

SPORTS 'N SPOKE

November 2024

PARALYMPIC HIGHS

Wheelchair basketball,
archery highlight 2024 Games

QUAD GODS

Documentary focuses on
quadriplegic video gamers

Calming Presence

Horses help people with disabilities gain confidence



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PICKLEBALL NATIONALS

The USA Pickleball Nationals will host its first wheelchair division championships this month in Mesa, Ariz., and *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* will be there. Check out the website for updates, stories and photos during the Nov. 9–11 wheelchair tournament action.

WCMX CHAMPIONSHIP

Wheelchair motocross is having its big event, and *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* will be there. We'll be at the one-day WCMX World Championships Dec. 7 in Birmingham, Ala. Check out the website and Facebook (facebook.com/sportsnspokes) for more event coverage.

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Or go to
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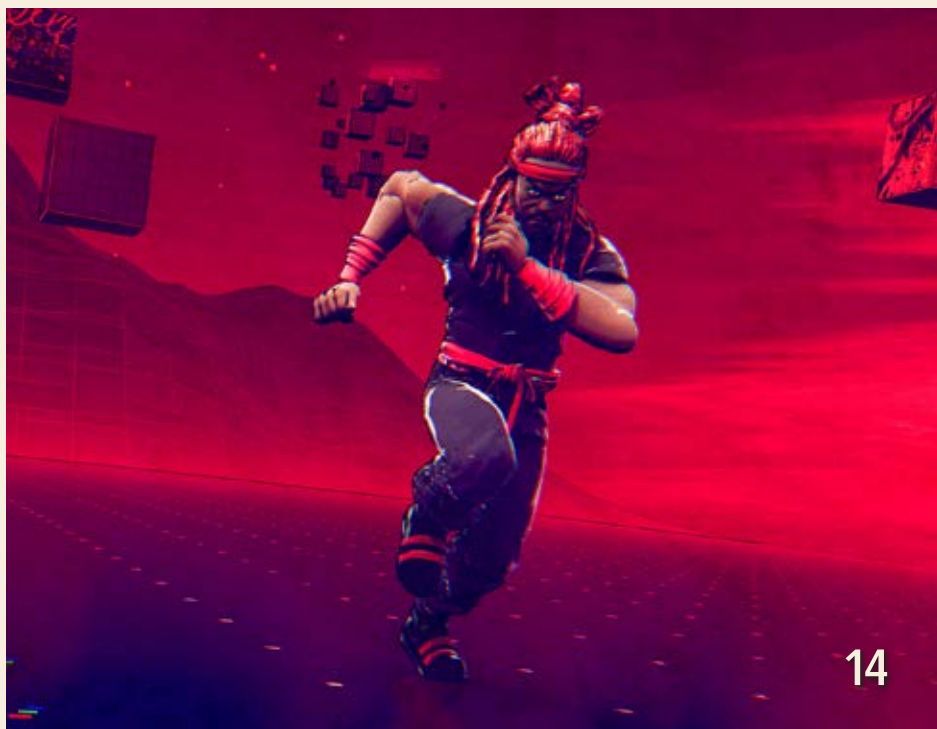
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On the cover: Army veteran Cathy Davis enjoys petting horses, adaptive riding and horsemanship at Maryland Therapeutic Riding in Crownsville, Md.

Photo courtesy of Maryland Therapeutic Riding.



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IMPACTING LIVES THROUGH EDUCATION: Funding Projects to Improve Life After SCI/D

FY2025 GRANT CYCLE OPENS SEPTEMBER 2

Paralyzed Veterans of America Spinal Cord Injury Education Foundation funds projects, conferences and symposia to improve the lives of individuals living with spinal cord injury/disease (SCI/D).

Awards will be made in May 2025 for the grant period of June 1, 2025–May 31, 2026. The FY25 amounts are:

- Maximum of \$75,000 for project grants
- Maximum of \$20,000 for in-person or hybrid Conference & Symposia grants
- Maximum of \$10,000 for virtual Conference & Symposia grant

FOUR TYPES OF FUNDED PROJECTS

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
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| ■ Professional Development & Education | ■ Conferences & Symposia |

All applications must be submitted online by **December 2, 2024**.

Apply at: <https://pva.aibs-scores.org>

Late applications will not be accepted.



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AL
KOVACH JR.

My Opinion



SPORTS SPOKES

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Avez-Vous Vu Ça!?

During the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, my wife and I struggled to find a school for our two daughters due to restrictions in class sizes. After an extensive search, we found a

school that followed the French education system and could accept them immediately.

Le Lycée Français de San Diego is an international school with about 29 countries represented by the student body. For that reason, on the last day of class in June, the school chose to celebrate by hosting a parade full of pomp and circumstance, much like the opening ceremonies for the Olympics. It was good timing, considering many of us would be spending much of our summer vacation glued to our televisions watching the world's greatest athletes competing in the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris.

As expected, NBCUniversal did an excellent job covering the 17 days of Olympic competition, but I was surprised to see that they followed that up with another 12 days of Paralympic coverage. Matter of fact, by the time the those Games ended, NBCUniversal set a few Paralympic records of its own.

Coverage of the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games reached a record 15.4 million viewers via NBC, Peacock, CNBC, USA Network and Telemundo from the opening ceremonies on Aug. 28 to the closing ceremonies on Sept. 8.

Moreover, NBCUniversal's efforts to reach the broadest spectrum of viewership included enhanced closed captioning, expanded audio description and improved digital content accessibility. NBCUniversal's effort to expand viewership was a success and resulted in the most-watched Paralympics cable telecast on record.

"From the host city to the athlete performances to the return of friends and families, Paris 2024 set a new standard of excellence

and will be regarded as one of the most spectacular Paralympic Games ever," Executive Producer and President of NBC Olympics & Paralympics Production Molly Solomon says in a Sept. 13 press release. "We knew our coverage needed to meet the moment, so we produced more hours than ever, streamed every sport on Peacock, added innovations such as Gold Zone and Multiview for the first time and had more commentators on site than ever before. The result was record viewership, setting a high bar for LA28 that we can't wait to surpass yet again."

Obviously, Paralympic organizers want exposure and NBCUniversal delivered, but that comes at an enormous cost. So, you might be asking yourself, "Who's paying the bills?"

Well, much credit goes to Toyota Motor Corporation, which was the presenting sponsor of NBCUniversal's exclusive coverage. NBCUniversal reported a 60% increase in advertising sales compared to the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, so maybe there's money to be made when covering adaptive sports?

But are fans of adaptive sports satisfied with media coverage in between Paralympics? Probably not. Would viewers want to see wheelchair rugby and basketball every weekend on television? I don't know. But I've got a feeling NBCUniversal, Telemundo or any other network won't be covering adaptive sports again until 2028.

In the meantime, we can watch Detours. The show is a partner of *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* and is hosted by two-time Paralympian Bob Molinatti. Detours creates original video content for its YouTube channel (youtube.com/@AllAthletes) and sportsnspokes.com, where Bob engages in conversations with athletes, coaches and others regarding the past, present and future of adaptive sports.

The impact of Detours' content has exceeded expectations, so expanding its coverage is certainly in its future.

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.

"Once viewership increases to a level that can support our expansion, we can begin providing live coverage of events and competitions in addition to our interviews that we're doing now," Bob says.

Years ago, a benchmark leading to legitimizing adaptive sports was seeing it on network and cable television. Beginning in the 1990s, Bob covered adaptive sports as host of ESPN's *Breakaway* and a few years later, *In Pursuit*, giving adaptive sports a boost in "street cred." But these days, people are migrating to streaming services for more personalized viewership.

Nielsen Media Research tracks viewership, and according to its July 2024 report, streaming services represent 41.4% of the consumer pie, while cable is at 26.7% and broadcast is a mere 20.3%.

It should be no surprise that Detours chose YouTube's platform, considering it's leading the pack with more than 10% of the streaming market.

"Network recognition is in many ways fading from the concept of legitimacy of the product's success," Bob says. "Streaming is clearly the future where viewers can watch what they want with little more commitment than turning on their personal device."

Coverage of adaptive sports lends acceptance and respect — something that has been in the works since 1948, when a wheelchair basketball team comprising paralyzed veterans barnstormed America with an entourage of sports journalists covering their games on television and in newspapers.

Whether I'm watching the Paralympics on television, a wheelchair rugby match on Peacock or Bob interviewing the latest men's or women's wheelchair division winner of the Boston Marathon on Detours, I appreciate the coverage and that it's available on a broad spectrum of media platforms.

Further, I'm happy to see the executives at corporations as big as Toyota

find adaptive sports worthy of their financial support; not just for some kind of altruistic cause, but something that has commercial viability.

When this summer ended, it was time for the kids to start class again. I'm sure those of you who use wheelchairs are familiar with the attention we seem to draw from curious kids.

While in a crowded hallway crammed with kindergartners, I was approached by one of my daughter's classmates, whose family was from Martinique in the French West Indies. Hanging around the 5-year-old boy's neck was Phryge, the red anthropomorphic Phrygian cap that was the mascot for the 2024 Paralympic Games.

This historically symbolic cap was worn by the rebels during the French Revolution, so it represents liberty, patriotism and all that good stuff. Perhaps you might find it even more interesting that Papa Smurf donned the Phrygian cap? OK, maybe not.

Nevertheless, it was easy to appreciate this little boy's pride in his French roots considering he attended a French school, but I was surprised when his parents told me their son had been watching the Paralympics on NBC every evening and had become a big fan.

All the same, I'm just happy a 5-year-old kid finds athletes competing in wheelchairs interesting. It gives me hope for the normalization of adaptive sports.

As usual, partagez vos pensées at al@pvamag.com.



S'NS

In The Game

LACROSSE

WLUSA Crowns Champions

Milwaukee and Colorado each won 2024 Wheelchair Lacrosse USA (WLUSA) national championships in mid-August at the Ozaukee Ice Center in Mequon, Wis.

The top-seeded Milwaukee Eagles won the A Division Wheelchair Lacrosse USA national championship, beating the No. 3 seed Grand Rapids (Mich.) Frenzy, 4-0, on Aug. 18 at the Ozaukee Ice Center in Mequon, Wis.



CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

The No. 6 seed Colorado Rolling Mammoth defeated the No. 7-seeded Northeast Passage (New Hampshire) Wildcats, 3-1, for the Wheelchair Lacrosse USA B Division national title on Aug. 18 at the Ozaukee Ice Center in Mequon, Wis.



CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

PARA CANOE

Henshaw Leads Great Britain

Charlotte Henshaw nabbed two gold medals and helped Great Britain finish as the top medal winners in para canoe with four overall at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games in late August and early September.

The 37-year-old won the women's va'a single 200 meters VL3 division and then later defended her Paralympic title in the women's kayak single 200 meters KL2 division.

Great Britain's Hope Gordon earned silver in the women's va'a single 200 meters VL3, while Emma Wiggs placed second in the women's kayak single 200 meters KL2.

Africa also won its first Paralympic canoe gold medal, as Algeria's Brahim Guendouz won gold in the men's kayak 200 meters KL3 final.

Great Britain's Charlotte Henshaw celebrates winning the women's kayak single 200 meters KL2 division at the Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games at Vaires-Sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in France.



PARA CLIMBING

Seven United States Athletes Snag Medals

U.S. paraclimbers Melissa Ruiz and Brian Zarzuela each won gold medals in their divisions, while five other U.S. athletes also recorded medals at the third and final International Federation of Sport Climbing Paraclimbing World Cup at the end of September in Arco, Italy.

Ruiz won gold in the women's RP1 division, while Zarzuela won gold in the men's AU2 division. Emeline Lakrout (women's B1 division), Eleanor Rubin (women's AU2) and Ben Mayforth (men's RP2) each earned silver medals, while Cail Soria (women's AL2) and Laura Heaton (women's RP3) each took bronze medals.

For full results, visit ifsc.results.info/#/event/1391.

PARA EQUESTRIAN

Trunnell Makes U.S. History

Three-time Paralympian Roxanne "Roxie" Trunnell became the most decorated para equestrian athlete in U.S. history at the 2024 Paris Paralympics in late August and early September.

After earning a silver medal in the Individual Grade 1 class, that marked her fourth career Paralympic medal (two golds, one silver and one bronze) — giving her the most among all U.S. para equestrian athletes.

The U.S.' Roxanne "Roxie" Trunnell and horse Fan Tastico H compete during the Grade IV Team Event during the 2024 Paris Summer Paralympic Games at Chateau de Versailles in Versailles, France.



© GETTY IMAGES/ALEX SLITZ

In The Game

Additionally, the U.S.' Rebecca Hart won her first career Paralympic gold medal in her fifth Games. She and her mare, Floratina, recorded a personal-best score of 77.900 points in the Individual Championship Test – Grade III to take the class, and then she added another gold in the Individual Freestyle Event – Grade III. And first-time U.S. Paralympian Fiona Howard also won two golds, taking the Individual Grade II competition and the Individual Freestyle Event Grade II. The U.S. also took the team event, while Kate Shoemaker earned bronze in the Individual Freestyle Event (Grade IV).

PARA FENCING

Jana Wins All Three Events

Thailand's Saysunee Jana made para-fencing history at the 2024 late-August and early-September Paris Paralympics.



Thailand's Saysunee Jana showcases her gold medal and the Paralympic mascot, Phryge, after winning the women's épée category B division at the 2024 Paris Summer Paralympic Games.

After taking the women's sabre, foil and épée category B events at the Grand Palais in Paris, she became the first female wheelchair fencer to win all three individual events at one competition.

SHOOTING

Jin-ho Hits For Two Golds

The Republic of Korea's Park Jin-ho not only doubled up on gold medals, but he set a Para-



Park Jin-ho of the Republic of Korea competes during the men's R1 10-meter air rifle standing SH1 final at the 2024 Paris Summer Paralympic Games.

lympic record, too, at the 2024 late-August and early-September Paris Paralympics in France.

He notched wins in the R1 men's 10-meter air rifle standing SH1 division and also took the R7 men's 50-meter rifle 3 positions SH1 division, with a Paralympic record 454.6 points, at Chateauroux Shooting Centre in France.

Additionally, France's Tanguy De La Forest won his first Paralympic gold medal, taking the R5 mixed 10-meter air rifle prone SH2 division.

SOFTBALL

New Wheelchair Champs

The Minnesota Courage Kenny Rollin' Twins are the new USA Wheelchair Softball International Wheelchair Softball World Series champions.

The Rollin' Twins (Minneapolis) defeated the Nebraska Barons (Omaha, Neb.), 13-5, in the Aug. 17 Division I championship game in Valley, Neb.

Nebraska had defeated Minnesota, 12-4, earlier that day to hand the Rollin' Twins their first loss, but the team rebounded in the if-necessary and final championship game.

Team Japan had won the Division I title each of the last two years but didn't participate in the tournament this year. Nebraska had advanced to the Division I title game each of the last three years.



The Minnesota Courage Kenny Rollin' Twins finished as the USA Wheelchair Softball International Wheelchair Softball World Series Division I champions, defeating the Nebraska Barons, 13-5, in the Aug. 17 title game in Valley, Neb.

The Deep South Hurricanes (Mississippi) finished as Division II champions, defeating the Min-

nesota Flamethrowers (Minneapolis), 8-6, in the title game. STRAPS (San Antonio) defeated

the West Michigan Rollin' Whitecaps (Grand Rapids, Mich.), 3-1, to take the Division III title.

USA Wheelchair Softball International Wheelchair Softball World Series

DIVISION I ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

POS.	PLAYER	TEAM
Pitcher	Jim Beilfuss	Shepherd Sluggers
Catcher	Ethan Eckelbarger	Nebraska Barons
First Base	Charles Armstead	Parasport Texas
Second Base	Scott Rickford	Minnesota Rollin' Twins
Shortstop	Jorge Alfaro	Chicago Wheelchair Cubs
Third Base	Jimmy Jackson	LWSRA Hawks
Left Field	Matt Bollig	Kansas City Royals
Left-Center Field	Josh Maier	Nebraska Barons
Right-Center Field	Brendan Downes	Minnesota Rollin' Twins
Right Field	Dan Palmer	LWSRA Hawks

DIVISION I AWARDS

AWARD	PLAYER	TEAM
Best Class 4	Cole Anders	Columbus Pioneers
Best Class 3	John Teegarden	Kansas City Royals
Best Class 2	Isaac Gonzalez	Columbus Pioneers
Best Class 1	Greg Suing	Nebraska Barons
Best Quad	Jason Miller	Minnesota Rollin' Twins
Best Rookie	Troy Beckford	Minnesota Rollin' Twins
Best Hitter	Charles Armstead	Parasport Texas
Sportsmanship	Zack Gorecki	LWSRA Hawks
	Siobhan Bertels	Kansas City Royals
Golden Glove	Devin Lockett	LWSRA Hawks
George Kiefner Volunteer	Travis Hasenkamp	Nebraska Barons
MVP	Brendan Downes	Minnesota Rollin' Twins
Coach of the Year	Jeff Spartz	Minnesota Rollin' Twins

DIVISION II ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

POS.	PLAYER	TEAM
Pitcher	Allen Champagne	Deep South Hurricanes
Catcher	David Gildon	Arizona Diamondbacks
First Base	Nick Pryor	Arizona Diamondbacks
Second Base	Scott Therrell	Deep South Hurricanes
Third Base	Joe Lang	Minnesota Flamethrowers
Left Field	Luis Raygoza	Arizona Diamondbacks
Short Field	Marcus Oden	San Francisco Wheelchair Giants
Center Field	Noah Gibbs	Deep South Hurricanes
Right Field	Ace Schmidt	Minnesota Flamethrowers

DIVISION II AWARDS

AWARD	PLAYER	TEAM
MVP	Heath Brunies	Deep South Hurricanes
Best Class 3	Zane Goodwin	Deep South Hurricanes
Best Class 2	Justin Walker	Arizona Diamondbacks
Best Class 1	Caleb Wilson	National Wheelcats
Best Quad	Johnny McGinn	Deep South Hurricanes
Best Hitter	David Richardson	Minnesota Flamethrowers
Best Rookie	Jesse Martinez	National Wheelcats
Sportsmanship	Mike Bennett	National Wheelcats
Golden Glove	Archie Spencer	National Wheelcats

In The Game

SWIMMING

Winnett Takes Gold

United States swimmer Taylor Winnett recorded a gold medal in the women's S7-S10 3-kilometer race at the Sardinia 2024 Open Water Cup at La Cinta Beach in San Teodoro, Italy.

Winnett bested her runner-up and silver-medal finish from last year in the event.

U.S. men's teammate Matthew Torres (S8) won the men's S7-S10 3-kilometer event.

After winning two gold medals at the 2024 Paralympics, Great Britain's Tully Kearney won the women's S3-S6 1.5-kilometer event over teammate Ellie Challis (S3) and Italy's Caterina Meschini (S6). Venezuela's Ivanoski Marichal won the men's S3-S6 1.5-kilometer race, beating out Mexico's Pedro Haro (S6) and Italy's Giuseppe Cotticelli (S6).

Additionally, triple Canadian Paralympic medalist Nicholas Bennett (S14) won the men's 3-kilometer S11-S14 race, defeating Finland's Nader Khalili (S14) and Italy's Kevin Casali (S14).

TENNIS

Two Golds For Kamiji

Japan's Yui Kamiji rallied for two impressive Paralympic double gold medal wins at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. It marked her first career women's wheelchair singles and doubles gold medals.

The world-No.2-ranked Kamiji defeated the world No.-1-ranked

and defending Paralympic champ Diede de Groot from the Netherlands, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, in the Sept. 6 gold-medal match at Roland-Garros in Paris to take the title. One day before, the 30-year-old Kamiji teamed up with Japan's Manami Tanaka, defeating de Groot and Netherlands teammate Aniek van Koot, 4-6, 7-6 (7-3), 10-8, in a three-hour match.

Previously, Kamiji earned silver at the Tokyo Paralympics in

Paralympic gold-medal match.

And in the quad division, the Netherlands' Niels Vink captured both titles.

He defeated countryman Sam Schröder, 6-0, 6-1, for the men's singles gold medal.

Then, he teamed up with Schröder to defeat Great Britain's Andy Lapthorne and Gregory Slade, 6-1, 6-1, to win the gold-medal match in the men's doubles division.

Japan's Yui Kamiji celebrates winning a gold medal in the wheelchair tennis women's singles final at the 2024 Paris Summer Paralympic Games at Roland-Garros in France.



© GETTY IMAGES/ELSA

2021, falling to de Groot in the final, and earned a bronze in women's singles at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games.

On the men's side, Japan's Tokito Oda continued the country's success. The 18-year-old earned his first Paralympic medal, winning gold with a 6-2, 4-6, 7-5, victory over Great Britain's Alfie Hewett.

Hewett also earned gold in men's wheelchair doubles. Hewett and countryman Gordon Reid defeated Japan's Takuya Miki and Oda, 6-2, 6-1, in the

Another Japan Open For Oda

World No.1-ranked men's wheelchair tennis player Tokito Oda repeated as the Japan Open champion at the end of September.

Just 18 years old and a Paralympic gold medalist, Oda defeated Argentina's Gustavo Fernandez, 6-3, 6-4. Oda won all his matches in straight sets.

S'NS

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED for a Research Study for People with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

This study will test a health promotion program for people aging with SCI.

You may be eligible if you:

- ✚ Have had a traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI)
- ✚ Are at least 45 years of age **OR** have had your injury for at least 15 years
- ✚ Have access to a smartphone, tablet or computer with internet connection
- ✚ Are able to communicate in an online group in English
- ✚ Live in the U.S.

The 8-week *Living Longer and Stronger with SCI* program (LLS for short) is a group health promotion program offered online in Zoom.



Eligible participants will be randomized (like flipping a coin) to either the LLS program or a control group.

All participants will complete online questionnaires on three occasions. Participants will receive a small payment for their time.

CONTACT US to find out if you are eligible!

by phone: **713-797-7767**

by email: TIRR.LLSstudy@uth.tmc.edu

OR

Scan the QR code to provide your contact information



The study is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). The study is conducted by TIRR-Memorial Hermann's Spinal Cord Injury and Disability Research Center in Houston, Texas in collaboration with investigators affiliated with the University of Texas Houston Health Science Center, and the University of Montana.



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Different Documentaries

A person is shown from the side, wearing large black headphones and looking at a computer monitor. The monitor displays a game with bright, colorful lines and shapes, possibly a racing or action game. The background is dark with some blue and purple light. The overall mood is focused and immersive.

by John Groth

When Jess Jacklin first started filming *Quad Gods*, she wanted to go against making a typical sports documentary.

Yes, she wanted to show competition.

But there was an even more alluring, captivating and compelling video for her to capture.

For a group of eight quadriplegic video game players, esports also gave them an outlet and showed them ways they could bond, cope with their situations and reestablish their identities in life. So, she brought together how they dealt with their disabilities in their day-to-day lives, what adaptive gaming provides them and what they want for the future.

"This is a story about a community found and also people having a different experience through their own, going through different accidents, going through different experiences, but finding each other and that gaming and community is really a way to find a common ground," Jacklin says.

ary

Director Jess Jacklin hopes the film *Quad Gods* shows how people with spinal cord injuries find community through a love of video games.



ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HOSFELDER COURTESY OF ADOBE FIREFLY © GETTY IMAGES/GREMLIN

Founded in 2019, the Quad Gods, shown here, have a mission of integrating and highlighting gamers with disabilities as serious esports competitors.



Snapshot – Warts And All

After debuting at June's Tribeca Film Festival in New York, *Quad Gods* was released in July to the public on Max (HBO). The documentary follows the lives of three New York residents — Richard, Blake and Prentice — who are each quadriplegics who do adaptive video-

David Putrino, MD, director of Rehabilitation Innovation for the Mount Sinai Health System in New York, helped form and start the Quad Gods.

Putrino was impressed with how much care Jacklin put into telling the Quad Gods' stories.

Early on in the filming process, he remembers working in the lab early for eight hours, while she

"It's just like, this is the life of these folks, and this is how it goes. And, you know, here's a snapshot of it, warts and all. You just get to see the true story very transparently. And I just really loved that. And, you know, I think it's a really incredible way of telling the story."

— David Putrino

Quad Gods member Richard laughs while playing the video game *Rocket League*.

game playing and are members of the Quad Gods, the first all-quadruplegic esports team, based out of Mount Sinai Hospital, in New York City.

Founded in 2019, the Quad Gods' mission is to integrate and highlight gamers with disabilities as serious esports competitors.

COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS



filmed in the lab's back room. He says she met with each Quad Gods member for nearly an hour. And every time she opened the door and came out, tears streamed down her face from hearing everyone's story for the first time.

"I was just in awe of Jess. I thought that what she did in telling the story ... It's such a great way of telling a disability story. I haven't seen a lot of documentaries about disability that tell the story quite this way, where it's just real and you get to see there's no like perfect narrative arc of like 'and then they conquered disability.' It's just like, this is the life of these folks, and this is how it goes. And, you know, here's a snapshot of it, warts and all," Putrino says. "You just get to see the true story very transparently. And I just really loved that. And, you know, I think it's a really incredible way of telling the story."

Putrino helped start the group when he met Chris Scott, the original Quad Gods member, back in March 2019. A skydiver, Scott was injured in 2017 during a skydiving accident and was paralyzed from the neck down. When discussing life after his injury



COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Quad Gods team members navigate a Brooklyn, N.Y., street in their wheelchairs. The documentary showcases how they deal with accessibility.

with Putrino, Scott shared with him his love of gaming and Putrino asked to show him. So, Scott promptly demolished Putrino in NBA2K just using his QuadStick, a mouth-operated video game controller for quadriplegics. Soon after, the idea for the Quad Gods was born. Only a few months later, in July 2019, Scott, who is shown in the film, died from a chest infection.

It's a moment that Jacklin, Putrino (who is also known as the Quad father) and Prentice, all agree galvanized the Quad Gods — and there are some touching moments at the funeral service shared in the documentary.

"... They were going to make something of this. And in terms of the team story, that there was going to be a lot of heart to that," Jacklin says.

That heart follows them through their stories.

There's Blake, who works for UberEATS and wants to date. There's Richard, who helps take care of his teenage daughter. And there's Prentice, whose goal is to walk again and who continues to work on that through the use of an exoskeleton. And there's also who they wish they were and want to become — which is depicted with avatars and animation.

Each Quad God also designed an avatar of himself, with some depicting themselves in a wheelchair with super powers but others like a Street Fighter character. Storytelling weaves everything together. That includes Prentice's story.

A level C4-C6 quadriplegic, Prentice was injured after a motorcycle accident in New York City in July 2000. He was riding to Rucker Park to watch former Los Angeles Lakers player Kobe Bryant

COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS



Quad Gods member Blake says esports are just a part of his life in the documentary.



COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS

play basketball that day and his front tire popped on FDR Drive, which threw him off his motorcycle, and he broke his neck when he landed. He calls it a "freak accident."

Prentice, though, has always loved video games. He started playing video games in the early 1980s, using the ColecoVision. He moved on to Atari and

then started playing sports games on the Nintendo and Sega Genesis, and started playing John Madden football games heavily. But while he likes playing, he also remains focused on trying to walk again — and helping others who are paralyzed or in similar situations, too.

The documentary helped Prentice gain

one major realization — that the movie was bigger than himself and bigger than the Quad Gods.

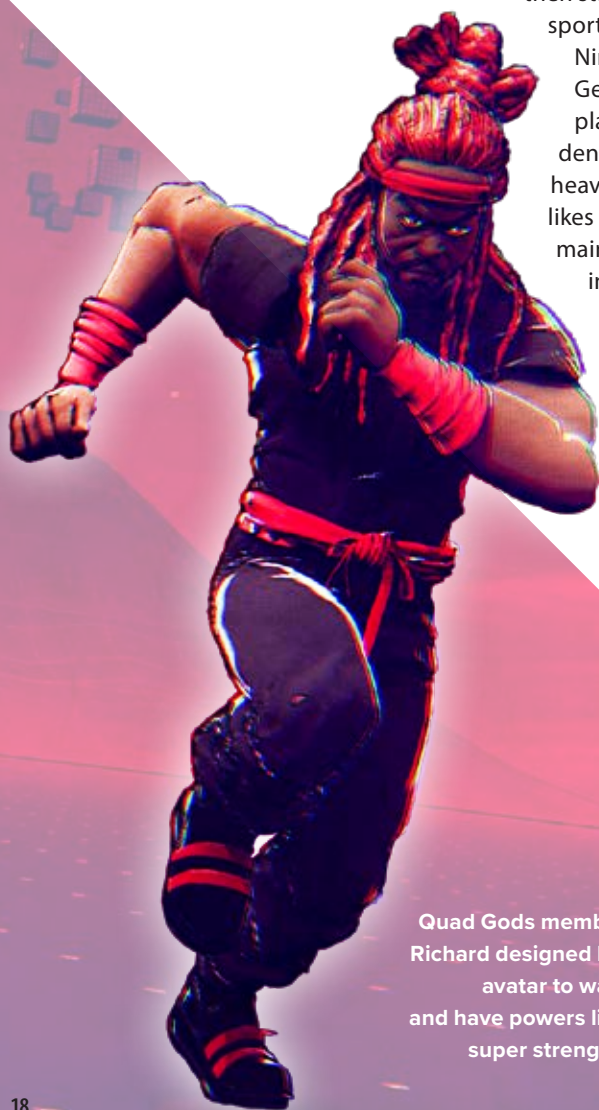
"You know, I was nervous about the Q and A [question and answer] after the first screening, after the first showing at Tribeca Film Festival. And I told my brother, like, 'Man, I don't really want to do this Q and A. I don't like it. I'm nervous. It's making me nervous.' And he's like, 'Why?' He's like, 'You've been doing Q and A all your life. You coach kids, you talk to them after [football] practice.' And then he said, 'This ain't even about you.' He said, 'It's not about you anymore. It's about you 21 years ago in the hospital, not knowing where your life was going.' He said, 'And now you got so much going on. There are people that need that. They need to see it,'" Prentice says. "So, that's when I realized, you know, it's bigger than just winning on a video game. It's bigger than showing my accomplishments. It's about getting people new accomplishments, helping people accomplish more in this process and helping people accomplish more than they even think they can. Because if you would have told me that ... I would have been doing this when I first got hurt, I'd have been like, 'Yeah, right. You're lying. You're just trying to motivate me in a different way.' But no, these things are reality. It's a possible reality. So, it just gave me another sense of purpose."

Dreaming Big

Jacklin calls it a dream project. She deals with chronic pain herself and was intrigued by the Quad Gods and how they deal with their daily life struggles and challenges.

So, in 2019, she was invited by Putrino to meet the group, and for over two years, Jacklin followed the Quad Gods in and out of their lives. She filmed in and around every borough of New York.

"As a documentary filmmaker, you know, you're



COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Quad Gods member Richard designed his avatar to walk and have powers like super strength.

looking for where's my character starting? What are their goals and where do they go? And you know, that was one evolution that was really exciting in the story to explore — was just that growth and that discovery," Jacklin says. "I think anybody that's gone through an accident, it's a paradigm shift in your life experience. I mean, it's a defining moment that you have to kind of go, like, internal and figure out what does this mean

cess to technology and visibility ... Because these folks were extraordinary all along," Putrino says. "It's really to me, the story is showing how much we lose as a society when we're not attending to the disability community. And we're just expecting them to stay out of sight and not be visible. And so, I like the way the story told that. I like the way the story just really showed how relatable all of the Quad Gods are. You don't need

"I think anybody that's gone through an accident, it's a paradigm shift in your life experience. I mean, it's a defining moment that you have to kind of go, like, internal and figure out what does this mean for me moving forward. And I was really interested in that answer with each of the subjects." — Jess Jacklin

for me moving forward. And I was really interested in that answer with each of the subjects."

Putrino views the documentary as a call to action — to help people with disabilities. When they have the proper accommodations and items to help them live their lives, he says you see who they really are — before their injury.

"It's like this is what everybody should be getting access to. This is what all folks who are living with a disability should be able to engage with, in terms of ac-

cess to technology and visibility ... Because these folks were extraordinary all along," Putrino says. "It's really to me, the story is showing how much we lose as a society when we're not attending to the disability community. And we're just expecting them to stay out of sight and not be visible. And so, I like the way the story told that. I like the way the story just really showed how relatable all of the Quad Gods are. You don't need

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COURTESY OF HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS



Quad Gods members, Richard, left, and Sergio, right, are focused on in the documentary.

A Steady Gait

Adaptive riding and horsemanship can help people with spinal cord injuries reach cognitive goals, regain confidence and improve mental health.

by Jennifer Best

When Kirby Bowling was growing up in Nebraska, horses were no strangers to him. They had jobs to do on the farm and served as his cousin's champion barrel racing mounts. Fast-forward through 26 years in the Air Force, and once again Bowling was looking to horses as a tool. This time, to help him regain mobility.

What he found in the animals and the programs and people they serve were team players, emotional supporters and modes toward mobility.

"The benefits in riding are this long list that are helpful for anyone with a physical condition: increased heart rate, muscle tone, proprioception awareness, where you feel what's happening under you," says Maryland Therapeutic Riding program manager Linsey Erar. "The rider is like a buoy on the wave — the buoy is staying upright on the wave, but not stationary, so it's constantly adjusting to stay on the wave. On the horse, riders get as long and tall as they can get to feel how their hips are moving and feel how the horse's movement is affecting the upper body."

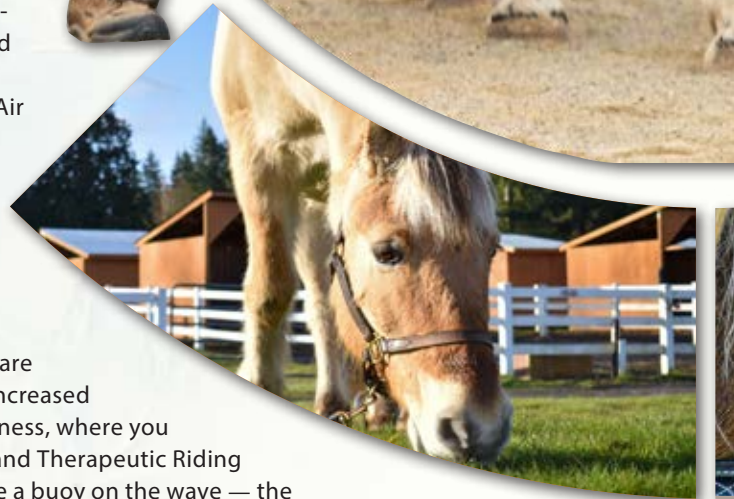


ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANCOU PHOTOGRAPHY
© GETTY IMAGES / SERGEY PUPIN COURTESY OF LITTLE BIT
THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER AND COURTESY OF MARY-
LAND THERAPEUTIC RIDING



Three years of exposure to burn pits in Afghanistan left the now-Laurel, Md., resident Bowling with neurological issues. In 2019, he arrived in a wheelchair at Maryland Therapeutic Riding in Crownsville, Md., with Wounded Warrior Project. Today, he walks unassisted, teaches resilience, unarmed and armed self-defense, serves as a security consultant and mentors young men. "Being around horses wasn't anything new, but I thought it was intriguing how they're using horses as therapeutic methodology," Bowling says.

Therapeutic Riding Programs

The Maryland Therapeutic Riding program is among more than 600 in the United States with adaptive/therapeutic riding programs certified by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.). Since 1969, the nonprofit organization has focused on promoting safe and effective therapeutic/adaptive riding through standardized training, certi-

“Not only is it physically helpful, but also very good for mental health. A lot of times, I get depressed and I’m very sad, but when I get to the horse, it’s like the horse seems to know what mood you’re in. You don’t have to explain yourself. I talk to the horse, praise him. I always feel better after riding. Always.” — **Cathy Davis**

fication and credentialing among professional equine-assisted service programs.

Today, PATH has more than 4,800 certified professionals who help and support more than 46,000 children and adults — including 5,200 veterans — through a variety of equine-assisted services.

Therapeutic riding, now more often called adaptive riding and horsemanship, differs from hippotherapy, a broader term which includes occupational, physical and speech therapies with the horse as an accessory to the therapy.

“All of these allow patients to work toward clinical goals facilitated by a therapist, but now outside on the back of a horse and in an environment that doesn’t feel like therapy. It feels like we’re riding,” Erar says. “The horse helps them reach their goals and accelerate their goals.”

Programs like hers focus on the physical, as well as social-emotional and cognitive goals, through a blend of mounted and unmounted activities.

“There’s a value in simply caring for them, grooming, teaching the things we do for the horse, not to the horse. There’s so much happening in that learning opportunity that meets way more than the horse-related goal. It touches on independence, self-awareness, bilateral communication, so much when we’re just partnering with a horse and caring for them,” Erar says.

Many riders begin with some form of hippotherapy, move to adaptive riding, then later ride recreationally. Some arrive simply ready to ride.

“Not only is it physically helpful, but also very good for mental health,” says Army veteran Cathy Davis of White Plains, Md. “A lot of times, I get depressed and I’m very sad, but when I get to the horse, it’s like the horse seems to know what mood you’re in. You don’t have to explain yourself. I talk to the horse, praise him. I always feel better after riding. Always.”

Army veteran Cathy Davis, center, says adaptive riding and horsemanship has provided improved strength, mobility and a sense of authority.





Can Help With Confidence

At barns around the country like Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center in Redmond, Wash., it's not unusual to see a rider wheel up an accessible ramp to the loading platform. Using a lift, the rider is placed in the saddle. Depending upon the rider's skill, injury level and need, a team of volunteers provides support, which may include leading the horse and standing on each side, with their hands on the rider's leg to help steady him or her.

"Initially, I had a lead walker and two side walkers to help me stay on the horse. We were doing basic physical therapy: range of motion, mobility, strength and endurance. PT [physical therapy] is not an easy thing regardless, but when you're doing it on an object that's moving in all directions, it's tough. It's work. I was sweating," Bowling says.

Over time, as riders build skill, confidence and strength, the volunteers reduce their support until, for many, they are minimally present if they remain in the arena at all.

"We have a number of individuals with spinal cord injuries, and what they report gaining from riding is a boost in confidence, relearning how their body interacts and coordinates through space, and the opportunity to engage socially with other individuals with similar interests," says Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center Adaptive Services Director Devon Stone.

The movement of the horse is similar to the natural movement of walking, so it fires the rider's neural pathways that are ignored when he or she is seated in a chair.

"Riding mimics the anterior/posterior tilt we experience when we're walking," Erar says. "Riders gain so much strength and muscle tone through that motion, moving their hips with the horse's hips. Their respiratory rate is increased, and their neural pathways are all being improved because of the movement of the horse."

At Maryland Therapeutic Riding, a rider is helped onto a horse via a lift.



With adaptive riding and horsemanship, a rider's respiratory rate is increased and neural pathways are improved because of the horse's movement.



COURTESY OF LITTLE BITTHERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER

Adaptive riding and horsemanship, or therapeutic riding, can help people with spinal cord injuries or in wheelchairs develop confidence, skill and strength.



COURTESY OF MARYLAND THERAPEUTIC RIDING

While riding provided Davis with improved strength and mobility over the course of 15 years, confidence and mental boosts were the earliest benefits she noticed.

"I really like equine therapy because you regain that sense of authority you had when you were in the military, before you were in a wheelchair," she says.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Tampa Healthcare System led Davis to adaptive riding while she was living in Florida. An illness-induced traumatic brain injury eventually put her in a wheelchair with no feeling on the entire right side of her body and severely compromised balance.

Davis found her way to Maryland Therapeutic Riding in 2009 and now rides closer to home at Promise Landing Farm in Upper Marlboro, Md.

"It took me about 10 years before I let my side walker, Mitch, let go," she says. "When you're in my situation, sometimes, you know, you're scared to take chances, so I probably could have done it earlier. Now, I think just having my side walker there, knowing he will grab me and won't let me hurt myself, gives me that confidence."

While it began as therapy, horseback riding has become a way of life for Davis. It is the impetus for everything else she does to keep fit.

"It's funny — I started riding as therapy, but now I keep fit so I can ride. My husband says that I'm more active when I ride, so I guess it works," Davis says. "The way the horses move helps improve my balance, for sure. As I've gotten older, there's a lot I've given up, but I can't give up horseback riding. I'll always ride."

The first step to riding is calling a local barn. Learn what programs they offer and share with them the rider's goals. Some will direct potential riders to applications that can help them communicate their interests and needs. For physical therapy, suitably staffed programs may need a physician's referral.

Most do not work with insurance companies, but when referred by a physician for therapy at qualified programs, will provide receipts riders can send to their insurers. Many are funded at least in part through grants and fundraising, which could cover all or a portion of the costs for qualified riders.

To find a riding program in your area or for more information, visit pathintl.org.

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Riding A Horse Of Course

COURTESY OF LITTLE BIT THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER



Here are some resources to help you get started with adaptive riding and horsemanship:

- **Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.)**, pathintl.org
- **Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Crownsville, Md.**, 410-923-6800, horsesthatheal.org
- **Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center, Redmond, Wash.**, 425-882-1554, littlebit@littlebit.org
- **Promise Landing Farm, Upper Marlboro, Md.**, 301-249-2971, promiselandingfarm.org
- **National Ability Center, Park City, Utah**, discovernac.org/program/adaptive-horseback-riding
- **Shangri-La Therapeutic Academy of Riding's Heroes & Horses program, Lenoir City, Tenn.**, 865-988-4711, rideatstar.org/heroes--horses.html



U.S. archer Matt Stutzman won a gold medal in the men's individual compound open and promptly retired afterward.



After winning gold medals, U.S. athletes Steve Serio and Matt Stutzman retired on the spot at this year's Paralympic Games in Paris.

U.S. men's wheelchair basketball player Steve Serio closed his Paralympic career by helping lead the team to a third straight gold medal.

Closing Their Stories



*by Luke Hanlon/
Red Line Editorial*

With Team USA nursing a late lead in the Sept. 7 gold-medal Paralympic men's wheelchair basketball game in Paris, Steve Serio caught his Great Britain defender sleeping and streaked down the center of the paint. Grabbing a perfect bounce pass from teammate Brian Bell, the longtime U.S. men's wheelchair basketball captain sunk an easy layup.

It's a play fans have seen hundreds of times over the past two decades. But this one, in this year's Paralympics, may have been the last major highlight for one of Team USA's all-time greats.

McFadden Races To History

U.S. wheelchair racer Tatyana McFadden became the winningest American track and field athlete of all time, including the Paralympics and Olympics, at the Aug. 28–Sept. 8 Paris Summer Paralympics. With two medals at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, McFadden now has 22 Paralympic track and field medals.

McFadden earned a silver medal in the T54 women's 100 meters, finishing in 15.67 seconds (.17 seconds behind Belgium's Léa Bayekula, who set a Paralympic record), on Sept. 4 to tie her with Bart Dodson for the most Paralympic track and field medals won by a U.S. athlete. McFadden set the record a couple of days later, earning a bronze medal in the Sept. 6 mixed 400 universal relay with Noah Malone (men's T12), Hunter Woodhall (men's T62) and Taylor Swanson (women's T37). China won the event in a world record 45.07 seconds, followed by Great Britain (46.01 seconds) and the United States (47.32 seconds).

A seven-time Paralympian, the 35-year-old McFadden has competed in every Summer Paralympics since the 2004 Athens Games in Greece. She now has eight Paralympic gold medals, nine silver medals and five bronze medals. Born in Leningrad (in the then-Soviet Union) in 1989, McFad-

den has spina bifida and is paralyzed from the waist down. She was abandoned by her birth mother in an orphanage for six years before being adopted by Deborah McFadden and her partner, Bridget O'Shaughnessy, who took her to live in Baltimore, Md.



© GETTY IMAGES/AITOR ALCALDE

Serio, who turned 37 the following day, fouled out and watched from the bench as his team made history as the first to earn a Paralympic three-peat in wheelchair basketball. Now, with four medals over his five Paralympics, the Westbury, N.Y., native is ready to call it a career.

"This is what dreams are made of, man," he told NBC afterward. "The totality of the journey, how much this team has grown up together. We've won together, we've lost together. To cap off my Team USA career with a win like this, with 12 athletes that I love and a great staff behind me, this is what dreams are made of."

The historic three-peat — one of three for Team USA in Paris — was one of many highlights from the 2024 Paralympics, which saw more than 4,400 athletes from a record 169 delegations compete across the 12-day event.

Continuing to build upon momentum with the public, organizers sold 2.5 million tickets as fans packed iconic venues throughout Paris, and a record 165 television channels across the world broadcast the Games, including an unprecedented 1,500 hours of live coverage on Peacock in the United States.

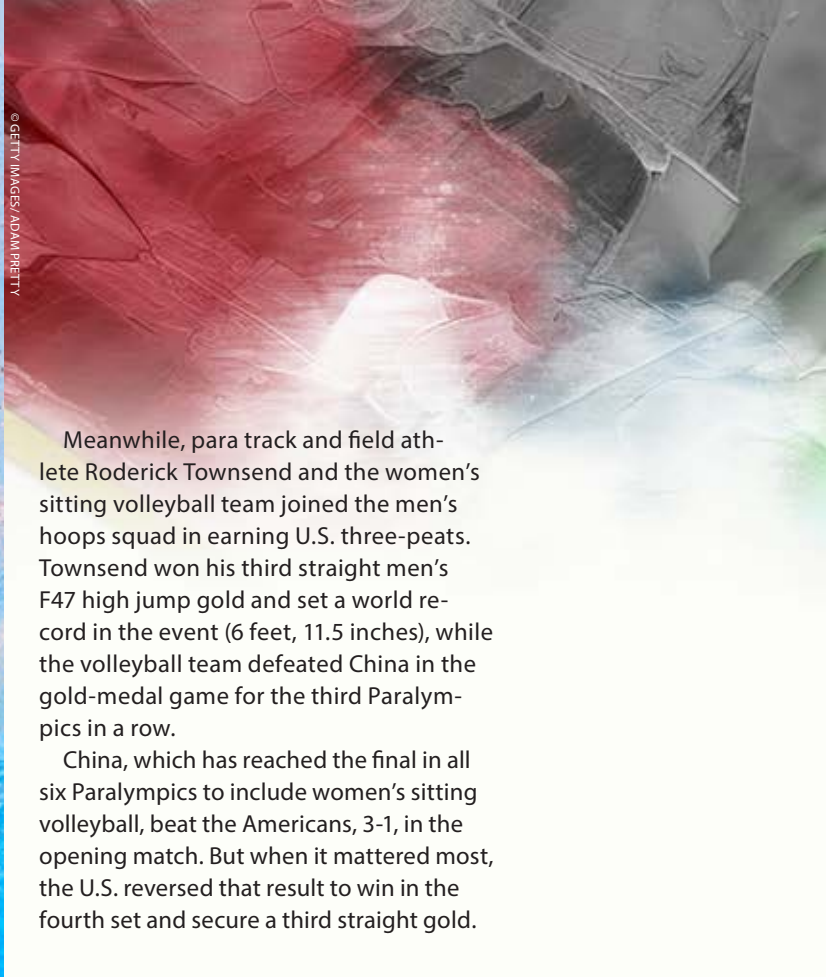
Whether in person or watching at home, fans saw a familiar trend in Paris: Winning 94 golds and 220 total medals, China topped the medal table for the sixth straight Summer Paralympics. Meanwhile, Team USA finished third in both golds (36) and total medals (105).

Record Barrage

China's Jiang Yuyan won plenty of those medals. Yuyan, who had her right arm and leg amputated at age 4, has become known as the "Flying Fish." The 19-year-old swimmer in the women's S6 classification lived up to her nickname by winning seven of her nine races in Paris, while also setting a pair of individual world records and helping set a third in a relay.

Of the 97 world records set in Paris, no sport saw more than track and field, with 40 all-time marks going down in the packed Stade de France.

A pair of Team USA newcomers accounted for three of them. Jaydin Blackwell arrived in Paris as the back-to-back world champion and reigning world record holder in the men's T38 100- and 400-meter races. The bright lights of the Paralympics didn't faze



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© GETTY IMAGES/MICHAEL STEELE

China's Jiang Yuyan, who had her right arm and leg amputated, won seven of her nine races at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

the 20-year-old, as Blackwell broke his own world record in the 100 and matched his record in the 400 on his way to two gold medals.

Like Blackwell, Noelle Malkamaki broke out last year with three world-record throws on her way to a world title in the women's F46 shot put. She defended her world title this spring and then broke her world record at June's U.S. Paralympic trials with a 13.6-meter throw.

The 23-year-old shattered that distance two times in Paris — recording a throw of 13.95 meters on her second attempt, then a 14.06-meter toss on her fourth attempt — to comfortably win gold.

Keep The Medals Coming

Several of Team USA's most established stars added to their decorated careers in Paris. Multi-sport star Oksana Masters defended her two road handcycling gold medals to bring her career total to 19, while wheelchair racer Tatyana McFadden is now the most decorated U.S. athlete in para track and field with 22 medals.

But no active American has more medals than Jessica Long. Competing in her sixth Paralympics, the swimmer won two medals (golds in the women's S8 100-meter butterfly and women's S8 400-meter freestyle) to bring her career total to 31.



U.S. handcyclist Oksana Masters defended her two road handcycling titles and won two gold medals in Paris, giving her 19 career Paralympic medals.



Canadian Legend Retires For Real

Canadian men's wheelchair basketball legend Patrick Anderson has called it a career — for real this time. A six-time Paralympian, the 45-year-old Anderson helped lead Canada to three Paralympic gold medals (2000 Sydney, 2004 Athens and 2012 London) and one silver medal (2008 Beijing). This Paralympics, Canada finished in fourth place, falling 75-62 to Germany in the bronze-medal game.

It will be Anderson's third and likely final break this time around. After earning the 2008 Paralympic silver medal, he retired from wheelchair basketball and moved to New York to go to college and become a professional musician, taking a hiatus from the national team. But four years later, he returned to help Canada win gold at the 2012 London Paralympics — totaling 34 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in a 64-58 gold-medal game victory over Australia.

From 2012 to 2017, Anderson took another hiatus to focus more on his musical career with his wife, Anna Paddock, as they worked as a singer-songwriter duo called The Lay Awakes, and playing club wheelchair basketball, according to *The Associated Press*. But he continued to play wheelchair basketball for the New York Rollin' Knicks along with club play. Born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Anderson was hit by a drunk driver at 9 years old and lost both his legs below the knee.



Fantastic Frech

Ezra Frech pulled it off. He's a double-gold Paralympic medalist — along with a Paralympic track and field record holder. At just 19 years old, Frech, who is an amputee born without his left knee and fibula and missing fingers on his left hand, had one impressive Paris Paralympics.

First, he rallied from a slow start to come back and win the men's T63 100-meter sprint, finishing in 12.6 seconds and defeating Denmark's Daniel Wagner by only .02 seconds, thanks to a last-second lean. Just one day later, he won gold in the men's high jump with a 1.94-meter jump, setting a Paralympic record and nearly eclipsing his own world record mark.

© GETTY IMAGES/ EZRA SHAW

The greatest Paralympic team dynasty comes in men's sitting volleyball, though. Coming into Paris, Iran had won seven of the 12 gold medals in the sport's history, including the last two. Behind the 8-foot-1-inch Morteza Mehrzadselakjani — the second-tallest man in the world — Iran earned a three-peat of its own by beating Bosnia and Herzegovina in the gold-medal match.

The United States extended a different kind of streak in wheelchair rugby in Paris. Coming off silver medals in the last two Paralympics, the U.S. team led by co-captain and four-time Paralympian Chuck Aoki, as well as newcomer Sarah Adam — the first woman to play for the U.S. wheelchair rugby team at the Paralympics — and paralyzed veteran Mason Symons, recovered from a close loss to Japan in the group stage to reach the gold-medal match. Though Japan proved victorious again (48-41) in the rematch, the U.S. continued its streak as the only country to have medaled at every Paralympics since the sport was added in 1996.

Rounding out the team sports, the previous two Paralympic champions met in the women's wheelchair basketball final. After dropping 20 points in the semifinals, Team USA's Rose Hollermann scored 17 points and grabbed eight rebounds in the final. But the Dutch duo of Bo Kramer and Mariska Beijer combined for 45 points to help the Netherlands win, 63-49, and repeat as champs.

Gold-Medal Highlights

Liana Mutia (judo) joined Miles Krajewski and Jayci Simon (badminton) in winning the first U.S. medals in their respective sports. Paralympic debutant Fiona Howard swept three gold medals, including the first U.S. gold in the team event, as the U.S.

equestrian team enjoyed its most successful Paralympics in 40 years.

The U.S.' Daniel Romanchuk pulled off a major upset in the T54 men's 5,000 meters, knocking off Switzerland's Marcel Hug, who was the defending champ. Romanchuk took the lead late and edged out Hug, finishing in 10 minutes, 55.28 seconds compared to Hug's 10:55.78, while Kuwait's Faisal Alrajehi was third in 10:55.99.

© GETTY IMAGES/ DAVID RAMOS



Switzerland's Marcel Hug won the men's T54 wheelchair marathon, finishing in 1 hour, 27 minutes and 39 seconds to record his third straight Paralympic gold medal in the event.

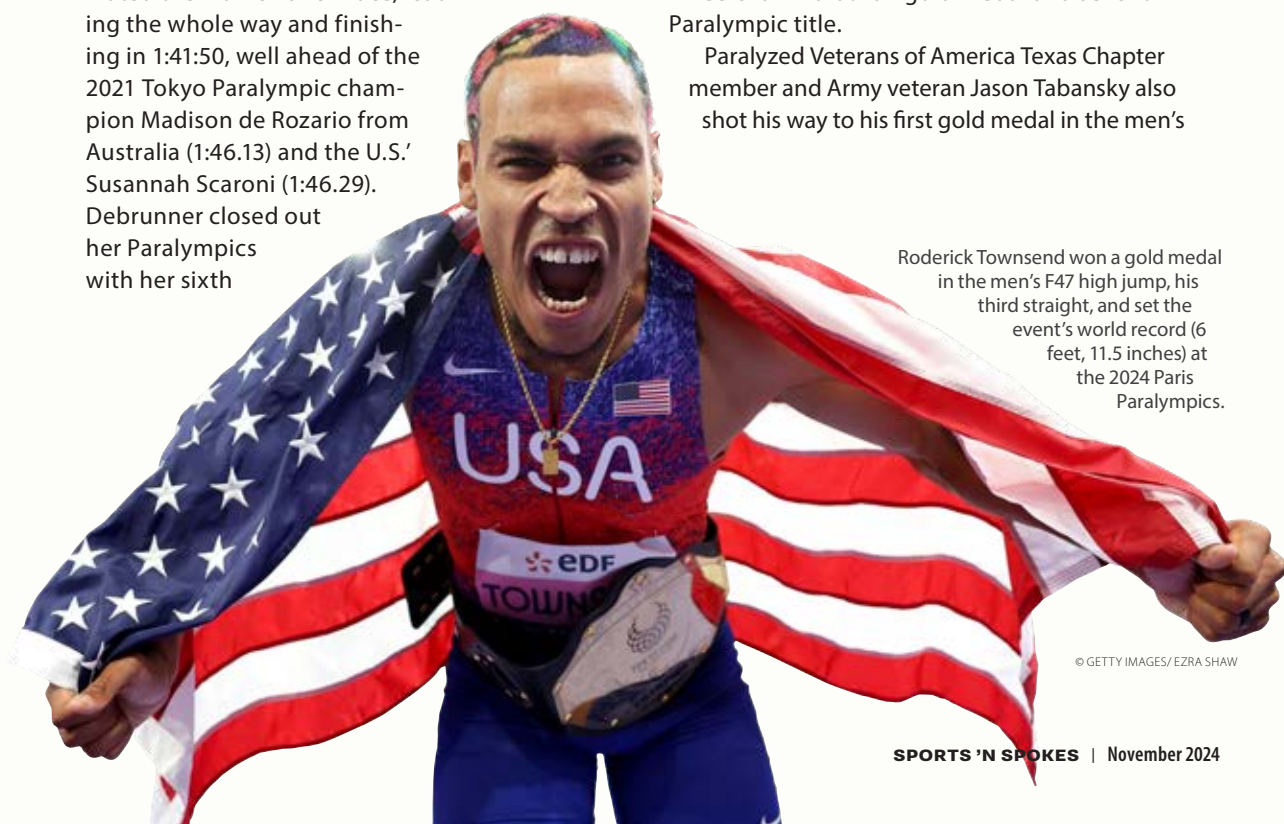
Paralyzed Veterans of America Texas Chapter member Jason Tabansky scored a 10-point bull's-eye on his final shot to win the men's archery W1 individual division.



But Hug earned some revenge. On the final day, the Swiss duo of Catherine Debrunner and Hug completed a wheelchair marathon sweep. The 29-year-old Debrunner dominated the women's T54 race, leading the whole way and finishing in 1:41:50, well ahead of the 2021 Tokyo Paralympic champion Madison de Rozario from Australia (1:46.13) and the U.S.' Susannah Scaroni (1:46.29). Debrunner closed out her Paralympics with her sixth

medal (five golds and one silver). Meanwhile, Hug, 38, won the men's T54 marathon in 1:27.39, finishing ahead of China's Jin Hua (1:31.19) and Japan's Tomoki Suzuki (1:31.23) to record his third straight wheelchair marathon gold medal and seventh Paralympic title.

Paralyzed Veterans of America Texas Chapter member and Army veteran Jason Tabansky also shot his way to his first gold medal in the men's



Roderick Townsend won a gold medal in the men's F47 high jump, his third straight, and set the event's world record (6 feet, 11.5 inches) at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.



© GETTY IMAGES/SEAN M. HAFEEY

Weggemann Wows

In her first Paralympic Games as a new mom, U.S. swimmer Mallory Weggemann delivered. She won a gold medal, set a Paralympic record and defended her title in the women's SM7 200-meter individual medley and earned a silver medal in the women's S7 50 butterfly event at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

With her 17-month-old daughter, Charlotte, in the stands, Weggemann finished the SM7 200 individual medley in 2 minutes, 53.29 seconds — besting her previous record of 2:54.25 set in the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics and winning over Canada's Tess Routliffe (2:57.17) and the U.S.' Julia Gaffney (3:01.27).

Weggemann, who sustained a level T10 spinal cord injury after an epidural injection to treat post-shingles back pain in 2008, also placed second in the women's S7 50 butterfly. Canada's Danielle Dorris won the event in 33.62 seconds, followed by Weggemann (34.94 seconds) and Italy's Giulia Terzi (35.40 seconds).



archery W1 individual division (see *People* on page 34). He scored a 10-point bull's-eye on his final shot to defeat the world No. 1-ranked archer, China's Han Guifei.

And then there's archer Matt Stutzman, who left with history of his own.

Born without arms, Stutzman's persona as the "Armless Archer" began at the London 2012 Games, when he took home a silver medal in the men's individual compound open competition. After falling short of the podium in 2016 and 2021, Stutzman announced he would give it one more go at the 2024 Games in Paris.

While constantly pumping up crowds and celebrating 10-ring scores, the 41-year-old Stutzman delivered a memorable swan song. In the round of 16, he faced off against Finland's Jere Forsberg — who beat him in the 2012 final — in a one-arrow shoot-off. Forsberg hit a 10 with a shot 19.7

millimeters away from the center of the target. Stutzman responded with a dead-center bull's-eye to advance to the quarterfinals.

Stutzman won another shoot-off in the semifinals and then posted a Paralympic record score of 149 out of a possible 150 in the final to secure the gold medal. After winning gold — the first for an archer without arms — he set down his bow and bowed to it, officially signifying the end of his career.

SPORTS 'N SPOKES assistant editor John Groth contributed to this story.

Luke Hanlon is a sportswriter and editor based in Minneapolis. He is a freelance contributor to SPORTS 'N SPOKES on behalf of Red Line Editorial, Inc.

S'NS

People

One Crazy Paralympic Ride

by Bob Reinert/Red Line Editorial

When archer Jason Tabansky failed to qualify for the 2024 Paralympic Games during the U.S. Paralympic team trials in May, he continued to train as if he would somehow get to the Aug. 28–Sept. 8 event. After all, it wouldn't be the first time in his life that he had overcome long odds.

© GETTY IMAGES/ALEX DAVIDSON



Jason Tabansky with his first Paralympic gold medal and the Paralympic Phryge mascot.

A Paralyzed Veterans of America Texas Chapter member and retired Army staff sergeant from Boerne, Texas, Tabansky picked up the sport eight years ago after a spinal cord injury forced him to medically retire. Competing in the men's individual W1 classification, for athletes who shoot from a wheelchair, he's risen internationally and competed at the global level.

His goal, though, was to compete in a Paralympics. To his bittersweet surprise, the second chance came in June.

“As an athlete, it really, really taught me that being well-prepared goes a long way, and trusting my training and trusting my preparation. I did a lot of work on the mental aspect of the sport. As a person, it just taught me to never give up on what you want. You never know what can happen, and always be ready for it.” — Jason Tabansky

An injury and subsequent surgery forced Australia's Chris Davis — a friend of Tabansky's — to relinquish his spot in Paris.

As the highest-ranked nonqualified competitor in the men's W1 division, Tabansky was awarded the slot. And he shot his way through to win his first Paralympic gold medal.

“Just to get to Paris was the hard part,” says Tabansky, who had spent 15½ years in uniform before having to retire. “I never stopped training. I trained like I was going just in case something like this

happened. I had it set in my head that I wasn't going to stop until the first arrow was shot in Paris. But until then, I was going to keep going.”

CRUSHING THE MOMENT

Once Tabansky arrived in Paris, he made the most of his Paralympic debut. After placing sixth in the qualifying round — but only six points out of second place — he turned his focus to getting accustomed to the venue, crowd, wind, sun and lighting.



Paralyzed Veterans of America Texas Chapter members and archers Jason Tabansky, left, and Marco De La Rosa, right, tour Paris during the 2024 Paralympic Games.

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA TEXAS CHAPTER



Paralyzed Veterans of America Texas Chapter member Jason Tabansky won a gold medal in the men's individual W1 division with his final arrow.

"All those little variables," he says. "Everything went really well."

In the W1 division, competitors shoot five sets of three arrows each, and who-

ever scores the most points out of the end of 15 arrows wins.

After reaching the qualifying rounds, Tabansky defeated Czechia's David

Drahonínský, 139-131, in the quarter-finals, and Italy's Paolo Tonon, 136-115, in the semifinals to earn a spot in the Sept. 1 gold-medal match against China's Han Guifei, the world's No. 1-ranked W1 archer.

"I got into a really good rhythm right into the final match," Tabansky says. "That was just a matter of telling myself to stay calm and just take it easy. I just soaked it in and took one shot at a time."

Leading Guifei in the final set, on his next-to-last arrow, Tabansky shot only seven out of a possible 10, making the match closer.

"I got a little ahead of myself," he recalls. "I just rushed it."

On his final shot, however, Tabansky sent his arrow into the center circle for



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10 points to secure a 134-131 win and the gold medal.

"Honestly, I remember loading my arrow, hooking my release, drawing back and then screaming," he told TeamUSA.com after the match. "I don't remember the shot. All I remember was thinking, 'Put the pin in the gold, and let's punch this thing.' After that, it was just a fountain of emotions that I've had going through me for the last seven years."

That final wasn't easy, however.

As he was competing, a swarm of gnats hovered in front of him.

"I couldn't take a deep breath," Tabansky says. "The last thing I wanted to do was inhale a mouthful of them."

Tabansky, who has also finished as high as fifth at the world championships and owns a silver medal from the 2023 Parapan American Games, enjoyed his first Paralympic Games experience. The competitions took place at the Esplanade des Invalides, the same venue that hosted Olympic archery a few weeks



© GETTY IMAGES/ ALEX DAVIDSON

Army veteran Jason Tabansky celebrates his first gold medal and credits his family, coaches, doctors, physical therapists and others who helped him get there.

earlier. It's located near a famous military hospital and the final resting place of the late former French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

"The venue itself was really nice," Tabansky says. "It was right in downtown Paris. I think that the organizers did a really good job with accessibility out there. They had lots of ramps and pathways and things like that. Paris itself, getting around wasn't too difficult. It was relatively easy."

way, and trusting my training and trusting my preparation," Tabansky says. "I did a lot of work on the mental aspect of the sport. As a person, it just taught me to never give up on what you want. You never know what can happen, and always be ready for it."

Tabansky wants people to know that he didn't win a gold medal by himself. He credits his wife, Courtney Brassard — also a competitive archer — his mother, coaches, doctors, physical therapists and others who helped him get there.

"The most important thing is having the right support system," he says. "I'm very fortunate to have a lot of good people because this wasn't done just by me. This was done as a group. It takes an army to accomplish this one mission. I just want to make sure that they get acknowledged, as well, because it's not just me. It's everybody else."

Though his first Paralympics didn't come until age 41, this probably won't be his last. As Tabansky pointed out, there were archers in their 60s in Paris.

"I've got a ways to go," he says.

Bob Reinert spent 17 years writing sports for The Boston Globe. He also served as a sports information director at Saint Anselm College and Phillips Exeter Academy. He is a contributor to SPORTS 'N SPOKES on behalf of Red Line Editorial, Inc.

S'NS



Marco De La Rosa, left, and Jason Tabansky competed at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games in France.

A VILLAGE OF HELP

Discovering the sport was relatively easy, too.

Tabansky was injured in 2016. A flight engineer instructor, he had slipped and fallen while covering up a CH-47 Chinook helicopter on a rainy day in London. While in the hospital, an epidural abscess compressed his spinal cord from level C4 through T4.

In rehab, a therapist recommended archery, so Tabansky tried it, began to compete and did well. He dedicated himself to making the national team and the Paralympic Games.

"As an athlete, it really, really taught me that being well-prepared goes a long

Sports Associations

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451 Hungerford Drive, Ste. 608
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moveunitedsport.org

ARCHERY

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210 USA Cycling Point
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clubs@usarchery.org

BASKETBALL

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6 Antares Drive, Phase 1, Unit 8
Ottawa, Ontario K2E 8A9
Canada
(613) 260-1296
info@wheelchairbasketball.ca
wheelchairbasketball.ca

International Wheelchair Basketball Federation
5 Route Suisse
1295 Mies
Switzerland
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iwbfb.org

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(719) 266-4082
nwba.org

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jdolezal@verizon.net

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wheelchairbodybuilding@gmail.com
wheelchairbodybuilding.com

BOWLING

American Wheelchair Bowling Association
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16006 Congo Lane
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(713) 444-7588
gryan210@sbcbglobal.net
awba.org

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usfencing.org

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William Thar, Sec./Treas. (973) 507-6072
freedomswings.org

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Universal Wheelchair Football Association
U.C. Raymond Walters College
Disability Services Office
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(513) 792-8625
john.kraimer@uc.edu

GOLF

U.S. Golf Association
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Colorado Springs, CO 80906
(719) 471-4810, ext.15
usga.org

National Amputee Golf Association
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(800) 633-6242
info@nagagolf.org
nagagolf.org

HOCKEY

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info@sledhockey.org
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HORSEBACK RIDING

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pathintl.org

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casacolina.org

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worldteamsports.org

QUAD SPORTS

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info@borp.org
borp.org

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

RACQUET SPORTS

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

United States Tennis Association
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usta.com

RECREATION

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point@turningpointnation.org
turningpointnation.org

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NRA Disabled Shooting Services
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Fairfax, VA 22030
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Ski for Light, Inc.
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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
bfroendt@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
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Springfield, VA 22150
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americancanoe.org

Handicapped Scuba Association
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San Clemente, CA 92672
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hsascuba.com

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On The Sidelines

CLIMBING

Getting A Grip At Texas A&M

A new program at one of the largest universities in the country is giving students with disabilities a chance to reach new heights.

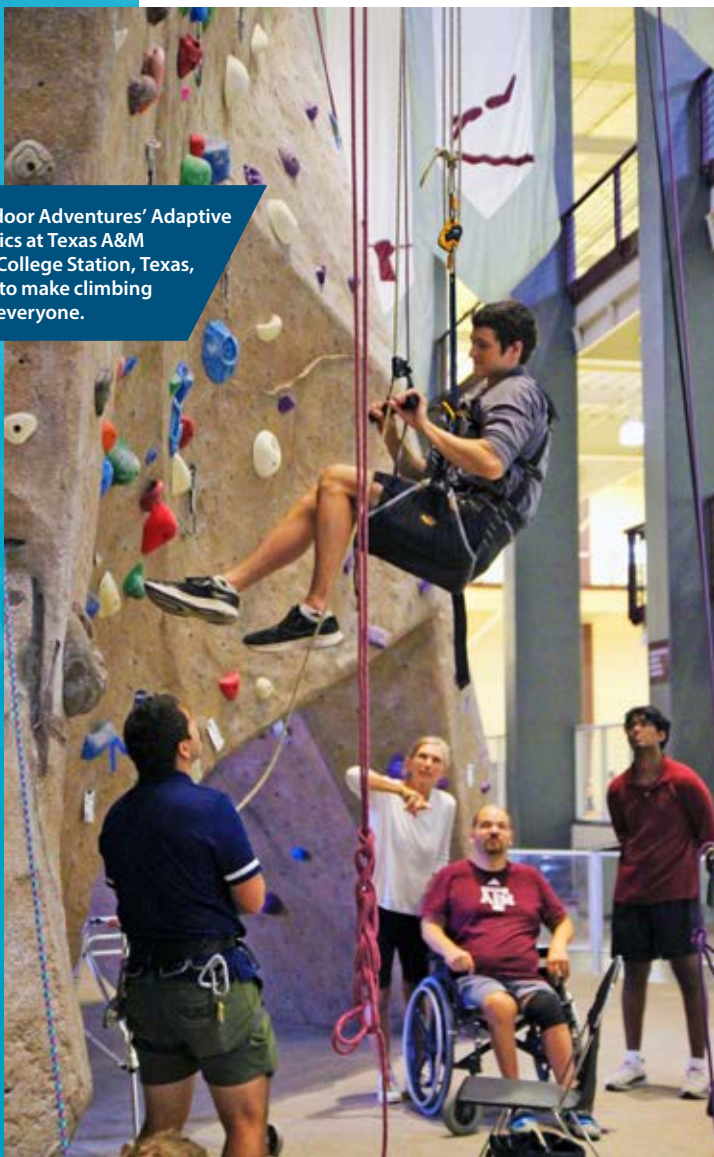
Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, announced in September it launched Outdoor Adventures' Adaptive Climbing Clinics. The program through Texas A&M

Rec Sports is designed to make rock climbing accessible to everyone at the university's Student Recreation Center Indoor Climbing Facility.

Climbers already use sticky shoes and ropes to aid in climbing, and adaptive climbing introduces additional equipment or rigging to make the sport accessible to climbers who may not have thought it was possible.

The two-hour clinics offer a personalized adaptive climbing experience through one-on-one sessions with staff, tailored to each participant's ability. Climbers define their own challenges and determine how they want to engage with the sport, resulting in a collaborative process to test a harness setting or rigging setup to retain the right amount of challenge. The first of six clinics began in September and wraps up with three clinics in November. For more information, visit recsports.tamu.edu/programs/outdoor-adventures.

The new Outdoor Adventures' Adaptive Climbing Clinics at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, are designed to make climbing accessible to everyone.



CLAIRE FRAZIER

EVENTS

Nationals Headed To Michigan

One of the biggest and longest-running adaptive sports national championships is headed north to Michigan for the next two years.

Move United announced Aug. 13 that it has selected Grand Rapids, Mich., as the host for the 2025 and 2026 The Hartford Nationals. The event was held in Hoover, Ala., and Birmingham, Ala., last year.

Last year's event in Alabama drew 400 athletes with disabilities and over 150 coaches from 34 states and the District of Columbia to compete in archery, para powerlifting, paratriathlon, shooting, swimming, track and field and wheelchair tennis.

In addition to the competitions, the event will feature clinics, educational sessions and social opportunities.

The event began in 1957 for adult athletes and continued through 1995. Youth were brought into the mix in 1985, and



The Hartford Nationals are headed to Grand Rapids, Mich., for 2025 and 2026.

adult competition was eventually phased out in favor of the Junior Nationals. Those two events were merged in 2023, allowing youth and adult athletes to compete at the same event.

The *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* Junior Athlete of the Year award was regularly awarded at the Junior Nationals and now at The Hartford Nationals.

This will be the first time the event has visited Michigan since the Junior Nationals were held in Saginaw, Mich., in 2011.

For more information, visit moveunitedsport.org.

FACILITIES

New Complex In St. Louis

A new adaptive sports complex in the St. Louis area is providing children and others with disabilities a chance to play sports

in an inclusive environment. The \$5.5 million South County YMCA Adaptive Sports Complex opened in June and is located about 15 miles south of downtown St. Louis. The complex is the first of its kind in Missouri and one of only 46 in the United States.

At the heart of the complex lies a custom-designed Miracle League baseball field featuring a cushioned, barrier-free surface and accessible dugouts to accommodate players of all abilities.

Officially dedicated Paul Goldschmidt Field after the St. Louis Cardinals' 2022 National League MVP first baseman, the field is designed to capture the essence of the Cardinals' Busch Stadium, complete with a silhouette of the iconic Gateway Arch in the outfield.

Beyond the baseball field, the complex has a soccer field, running track, outdoor fitness area,

playground, office space, concession building, covered pavilion and family-style restrooms.

Designed by architecture, engineering and construction firm KAI, the complex was a collaborative effort between the St. Louis Cardinals' charitable foundation, Cardinals Care, the Gateway Region YMCA, Boniface Foundation and The Miracle League.

For more information, visit gwryymca.org/locations/ymca-adaptive-sports-complex.

LA28

Medical Partner

Athletes, coaches and others at the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles will have access to some top-notch medical care.

LA28, the Games' organizing committee, announced in September a partnership with Cedars-Sinai to be the official medical provider for the Olympics and Paralympics. Located in Los Angeles, Cedars-Sinai will help establish medical services in the Olympic and Paralympic village and at the various sporting venues.

"Cedars-Sinai has been a cornerstone of the Los Angeles community for more than 120 years. LA28 is already creating a legacy driving community benefit, and we don't need to wait until 2028 to make an impact," says Chris Pepe, chief commercial officer at United States Olympic & Paralympic Properties and LA28, in a Sept. 19 press release. "This partnership will en-

The South County YMCA Adaptive Sports Complex in the St. Louis area opened in June and includes a Miracle League baseball field made to resemble the St. Louis Cardinals' Busch Stadium.



On The Sidelines

hance our collective efforts to drive progress, reimagining the way the Olympic and Paralympic Games serve the world. We have a unique opportunity together to have everyone be a part of the LA28 story.”

Featuring more than 200 locations throughout Southern California, including a Level I trauma center, Cedars-Sinai is one of nine medical institutions in the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Medical Network and has already begun offering care for Team USA athletes. Cedars-Sinai is the exclusive provider in Los Angeles and surrounding areas of Southern California.



LOS ANGELES 2028 ORGANIZING COMMITTEE IN COLLABORATION WITH NIKE DESIGN TEAM AND WORKS COLLECTIVE

“We’ve been training for this,” says Thomas M. Priselac, president and CEO of Cedars-Sinai, in the press release. “Team USA’s pursuit of greatness drives them to never stop pushing what’s possible. Cedars-Sinai’s team shares this pursuit of greatness and is continu-

ously expanding the boundaries of what’s possible for our patients and community.”

The 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles are set for July 14–30, 2028, while the Paralympic Games will follow Aug. 15–27, 2028.

For more information, visit la28.org.

PARALYMPICS

Paris Summer Games Draw Record Viewers

Whether it was on TV or online, a record number of viewers in the United States



watched the Summer Paralympic Games in Paris via NBCUniversal.

The network announced Sept. 13 its coverage of the Games drew a record 15.4 million total viewers across NBC, Peacock, USA Network, CNBC and Telemundo during the 12-day event from Aug. 28–Sept. 8.

A NBCUniversal press release says that Paris Paralympic viewership on NBC and Peacock averaged 1.2 million viewers, which is up 31% from the Summer Games in Tokyo in 2021.

Primetime coverage on NBC on Sept. 1 averaged 1.8 million viewers, making it the second-most watched Paralympics telecast on record. The program included highlights of the opening ceremonies and the first two days of competition.

The more than 90 hours of live coverage of the Games on USA Network during weekday mornings and afternoons drew an av-

erage of 162,000 viewers, according to NBCUniversal. Those numbers are up 113% from Tokyo.

Presented by Toyota Motor Corporation, the network's Games coverage included roughly 1,500 hours across all 22 Paralympic sports on its Peacock streaming service and more than 140 hours airing on NBC, USA Network, CNBC and Telemundo.

2030 Winter Program Set

Para ice hockey will headline the sports program for the 2030 Winter Paralympic Games in France.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) announced Oct. 2 that para ice hockey is one of six sports that have been approved for inclusion at the Games, which will take place in multiple regions near Nice,

The 2030 French Alps Winter Paralympic Games will take place in multiple regions near Nice, France, and will have six sports headlining them.



France, and are being branded as French Alps 2030.

The other five sports approved for inclusion are para alpine skiing, para biathlon, para cross-country skiing, para snowboarding and wheelchair curling.

Para ice hockey will make its 10th appearance at the Winter Paralympics after debuting at Lillehammer 1994 in Norway. The United States is the most successful para ice hockey team in Games history with five gold medals and one silver medal.

French Alps 2030 will be the 15th edition of the Winter Paralympics and the 10th to take place in Europe.

For more information, visit olympics.com/ioc/celebrate-olympic-games.

S'NS



The 2024 Paris Paralympics drew a record 15.4 million total viewers across NBC, Peacock, USA Network, CNBC and Telemundo during the 12-day event.

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The Editorials from **SPORTS 'N SPOKES** 1975 to 2007 Cliff Crase

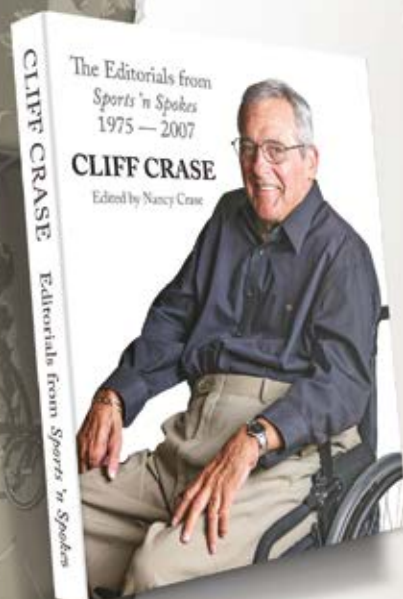
Edited by Nancy Crase

Take a peek into the history of wheelchair sports written as the events unfolded in a new book, *The Editorials from SPORTS 'N SPOKES 1975 to 2007*.

The editorials, written in Cliff's unique style of writing and a reflection of his charismatic personality, are presented in chronological order.

Photos published with the editorials are included, as are many additional unpublished photos from the *SPORTS 'N SPOKES* archives.

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TAKING A SHOT

Division A Milwaukee Eagles player Drew Selz shoots on goal during the 2024 Wheelchair Lacrosse USA national championships in Milwaukee. The Eagles secured a 4-0 victory over the third-seeded Grand Rapids (Mich.)

Frenzy for the Division A championship.

Photo by Christopher Di Virgilio.

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