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Finalists for 2025 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award Announced



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Intercollegiate Tennis Association (<https://wearecollegetennis.com/>), April 29, 2025

Tempe, AZ – The Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) is pleased to announce today the three finalists for the 2025 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award as endowed by Tam O’Shaughnessy.

With 2025 marking the fourth year in which this award has been a part of the ITA awards program, the ITA Sally Ride STEM Award honors one of the biggest icons in American history, Dr. Sally Ride, who was the first American woman to soar into space.

Awarded to a female student-athlete who demonstrates zeal, dedication, and perseverance toward her tennis training and competition, STEM studies, and long-term goals, the ITA Sally Ride STEM Award serves as a symbol of the ability of women to shatter barriers.

In 2025, three finalists were selected after showcasing bravery and perseverance to blaze new trails both on and off the tennis court during their time in college. These finalists are Kate Bellia (Notre Dame), Sarah Livingston (Sewanee: The University of the South), and Jessica Lu (MIT), who each have followed in Ride’s footsteps.

“Once again, this year’s finalists for the ITA Sally Ride STEM Award are extraordinary student-athletes who have demonstrated grit and gusto on the court and in the classroom,” said O’Shaughnessy, who was Ride’s life partner. “Sally would love that one of these young women, who loves tennis and science just like she did, will be supported in her dreams.”

Previous recipients of the ITA Sally Ride STEM Award include Hannah Kassaie from Case Western Reserve (2024), McKenzie Ferrari from UMass Dartmouth (2023), and Anna Tifrea from the California Institute of Technology (2022).

“We are proud to recognize the finalists for the 2025 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award,” stated ITA CEO David Mullins. “All three finalists are outstanding student-athletes who exemplify the powerful intersection of academic excellence in STEM and competitive success in collegiate tennis. Their achievements honor the pioneering legacy of Dr. Sally Ride and serve as an inspiration to future generations of scholar-athletes.”

Each year, the recipient of the award receives a grant in the amount of \$8,000 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.].

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

Kate Bellia | Notre Dame | NCAA Division I

During her time at Notre Dame, Kate Bellia has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to excellence not only as a leader on the tennis courts, but as phenomenal student as well. Coming into Notre Dame after a successful high school career, Bellia started her collegiate career eager to make a lasting impact both academically and athletically. However, as with most things in life, her eagerness quickly turned into a story of resilience and perseverance after sustaining a season-ending stress fracture in her foot during the fall of her freshman year. Knowing that her role was diminished on the court, Bellia became the best leader that she could be, realizing the strength of the program lay within the team which is a lesson she translates into her future career as an aspiring physician. In the classroom, she has challenged herself to engage in meaningful research that aims to better the lives of others. At Notre Dame, Bellia has researched mechanisms of cancer cell apoptosis evasion and has spent time in Poland looking into research done to twin children at Auschwitz. Graduating this May with a degree in Biological Sciences, Bellia has been accepted into many top medical programs in which she intends to become a physician who focuses on cutting-edge research and treatment for the most underserved members of the community.

Sarah Livingston | Sewanee: The University of the South | NCAA Division III


Sarah Livingston has spent her time in college learning lessons around persistence, collaboration, and self-confidence all the while managing the rigors of being a student-athlete and a STEM major. Coming into college, Livingston would often wonder if she could really excel in the ways in which she imagined, dreaming big knowing that she wanted to leave a lasting impact. At Sewanee, Livingston would quickly find out that her ambitions can become a reality, putting her focus on being the best teammate possible and the best student possible. After a tough stretch of matches during her junior year, Livingston organized a player-focused survey to learn her teammates' strengths, weaknesses, goals, aspirations, and training desires to better team morale. In the weeks after, teammates were revitalized with energy and her leadership helped the team push through the remainder of the season with high hopes on the outcomes. Taking a similar approach in the classroom, Livingston has built a strong support system around her to succeed academically as well working with teammates and professors to build learning communities that she has excelled in. Livingston will be applying for medical school this cycle with the ambitions to become a physician. She hopes to pour her heart and soul into providing high-quality, compassionate care to all of those in need.


Jessica Lu | MIT | NCAA Division III

For Jessica Lu, tennis has long served as a much greater tool than just a competitive outlet between a player and their opponent. For as long as she can remember, Lu has looked at tennis as a mirror reflecting who she is, who she wants to be, and how she chooses to grow as a person. Not always being the fastest player or hardest hitter, Lu has had to learn to win in unique ways which she attributes to her perspective in the classroom as well. Majoring in Computation and Cognition, Lu has utilized this problem-solving mindset from her tennis career to fuel her passions for STEM. Additionally, Lu has seen the comparisons between tennis and STEM studies when it comes to being a lifelong learner. Lu relates the never-ending struggle of always looking to improve every facet of

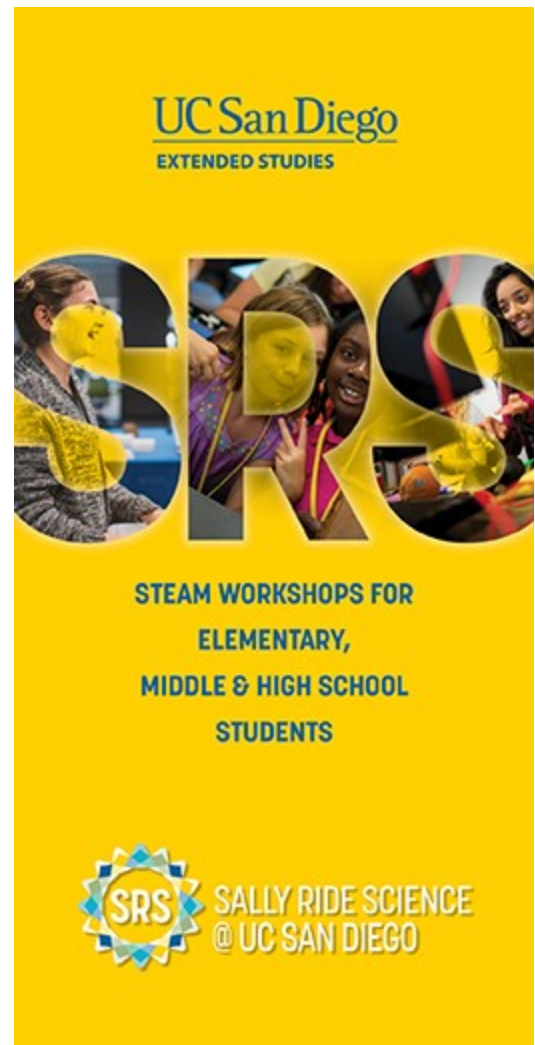
one's tennis game to the endless terrain to learn and explore in STEM studies. Through it all, whether as a junior or at MIT, Lu has learned to find joy in the hardest of challenges. Whether it is a tough opponent or a rigorous course, Lu sets out to find the meaning of the process rather than just the outcome. Upon graduation, Lu plans to pursue a Master of Engineering in Computation and Cognition at MIT. Here she hopes to use what she learns to open new doors for others, and to keep reaching for better answers, better solutions, and a better future.

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 SALLY, award-winning documentary from National Geographic, premieres at Sundance Film Festival (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/national-geographic-documentary-sally-to-premiere-at-sundance-film-festival/>)

National Geographic Documentary Films Unveils Trailer for Award-Winning SALLY Documentary (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/national-geographic-documentary-films-unveils-trailer-for-award-winning-sally-documentary/>) 

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