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March 2024

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The Paralyzed Veterans of America Bass Tour allows anglers with disabilities, non-veterans and veterans alike, chances to compete in tournaments and enjoy camaraderie.

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BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The National Wheelchair Basketball Association Junior & Adult Division Wheelchair Basketball National Championships will be held in Richmond, Va., April 5–7 and April 12–14 — and *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* will be there. Come say hello and check out Facebook (facebook.com/sportsnspokes) for more!

JUNIOR ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

SPORTS 'N SPOKES is accepting nominations for its Junior Athlete of the Year. This year's winner will take home \$2,500 in cash, be featured in the September issue and will receive a one-year magazine subscription and a custom-made plaque. Visit the website to fill out a nomination form.

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On the cover: University of Alabama men's wheelchair basketball player Peter Berry and the Crimson Tide will try to defend their National Wheelchair Basketball Association Men's Intercollegiate Division wheelchair basketball national title this month. Photo by Kellcie Temple.



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Late applications will not be accepted.

For additional information, contact:
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My Opinion



SPORTS SPOKES

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A Fishy Bracket

Well, here we go again. Millions of fanatics are watching college basketball this month, and many of them are bragging about their brackets.

It's March Madness 2024, and the Showalter Fountain fish is still missing. I'll explain the missing fish later.

When the entire slate of men's NCAA Division I tournament brackets is released on Selection Sunday (March 17), fans will quickly begin filling out their picks for who will win each of the 63 games. According to *Sports Illustrated*, approximately 60 million to 100 million brackets are filled out each season.

The chances of filling out a perfect bracket are nearly impossible. Not a single person in the history of the men's tournament has succeeded in filling out a 100% correct March Madness bracket since the results have been tracked by the NCAA.

The closest any person has ever gotten to filling out a perfect bracket was in 2019, when a fan from Ohio correctly picked the first 49 winners. Unfortunately, the guy's winning streak was broken after the Sweet 16.

According to ncaa.com, the odds of predicting winners of all 63 games correctly are 1 in 9,223,372,036,854,775,808. With the odds of recording a perfect bracket at 1 in 9.2 quintillion, the only sure bet is that I won't win.

Even though I was a student at Indiana University (IU), I never cared much for basketball and to this day, I've never attempted to fill out a bracket. In the Hoosier state, basketball is a religion, so to some locals, I guess I was considered a heathen.

However, for a few hours on March 30, 1987, I became an IU basketball fan. Indiana was playing Syracuse for the national championship, and I had joined several housemates in our living room to watch the game on the television.

Not because I cared so much about the game, but because I had just finished my homework,

someone brought beer and the guys seemed to be having a great time. I have to admit, the competition was fierce and with just 3 seconds remaining in the game, Keith Smart hit the game-winning shot to give Indiana a 74-73 victory and the 1987 NCAA national title.

Following the game, I ran down to IU's iconic Showalter Fountain located at the center of our campus with the rest of my housemates. I guess I got caught up in the excitement because it was just 30 degrees outside, and I was wearing only a T-shirt, sweatpants and my favorite pair of flip-flops.

The crowd was massive, excited and mostly drunk. The mob's collective behavior was mostly positive and celebratory, however, a few fans took things a bit too far. A handful of students, I assume fueled by alcohol and adrenaline, jumped into the fountain's frigid water, while others proceeded to climb the sculpture of Venus and the five bronze fish that had been installed in the fountain in 1961.

I became trapped in the mob and soon suffered the consequences of partying without proper footwear. Someone stepped on my heel, which caused my left flip-flop to come off my foot.

The crowd was tightly packed and surged unpredictably so much so that my friend advised me not to bother searching for the flip-flop at that time, as it might lead to me being trampled. Alas, we retreated from the raucous event without my left flip-flop.

The next day I woke up early, washed my filthy left foot and rode my bike to the fountain, only to discover an expansive sea of red Solo cups, beer cans and quite a few shoes. The debris left behind by the revelers was somewhat amusing considering the circumstances.

However, later that day, university staff announced that hooligans had made off with the sculpture of a 200-pound bronze fish during the celebration. But as luck would have it, I found a flip-flop that I believed was mine, so it wasn't a total loss.

Now in its 49th year of publication, *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* is the nation's premier magazine for wheelchair sports and recreation primarily for those with spinal-cord injury, spina bifida, amputation and some congenital defects. Not responsible for unsolicited material. *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* neither endorses nor guarantees any of the products or services advertised. © 2024 Paralyzed Veterans of America. All rights reserved. Reproduction of the whole or any part of the contents without permission is prohibited.

Campus police were left with no leads, and the university never received a ransom note, so for the next 22 years, the story of the missing Showalter Fountain fish became folklore.

In 2009, the university commissioned its replacement and a new fish was installed. Astonishingly, more troublemakers raided the fountain in 2010 and ran off with the second-string fish. Fortunately, a mold of the sculpture was created by a Detroit company and has been used repeatedly by the university to reproduce the water-spewing fountain-dweller when needed.



Indiana University's Showalter Fountain and its sculpture of Venus and five bronze fish.

COURTESY OF INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Over the last decade, the now legendary fish has survived the she-nanigans of many vandals and would-be thieves, yet the location of the original Showalter Fountain fish remains a mystery.

I'm guessing this year's March Madness will come and go with no sign of the elusive water-spewing fish or

In 2013, one of the bronze reproductions was spotted on Instagram, so university officials began negotiating the repatriation of the fish. Immunity from prosecution was offered, and the hefty bronze fish was recovered from an undisclosed location.

a basketball fan with a perfect bracket — but I remain hopeful for both.

Good luck with your brackets, and let me know if you find the fish: al@pvamag.com.

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In The Game

ATHLETICS

Carter, Mayo Win Medals

Two former *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* Junior Athlete of the Year award winners each earned para track and field medals at the World AbilitySport Games in December 2023 in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand.

A 2021 award winner, Zach Carter won gold in the shot put, while Delmace Mayo, the 2022 award winner, earned silver in the 5,000 meters.

and javelin), Gunnarson (100 and 1,500) Borgmeier (400, 800 and 1,500) and Winter (400) each earned silver medals.

And Lauren Fields (100, 200 and 400), Gianni Quintero (1,500), Christian Ramirez (shot put), Gunnarson (200 and 400), Jundt (400 and long jump), Meairs (800 and 1,500), Hamilton (400), Anwar (100), Brandt (shot put), Butts (200) and Winter (long jump) each earned bronze medals.

To compete, athletes had to apply and meet certain criteria, including having two or more years of competition experience at

CHRISTOPHER DIVIRGLIO



Zach Carter

They were two of 20 U.S. athletes who competed in the Dec. 1–9, 2023, event, and Move United athletes won 47 total medals.

Adaylia Borgmeier (100, 200 and 5,000), Tyler Gunnarson (5,000), Lily Rosenthal (200), Kaidyn Stockdale (shot put, javelin and discus) and Sam Winter (200) also won gold medals. Michael Anwar (200), Ben Brackett (shot put and discus), Ben Brandt (200 and javelin), Will Butts (400 and long jump), Will Hamilton (100 and 200), Lucas Jundt (100), Elicia Meairs (javelin), Jillian Romanyk (shot put), Rosenthal (long jump



Delmace Mayo

the national level, according to a January Move United press release.

BASKETBALL

U.S. Men's Initial Paralympic Roster Selected

Sixteen players, including 12 from the gold-medal-winning 2023 Santiago Parapan American Games men's wheelchair basketball team, have been named as initial selections

CHRISTOPHER DIVIRGLIO

for the 2024 U.S. men's national wheelchair basketball team.

Selections were made after the 2024 USA men's tryout camp, held Jan. 3–7 at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. The roster will be narrowed down to 12 athletes, along with four alternates, after the March 27–31 Paralympic team selection camp there.

The 16 initial athletes are:

- Steve Serio (Westbury, N.Y.)
- Brian Bell (Birmingham, Ala.)
- Trevon Jenifer (Huntingtown, Md.)
- Jake Williams (Milwaukee)
- Jorge Sanchez (Oakland, Calif.)

- John Boie (Milton, Wis.)
- Ryan Neiswender (Lebanon, Pa.)
- Jorge Salazar (Delano, Calif.)
- Fabian Romo (Chicago)
- Talen Jourdan (Deerfield, Wis.)
- Jeromie Meyer (Woodbine, Iowa)
- AJ Fitzpatrick (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)
- Peter Berry (Houston)
- Paul Schulte (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- Nate Hinze (Oshkosh, Wis.)
- Aaron Gouge (Grand Prairie, Texas)

Most recently, Serio, Bell, Jenifer, Williams, Sanchez, Boie, Salazar, Romo, Jourdan, Meyer, Fitzpatrick and Berry helped lead the

U.S. to gold at the Parapan American Games in Chile.

Additionally, Serio, Bell, Jenifer, Williams, Sanchez, Boie, Neiswender and Hinze all played on the U.S.' 2021 Tokyo Paralympic gold-medal-winning team in Japan. This year's Paris Paralympic Games run from Aug. 28–Sept. 8 in France.

U.S. Women's Initial Paralympic Roster Named

Just like the men, 12 of the 16 initial 2024 U.S. women's national wheelchair basketball team selections come from the gold-



In The Game

medal-winning 2023 Santiago Parapan American Games team.

The initial roster was named after the U.S. held its 2024 women's tryout camp Jan. 3–7 at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. It will be narrowed down to 12 athletes, along with four alternates, after the March 27–31 Paralympic team selection camp there.

The initial 16 athletes are:

- Natalie Schneider (Syracuse, Neb.)
- Rose Hollermann (Elysian, Minn.)
- Becca Murray (Germantown, Wis.)
- Courtney Ryan (Chula Vista, Calif.)
- Josie Aslakson (Jordan, Minn.)
- Bailey Moody (Alpharetta, Ga.)
- Lindsey Zurbrugg (Portland, Ore.)
- Ixhelt Gonzalez (Chicago)
- Abigail Bauleke (Savage, Mich.)
- Emily Oberst (Brookfield, Wis.)
- Kaitlyn Eaton (Houston)
- Josie DeHart (Fruita, Colo.)
- Ali Ibanez (Murray, Utah)
- Quinn Meyer (Austin, Texas)
- Zoe Voris (Chicago)
- Elizabeth Becker (Charlotte, N.C.)

Schneider, Hollermann, Murray, Ryan, Aslakson, Moody, Zurbrugg, Gonzalez, Bauleke, Oberst, Eaton and DeHart all played on the U.S.' Parapan American Games team, while Voris was an alternate. Ten women — Hollermann, Murray, Ryan, Aslakson, Moody, Zurbrugg, Gonzalez, Bauleke, Eaton and Ibanez — played on the 2021 U.S. women's bronze-medal-winning Tokyo Paralympic team in Japan. This

year's Paris Paralympic Games are set for Aug. 28–Sept. 8 in France.

SKIING

Three Medal At Opener

Germany's Anna-Lena Forster, Norway's Jesper Pedersen and the Netherlands' Jeroen Kampschreur each brought home medals from the Dec. 16–17, 2023, season-open-

ing para alpine skiing World Cup in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

Forster, the lone competitor in the women's downhill sitting division, finished both days to claim gold both times. Pedersen won the men's downhill sitting division's first race, beating Kampschreur by 1.69 seconds. But Kampschreur returned the favor, taking the final day's title.

Germany's Anna-Lena Forster, shown in this 2022 Beijing Paralympics photo, won the women's downhill sitting division at the December 2023 para alpine skiing World Cup in St. Moritz, Switzerland.



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SWIMMING

Araujo, Summers-Newton Win Awards

Brazil's Gabriel Araujo and Great Britain's Maisie Summers-Newton each secured 2023 Best Overall Athlete titles in December at the Citi Para Swimming World Series.

Araujo actually doubled up titles, winning the Best Male Overall Athlete and High-Support Needs titles. He finished with 4,242



Brazil's Gabriel Araujo, shown in this photo at the August 2023 Para Swimming World Championships in Manchester, England, won the Citi Para Swimming World Series' Best Male Overall Athlete and High-Support Needs titles.

points, beating out Italy's Simone Barlaam (4,194 points) and two-time World Series winner Antoni

Ponce Bertran (Spain), who had 4,176 points for the male overall title.

Summers-Newton had 3,931 points, edging out Great Britain teammate Poppy Maskill and Netherlands swimmer Chantalle Zijderveld, who each had 3,923 points.

POWERLIFTING

Poland Nabs Six Golds

Poland totaled six gold medals, including two by Beata Jankowska, to take the World Para Paralifting Nakhon Ratcha-



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In The Game

sima 2023 World Cup in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, and close out the season.

Jankowska took the women's up-to 86 kilograms division with a 94-kilogram lift and won a gold on the mixed team along with Marek Trykacz and Michal Salwa.

Poland's Paulina Przywecka-Puziak also won gold, taking the women's up-to 61 kilograms division with a 101-kilogram lift on her final attempt, along with Slawomir Szymanski (men's up-to 54 kilograms division, 129 kilograms), Tomasz Kociubinski (men's up-to 72 kilograms division, 165 kilograms) and Wawrzyniec Latus (men's up-to 88 kilograms division, 184 kilograms).

Additionally, Thailand's Kamolpan Kraratpet took two medals, winning gold with a 90-kilogram lift in the women's up-to 55 kilograms

division and a silver with teammates Amorntep Pongsao and Ton Yarnpairot in the mixed team event.

For full results, visit paralympic.org.

SHOOTING

Three Golds For De La Forest

Tanguy de la Forest, Abdullah Sultan Alaryani and Lee Jang-ho each closed the 2023 shooting para sport season with titles at the Al Ain 2023 World Cup in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, in December. De la Forest brought home three golds, while Jang-ho earned three medals and Alaryani earned two medals.

France's de la Forest won the R9 mixed 50-meter rifle prone SH2 division with a world-record 254 points, scored 639 points in the

R4 mixed 10-meter air rifle prone SH2 division to edge past teammate Justine Beve and took the R4 mixed 10-meter standing air rifle SH2 division with 637 points.

South Korea's Jang-ho took the R6 mixed 50-meter rifle prone SH1 division with 250.5 points and earned bronze in the men's 10-meter air rifle standing SH1 division and R7-R8 mixed 50-meter rifle prone SH1 division.

The United Arab Emirates' Alaryani won gold in the R7-R8 mixed 50-meter 3 positions SH1 division, totaling 460.6 points and finishing more than eight points ahead of Sweden's Anna Benson. He earned silver in the R6 mixed 50-meter rifle prone SH1 division behind Jang-ho.

For full results, visit results.sius.com/events.aspx?Championship=dbec5d90-7772-49ea-afab-d93cf69a77ee.

The United Arab Emirates' Abdullah Sultan Alaryani, left in this 2021 Paralympics photo, won gold in the R7-R8 mixed 50-meter 3 positions SH1 division at the Al Ain 2023 World Cup.



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WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

U.S. Team Announces Initial Paralympic Roster

Sixteen athletes have been selected to the 2024 U.S. national wheelchair rugby roster after a Dec. 11–16, 2023, selection camp at Lakeshore Foundation, a U.S. Olympic and Paralympic training site, in Birmingham, Ala.

That group will be narrowed down to 12, with four alternates, for the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games, which run from Aug. 28–Sept. 8 in France.

The 16 athletes are:

- Sarah Adam (Naperville, Ill.)
- Jeff Andrews (Santa Rosa, Calif.)
- Chuck Aoki (Minneapolis)
- Travis Baker (Hamilton, Ohio)
- Justin Beavers (Portland, Ore.)
- Clayton Brackett (Birmingham, Ala.)
- Jeff Butler (Fort Wayne, Ind.)
- Chris Fleace (Tucson, Ariz.)
- Lee Fredette (East Moriches, N.Y.)
- Brad Hudspeth (Stilwell, Kan.)
- Chuck Melton (Richview, Ill.)
- Eric Newby (Nashville, Ill.)
- Josh O'Neill (Colorado Springs, Colo.)
- Zion Redington (Birmingham, Ala.)
- Mason Symons (Hershey, Pa.)
- Josh Wheeler (Tucson, Ariz.)

In November 2023, 11 athletes, including Aoki, Adam, Baker, Brackett, Butler, Hudspeth, Fredette, Newby, O'Neill, Redington and Symons, helped lead the team to a qualifying spot in the Paris Paralympic Games with a gold-medal

win at the Parapan American Games in Santiago, Chile.

PVA Rugby Invite Champs

At Paralyzed Veterans of America's Wheelchair Rugby Invitational Jan. 12–14 in Louisville, Ky., the WWAR Generals, Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2 and University of Michigan B Team each captured titles.

The WWAR Generals defeated the Phoenix Ability360 Heat, 55-46, for the Division I title, while the Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2 defeated the Magee Eagles, 50-31, for the Division II title. And the University of Michigan B Team defeated Oscar Mike Militia, 55-43, for the Division III title.

In Division I, Stuart Robinson (WWAR Generals) won the Best High-Pointer honors, Sarah Adam (St. Louis Bombers) took the Best High Mid-Pointer



WWAR Generals' Anthony McDaniel, with ball, moves in to score against Phoenix Ability360 Heat 1 in the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational Division I championship game Jan. 14 in Louisville, Ky.



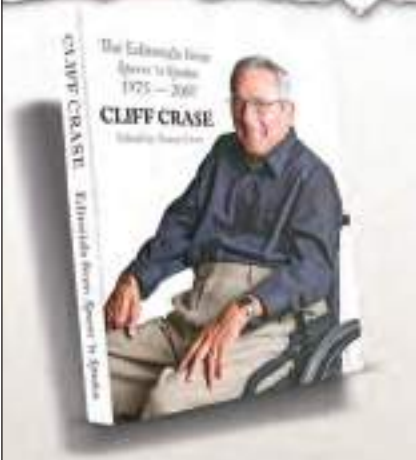
Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2's Agustin Serrano, right, hangs onto the ball while the Magee Eagles' Pasqual Paco Torres defends during the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational's Division II championship game Jan. 14 in Louisville, Ky.

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

In The Game

**The Editorials
of Cliff Crase**
SPORTS 'N SPOKES
magazine
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Edited by
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award, Ryan Engleby (WASA/CKRI Lightning) won the best Low Mid-Pointer honor and Joe Jackson (Phoenix Ability360 Heat) won Best Low-Pointer. WWAR Generals' Anthony McDaniel won the Most Valuable Player.

In Division II, Pasqual Paco Torres (Magee Eagles) won the Best High-Pointer, Stephen Eik (Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2) won Best High Mid-Pointer, Zach Bradley (Shepherd Smash) won Best Low Mid-Pointer and Brian Sperle (Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2) won Best Low-Pointer. Phoenix Ability360 Heat 2's Agustin Serrano won the Division II Most Valuable Player honors.

And in Division III, Justin LeClaire (Chicago Bears) won Best High-Pointer, Kaleb Wilson (Oscar Mike Militia) took Best High Mid-Pointer, Josh Burch (Oscar Mike Militia) took Best Low Mid-Pointer and Chris Fleace (Oscar Mike Militia) won Best Low-Pointer. Oscar Mike Militia's Mason Symons won Division III Most Valuable Player honors.

Additionally, Brooks Bandits player Don Bergman won the Jeremiah Butler Best Smile Sportsmanship Award and WWAR Warriors player Chris Hull won the Jerry "Bull" Baylor Mentorship Award.

WWAR Wins January Jam

The Wounded Warriors Abilities Ranch (WWAR) Generals won the January Jam International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament, held Jan. 20–22 at Lesley "Les" Miller Jr. All People's Life Center in Tampa, Fla.

London Annihilators Wheelchair Rugby placed second, while

Texas Stampede Wheelchair Rugby Association was third.

WWAR's Anthony McDaniel was selected as Tournament Most Valuable Player, while WWAR's Stuart Robinson was picked as Best High-Pointer, London's Cody Caldwell earned Best Mid-Pointer and WWAR's Eddie Crouch earned Best Low-Pointer. TIRR Texans' Mark Ingemann Peters and Robinson tied as Best High-Pointer, and Robinson earned the award via coin toss.

Texas Wins Battle Of The Bay

Texas captured the Jan. 14–16 Battle of the Bay wheelchair rugby championship in Sacramento, Calif. Texas went 3-0, defeating Las Vegas (56-31), High Fives B (54-37) and High Fives A (55-51) to capture the title.

Alex Pabon was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. David Garcia (Best High-Pointer), Steven Toyoji (Best Mid-Pointer) and Earl Bowser (Best Low-Pointer) also earned awards.

High Rollers Win In Vegas

The Las Vegas High Rollers won the Jan. 26–28 Vegas Vengeance title, while the Ottawa Stingers placed second and Kansas City Revolution finished third. Lukasz Rekawiecki (Most Valuable Player and Best High-Pointer awards), Michael Lykins (Best Mid-Pointer Award), Patrice Dagenais (Best Low-Pointer Award) and Tony Durham (Sportsmanship Award) each received all-tournament honors.

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clubs@usarchery.org

BASKETBALL

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wheelchairbasketball.ca

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National Wheelchair Basketball Association*
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usfencing.org

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U.S. Sled Hockey Association
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MULTISPORT

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255 East Bonita Avenue
Pomona, CA 91769
(909) 596-7733 / 593-0153 (fax)
casacolina.org

Move United
451 Hungerford Drive, Ste. 608
Rockville, MD 20850
moveunitedsport.org

World T.E.A.M. Sports
4250 Veterans Memorial Highway,
Ste. 420E
Holbrook, NY 11741
(855) 987-8326 / 288-3377 (fax)
worldteamsports.org

QUAD SPORTS

Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program (BORP)
3075 Adeline St., Ste. 155
Berkeley, CA 94703
(510) 849-4663 / 849-4616 (fax)
info@borp.org
borp.org

United States Wheelchair Rugby Association
4000 Ridgeway Drive
Homewood, AL 35209
(205) 999-3092
uswra.org

RACQUET SPORTS

International Tennis Federation (Wheelchair Tennis Department)
Bank Lane, Roehampton
London SW15 5XZ, England
(011) 0044-(0)208-878-6464
0044-(0)208-392-4744 (fax)
wheelchairtennis@itftennis.com
itftennis.com

United States Tennis Association
70 W. Red Oak Lane
White Plains, NY 10604
(914) 696-7000 / 696-7029 (fax)
usta.com

RECREATION

Turning POINT (Paraplegics On Independent Nature Trips)
403 Pacific Avenue
Terrell, TX 75160
(972) 524-4231
point@turningpointnation.org
turningpointnation.org

SHOOTING

Move United
451 Hungerford Drive, Ste. 608
Rockville, MD 20850
moveunitedsport.org

National Wheelchair Shooting Federation*
102 Park Avenue
Rockledge, PA 19046
(215) 379-2359 / 663-0102 (fax)

NRA Disabled Shooting Services
11250 Waples Mill Road
Fairfax, VA 22030
(703) 267-1495 / 267-3941 (fax)

SKIING

Move United
451 Hungerford Drive, Ste. 608
Rockville, MD 20850
moveunitedsport.org

Ski for Light, Inc.
1455 West Lake Street
Minneapolis, MN 55408
(612) 827-3232
info@sfl.org
sfl.org

SOFTBALL

National Wheelchair Softball Association
13414 Paul Street
Omaha, NE 68154
(402) 305-5020
bfroendtd@cox.net
wheelchairsoftball.org

TABLE TENNIS

American Wheelchair Table Tennis Association
23 Parker Street
Port Chester, NY 10573
(914) 937-3932
johnsonjennifer@yahoo.com

TRACK & FIELD

Adaptive Track & Field USA (ATSUSA)
https://www.atfusa.org

WATER SPORTS/RECREATION

American Canoe Association
7432 Alban Station Boulevard
Ste. B-232
Springfield, VA 22150
(703) 451-0141 / 451-2245 (fax)
americancanoe.org

Handicapped Scuba Association
1104 El Prado
San Clemente, CA 92672
(949) 498-4540 / 498-6128 (fax)
hsa@hsascuba.com
hsascuba.com

Water Skiers With Disabilities Association
1251 Holy Cow Road
Polk City, FL 33868
(800) 533-2972 / (863) 324-4341
325-8259 (fax)
usawaterski.org

MOVING OUT OF THEIR LANE

by Jennifer Best

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH
© GETTY IMAGES/AE B

As the only university or college with a para swimming team, the University of Arizona just completed its third season and aims to keep providing opportunities.

The University of Arizona (UA) continues paving a path toward equity in sports as it builds another nation-first collegiate para athletic team. The UA Para Swim Team wrapped up its third season Dec. 15–17, 2023, at the U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships.

The Wildcats' Liberty "Libby" Freeman and Jonathan Trawick joined more than 110 athletes at Rosen Aquatic & Fitness Center for the first U.S. Paralympics Swimming event hosted in Orlando, Fla.

"I've known that I wanted to be at the University of Arizona since the age of 9, but when they opened up the vet school and started para swimming at

the same time, I figured that had to be a sign, and I fully committed here," Freeman says.

The growing program, established in 2021 under the leadership of coach Laura Utsch, is the seventh sport to join the university's adaptive athletics menu. Other programs are wheelchair basketball, tennis, rugby, golf and handcycling, as well as track and field and road racing. All participating student-athletes are provided tuition assistance, coaching, tutoring and additional services.

"The University of Arizona has the opportunity for anyone who can swim even a little bit at the moment, but in the future as ex-



Laura Utsch

AIDAN GRAVELLE



University of Arizona para swimming team members Jonathan Trawick, left, and Libby Freeman competed at the December 2023 U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships in Orlando, Fla.

CHRIS RICHARDS

COURTESY OF LIBBY FREEMAN

COURTESY OF LIBBY FREEMAN

perienced swimmers find us, we'll have to be more selective," Utsch says. "For now, I'm really focused on developing technique in swimmers who haven't ever had that kind of coaching before." That focus is quickly paying off for student-athletes and the university. In Orlando, Trawick (cerebral palsy, L4/L5 lumbar fusion) and Freeman (left above-the-knee amputee) turned in personal-best performances event after event. Trawick smashed his previous personal best times in the men's S8 50- and 100-meter freestyles and 100 backstroke. Freeman sliced time in the women's S9 100 butterfly and 100 backstroke, along with the women's S9 50, 100, 200 and 400 freestyle events. Trawick finished second in the 100 freestyle (1 minute, 34.43 seconds) and 100 backstroke (2:15.26) and third in the 50 freestyle (40.77 seconds), while Freeman had top-10 finishes in the women's S9 100 butterfly (1:26.73, ninth) and 100 backstroke (1:23.29, 10th). She also placed 11th in the 100, 13th in the 50 and 15th in the 400 freestyles.



University of Arizona para swimmer Libby Freeman, left, coach Laura Utsch, center, and para swimmer Jonathan Trawick at the U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships.



COURTESY OF LIBBY FREEMAN

Libby Freeman earned top-10 finishes in the women's S9 100-meter butterfly and 100 backstroke at the December 2023 U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships.

The two also swam on the mixed 400 medley relay, along with Noah Thomas and Cali Prochaska, as an unattached team, and placed second (6:17.15).

"Focusing on Jon's stroke and gaining control was an experiment, and it paid off because he's already gone best times at nationals, and that's without training any kind of speed or endurance. Libby was only working out three or four times a week. This just showed me that a lot of swimmers with disabilities haven't even touched their capability or any kind of top ceiling in their sport," Utsch says. "I'm in the middle of creating that for these swimmers. But they're the ones that have to do the work, and they have to buy in to doing work at a level they've never experienced before."

Diving In

The para swim team has long been in the making at the university, whose athletics department has supported adaptive sports since 1979.

The University of Arizona's Libby Freeman, far left, closed her para swimming season at the December 2023 U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships.

"Swimming makes perfect sense in Tucson, Arizona, because we can swim all year round, but we needed a swimmer to start it," says Peter Hughes, athletic director at University of Arizona Adaptive Athletics.

As Hughes, a former UA athlete himself, coached wheelchair basketball there for years, three-time Paralympic swimmer Martin Parker approached him about developing a swimming aquatics program. When Hughes took the directorship in 2018, Parker continued the push.

Then along came Annalysa Lovos (L3-5 spinal-cord injury), now a graduate student, whom Hughes met in 2020 as she practiced dry-land swim bench training at the Disability Resource Center. Although she'd been a competitive athlete in various sports before her injury, she had never competed in aquatics.

When Hughes pitched her on being first, she was all in.

He paired Lovos with Utsch, a former Division I athlete who had been coaching challenged athletes for years at nearby Find Your Fins. She already knew how to analyze each swimmer's particular needs, adapt strokes and build teaching and training programs to meet those unique needs.

"I love the water, and I know it's a great place for people to be, especially for people with addictions, disabilities and veterans," Utsch says.

For athletes like Freeman, work in the pool offers physical fitness, a competitive outlet and a psychological change of gears from the everyday routine.



COURTESY OF LIBBY FREEMAN

“If we can provide these opportunities here in Arizona, then other schools can do it, as well. Right now, we provide that place for these young people to look forward to.” — Peter Hughes

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“I just love the feeling of swimming,” Freeman says. “It’s not necessarily quiet, but it allows me to focus. It’s not chaotic like everything else outside the water. I think that’s what I love about it most.”

Building A Program

With no other U.S. colleges or universities offering para swimming, UA athletes compete at U.S. Paralympics Swimming, U.S. Masters Swimming and Move United sanctioned events, and in exhibitions at University of Arizona varsity home swimming meets.

“If we can provide these opportunities here in Arizona, then other schools can do it, as well. Right now, we provide that place for these young people to look forward to,” Hughes says.

In season two, freshman Thomas (hypochondroplasia, a form of short-limbed dwarfism) joined Lovos on the team (though he is no longer on it), and the word got out. Students with disabilities who are



COURTESY OF SKYLER FISHER

seeking academic rigor in a university setting paired with access and benefits of collegiate swimming are now veering toward the developing program.

In fall 2023, Trawick crossed the country from Gainesville, Fla., to join the program as it entered a third season, and Story Turner joined from Ogden, Utah. Tucson-raised Freeman says the addition of her chosen course of study, as well as her preferred sport, solidified her commitment to her hometown university this year.

In addition, the program welcomed two para triathletes into the lanes: Skyler Fisher of Dallas and Olivia Molnar of Lewisville, Texas.

“Being on a team is a really good outlet for me to be able to do things other than just going to school, bed, then doing it all over again,” says Fisher, whose Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease limits her mobility from the waist down. “We get to travel to some really cool places, and you get to meet a lot more people when you do a sport.”

University of Arizona para triathlete Skyler Fisher, left, joined the University of Arizona para swimming team in 2023.



CHRIS RICHARDS

Jonathan Trawick earned four top-three finishes at the December 2023 U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championships.

COURTESY OF SKYLER FISHER



Skyler Fisher, in red cap, swam for a dozen years and discovered triathlon before joining the University of Arizona para swimming team. She's a para triathlete who trains with the team.

The change of venue, coach and program immediately paid off for Trawick. At the U.S. Masters Swimming Ron Johnson Invitational in November 2023, he set personal bests in the 50 and 100 freestyles.

While Lovos was new to the sport, more of the latest additions have previous competitive experience. Freeman swam for a decade before hitting the Wildcat deck. Fisher was a born swimmer,

“I love the water, and I know it’s a great place for people to be, especially for people with addictions, disabilities and veterans.” — **Laura Utsch**

constantly in the water with her brother, Kendyl, throughout their childhood. She swam for a dozen years, then discovered triathlon before joining the University of Arizona.

“The adaptive sports program here is one of the best in the country, and when I visited, I really enjoyed the whole environment and the opportunities they have for us,” Fisher says.



AIDAN GRAVELLE

University of Arizona para swimming team members pose after an early-February practice on campus in Tucson, Ariz.



Those opportunities include expanding the simple life of a student to the complex life of student-athlete with the added rigors of training and competition.

Opened doors have already led to nationwide, even international, travel to meet, greet and compete with their peers.

The University of Arizona para swimming team practices at the pool in Tucson, Ariz.

"I've never been out of the country, so to get to go to Spain and Italy with USA Triathlon to compete against athletes from other countries was cool," Fisher says. "Travel was a hot mess with the chair, the bike, the race chair, but it feels like it gets easier every time."

While the national championships are behind them, each swimmer knows there's never truly an end to swim season. One lap rolls into the next, as they reach for the walls and beyond for meets to come. Fisher dreams of racing in Australia and the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympic Games, where Freeman hopes to compete, as well.

"I'm fully committed," Freeman says. "I'm letting Coach Laura take control, and we'll see from there. She seems to know what she's doing. I've dropped loads of time, so I'm putting full trust in her."

For more information about UA Para Swimming, visit adaptiveathletics.arizona.edu/sports/para-swimming.

S'NS



Skyler Fisher, who has Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, says being on the University of Arizona's para swimming team has provided an outlet.



Hoops

The University of Alabama's teams have combined for 13 intercollegiate wheelchair basketball championships since 2005. So, what's led to the Crimson Tide's dominance?

by Steve Goldberg/Red Line Editorial

photos by Kellcie Temple

It's a Monday practice, and University of Alabama shirts roll through the layup line. But this isn't training on the school's Tuscaloosa campus. It's 450 miles northeast at a church gym in Charlotte, N.C. Since 2010, five wheelchair basketball players from the Charlotte Rollin' Hornets junior teams have made the journey down Interstates 85 and 20 to play for the Crimson Tide. Three are there now, and two more will join them next season.

Located in the heart of a vibrant southeast region known for wheelchair hoops, Alabama has become a magnet for top recruits. But the Tide's success — nine National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) intercollegiate championships for the women, plus four for

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH © GETTY IMAGES/AMBERDY

Hotbed

University of Alabama men's wheelchair basketball players Gabe Taylor, top left, Eric Francis, black shirt, Tim Houston, center, and Aaron Berry, right, are part of the Crimson Tide's 2023-24 team.



the men, all in the past two decades — is about much more than geography, people close to the program say.

"They're the leader of the intercollegiate division in facilities and the way their staff has been built out," says Mike Godsey, the longtime director and coach of the Rollin' Hornets, a program with a history of sending alums on to college programs. "And that transcends itself across everything that they do, including summer camps and interaction in the recruiting process."

As wheelchair basketball continues to grow both nationally and internationally, Alabama has increasingly established itself as the gold standard for the college game.

For evidence of that, look no further than the NWBA Men's and Women's Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball National Championships this month, where both Crimson Tide teams

enter as the reigning champs, with the women having won each of the last four titles.

The women's intercollegiate wheelchair basketball championships run March 7–9 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Ala., while the men's intercollegiate wheelchair basketball championships run March 13–16 at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Minn.

The University of Alabama's two teams have combined for 13 championships. But the foundation for that success was set at the start of Alabama Adapted Athletics in 2003, which included the women's wheelchair basketball team, built upon the drive and vision of its co-founders and with some early help from a key champion in the administration.

Setting The Foundation

Twenty-one years ago, incoming assistant professors of kinesiology Brent Hardin and Margaret Stran arrived on campus with visions of creating an adaptive sports program at the school. Hardin had been introduced to para sports in 1996 while working on his master's degree at the University of Georgia and witnessing the



The University of Alabama women's and men's wheelchair basketball teams play at Stran-Hardin Arena — a 27,000-square-foot arena built in 2018.

Paralympic Games just down the road in Atlanta. He later met Stran, a member of the 1992 and 1996 U.S. Paralympic women's wheelchair basketball teams, while teaching at the University of West Georgia, where she was coaching wheelchair basketball.

"Oh, this is our chance," Hardin recalls thinking. "Let's let him know what we want to do."

In perhaps a stroke of luck, the new president, Robert Witt, had come to Tuscaloosa from the University of Texas at Arlington, which had been

“What Alabama has done is to really raise the bar very, very high. Right now, there’s not a lot of programs that can match what they’re doing. In the short-term, that kind of hurts. But long-term, it’s fantastic what they’re doing because it’s going to force other programs to really grow and push and find ways to catch up, which is only going to elevate the sport.” — **Ron Lykins**



"When I interviewed here in Alabama, I made it pretty clear with the folks here that we wanted to start an adapted athletics program and kind of laid out our vision in my interview," Hardin says.

Suddenly, at a new faculty orientation, Hardin had the chance to chat with the university's president who, coincidentally, was also new to the job.

a power in men's wheelchair basketball. Adaptive sports were hardly new to him.

"He didn't come out and support us right away monetarily," Hardin says.

"But he did support us, and he did open a lot of doors because he believed in what we wanted to do."

With that support, Hardin and Stran got to work creating Alabama Adapted Athletics. The program eventually grew to add teams for men's wheelchair basketball (2005), wheelchair tennis (2011) and track and field (2023), but Stran and Hardin wanted to start with a women's wheelchair basketball team because there were only two college women's teams — the universities of Illinois and Arizona — at the time, both of whom were playing in the overall NWBA women's division.

"It was hard, but we had a team and we were moving forward," Stran says. "I think it was really recruiting people and getting them to realize that Alabama had a program, that Alabama was a good place to go. That was one of the bigger things, was really getting more people to buy into it."

In the early years, Stran played on the team and co-coached it alongside Hardin. A tipping point came when Paralympic champion Stephanie Wheeler, who had played previously at Illinois and is currently the women's coach there, came to Alabama to pursue her master's degree. That added credibility to the team, and soon there was bevy of world-class talent taking residence in Tuscaloosa. The rosters for the women's teams that won three consecutive titles from 2009 to 2011 read like a combined Paralympic all-star squad, with as many as seven athletes representing three countries. The talent, and victories, have been a staple at Alabama ever since.

University of Alabama men's wheelchair basketball player Parthasarathi Venkatram is a senior from India.



University of Alabama women's basketball coaches and support staff cheer on the team during a home game.

A Home Of Their Own

Alabama had already established itself as a strong program when, in 2018, it opened Stran-Hardin Arena, the first purpose-built college wheelchair basketball facility. Along with a competition court, it includes accessible locker rooms, a weight room, an athletic training room, an equipment room and office suites. The facility is no doubt a major recruiting tool, but it's also a model for other programs, says Ron Lykins, the long-time Missouri men's wheelchair basketball coach.

"What Alabama has done is to really raise the bar very, very high," says Lykins, who also led the U.S. national women's and men's wheelchair basketball teams to four Paralympic gold medals. "Right now, there's not a lot of programs that can match what they're doing. In the short-term, that kind of hurts. But long-term, it's fantastic what they're doing

University of Alabama men's wheelchair basketball player Peter Berry prepares to shoot.





University of Alabama women's wheelchair basketball players Mary Silberman, left, and Joy Haizelden, below, are both originally from outside the U.S. Silberman is from Israel, while Haizelden is from England.



because it's going to force other programs to really grow and push and find ways to catch up, which is only going to elevate the sport."

Expecting it to be named for the primary donors who supported the project, Stran and Hardin were totally surprised when those benefactors worked secretly to put their names on the building.

It Takes A Village

The arena might be Alabama's most visible commitment to its adaptive sports programs, but look at the national championship plaques that line the

The University of Alabama women's wheelchair basketball team will aim for its fifth straight intercollegiate championship.



wall there, and you'll see something else. Underneath the names of the accomplished players and coaches, including several who have won Paralympic or world championships medals for Team USA, Canada and other countries, are even more names.

On the 2019 women's championship plaque, along with head coach Ryan Hynes and assistant coach Karolina Lingyte, there is the support staff of an athletic trainer, a strength coach, a sports psychologist and three managers. Same for the men's 2018 championship led by coach Ford Burttram, except for the fact that they had five managers. The 2023 men's plaque upgraded to include a director of sports medicine, an operations coordinator, a play-by-play broadcaster and a marketing director.

These are NCAA-level numbers and titles, and that's the point, according to Hardin, who says they

want to give their adaptive athletes the same experience afforded those on the university's NCAA teams.

So what started as a small volunteer program is now home to over 30 high-performance student-athletes with disabilities and 13 full-time coaches and staff. The wheelchair basketball teams and other sports have a website similar to Alabama's NCAA teams (bamaadapted.com). Games are packed through proactive student body and community engagement. There's an online Alabama Adapted Coaches Show.

Basketball games are made of moments, and the best teams — the winning teams — are the ones that take the greatest advantage of them.



"I'm a big believer that things work out the way they're supposed to," Hardin says. "And when I look back on the program, there were so many moments like that, that if we hadn't met [Witt] that day, and if he hadn't come here with an understanding that wheelchair basketball or adapted athletics could be a bright light for the university, we wouldn't have gotten the traction that we did."

The chief press officer for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, Steve Goldberg covered every summer Paralympic Games from Sydney 2000 through Rio de Janeiro 2016 for various newspapers, magazines and online media. He is a contributor to SPORTS 'N SPOKES on behalf of Red Line Editorial, Inc.

S'NS

The University of Alabama's men's wheelchair basketball team enters this month's intercollegiate tournament as the defending champ.

NWBA Wheelchair Basketball Tourney Time

WHAT: National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Wheelchair Basketball National Championships

WHEN & WHERE:

Women's Intercollegiate — March 7–9 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Men's Intercollegiate — March 13–15 at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Minn.

Junior Division (Prep, Varsity and Junior Varsity) April 5–7 at Sportable in Richmond, Va.

Adult Division (Divisions I, II and III) April 12–14 at Sportable in Richmond, Va.

Women's Division and Military Division April 26–28 at Turnstone Center for Adults & Children with Disabilities in Fort Wayne, Ind.

All About



The Paralyzed Veterans of America Bass Tour allows anglers with disabilities, non-veterans and veterans alike, chances to compete in tournaments and enjoy camaraderie.



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of America's Bass Tour has been around for more than 30 years, but it officially took form in 1996.



The Bass ... Tour

by John Groth

For Arthur Hunt, fishing is magical.

A regular on the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Bass Tour for more than 15 years, Hunt's a rural countryman who simply loves the sport of fishing.

"I like to figure it out. It's like a puzzle," says Hunt, a Harrisburg, Ill., resident. "[It's] just the excitement, the anticipation and the outdoors. It's 50 percent fishing, 50 percent being outdoors. I love to be outdoors."

A non-veteran, the 56-year-old Hunt was injured Nov. 9, 2000, when he fell out of a tree stand while deer hunting in Harrisburg, fracturing his level L1-L2 and T12 vertebrae. He joined the PVA Bass Tour in 2007 after coming across it during an internet search.

Hunt now lives for the sport. He grew up fishing with his father, Joseph, who worked second shift and would take him fishing in the morning. Now, he makes his own baits and lures, which he learned from his grandfather, Atto McCluskey, and lets kids come over and pick some out. He has his own boat and fishing setup; his wife, Brandi, joins him during trips and they fish together, and he joins other PVA Bass Tour anglers early on tournaments as they share an Airbnb rental. One of the top competitors in the Open Division, Hunt loves the camaraderie.

"I defin tely have made family from all over the U.S. — Texas, Georgia, the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Oklahoma," Hunt says. "It's competitive. It's chippy at times."

But it sure is fun.

"I have met some of the most wonderful people on earth. And if you've never seen or been to a tournament or been out at the pier at 4 o'clock in the morning, either fir men or policemen or motorcycle groups, paralyzed veterans, you haven't lived 'til you've seen that," says PVA Kentucky-Indiana Chapter member Christine Ledger. "The respect, the sacrifice, not only what paralyzed veterans sacrifice, but groups just give up the whole weekend to do this for all of us. It's just amazing."

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Mid-America Chapter member Ferlin Widowski says the PVA Bass Tour has helped with physical activity, especially because he has multiple sclerosis.



COURTESY OF FERLIN WIDOWSKI



Some anglers leave their wheelchairs before being transferred onto a boat to go fishing.

Tour History & Setup

PVA's Bass Tour, which has been around for more than 30 years but officially took form in 1996, features seven three-day tournaments — four in the fall and three in the spring, with its next one — the Citrus Slam Bass Tournament — running April 5–7 in Kissimmee, Fla. All fishing is catch and release.

Anglers can compete in one of four categories: Individual Open, Team Open, Bank or Team Bank divisions. Open Division competitions are done inside the boat on the water, and all anglers are fishing only for bass. Bank divi-

sion anglers can fish from anywhere on the bank and can catch all types of fish — just as long as the fish is 4 inches or longer.

Individual Open Division anglers must be rated 100% disabled by the government or military, rehabbed at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), military or civilian hospital and be a PVA member or PVA associate member, walking or wheeling, or who has significant mobility impairments. Anglers are paired with an able-bodied boat partner for the tournament, with the boat partner offering mentorship, coaching and navigational assistance. Boat partners are not allowed to fish for participants.

Entry fees are \$135 for Open Division anglers and \$80 for Bank Division anglers per event. Open Division anglers can pay another \$10 for the “Big Bass” pot, while anyone who doesn't want to compete for a prize can fish for free.

Boat partners, who pay \$50, are randomly drawn — with anglers organized alphabetically and drawing numbers out of a hat to pick them. Once an angler has his or her boat partner, the angler can go out on the water. Some boat partners know plenty about the area and are local; some are just helping fill in spots. It's all the luck of the draw.

With the Team Open Division, able-bodied partners can fish for participants if it supports the angler's injury, and able-bodied partners can also assist anglers in securing fish if the angler's disability doesn't allow the angler to do so.



COURTESY OF CHRISTINE LEDGER

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Kentucky-Indiana Chapter member Christine Ledger, right, and her wife, “Peep” Parrish, fish in the PVA Bass Tour's Bank Division.

Whether fishing from a boat or the bank, scores are based on total weight of fish caught, and anglers have a limit of five fish. Once the season concludes, the PVA member with the highest amount of points is awarded the Veteran Angler of the Year honor and the opportunity to compete in the annual B.A.S.S. Nation Championship.

"It's good — sometimes it's tough," Hunt says. "There's a lot of local anglers you have to fish with. It's good enough. You can compete with anybody."

Just Needed A Push

Sometimes, it just takes a push to get started.

Four years ago, the 66-year-old Ledger was diagnosed with cervical myelopathy, or the compression of her spinal cord, at her level C5 vertebra. That meant the Navy veteran, who worked in data processing, would have to live life in a wheelchair full-time.

After a year of struggles, she joined a St. Louis VA Video Connect group through the St. Louis VA spinal-cord injury unit. They pushed her to try out fishing with the PVA Bass Tour. The Scottsburg, Ind., resident hadn't fished since she was a child, when she and her late-dad, John, caught bass at Rayburn Lake in south-

east Texas. Now, three years since her diagnosis, she's catching fish again with help from her 63-year-old wife and caregiver, "Peep" Parrish, in the Bank Division. There, she can reel in any type of fish.

Ledger even has her own customized outdoor wheelchair, which she takes with her, while Parrish helps set her up to fish.

Parrish baits the hook, casts the rod out and puts it in a holder, which has a shock absorber/tension rod. So, when the fish gets on the hook and jerks it, all Ledger has to do is reel it in. Ledger says she tried baiting the hook in the past, but she kept sticking



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Kentucky-Indiana Chapter member Hack Alberston, white shirt in both photos, in the 2021 Land of Lincoln PVA Bass Tournament.



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of America Bass Tour anglers, above photos, compete in the 2021 Southeastern Challenge.

“Once you have MS, you’re kind of stuck in the house with MS. I still wanted to do something at my level. I can’t go back to what I did when I was in the Army.” — **Ferlin Widowski**

herself — which they didn’t want to continue because it could lead to an infection.

“When you’re fishing in a tournament, nobody can touch the reel.

You have to reel it in yourself regardless of any trouble you’re having,” Ledger says. “They can do everything else for you but reel. They can set up the reel, and they can bring the fish in. They can net the fish. But I have to bring the fish in where it can be netted.”

While Ledger uses a variety of baits, one of the strangest but best-working ones is her own concoction of chicken breast chunks marinated in strawberry Jello. She says it works — especially with catfish.

“Catfish love it. The smell is also pretty strong. I marinate it overnight,” she says. “I like using chicken

better than liver because liver gets mushy and it doesn’t stay on the hook as long. The chicken breast pieces stay on the hook longer.”

Lasting Impression

PVA Mid-America Chapter member and Army veteran Ferlin Widowski has fished on the PVA Bass Tour for about 15 years.

A 60-year-old Jenks, Okla., resident, Widowski served from 1983 to 1996 as an airborne combat engineer at Fort Bragg in North Carolina before later changing to fire support and working at Fort Lewis, a former Army base in Colorado, and then Fort Cavazos (formerly called Fort Hood) in Texas. He was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 2000.

Widowski had only fished off riverbanks for catfish and crappie until one day when he and a military friend checked out a PVA bass fishing tournament just for fun and to film himself fishing. Then, Widowski went to Dallas and competed in a tournament hosted



Paralyzed Veterans of America Bass Tour anglers say fishing on the tour brings plenty of camaraderie and fun.

by the PVA Lone Star Chapter at Lake Ray Hubbard. But what really hooked him was a tournament back in the late 2000s when some major entertainment — Hooters Girls, the then-NFL Washington Redskins’ Hogettes and even some monster trucks — showed up at one of their Maryland events. It left quite an impression.

“After that year, I’ve done every single tournament since then,” Widowski says.

It’s not only provided him with a main hobby, but it’s helped with physical activity, and it’s given him lifelong friendships, too.

“Once you have MS, you’re kind of stuck in the house with MS. I still wanted to do something at my level. I can’t go back to what I did when I was in the Army,” Widowski says. “I fish hard if I feel good. I slow down if I’m not. It’s a lot harder than I thought it would be. It’s probably not the best thing I should do for my illness. A lot of times, my symptoms are heat-related, and it’s hot out there on the water sometimes.”

But what’s really made an impact on Hunt is some of the other anglers themselves. He still remembers going fishing with Jeff Koch, a quadriplegic.

“He’d sit in bottom of boat until we were ready to go. We took him in Florida last year. We fished 11 hours and he still wasn’t ready to go,” Hunt says. “The people around with PVA and stuff are amazing. A lot of them are amazing. Some are my heroes because it’s not easy for them. It’s pretty easy for me to do it because I’m only paralyzed from the waist down. Some guys don’t have full function of their hands. To watch them cast is amazing. Watching them is out of this world. Jeff is amazing at what he does.”

For more information on the PVA Bass Tour, visit pva.org.



S'NS

All fishing done during Paralyzed Veterans of America Bass Tour events is catch and release.



The Extra Point

Cal-Diego's Got A New Dragster

by John Groth/photos by Larry Houghton

Strapped in tight with six seatbelt buckles, a helmet on his head and hand controls on his left side, Justin Ashbaugh remains focused and calm.

Loud roars of revved up engines below inside the car, sparks fly as other cars zoom down the Barona Drag Strip racetrack in Lakeside, Calif., but the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Cal-Diego Chapter member is locked in this Oct. 20, 2023, night.

Here he is, ready to race an adaptive-controlled green 1950 Studebaker Champion Starliner dragster down that asphalt at 75 mph with one goal in mind — get it to the finish line in 9 seconds flat.

He takes a few deep breaths before moving up to the starting line. The lights flash — yellow, yellow, yellow, and then full out green — and he's off full throttle with the hand controls.

The back tires get loose to start, but he reels it in with the controls and moves down the straightaway, finishing in 9.88 seconds.

"I just counter-steered, and I was getting ready to let out of it. And then sometimes, you know, if you get out of it and



Paralyzed Veterans of America Cal-Diego Chapter member Justin Ashbaugh drag races a 1950 Studebaker Champion Starliner, left, in October 2023 at Barona Drag Strip in Lakeside, Calif.

get back in it, it'll grab then. But I was just getting ready to let out, and then it grabbed on me. So, I was like, I'll stick in it," Ashbaugh says. "We've been running very consistent on our speed. It's just our launches we're struggling with a little. We made some suspension adjustments a couple weeks ago because the car was leaning. We wanted to just level it so it looks better on the shows and stuff. So, we made some suspension adjustments and ever since then, we've been spinning. So, we might just have to go back to having a lean to it."

STREET LEGAL

Over the last decade, PVA's Cal-Diego Chapter has leaned into its love for adaptive auto racing.

Located on the Barona Indian Reservation and nestled right inside the mountains, Barona Drag Strip is a 1/8-mile drag strip located in Lakeside, Calif. It originally started as a sand drag strip in the 1990s, but it was paved and converted in 2003 to the 1/8-mile drag strip. A National Hot Rod Association (NHRA)-sanctioned track, it's home to the NHRA Summit Racing Series.



Paralyzed Veterans of America's old Speedy logo is featured on the 1950 Studebaker Champion Starliner adapted dragster.



“OK, so, racing is fun, though. Like, it’s exhilarating. And it’s just fun to get out here. And the community is awesome [here].”

— Justin Ashbaugh

.....

But on this particular Friday night and on other fall Friday nights marked Street Legal Friday Night racing, all kinds of cars, from dragsters to roadsters to regular black sedans and two-door coupes to PVA’s adaptive-controlled Studebaker, line up and race against other cars — one on each side — on the track.

They’ve come a long way from when the adaptive dragster was just an idea.

Three years ago, late-PVA Cal-Diego Chapter member and adaptive racecar



Paralyzed Veterans of America Cal-Diego Chapter member Justin Ashbaugh transfers into the adapted 1950 Studebaker Champion Starliner dragster.

driver Duane Norman approached Cal Rothe about designing the Studebaker and turning it from a regular car into an adaptive dragster. Tom Loftin, who had been a friend of Norman’s for decades, bought the car in June 2020 and donated it to PVA’s Cal-Diego Chapter in August 2021.

The 71-year-old Rothe knew Norman from the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Road Racing community, and when Norman pitched him the idea, he was intrigued. PVA’s Cal-Diego Chapter had raced

an adaptive-controlled Chevrolet Corvette C6 and Nissan 240SX at the SCCA Autocross Racing Series held monthly at Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego during the late 2010s. However, the stadium was sold to San Diego State University in 2020 and demolished in December of that year, leaving PVA without a track to race its adaptive cars.

Rothe says Norman told him this could be their new project — to develop an adaptive street-racing car for other paralyzed or injured veterans to drive.



Paralyzed Veterans of America Cal-Diego Chapter member Justin Ashbaugh’s goal is to finish the Street Legal Friday Night Division drag race in 9 seconds.



This 1950 Studebaker Champion Starliner was rebuilt, including the engine and steering column. The wheels, seats and doors all had to be worked on.

A Ramona, Calif., resident and an engineer who's built vehicles throughout his life, Rothe was sold. They started in November 2021. They had a body sitting with two-by-fours and screws on an Art Morrison chassis, modified it and then grafted the body to the current Art Morrison chassis. Then, Rothe filled in all the floor pans, the fire walls, did the aluminum work inside and the outriggers, notched in the exhaust systems, installed the small block

Chevy and automatic overdrive transmission and built the headers. He says Norman was instrumental in locating all the parts and materials to help do the job.

"But I really enjoyed the project, and what I really enjoyed the most out of it was Duane Norman. He was just the best person, best friend a person could ever ask for. You know, he and my buddy, Guy, and I worked on it, and he would bring us over a sandwich at lunch. We'd take

a break at lunch, and we'd all talk about what's going on on the car and calculate our future plans and what we can get done," Rothe says. "And I was always so excited when Duane would come over. I could show him what I've gotten done because it was my physical body, but it was his mental assistance that combined with me to build the car. I didn't do a single move without Duane knowing and approving of it, and we all went forward."



Paralyzed Veterans of America Cal-Diego Chapter member Justin Ashbaugh, seated in car, chats with Tom Loftin. At right, Ashbaugh, right, looks at the adapted 1950 Studebaker dragster with Tom Loftin, far left, and Loftin's great-nephew, Tyler, center.



ADRENALINE RUSH

They moved forward with racing, too.

After driving through 30 minutes of plenty of twisty-turny mountain roads, Ashbaugh entered the drag strip and took the car into the tech inspection area. Tech inspection members there look for car safety hazards, which could include things like steel lines that are close to a header, any part of the car that could catch on fire, oil leaks and loose parts and/or debris under the tires that could send the car into the wall.

But there's more. They also check other technical aspects, like safety gear, approved car parts, rubber hoses and other precautions that show the car is up to specifications for the class and speed, and they have the driver fill out required paperwork — which includes a liability release.

Once the tech inspection was completed, Ashbaugh drove it to a spot where the team, which included Loftin, and his great-nephew, Tyler, helped prepare it for racing.

Before racing, the team looks the car over themselves, revs the engine with a rev limiter so the engine isn't blown, checks tire pressures and temperatures, checks the brake fluid, looks for bulging tires or fuel leaks, cleans the car out and performs a general safety check. Once, that's done, it's time for Ashbaugh, or anyone else, to strap in and have some fun.

Dressed in a long blue flannel shirt, jeans, shoes and donning a helmet,



Paralyzed Veterans of America Cal-Diego Chapter members Darius Jones, left, and Justin Ashbaugh after an Oct. 20, 2023, race at Barona Drag Strip.

Ashbaugh was ready to race. All drivers must wear long pants, T-shirts with sleeves (no tank tops), shoes with closed toes and heels, socks and helmets.

The 32-year-old Ashbaugh sustained a level T5-T6 spinal-cord injury (SCI) while mountain biking in Rainbow Valley, Calif. A Marine Corps veteran, he served from 2011 to 2015 as a helicopter mechanic.

Ashbaugh developed a love of racing during his teenage years. While in high school in Pennsylvania, he dated a girl whose father raced on dirt tracks. Ashbaugh served on the pit crew, and his love for racing took off even more.

But he loves working on cars just as much, if not more, than he does driving them. So, he works on the Studebaker at home and drives it over to race at Barona.

"OK, so, racing is fun, though. Like, it's exhilarating. And it's just fun to get out here. And the community is awesome [here]," Ashbaugh says. "Like, everybody just comes up, and you break something, the guy that you're racing against, if he's got an extra part, he'll grab it and put it on your car — even though he's racing against you, just because they want to see you outside."

PVA Cal-Diego Chapter member Darius Jones found that out firsthand.

He met up with Ashbaugh about 30 minutes into the evening. A Navy veteran, the 34-year-old Jones served from 2009 to 2017 as a logistics specialist. But on Aug. 3, 2016, he sustained a level T4 complete SCI in a motorcycle accident in San Diego.

Jones drove an hour and a half to watch Ashbaugh motor down the track by himself before joining him as a passenger for the first time on the third race.

Before his injury, Jones used to race on his motorcycle. He'd wheeled 100 mph plenty of times and even made it up to 174 mph before. So, 75 mph wasn't a major deal.

But Jones definitely enjoyed it.

"Pretty much what I expected — two or three seconds of, like, adrenaline rush, and just smooth on out at the beginning. I mean, when we're just sitting there looking at the lights and once you take off, it's just like I could feel the car kind of, like, spinning a bit. So, it's like, ah!" Jones says. "And then, they get straight. But it was fine. I mean, it's like I've been doing this forever already even though it's my first time."

S'NS

On The Sidelines

BASKETBALL

Vines Among Historic NWBA Hall Of Fame Class

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Research and Education Director Cheryl Vines is among a historic group of new

members in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Hall of Fame.

On Feb. 2, the NWBA Hall of Fame Committee announced Vines as part of the first

class of hall of famers exclusively composed of women. Joining her in the Class of 2024 are wheelchair basketball Paralympians and longtime contributors Andrea Woodson-Smith, PhD, and Darlene Hunter, PhD.

The historic class coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the Women's Sports Foundation, underlining its ongoing mission for equity in sports and the NWBA's commitment to developing talent among women and girls in wheelchair basketball.

Cheryl Vines

Inducted in the contributor category, Vines' involvement in wheelchair basketball spans decades.



Cheryl Vines

It started from her support for the Valley Free-wheelers in the mid-1970s to her instrumental role with the Arkansas Rollin' Razorbacks, where she participated in 14 consecutive post-season tournaments and contributed to five national championships.

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Her commitment extended to establishing the Wayne Kunishige Memorial Scholarship and the Bill and Julie Duncan Good Guy Award, recognizing excellence in academics, sports and community service.

Vines' impact expanded beyond team support. She was the first woman to serve on the NWBA tournament selection committee and later took the role as chair. Vines' significant contributions continued as she worked alongside her husband and fellow hall of famer, Harry Vines, during his tenure as NWBA president, contributing to the organization's growth and communication systems.

In 2011, Vines embraced a new role as a classifier, actively participating in the adoption of the 4-point system and the move to functional classification. She became NWBA Hall of Fame Committee treasurer in 2021.

Andrea Woodson-Smith, PhD

Part of the NWBA for more than two decades, Woodson-Smith is notable for her career as a player and a contributor.



Andrea Woodson-Smith, PhD

She was a member of the national team from 2003 to 2012 and helped the squad to gold medals at the 2010 World Championships and that year's Parapan American Games. Woodson-Smith also helped guide Team USA to a fourth-place finish at the 2012 London Paralympics.

The second female African-American player on the Paralympic basketball team, she broke barriers and continues to inspire. Woodson-Smith has served on the NWBA Board of Directors and several committees, including the Women's Growth and Diversity Committee.

Additionally, her research in wheelchair basketball showcases its profound impact

on individuals with disabilities, emphasizing its significance not only in promoting a healthy physical lifestyle but also providing crucial mental and emotional support.

Darlene Hunter, PhD

Hunter's wheelchair basketball journey is adorned with achievements.



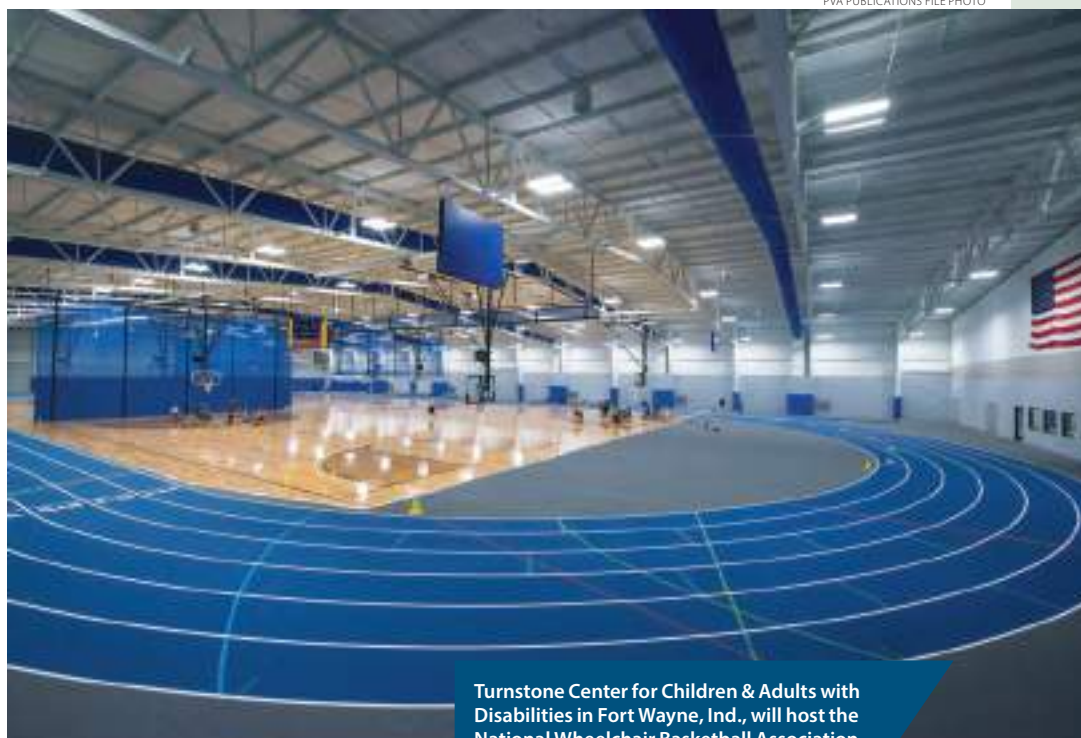
Darlene Hunter, PhD

A multiple medal winner in international competitions, she was a member of the national team from 2010 to 2016 and 2019 to 2021. Hunter was the co-captain of the 2021 Paralympic team in Tokyo and helped Team USA win a bronze medal.

Hunter's commitment to the sport expanded beyond the court. She coached the Lady Mavericks women's wheelchair basketball team and Dallas Junior Wheelchair Mavericks White team in Dallas. Her passion for nurturing talent led her to host an annual women's wheelchair development camp at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Hunter actively serves on various boards and committees, dedicating her time to advancing wheelchair basketball and advocating for policy changes within sports organizations.

She currently serves as the athlete representative for wheelchair basketball for the United States



Turnstone Center for Children & Adults with Disabilities in Fort Wayne, Ind., will host the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Women's and Military Division Wheelchair Basketball tournaments in April.

Olympic/Paralympic and NWBA and the NWBA Women's Growth and Development Committee.

The induction ceremony for the class of 2024 is April 13 at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Va., the host city for the 2024 NWBA Junior and Adult Division Wheelchair Basketball National Championships.

For more information, visit nwba.org.

Hotels Details Set For Events in Fort Wayne

Hotel details have been set for next month's National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Women's and Military division national championship tournaments in Fort Wayne, Ind.

The NWBA announced in late January it has secured 11 hotel properties to support the lodging accommodations for the national championship weekend. Competitive rate offerings have

been reserved at each of the hotel properties.

Both championships are set for April 26–28 at the Turnstone Center for Children & Adults with Disabilities in Fort Wayne.

Lodging for both championships will utilize what the NWBA calls a "Stay to Play" model in a posting on its website. The association says the model "helps ensure the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) receives hotel rebates for room nights associated with our event."

Calling the model "vital" to supporting the LOC, the NWBA says in its website post that the "offset costs from these hotel rebates" come close to breaking even for hosting the event.

The NWBA says "a \$300 fine will be assessed to any team that does not follow the Stay to Play model." Fines will be collected by Turnstone.

For a list of hotels or more information, visit nwba.org.

On The Sidelines



Making Team USA allows fans to follow Olympic and Paralympic athletes on their journey to the Games.

MEDIA

New Team USA Storytelling Platform

Fans of Team USA are now able to follow and connect with Olympic and Paralympic athletes on their journey to the Games.

The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Properties, in association with internet provider Xfinity and NBC Universal, announced the creation of Making Team USA on Feb. 1.

The new website is billed as a first-of-its-kind marketing and sponsorship platform created to spotlight athletes and invite fans to connect with Team USA on their journey to qualifying for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Making Team USA gives fans unprecedented access to understand athletes and their sports.

The website aims to tell the untold qualification journey story. It will consist of live events and competitions, athlete-led storytelling, behind-the-scenes content and other digital experiences to learn more about each athlete.

Among the Paralympic trials to be covered by NBC Universal and Making Team USA are swimming June 27–29 in Minneapolis, Minn., and track and field July 18–20 at a site yet to be determined.

For more information, visit teamusa.com/making-team-usa.

PARALYMPICS

Refugee Team

There will be a refugee team at this summer's Paralympic Games in Paris.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) announced Dec. 13, 2023, plans to support a Refugee Paralympic Team (RPT) in Paris. The IPC will provide a pathway for para athletes with refugee status to compete at the Games.

To ensure the best possible preparations for the RPT ahead of the Paris Games, the French Ministry of Sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games have offered to host RPT athletes for a pre-Games training camp at one of France's centers of sport. The camp will provide an opportunity for focused preparation in advance of the Games.

Meanwhile, Paralympic partner Airbnb will support the team with training and other expenses on the road to Paris.

A team of up to 10 athletes for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games will be named early this year based on performance and meeting the eligibility and selection criteria. This will be third time the IPC has sponsored the RPT, with the first team taking part in the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro.

For more information, visit paralympic.org.

S'NS



Note: ** means this is not a PVA-sponsored event.

Air Guns

- **Wisconsin Air Gun Tournament**
March 8-9, 2024
Milwaukee, WI
- **Texas Air Gun Tournament**
May 4-5, 2024
San Antonio, TX

Bass Fishing

- **Citrus Slam Bass Tournament**
Hosted by Florida Gulf Coast PVA
April 5-7, 2024
Kissimmee, FL
- **Bluegrass Bass Bash Bass Tournament**
Hosted by Kentucky-Indiana PVA
April 19-21, 2024
Kuttawa, KY
- **Capital Clash Bass Tournament**
Hosted by PVA National
June 7-9, 2024
LaPlata, MD

Billiards

- **Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament**
March 15-17, 2024
Midlothian, VA
- **Mid-America Billiards Tournament**
May 23-24, 2024
Oklahoma City, OK

Bowling

- **Nevada Bowling Tournament**
November 30 - December 3, 2023
Las Vegas, NV
- **Florida Gulf Coast Bowling Tournament**
January 31-February 2, 2024
Tampa, FL
- **Texas PVA Bowling Tournament**
May, 8 2024
San Antonio, Texas

Boccia

- **Bayou Boccia Tournament**
February 2-3, 2024
Gulfport, MS

Paracycling

- **PVA Racing High Performance Racing Camp**
January 28-February 4, 2024
Brooksville, Florida
- **Swamp Classic****
February 3-4, 2024
Gainesville, FL
- **Valley of the Sun Stage Race****
February 17-18, 2024
Phoenix, AZ
- **PVA Pocahontas Off-Road Spring Camp**
April 10-14, 2024
Chesterfield, VA
- **PVA Off-Road Classic (PVA Off-Road Race)**
April 13, 2024
Chesterfield, VA
- **PVA Paracycling Learn to Race Camp**
June 21-22, 2024
Milwaukee, WI
- **US Paracycling Road National Championships**
(PVA High Performance Team)
TBD 2024
Location TBD

Trapshooting

- **Cal-Diego Trapshoot**
March 22-24, 2024
Redlands, CA
- **Vaughan Trapshoot**
May 24-26, 2024
Elburn, IL
- **Wisconsin Trapshoot**
June 7-9, 2024
Green Bay, WI
- **Iowa Trapshoot (Year End)**
June 21-23, 2024
Cedar Rapids, IA

Non-Series Events

- **PVA Rugby Invitational**
January 11-14, 2024
Louisville, KY
- **National Veterans Wheelchair Games**
July 25-30, 2024
New Orleans, LA

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Final Frame

Soaring To Score

Magee Eagles player Steven Seibert, center, fights through defenders during the January 2024 Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational in Louisville, Ky.

Photo by Christopher Di Virgilio.



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