

Saturday 27 November 2021

South Australia's top athletes celebrated at SASI Awards

Last night's annual South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) Awards held at Adelaide Oval, celebrated the best in sport in South Australia, in what's been an extraordinary year for high-performance sport.

Awards given on the night recognised SASI's top athletes, staff and coaches across a range of categories, acknowledging their outstanding contributions and achievements over the past 12 months.

The big winners on the night were:

- SASI Female Athlete of the Year – Madi Wilson (Olympic swimming gold medallist)
- SASI Male Athlete of the Year – Alex Hill (Olympic rowing gold medallist)
- SASI Para Athlete of the Year – Paige Greco (Paralympic cycling gold medallist)
- SASI Junior Female Athlete of the Year – Nikita Hains (Olympic diving athlete)
- SASI Junior Male Athlete of the Year – Angus Dawson (Olympic rowing athlete)

Presenting the awards for the Female, Male and Para Athlete of the Year last night, Minister for Recreation, Sport and Racing Corey Wingard said it was fantastic to recognise SASI's top performing athletes in an Olympic/Paralympic year.

"This has been the Institute's best result at the Games for many years, with 19 South Australian athletes bringing home 23 medals," Minister Wingard said.

"To be able to achieve that is a remarkable feat when you consider there was so much uncertainty in the lead up to Tokyo and teams were faced with travel arrangements, training conditions and competitive environments unlike anything we've ever seen before.

"I commend all of tonight's award winners for the courage, strength and heart they have displayed in order to excel in their field and achieve their sporting dreams."

For Female Athlete of the Year Madi Wilson, it's been a huge 12 months where she won a gold and bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics and then went on to claim more victories overseas at the FINA Swimming World Cup.

Madi has dealt with some challenging times more recently having been diagnosed with COVID-19 in September and spending the past six months away from home to compete at international events.

The two-time Olympian is currently in Eindhoven in the Netherlands for the International Swim League and said she was "shattered" not to be able to attend the Awards night, but she still got the chance to accept her award via a video message.

"A massive thank you to the entire SASI team – it's really hard for me to not get emotional when thinking about home at the moment," Wilson said.

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“They’re the most special people in my life at the moment and have made my journey throughout the last year the most incredible thing.

“Not only have they helped me grow as an athlete but as a human being as well, so thank you to every single one of them and a special thanks to my coach Peter Bishop, who is such an incredible guy and means so much to me.”

After not being able to hold the event last year because of COVID restrictions, SASI Director Wes Battams was thrilled the sporting community was able to come together in the same room and reflect on a challenging yet remarkable 12-month period.

“As we continued to grapple with effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, I’m so proud of not only the award winners, but every single one of our athletes and the SASI team who contributed to their success,” Mr Battams said.

“The behind the scenes efforts that go into producing elite sporting performances is phenomenal and deserves to be celebrated.

“It’s great to be able to look back on all this hard work at SASI’s night of nights.”

Another special moment at the Awards was the presentation of the Amy Gillett-Safe Award, which is given annually as a memorial to one of SASI’s and Australia’s favourite sportswomen and recognises commitment to sport through passion and persistence.

This prestigious honour was awarded to Olympic weightlifter Kiana Elliott who is committed to dual career activities and is regularly representing SASI in programs such as Olympics Unleashed, the Premiers’ be active Challenge and Bone Density SA school talks.

Other award winners for the night included SASI Coach of Year Peter Bishop, who played an integral role in the success of Madi Wilson and Kyle Chalmers at the Tokyo Olympics, and the SASI Service to Sport Award which went to Jamie Stanley, who supported the delivery of high-performance outcomes including five gold medals at the Tokyo Olympics/Paralympics.

See next page for more details on all 2021 SASI Award winners.

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Full list of 2021 SASI Awards winners:

- SASI Female Athlete of the Year – Madi Wilson (Olympic swimming gold medallist)

Madi made a splash in Tokyo, competing in her second Olympic Games. An impressive performance from Madi in the heats for the 4x100m Freestyle, saw the team go on to compete in the final where they brought home gold in this event. The 27-year-old then went on to swim in the Women's 4x200m Freestyle Relay where the girls set a new Commonwealth Record and secured a bronze medal. The top three teams in this race all swam under world record time. In the highly competitive 200m Freestyle field, Madi put in a gutsy effort in the heats and impressively earned herself a spot in the final.

- SASI Male Athlete of the Year – Alex Hill (Olympic rowing gold medallist)

Alex made history at the Tokyo Olympics, winning a gold medal in the Men's Four Rowing event. With his teammates Alexander Purnell, Spencer Turrin and Jack Hargreaves in tow, they pulled off an unbelievable performance to become the first Aussie winners of this event in 25 years. Along with bringing home the gold, Loxton's hometown hero can now proudly call himself a member of the new Oarsome Foursome. After coming away with a silver medal at the Rio Games in 2016, Alexander has shown hard work and determination really do pay off.

- SASI Para Athlete of the Year – Paige Greco (Paralympic cycling gold medallist)

Paige claimed Australia's first medal at the Tokyo Paralympics, winning gold in the C1-3 3000m Individual Pursuit. The 24-year-old also smashed her own World Record in this event, crossing the line in 3:50.815 minutes. Her medal wins at the Games didn't stop there, with Paige claiming a bronze medal on the road in the C1-3 Time Trial and it was a photo finish when she took out the third position in the C1-3 Cycling Road Race.

- SASI Junior Female Athlete of the Year – Nikita Hains (Olympic diving athlete)

Nikita made her Olympic debut this year, competing in the 10-metre platform diving event. She qualified for the Games after winning silver with a breakthrough performance at the Australian Open Championships held in June. Nikita put in a valiant performance in Tokyo where she only just missed out on progressing to the semi-final after finishing in 21st position with a score of 270. After her Olympic efforts, she was announced as one of 10 2022 Tier 2 Sport Australia Hall of Fame Scholarship Holders.

- SASI Junior Male Athlete of the Year – Angus Dawson (Olympic rowing athlete)

As a junior rower competing at a senior level, Angus has been seriously impressive on the water. He joined the 2021 Australian Rowing Team after a strong showing at the U23 World Championships in 2019, when he and his teammates were declared world champions. Since then, a focus on national team representation and contributing to podium success at international events has been paramount. He made his Olympics debut this year when he featured as the sole South Australian on the Australian Men's Eight crew where they earned a spot in the final after making the most of their opportunity in the repechage event.

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- Amy Gillett-Safe Award – Kiana Elliott (Olympic weightlifter)

Kiana found weightlifting after wrapping up her gymnastics career and displayed her dedication to the sport when she moved from New South Wales to South Australia to pursue more suitable training opportunities, which resulted in her gaining selection for the Tokyo Olympics. She is committed to dual career activities and secured a full-time role with Forensics SA after working as a temp there. In the community engagement space, she is regularly representing SASI in programs such as Olympics Unleashed, the Premiers' be active Challenge, Bone Density SA school talks and through her state weightlifting competitions. She also gained praise from the Australian Olympic Committee when presenting to sponsors post-Tokyo 2020.

- SASI Coach of the Year – Peter Bishop (Olympic swimming coach)

Peter is the coach of SASI Olympians Madi Wilson and Kyle Chalmers who excelled at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Peter has acted as Head Coach of the SASI swimming program for several years and consistently provides an elite daily training environment for his athletes.

- SASI Service to Sport Award – Jamie Stanley (Senior Sport Physiologist)

Jamie is a SASI staff member who has made a significant impact and positive contribution to SASI athletes and programs. This is evidenced by his passionate and focused support of athletes and coaches, delivering high-performance outcomes including five gold medals at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games from the athletes he worked extensively with during the cycle.

- Program Athletes of the Year:

- Canoe Sprint – Daniel Kucharski
- Cycling – Zac Marriage
- Diving – Nikita Hains
- Hockey – Hattie Shand
- Netball – Tahlia Dnistrjanski
- Rowing – Angus Dawson
- Swimming – Kyle Chalmers
- Individual Athlete Program – Sam von Einem (Para table tennis)

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