



## Press Release

For Immediate Release:

May 15, 2011

### **WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL CANADA ANNOUNCES 2011 MAJOR AWARD WINNERS & HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES**

(Longueuil, QC) – Wheelchair Basketball Canada proudly announced the names of its major award winners and Hall of Fame inductees Saturday evening at its 2011 annual awards banquet as part of the festivities of the 2011 National Championship in Longueuil, QC.

Sr. Women's National Team athlete Janet McLachlan (Vancouver, BC) and Team Ontario standout Dayton Sopha (Toronto, ON) were named Wheelchair Basketball Canada's Athletes of the Year, Shayne Smith (Toronto, ON) was awarded the Junior Athlete of the Year, while Joe Higgins (Delta, BC) was honoured with the Leadership Excellence Award and Ross MacDonald (Burnaby, BC) received the True Sport Award.

Former Sr. Women's National Team players Danielle Peers (Edmonton, AB) and Linda Kutrowski (Ottawa, ON) were inducted into the Wheelchair Basketball Canada Hall of Fame in recognition of their outstanding achievements on and off the court within the wheelchair basketball community.

The nominees for all of the award categories align with the values of Wheelchair Basketball Canada. The individuals exemplify fair play and sportsmanship while committing to values of inclusion. They are leaders in their communities; positive role models and they display superior performance in their respective disciplines. These awards are the membership's opportunity to nominate and recognize individuals for their contributions within their respective communities.

For more information on Wheelchair Basketball Canada's Awards & Hall of Fame visit: <http://wheelchairbasketball.ca/en/content.aspx?id=972>

**Female Athlete of the Year: Janet McLachlan (Vancouver, BC)**

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Janet McLachlan is a dominant force on the court. This past season she solidified her reputation as one of the premier female wheelchair basketball players in the world. As a member of the University of Alabama Crimson Tide, Janet led her team to a second consecutive national championship title while earning both all-star and MVP honours as the tournament's top scorer. Next, she led the BC Breakers to its first-ever gold medal at the CWBL Women's National Championships and again captured the tournament MVP award.

As a member of Team Canada, Janet turned in another clutch performance at the 2010 World Championships this past July. Her offensive firepower and strong work ethic were crucial in Canada's bronze medal performance. She finished the competition with seven double-doubles in seven games and led all players in tournament scoring and rebounds.

Janet later joined the Trier Dolphins squad and became one of only a handful of women playing in the male-dominated professional league in Europe. She is among the league's scoring leaders and continues to raise the profile of female athletes in the sport.

Janet is a pillar in the wheelchair basketball community with exceptional leadership, elite athletic ability and unwavering dedication to the sport. Wheelchair Basketball Canada is proud to name Janet Female Athlete of the Year.

- Bronze at 2010 World Championships – Canada
- Gold at 2010 Women's CWBL National Championships & named MVP – BC Breakers
- 2010 BCWBS Female Athlete of the Year
- 2010 National Collegiate Championship & named MVP – University of Alabama

### **Male Athlete of the Year: Dayton Sopha (Toronto, ON)**

Dayton Sopha is an elite wheelchair basketball talent. With hard work and perseverance, he returned to the court with a vengeance in 2010-2011 following a two year hiatus. Dayton helped lead a deep Ontario team to a silver medal at the National Championships in Saskatoon, SK, to go along with a tournament all-star award.

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Dayton was also a vital component for Ontario at the 2011 Canada Games. He put up monstrous numbers on the scoreboard throughout the tournament and his outstanding performance led Ontario to a silver medal finish. Dayton concluded the competition as one of the tournament's top scorers and was voted by his peers as the unofficial MVP of the Games.

Dayton displays leadership and maturity in his game, executing plays on both sides of the ball and making the players around him better. He is a force to be reckoned with on the court and he consistently works hard to elevate his game to the next level.

Given his accomplishments this past season, Wheelchair Basketball Canada is proud to name Dayton Sopha Male Athlete of the Year.

- Gold at 2011 CWBL Open Finals & named MVP – Variety Village
- Silver at 2011 Canada Games – Team Ontario
- Silver at 2010 National Championships & named All-Star – Team Ontario

### **Junior Athlete of the Year: Shayne Smith (Toronto, ON)**

Shayne Smith embodies the qualities of leadership, selflessness and commitment to one's sport. He is not only an outstanding wheelchair basketball player, but also a quality individual.

A two-time member of the Canadian National Junior Team, he most recently represented Ontario at the 2011 Canada Games. At the Games, he was the flag bearer for all of Team Ontario at the opening ceremonies. He also turned in a spirited performance during competition while instilling confidence in his fellow teammates en route to a silver medal. He also won a silver medal with Ontario at the 2010 National Championships.

He is a role model and an inspiration to others thanks to his motivational speaking and his countless efforts on and off the court. He is an active ambassador for both the Ontario Wheelchair Sport Association's Bridging the Gap Program and ParaSport Ontario's Ready, Willing and Able Program. Both initiatives aim to raise awareness and encourage people with disabilities to participate in sport.

Given his tremendous work ethic, his leadership within the sport community and his outstanding play on the court, Wheelchair Basketball Canada is proud to name Shayne Smith Junior Athlete of the Year.





- Silver at 2011 Canada Games – Team Ontario
- Flag Bearer at 2011 Canada Games – Team Ontario
- Silver at 2010 National Championships – Team Ontario

### **Leadership Excellence Award: Joe Higgins (Delta, BC)**

Joe Higgins has been a great leader and contributor to the wheelchair basketball community nationally and, in particular, the BC community for many years as an athlete, coach, mentor and volunteer. Living by his motto – to always over deliver and exceed all expectations – he “leads by example” and is a tireless worker for the development of the sport. With over 30 years of experience in coaching and developing programs, his passion, commitment and enthusiasm for the sport of wheelchair basketball today is stronger than ever.

Alongside a long and distinguished career with the Canada’s National Team program, he has influenced the development of new programs, the success of individual athletes and teams, and increased the overall participation of the sport in BC. He has organized countless programs in clubs, city leagues and universities in the province of British Columbia; developed new players, fine tuned experienced players and taught coaching skills. He has developed programs at Trinity Western University, is the coordinator of the BCWBS City League, assisted in the creation of the Okanagan Thunder’s Jamboree, now in its third year, is a regional coach in BC, a Centre for Performance coach for Wheelchair Basketball Canada and is the BC Men’s Provincial Coach.

Through his tireless work, and by virtue of his sport technical knowledge, his level of commitment, leadership skills, sense of fair play, coaching and program planning, his efforts have led to significant increases in the number of opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities across the country. Over the years he has helped guide a great many athletes and coaches to very successful and distinguished careers in wheelchair basketball.

So it is with great pride that Wheelchair Basketball Canada presents a true pioneer, Joe Higgins, with the Leadership Excellence Award for 2011.

### **True Sport Award: Ross MacDonald (Burnaby, BC)**

DELTA  
LEADER  
EXCELLENCE  
AWARD  
SPORT



WHEELCHAIR  
BASKETBALL  
CANADA

Ross MacDonald personifies the True Sport values as an athlete, coach and volunteer, whose commitment to the game extends to the provincial, national and international wheelchair basketball community.

On the court, he excels with a combination of fair play, respect, a contagious and upbeat attitude, as well as a competitive two-way game. He is a consistent offensive threat and a clutch shooter with sound defensive instincts and positioning. He continually pushes to elevate his game and to make the players around him better. This past season he helped lead British Columbia to a fourth consecutive National Championship, he earned MVP honours in the CWBL's BC conference with the Douglas College Lions, and he competed for Team Canada at the 2010 World Championships.

Off the court, he remains dedicated to fostering the development of the sport at the grassroots level in BC both in his role as a junior level coach and as president of the BC Wheelchair Basketball Society's board of directors. His efforts to give back have truly made a positive difference within the sport community.

Ross Macdonald truly is a role model who embraces the spirit of the True Sport Movement, and as such, is fully deserving of this prestigious award.

#### **Hall of Fame Inductee: Danielle Peers (Edmonton, AB)**

After three years of competing in wheelchair basketball as an able-bodied athlete, Danielle Peers was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy in 2002, making her eligible to try out for the National Team. In 2003, she gained a spot on the Canadian Women's National Team. That same year her Edmonton club team, the Inferno, began a six-year winning streak of the Canadian Women's Championships. The following year, she brought home a bronze medal from the Athens Paralympics.

She has since won a number of ground-breaking awards. In 2005, she became the first woman to be named to the NWBA (American Men's) All-Star Team with the Alberta Northern Lights. In 2006, she followed up as the first female tournament MVP at a Men's European Cup with C.S. Meaux - France. Later that same year, Danielle led the Canadian Women's team to a Gold Medal at the World Championships in Amsterdam, where she took home the honour of the World's Most Valuable Player. More recently, she has been named the 2007 Outstanding Athlete for all of Basketball Canada, and was a finalist for the 2007 International

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Sportswoman of the Year. In 2010 Wheelchair Basketball Canada named Danielle its first-ever True Sport Award recipient.

Off the court, Danielle continues to prove why she is known as “Doc” by her teammates. She is an active volunteer and organizer in her community, with roles ranging from past-commissioner of the Canadian Women’s Wheelchair Basketball League, to National Ambassador for Muscular Dystrophy Canada. She is also active as a public speaker and filmmaker. Danielle is currently working on her PhD at the University of Alberta, for which she has received the prestigious Canada Vanier Scholarship.

On behalf of our sporting community we would like to welcome Danielle Peers into the Wheelchair Basketball Canada Hall of Fame.

#### **Hall of Fame Inductee: Linda Kutrowski (Ottawa, ON)**

Linda Kutrowski played on the Canadian Women’s National Team for 20 years and was the co-captain of the team for many of those years. During her time on the National Team, she led the team to three straight Paralympic gold medals (1992, 1996, 2000) and three World Championship titles (1994, 1998, 2002).

She led the team by example, was one of the smartest players on court and a great leader off the court. One of numerous examples of her key leadership came in 2004 at the Athens Paralympics. The women’s team had suffered a devastating loss in the semi-final against the USA and were now in the bronze medal game, a spot they were very unfamiliar with having won gold at the three previous Paralympic Games. She was the game’s top scorer and she made it clear that she wasn’t going to let anything get in her way as she led her team to victory and a bronze medal.

Linda, more affectionately known by her team-mates as “Snake”, was deceptively quick, giving bigger opposing players much difficulty on the court. She was well respected internationally for her level of play and commitment to the game. Throughout her career she was always flexible and willing to learn. A student of the game, Linda always pushed her development as an athlete and development of the sport both nationally and internationally.

She is one of the pioneers in women’s wheelchair basketball in Canada and around the world. Her complete dedication to the sport and to her teammates is evident. Her sense of fair play and ethical conduct made her an excellent role model and

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ambassador for the sport. Without her commitment, dedication and passion women's wheelchair basketball would not be where it is today.

On behalf of our sporting community we would like to welcome Linda Kutrowski into the Wheelchair Basketball Canada Hall of Fame.

**For more information visit:** [www.wheelchairbasketball.ca](http://www.wheelchairbasketball.ca)

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### **About Wheelchair Basketball Canada**

Wheelchair Basketball Canada is the national sports governing body responsible for the organization of wheelchair basketball in Canada. It is a non-profit, charitable organization that is the Canadian member to the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF).

Wheelchair basketball is a fast paced, hard-hitting, competitive sport that has emerged as one of the most competitive and athletic sports played at the Paralympic Games. Our senior national teams are held in high esteem around the world for the elite skill and control that placed them on the podium with a combined five gold and one silver medal in the last five Paralympic Games.

### **For more information or to schedule an interview contact:**

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