari (UMass Dartmouth), Hannah Johnston (WashU), and Sarah Pertsemlidis (MIT).

The ITA Sally Ride STEM Award, as endowed by O’Shaughnessy, (Sally Ride’s life partner) was created to honor a female student-athlete who demonstrates zeal, dedication, and perseverance toward her tennis training and competition, STEM studies, and long-term goals.

“I’m beyond thrilled by the quality, character, and interests of the four finalists for the 2023 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award.” said O’Shaughnessy (who was Sally Ride’s life partner and cofounder of Sally Ride Science). “Sally would absolutely love that one of these exceptional scholar-athletes, who loves tennis and science just as she did, will be supported in her dreams.”

The ITA Sally Ride STEM Award was created in 2022, and the inaugural winner was Anna Tifrea from the California Institute of Technology. Tifrea continues her studies at the UC San Diego as she pursues a joint MD/PhD degree in medicine and biophysics.

“College tennis develops championship human beings on and off the court,” said ITA CEO Dr. Timothy Russell. “Our Association serves and advances our sport in the world of higher education, and returns the leaders of tomorrow. The ITA awards program is one of the most robust in college athletics, and our endowed named awards honor the best of the best. I am incredibly grateful to Tam O’Shaughnessy for her leadership and celebration of the spirit of Sally Ride and share Tam’s enthusiasm for an amazing group of finalists for this year’s Award.”

The recipient of the award will receive an \$8,000 grant to pursue her dreams. The award money given to the student-athlete may be used in any way she wishes (e.g., tuition, books, rent, etc.).

In addition, the ITA will donate \$2,000 to the women’s tennis program of the institution from which the award winner graduated.

Anjali Devireddy | Johns Hopkins University | NCAA Division III

Tennis was introduced to Anjali and her brother at a young age as a way for them to bond. With no knowledge of junior tournaments or collegiate athletics, Anjali and her siblings spent countless evenings together on court, bettering their skills one swing at a time. At the same time off the court, Anjali and her siblings watched as their grandfather battled Parkinson’s Disease. Experiencing her grandfather’s battle with Parkinson’s is what inspired

Anjali to pursue a degree in neuroscience when the time came for her to enroll in college. With her desire to compete and her passion for neuroscience, she realized Johns Hopkins University was the perfect fit for her interests. At Hopkins, Anjali not only was provided with an unparalleled STEM education, but also was given opportunities to impact the disadvantaged Baltimore community. Utilizing the knowledge gained through her studies at Johns Hopkins, Anjali authored a poster that was accepted by the American Epileptic Society for their 2021 Annual Meeting. Taking a large course load and performing this research allowed her to graduate a year early with a BS in neuroscience with honors. Anjali is planning on attending John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Medical School at UTHealth, through which she hopes to provide healthcare in disadvantaged communities.

McKenzie Ferrari | UMass Dartmouth | NCAA Division III

While McKenzie has always had an interest in science, tennis is truly what sparked her interest in the study of physics. Tennis was the perfect demonstration of how a better understanding of physics improves a player's game; it is vital for adjusting to various court surfaces and to understanding the spin of an opponent's return. At UMass Dartmouth, McKenzie chose to study physics to further understand the fundamental laws and theories governing not just the tennis court but also the universe. In addition to studying physics, McKenzie also spent time conducting research in astrophysics. McKenzie's research experience lies in the fields of stellar and transient astrophysics, illuminating the properties of the celestial objects we use as cosmic distance indicators. Additionally, McKenzie is active in organizing outreach activities within her university through STEM events such as a hovercraft design project with a local high school and the annual STEM4Girls program. McKenzie will now pursue a Ph.D. in Astrophysics at the University of Chicago, studying the physics of galaxies and their interactions with one another, while preparing for a career in academia and science communication.

Hannah Johnston | Washington University of St. Louis | NCAA Division III

From the age of 11, Hannah was fully consumed with tennis, spending tens of hours practicing each week, playing in tournaments most weekends, and captaining her team to two state championships in high school. As with tennis, Hannah was drawn to STEM from an early age, staying late in middle school classes to learn more from her teacher and to further explore concepts learned in labs. Here she started to ask questions about the world around her, something she continues to do through college and plans to do throughout her life. In upper level biology classes at WashU, Hannah was able to narrow in on her true passion. She found that she loved learning about immunology, where she could study the human immune system and apply science to help people with medical conditions. During a summer research program at MD Anderson, Hannah found ways to combine her love of tennis and scientific study. There, she helped create programming for a breast cancer intervention that includes exercise and nutrition changes, and over the next couple years, she published two papers on exercise-based prevention studies. This July, Hannah plans to attend medical school, where she will continue her studies.

Early in Sarah's life, tennis was a source of stress and frustration, as tournaments provided pressure, matches were lonely, and losing was always disappointing. However, no matter how frustrating tennis was for Sarah, she quickly realized how much she actually loved the game. Tennis made Sarah resilient, teaching her how to have fun even when things aren't going her way, and it helped her see everything as a learning opportunity, a chance to improve. After several summers spent in a cancer biology lab studying a vast STEM curriculum, Sarah decided to attend MIT where her passions for STEM and tennis could continue to grow. Sarah entered MIT as a bioengineering major because of her love for biology and her belief in a more systematic approach to research. Tennis and school had always felt like two separate entities for Sarah growing up, but at MIT, she found people who were so supportive and collaborative that she could combine these communities and fully be herself in multiple spaces. In her undergraduate research, Sarah realized that the problem she cared most about was improving the state of research and healthcare for women, so it became her dream to use synthetic biology to better understand reproductive systems. After graduation, Sarah will continue her studies at Duke University, where she will pursue a PhD in biomedical engineering in the lab of Pranam Chatterjee.

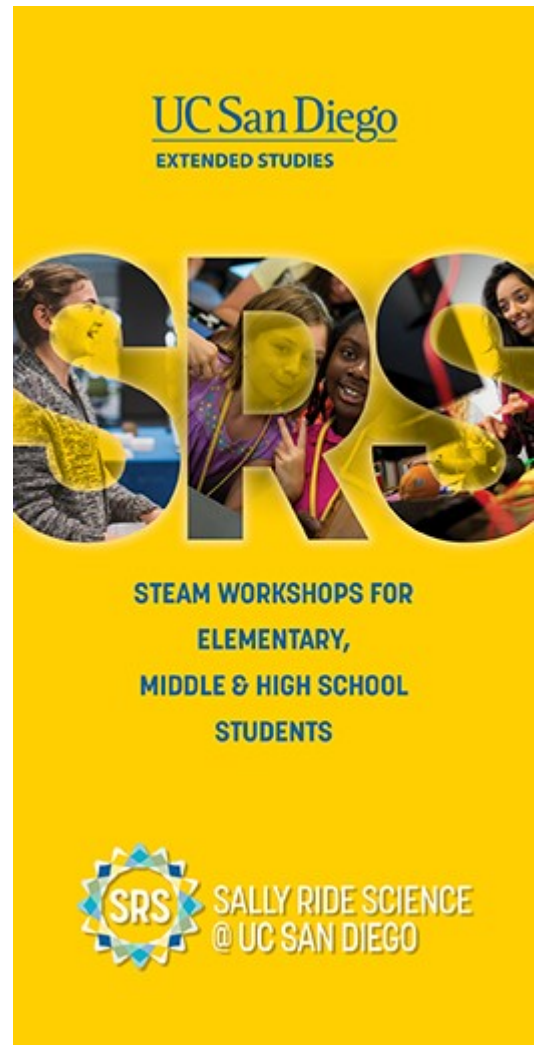
About The ITA: The Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) is the governing body and coaches association of college tennis, both an advocate and an authority for the sport and its members. Comprised of 1,260 colleges and universities, 20,000 student-athletes, 1,700 varsity programs, 3,000 coaches, and 1,350 college tennis officials, the ITA empowers college tennis coaches at all levels to deliver vibrant tennis programs that are vital to their college communities and transformational to their student-athletes. Follow the Spring 2023 college tennis season on the ITA website and ITA social channels on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube.

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[UMass Dartmouth's Mckenzie Ferrari Named 2023 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award Winner](https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/umass-dartmouths-mckenzie-ferrari-named-2023-ita-sally-ride-stem-award-winner/) (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/umass-dartmouths-mckenzie-ferrari-named-2023-ita-sally-ride-stem-award-winner/>)

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