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MARCH 2026
THE MAGAZINE FOR WHEELCHAIR
SPORTS AND RECREATION



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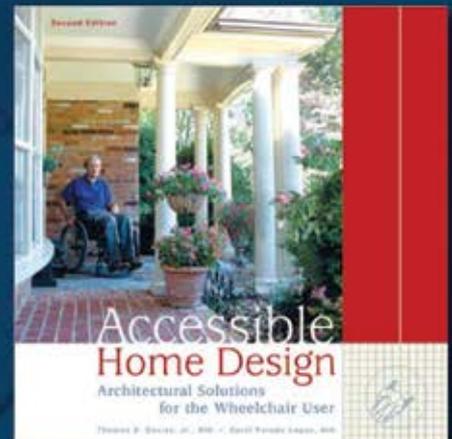
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Questions? Contact chris@pvamag.com.

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SNS march 2026

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United States Paralympic para ice hockey player Declan Farmer and para Nordic skier Kendall Gretscher are two medal hopefuls for this month's Paralympic Games in Italy. Cover photos by ©Getty Images/Wang He/Michael Steele

© Getty Images/Ryan Pierce

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Now in its 51st 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.

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Digital Highlights



WINTER PARALYMPICS

Now, it's time for the Paralympics to shine. With the Milano Cortina Olympics over, the Winter Paralympics are kicking off in Italy in March. And *Sports N Spokes* will have some photo highlights from the Games.



NWBA CHAMPIONSHIPS IN THE BAYOU

For the first time in history, the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Junior and Adult Division Wheelchair Basketball Championships are headed to Louisiana. And *Sports N Spokes* will be there. Come follow along later this month for stories, photos and results.

**CHECK OUT ALL THIS AND MORE AT
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It Wasn't Just A Football Game

BY AL KOVACH JR., EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



THE RAIN WAS FALLING IN SHEETS, the kind that turns sidewalks into rivers and stadium parking lots into mud pits.

My friends and I slogged through it, beers in hand, dodging puddles and fellow drenched fans. We were heading to this year's Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. But it wasn't just a football game. For a group of former Indiana University (IU) swimmers, scattered across the country and decades removed from campus, it was a reunion, a pilgrimage and a reminder of where it all began — with a legendary coach and a family built on chlorine and laughter.

I swam for Indiana from 1983 to 1987, part of one of the most respected swim programs in the country and coached by the incomparable James “Doc” Counsilman. His teams won 23 Big Ten Conference championships, six straight NCAA titles, and he coached two of the most successful Olympic teams in history, producing 21 gold medals. But for Doc, titles were never the point. They were the byproduct of something deeper.

Doc's mission was character. He had us in the pool early every morning and back in after a full day of classes, three to four hours a day, swimming well over 10 miles. Chlorine turned our hair to straw and our skin to sandpaper, and we carried the unmistakable scent of bleach everywhere.

We lived together, ate together, studied together and somehow still had energy

left to party together on weekends. We even dressed alike: red Speedos in the pool, gray Indiana Swimming T-shirts with “What's Up Doc?” on the shoulder for the classroom and red three-quarter-length parkas for cold walks home. We were instantly recognizable across the Bloomington, Ind., campus.

Doc enjoyed winning, but shaping people was his true mission. Character mattered more than the scoreboard. How we treated teammates, classmates and strangers mattered.

He could light you up for missing an interval and then ask how your chemistry exam went. Doc and his wife, Marge, hosted lasagna dinners at their home, where we ate, laughed and watched movies. He didn't just coach a team; he built a family.

Forty years later, that family reunited in Pasadena.

On Jan. 1, Indiana football reached the Rose Bowl for the first time in 58 years. For about 15 former IU swimmers, it was the perfect excuse for a long-overdue reunion.

Years ago, as students, we spent countless Saturdays in Memorial Stadium watching the Hoosiers fumble and lose, often in front of crowds smaller than our swim meets. Yet there we were, drawn together by the impossible — Indiana at the Rose Bowl. Some victories, we realized, aren't on the scoreboard. They're in the people you celebrate them with.

Game day arrived with a forecast warning that Southern California was about to endure what meteorologists politely called an “atmospheric river,” but it felt more like biblical punishment. I carpoled with friends, loading my van with beer, sandwiches, ponchos and dry clothes sealed in plastic bags, preparing, as it turned out, perfectly for what was coming.

Rain poured relentlessly as we crawled toward Pasadena. Despite having prepaid for premium disabled parking, the weather redirected us onto a golf course that quickly devolved into a muddy Woodstock, still a mile from the Rose Bowl.

Once parked, tradition took over. First came the beer. Parked next to us, a car full of Indiana coeds refused to exit, wary of ruining their Hoosier outfits. They remained inside applying makeup, curling eyelashes and inflating their big hair to even more impressive proportions.

Then, we called friends who were already tailgating near the stadium entrance. We were promised plenty of food and more beer, so we abandoned the van's relative dryness, said goodbye to the coeds and set off on a mile-long slog through mud and water, weaving through crowds of equally soaked revelers.

We weathered everything Mother Nature hurled at us and made it to the unofficial Indiana swimmer tailgate, which was packed with old friends, spouses and college-aged kids, all swathed in red-and-white Hoosiers gear.



Al Kovach Jr., seated front, attends January's Rose Bowl football game with fellow Indiana University alumni.

Fortunately, my friends used good judgment by not showing up in vintage Speedos, but some of us could still fit in our 40-year-old gray Indiana Swimming T-shirts. Around me were former All-Americans and Big Ten champions, now men in their 60s — gray hair, beer bellies, conversations about artificial hips and arthritic knees and one friend celebrating another year post-heart transplant.

We hugged, laughed, took pictures and told stories about our questionable college behavior, stories that somehow improved with age and worsened with sobriety. Eventually, someone reminded us we were there to watch a football game, not to just drink beer in the rain. So, we joined the roughly 90,000 fans migrating toward the 104-year-old stadium.

As we funneled through a narrow tunnel that was barely 9 feet wide, half of what fire officials would recommend today, tensions flared between Indiana and the opposing Alabama fans.

We survived the gauntlet and made a mad dash into the men's bathroom, where floors were coated in a pungent

slurry of mud, spilled beer and poorly aimed urine. I chose not to think too hard about what I was rolling through. Once seated with empty bladders, I pulled out a package of Clorox Handi Wipes and did what any responsible fan would do — bought more beer.

The rain stopped just in time for kickoff. Then, with 40 seconds left in the first quarter, it started — touchdowns. One after another. Indiana dominated. I texted every Hoosiers fan I knew, plus a grieving 'Bama friend who was watching from Hawaii. The taunting was irresistible. The final score was 38–3, Hoosiers. For the first time in our lives, Indiana football mattered.

After the game, we returned to base camp for one last beer, more photos and reluctant goodbyes. Someone suggested we might meet again at the national championship in Miami, just 18 days away. We nodded, knowing it was probably just the beer talking and our way of saying we didn't want this joyous moment to end.

Finally, the mile-long trek back to my van began. We were among the last

stragglers trudging through darkness, sinking into endless mud and skirting runoff from overflowing portable toilets. Thankfully, I still had Handi Wipes.

While we pawed through the van for the dry clothes we'd packed, an event security golf cart rolled up and deposited the coeds beside us. Their lashes were less curled and their hair somewhat deflated, but they were dry and mostly mud-free.

My friend blinked. "Wait. They have golf carts?!"

Three hours later, I finally made it home.

The next morning, as I hosed the mud and restroom slurry off my wheelchair, it hit me: We'd all come a long way since Bloomington. Doc has been gone a long time, but his legacy was right there in that stadium. He made us better people. He built a family that, over four decades, grew into something far larger than any of us imagined.

If Doc could see us now, I'd smile and say, "What's up Doc? I hope we made you proud."

As always, please share your thoughts with me at al@pvamag.com. 

SWIMMING

Para World Series Winners

THE UNITED STATES' LEANNE SMITH AND

Brazil's Gabriel Geraldo dos Santos Araujo each earned two top individual titles, while Spain's Anastasiya Dmytriv Dmytriv and Australia's Callum Simpson took one apiece to close the 2025 Para Swimming World Series.

Smith (S3) captured the Women's Division and High-Support Needs Women's Division overall titles. She finished with 4,417 points to take the Women's Division from results in Indianapolis and Spain, ahead of China's Chan Yui-lam (S14) with 3,822 points from events in Italy and Japan and Italy's Alessia Scortechini (S10) with 3,170 points from events in Italy and Spain.

Smith won the High-Support Needs Women's Division with that same 4,417 points, finishing well ahead of Singapore's Yip Pin Xiu (S2), who had 3,165 points, and Mexico's Fabiola Ramirez (S2), who had 2,674 points.

Dos Santos Araujo totaled 4,170 points from events in Indianapolis and Spain to take the overall Men's Division title for the third straight year. He finished just ahead of Denmark's Alexander Hillhouse (S14), who had 4,028 points after competitions in France and Spain, and Italy's Simone Barlaam (S9), who had 4,017 points after events in Italy and Spain.

He also took the High-Support Needs Men's title with 4,107 points and recorded a third consecutive title in that division, too. Dos Santos Araujo finished ahead of Turkey's Umut Unlu (S3), who had 3,276 points after events in France and Spain, and Peru's Isaias Sono (S3), who had 3,173 points from results in Peru and France.

Dmytriv Dmytriv (S9) totaled 3,648 points from events in Japan and Spain to capture the Junior Women's title, finishing ahead of Croatia's Emma Mečić (S9, 3,585 points from events in Italy and France) and Australia's Kael Thompson (S14, 3,435 points from events in Indianapolis and Australia).

Simpson (S8) won the Junior Men's overall title with 3,734 points from events in Indianapolis and Australia, just edging out Russia's Egor Shchitkovskii (S13) with 3,713 points from events in France and Italy and Turkey's Turgut Aslan Yaraman (S8) with 3,619 points from results in France and Spain.

The United States' Leanne Smith, shown in this 2025 World Para Swimming Championships file photo in Singapore, finished as the 2025 Para Swimming World Series Women's Division and High-Support Needs Women's Division champion.

© Getty Images/Yong Teck Lim





Brazil's Gabriel Geraldo dos Santos Araujo, shown in this 2025 Singapore World Para Swimming Championships file photo, finished as the 2025 Para Swimming World Series Men's Division and High-Support Needs Men's Division champion.

The U.S. finished with the highest team score with 14,926 points, beating out Italy (14,880 points) and Hong Kong (14,639).

TENNIS

Oda Makes History

JAPAN'S TOKITO ODA NOW IS THE YOUNGEST man to hold all four Grand Slam titles at the same time in not only wheelchair tennis, but any form of professional tennis overall.

The 19-year-old and world No. 1 Oda defeated Spain's Martin de la Puente, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2, on Jan. 31 to win the men's wheelchair singles Australian Open championship at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia. He's only the second men's wheelchair singles player to record four straight major titles, joining fellow Japanese player Shingo Kunieda, who won 12 majors in a row at one point from 2007 to 2011.

It marked Oda's second Australian Open title and his eighth major wheelchair tennis title overall. He actually doubled up on titles, as he and Argentina's Gustavo Fernandez won the men's wheelchair doubles title, defeating Spain's Daniel Caverzaschi and the Netherlands' Ruben Spaargaren, 6-2, 6-1.

Meanwhile, on the women's side, China's Xiaohui Li won her first Grand Slam



Japan's Tokito Oda celebrates with the trophy after his men's wheelchair singles final victory over Spain's Martin de la Puente on Jan. 31 at the 2026 Australian Open at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia.

© Getty Images/Skyline Pictures

title by defeating the Netherlands' Diede de Groot, 6-1, 6-2, for the women's wheelchair singles title. The 26-year-old is now the second Chinese player to win a Grand Slam women's wheelchair singles title after China's Wang Ziyi won the 2025 Wimbledon women's wheelchair singles championship. It was the 29-year-old de Groot's first appearance in a Grand Slam final since an eight-month break after the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games.

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Li also doubled up on titles, as she and Ziyi teamed together to win the women's wheelchair doubles championship, defeating Japan's Manami Tanaka and China's Zhenzhen Zhu, 6-2, 6-3, in the final.

And in the quad division, the Netherlands' Niels Vink knocked off teammate and four-time defending champion Sam Schröder, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5), to take home his first Australian Open singles title. It was a rematch from last year, and it marked Vink's eighth major quad singles title overall. He also teamed with Israel's Guy Sasson to capture the quad doubles title, as they defeated Great Britain's Andy Lapthorne and Australia's Heath Davidson, 6-3, 6-1, in the final.

Hewett Takes Brisbane Title

GREAT BRITAIN'S ALFIE HEWETT CAPTURED the men's wheelchair singles title at the Jan. 9-11 Brisbane International at Queensland Tennis Centre in Tennyson, Brisbane, Australia.

The top seed defeated Spain's Martin de la Puente, 6-1, 6-3, in the men's wheelchair singles final and won all three of his matches in straight sets. Spain's Daniel Caverzaschi and the Netherlands' Ruben Spaargaren took the men's wheelchair doubles title over Great Britain's Gordon Reid and Hewett by forfeit after Reid retired earlier from the wheelchair singles competition.

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

WWAR Generals Net PVA Three-Peat

FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR, THE Wounded Warriors Abilities Ranch (WWAR) Generals took home the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational Division I title.

The Generals dominated, cruising to a 64-48 victory over the Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (TIRR) Texans

China's Xiaohui Li plays a forehand in the women's wheelchair singles final against the Netherlands' Diede de Groot on Jan. 31 at the 2026 Australian Open at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia.

© Getty Images/Ukususha



Shepherd Smash's Duane Morrow, No. 21, makes a pass during the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational Division II championship game in February in Louisville, Ky.

Christopher Di Virgilio

Feb. 1 at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Ky. WWAR led 20-12 after the first period and 40-21 at halftime.

WWAR Generals player Stuart Robinson, a Royal Air Force veteran and two-time Great Britain Paralympian, was named the Division I MVP, while teammates Anthony McDaniel (Best High-Pointer), Josh Wheeler (Best High Mid-Pointer) and Ed Crouch (Best Low-Pointer) also earned Division I awards, along with TIRR's Paul Hopkins (Best Low Mid-Pointer).

In Division II, the Shepherd Smash held on for a 51-49 victory over the Wisconsin Adaptive Sports Association (WASA)/Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute (CKRI) Lightning. Leading 46-43 with 3 minutes

and 48 seconds left, Shepherd nearly let it get away. But the Smash's Duane Morrow scored off a lucky bounce pass from Samuel Robb with 1:10 remaining for a 49-47 lead, and the team hung on. Shepherd's Scott Stokes earned Best Low-Pointer and MVP honors, while WASA/CKRI's Kyle Peterson (Best High Mid-Pointer) and Ryan Engelby (Best Low Mid-Pointer) and Jefferson Moss-Magee Eagles' Pasqual Paco Torres (Best High-Pointer) also earned awards.

Finally, the Northeast Passage (NEP) Wildcats took Division III. NEP finished 5-0 in the six-team round-robin tournament, closing its tournament with a 47-34 win over the Ohio Buckeye Blitz. NEP also defeated the Pittsburgh Steelwheelers

Wounded Warriors Abilities Ranch Generals player Stuart Robinson, with ball, helped lead the team to a 64-48 victory over the Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research Texans in the Division I championship game of the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wheelchair Rugby Invitational Feb. 1 in Louisville, Ky. Robinson was named Division I MVP.



(60-27), Grand Rapids Thunder (61-13), Maryland Mayhem (53-27) and the Gaylord Warriors (51-50 in overtime).

Ohio's Michael Baney earned MVP honors, while Maryland's Michael Henley (Best High-Pointer) and English Harper (Best Low Mid-Pointer) and Gaylord's Armand Brunelle (Best High Mid-Pointer) and Brian Amundsen (Best Low-Pointer) won awards. Additionally, Maryland's Sha'mar Armwood

(Jeremiah Butler Best Smile Sportsmanship Award) and WWAR Warriors' Mike Whitehead (Jerry "Bull" Baylor Mentorship Award) received honors. And PVA also received the Best Event of the Year award from the United States Wheelchair Rugby Association.

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sports *N* spokes

A person in a wheelchair is shown from behind, with their arms raised in a celebratory gesture. They are wearing a dark blue athletic top with the letters 'SNS' in red on the back and a black helmet. The background is a blurred stadium with bright lights, suggesting a night-time event.

The Game's Not Over... **It's Just in Print**

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Sports N Spokes 2022 Junior Athlete of the Year Delmace Mayo, left, and 2025 Junior Athlete of the Year Madelyn Wilson, below, were named to the 2025 USA Track and Field Para High School All-American track and field team.

ATHLETICS

Two SNS Junior Award Winners Lead Honors

TWO *SPORTS N SPOKES* (SNS) JUNIOR Athlete of the Year award winners have received major honors.

The 2025 SNS Junior Athlete of the Year Madelyn Wilson, along with 2022 SNS Junior Athlete of the Year Delmace Mayo, are two of 44 high school para athletes who have been named to the 2025 USA Track and Field (USATF) Para High School All-American track and field team.

Athletes with Paralympic-eligible impairments qualify for the USATF Para High School All-American team and were selected based on results from the 2025 season, according to a Dec. 16 press release. The selection criteria looked at top athlete performances in each event in 2025 as compared against the “A” standard for the USATF Para Tier & Talent Protection Program, according to the release.

Wilson, a Spencer, Mass., resident, who received the *Sports N Spokes* honor last June, races in the women’s T54 wheelchair division 100-meter event.

A Boston resident, Mayo competes in the men’s T54 wheelchair division and in the men’s 100, 400, 800, 1,500 and 5,000 racing events.

A 2024 Paralympic silver medalist and world champion field event thrower, Arelle Middleton, was named the team’s Female Field Athlete of the Year for the third consecutive year. A Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., resident and high school senior, she just earned the first world championship title of her career in the F44 shot put at the New Delhi 2025 Para Athletics World Championships in India. She committed to play wheelchair basketball at the University of Alabama next school year.

Ryan Davis (Waskom, Texas), a wheelchair racer, was named the Male Track Athlete of the Year. He finished in a season-best time of 11 minutes, 47.42



Christopher Di Virgilio

Christopher Di Virgilio

seconds in the men's T54 5,000 meters at May's Desert Challenge Games in Tempe, Ariz., and also hit high school All-American marks with his 100, 400, 800 and 1,500 times.

Additionally, Violet Hall (Bloomington, Ind.) won Female Track Athlete of the Year honors, and Maximilian Allabaugh (Geneva, Ill.) earned Male Field Athlete of the Year honors. Also, wheelchair racer Gianni Quintero (Milwaukee) was selected and competes in the men's T54 100, 400, 800 and 1,500 events.

Below is the full USATF Para High School All-American Team in alphabetical order by first name with qualifying events.



Courtesy of USA Track & Field

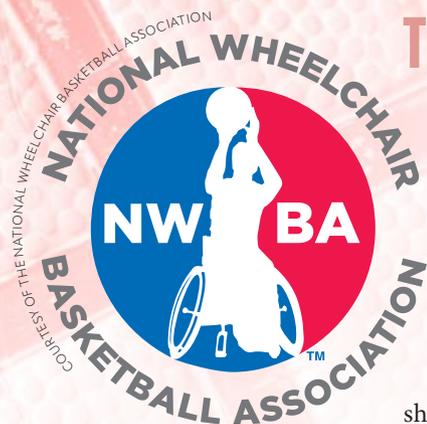
© Getty Images/Herreid

2025 USA Track & Field Para High School All-Americans

Name	Event	Name	Event
Aarya Krishnan	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500)	Katie Eddington	T63 (100)
Adaylia Borgmeier	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)	Kenbe Rogers	T64 (100, 200)
Amy Sziber	F53 (Shot put)	Kerragan Johnson	T47 (100, 200)
Arelle Middleton	F44 (Shot put)	Kohen Grantom	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)
Ariel Montejano	F46 (Shot put)	Lillian Fought	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500)
Avery Weeks	F47 (100, 200, 400)	Lily Rosenthal	T62 (100, long jump)
Ben Pendo	T35 (100, 200)	Logan Mann	T35 (100)
Brycen Phillips	T37/F37 (100, 200, 400, long jump)	Luzila Ashley-Castillo	T54 (100)
Chase Merriweather	T62 (100, 400)	Madelyn Wilson	T54 (100)
Chloe Chavez	T64/F64 (100, 200, discus, shot put)	Madison Hahs	T37/F37 (100, 200, 400, long jump)
Chris Adamson	T11 (100)	Maliya Emory	T54 (100)
Conner Hunt	T54 (100, 400)	Maximilian Allabaugh	T46/F46 (100, 400, high jump, long jump)
Delmace Mayo	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)	Rhett Owens	T37 (Long jump)
Erick Aleman	T64 (100)	Riley Dortone	T37 (400)
Gianni Quintero	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500)	Ryan Davis	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)
Grayson Adams	T45 (1,500)	Tyler Gunnarson	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)
Isabel Crew	T54 (100, 400, 800, 1,500, 5,000)	Tyler Villarreal	T64/F64 (100, high jump, long jump)
Isabelle Hogness	T54 (100)	Violet Hall	T46/F46 (100, 200, 400, long jump)
Ishaan Iyer	T20 (1,500)	Weston Powell	T34 (100, 800)
Jeremiah Mangels	T54 (100)	Will Warder	T38 (100)
John Reynolds	T37 (100, 200, 400)	William Butts	T62 (100, 400)
Josephine Portell	T54 (100)	Xavier Marsh	T12 (400)

BASKETBALL

Men's World Champs Team Pool



TWENTY ATHLETES HAVE BEEN INVITED to participate in the 2026 Men's USA Wheelchair Basketball Team Selection Camp scheduled for April 22-27 at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The selections were made by the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) and High Performance Selection Committee after the Jan. 3-7 World Championships Team Try-Out Camp at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center. The athletes are:

- ▶ Jared Arambula (Valparaiso, Ind.)
- ▶ Brian Bell (Birmingham, Ala.)

- ▶ Peter Berry (Houston)
- ▶ Drew Beutel (Naperville, Ill.)
- ▶ John Boie (Milton, Wis.)
- ▶ Jake Eastwood (Mill Creek, Wash.)
- ▶ AJ Fitzpatrick (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)
- ▶ Jude Hiley (Atlanta)
- ▶ Tim Houston (Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.)
- ▶ Preston Howell (Charlotte, N.C.)
- ▶ Trevon Jenifer (Huntingtown, Md.)
- ▶ Talen Jourdan (Deerfield, Wis.)
- ▶ Jeromie Meyer (Woodbine, Iowa)
- ▶ Ke'Sean Paire (Woodville, Texas)
- ▶ Fabian Romo (Chicago)
- ▶ Jorge Salazar (Delano, Calif.)
- ▶ Jorge Sanchez (Oakland, Calif.)
- ▶ Paul Schulte (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- ▶ Eric Rodriguez (Temecula, Calif.)
- ▶ Jake Williams (Milwaukee)

The team will be narrowed to 12 athletes after April's selection camp, and they will compete at the Sept. 4-19 International Wheelchair Basketball Federation Wheelchair Basketball World Championships in Ottawa, Ontario.



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Women's Worlds Team Pool Named

AFTER THE JAN. 3-7 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS Team Try-Out Camp at Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, Ala., 20 women have been selected by the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) and High Performance Selection Committee for the 2026 Women's USA Wheelchair Basketball Team Selection Camp this spring.

The camp will be held April 22-27 at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The athletes are:

- ▶ Josie Aslakson (Jordan, Minn.)
- ▶ Abigail Bauleke (Savage, Minn.)
- ▶ Josie DeHart (Fruita, Colo.)
- ▶ Kaitlyn Eaton (Houston)
- ▶ Ixhelt Gonzalez (Chicago)
- ▶ Rose Hollermann (Elysian, Minn.)

- ▶ Ali Ibanez (Murray, Utah)
- ▶ Quinn Meyer (Austin, Texas)
- ▶ Arelle Middleton (Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.)
- ▶ Bailey Moody (Johns Creek, Ga.)
- ▶ Becca Murray (Germantown, Wis.)
- ▶ Emily Oberst (Brookfield, Wis.)
- ▶ Courtney Ryan (Chula Vista, Calif.)
- ▶ Zoe Voris (Chicago)
- ▶ Lindsey Zurbrugg (Portland, Ore.)
- ▶ Emilee Gustafson (Big Lake, Minn.)
- ▶ Hayley Nilsen (Edina, Minn.)
- ▶ Abby Dunn (Susanville, Calif.)
- ▶ Skylar Scarnecchia (Warren, Ohio)
- ▶ Adrina Castro (Tucson, Ariz.)

The team will be narrowed to 12 athletes after April's selection camp, and they will compete at the Sept. 4-19 International Wheelchair Basketball Federation Wheelchair Basketball World Championships in Ottawa, Ontario. 



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SCAN ME

Golden Op

LABS conference spotlights what fans and athletes with disabilities can bring to the table.

BY LARRY BOROWSKY



© Getty Images/Simon Skafer

Italy's Arena di Verona will host the Opening Ceremony for this month's Winter Paralympic Games.

YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT TO FIND WHEELCHAIR ramps at a nearly 2,000-year-old stadium. But when the 2026 Winter Paralympics kick off this month at Italy's Arena di Verona, a Roman amphitheater built during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, fans with disabilities will find a full complement of amenities, including ramps, elevators, accessible bathrooms, wheelchair seating areas and more.

If an ancient coliseum can be retrofitted this way, why aren't such accommodations more common in America's modern sports venues? That's one of the issues that came up for discussion at last October's Adapted Sport Leadership and Business Symposium (LABS). The two-day conference attracted powerhouse figures in sports, tourism, assistive technology, government and related domains.

The consensus among the LABS speakers was that cases such as Arena di Verona reflect an encouraging trend. Instead of treating accessibility features as optional, the sports industry is increasingly recognizing

Opportunity

Illustration by Kerry Randolph
Graphics by Freepik



fans with disabilities and parasports events as huge growth opportunities. Teams, leagues and venues are rapidly investing in new technologies and infrastructure to attract a customer segment that, until now, has been treated as an afterthought.

“For so long, the disability sport community has been the focus of a charity narrative,” says Dawna Callahan, a former wheelchair racer who launched LABS seven years ago. “We need to build the business case and shift the narrative to a business focus.”

Parasports On The Rise

The centerpiece of Callahan’s argument is the Adapted Sport Economic Impact Study.

Now into its sixth year, the study has documented consistent, rapid growth in the overall value of parasports programs and events. The 2025 survey estimated that adaptive sports generate more than \$164 million in total economic activity per year, a one-year growth rate of 14% and a five-year increase of more than 100%.

“I don’t even know if we need to call it a ‘case’ anymore,” says sports business consultant Cole



Photos this page courtesy of All In Sport Consulting

McKeel during a LABS session. “We have proof. The numbers are continuing to increase. With the Los Angeles Paralympics coming up in 2028, if there was ever a time to jump into this space, this is the time.”

That secret is starting to get out. Throughout the conference, personnel from NBA, MLB, NHL and MLS teams described a wide range of strategies they’re pursuing to court the disability community, which by one estimate has an aggregate \$490 billion in disposable income. They’re launching initiatives that go way beyond compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and seeking to create a truly welcoming, accessible experience.

“Working with fans with disabilities is a big advantage to teams and



Dawna Callahan, above, launched the Adapted Sport Leadership and Business Symposium seven years ago. Top photo, some of the speakers are shown during last October’s event.



© Getty Images/Dilip Vishwanat

The MLS's St. Louis City SC plays at Energizer Park, which opened in 2022 and features many accessible amenities.

to venues,” says Kleo King, a longtime United Spinal Association official who has advised sports organizations on accessibility for more than a decade. “They understand the market base for fans with disabilities and the economy it can bring them.”

For example, before St. Louis City SC of the MLS broke ground on its new soccer stadium (which opened in 2022), the club solicited recommendations from the disability community and built many of them into the facility.

The stadium features a 360-degree concourse at street level, providing easy ingress/egress and convenient navigation to seating, concession stands, restrooms and luxury suites. There are also seven elevators, wheelchair attendants at every gate, accessible restrooms with adult changing stations scattered throughout the stadium and services for fans with hearing, sight and neurological impairments.

“When you design for accessibility, everyone benefits,” says Ken Earley, St. Louis City’s director of community relations.

Sharon Holmes, the manager of disability services for MLB’s Arizona Diamondbacks, echoed that sentiment, adding that mobility and hearing challenges are increasingly commonplace in America’s aging population.

And Matthew Gardner, senior director of customer insights for the NBA’s Portland Trailblazers, pointed out that fans with

disabilities typically attend games with non-disabled friends and relatives. So, if your facility can’t accommodate a person with a disability, you might lose an entire family’s worth of customers.

“Listening to what our fans have to say is such an important thing,” Earley says. “We’ve already benefited from opening up the conversation.”

International Event Time

For Linda Mastandrea, manager of accessibility for this year’s FIFA World Cup, the stadium is the last stop on an accessibility journey that might begin months before the game and an ocean away.

A former Paralympic wheelchair racer and longtime disability rights attorney, Mastandrea is coordinating accessibility efforts for a global event that will be played in 16 host cities across the United States, Mexico and Canada, with fans traveling from every continent.

“No matter which match or which city a person with a disability chooses to attend, we want them to have a seamless experience,” she says.

That process begins with buying tickets via an accessible app or website and encompasses disability accommodations for air and rail travel, ground transportation, lodging and public transit to and from matches. Mastandrea and her team are working with

authorities in every World Cup host city to drive home the long-term benefits of courting the adaptive fan base.

“We’re opening their eyes to the fact that this is a big opportunity,” she says. “People with disabilities are indeed sports fans. They have trillions of dollars of economic spending power across the globe. And they’re probably coming with a spouse, a partner, a family member, a group of friends or all of the above. So, every step you take toward providing accessible services opens the door to this exponential increase in your market potential. I think we’re going to see some amazing changes for the World Cup and sporting events beyond.”

The World Cup is the first in a string of huge international events coming to the U.S. in the next decade. The 2028 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Los Angeles (LA28), potentially the 2031 FIFA Women’s World Cup and then the 2034 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Salt Lake City will quickly ensue. Taken together, they have the potential to make an impact that transcends sports and changes broader perceptions of disability.

“Mega events provide an unprecedented chance to create a lasting legacy,” says Majd Steitieh, director of growth strategy for U.S. Soccer. “It’s about more than removing barriers to access. It’s about designing belonging from the start and fostering a culture where everybody feels like they belong.”

Ileana Rodriguez, a former Paralympic swimmer who now serves as LA28 vice president of

“
For so long, the disability sport community has been the focus of a charity narrative. We need to build the business case and shift the narrative to a business focus.
”

[*Dawna Callahan*]

Paralympic strategy and relations, says these accessibility efforts go beyond sports.

“We’re going to see a much more accessible Los Angeles,” Rodriguez says. “This shouldn’t be a stand-alone event that comes and goes. It can make people realize that disability is a normal part of the human experience. And hopefully that will start to change the way communities think and operate from a physical infrastructure perspective and from a social perspective. It’s a key event that can be felt for generations.”

Leaning Into Accessibility

Civic leaders don’t need to be sold on the value of major events such as World Cups and Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Competitive parasports are a different matter, for now. But events such as the Sitting Volleyball World Cup, World Para Ice Hockey Championships and



Courtesy of Paralyzed Veterans of America

More venues, such as U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, which won Paralyzed Veterans of America's Barrier-Free America Award last year, are emphasizing inclusivity.

Fort Wayne, Ind., has hosted multiple adaptive sports events, including the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Military and Women's Division Wheelchair Basketball National Championships in 2024 and 2025.



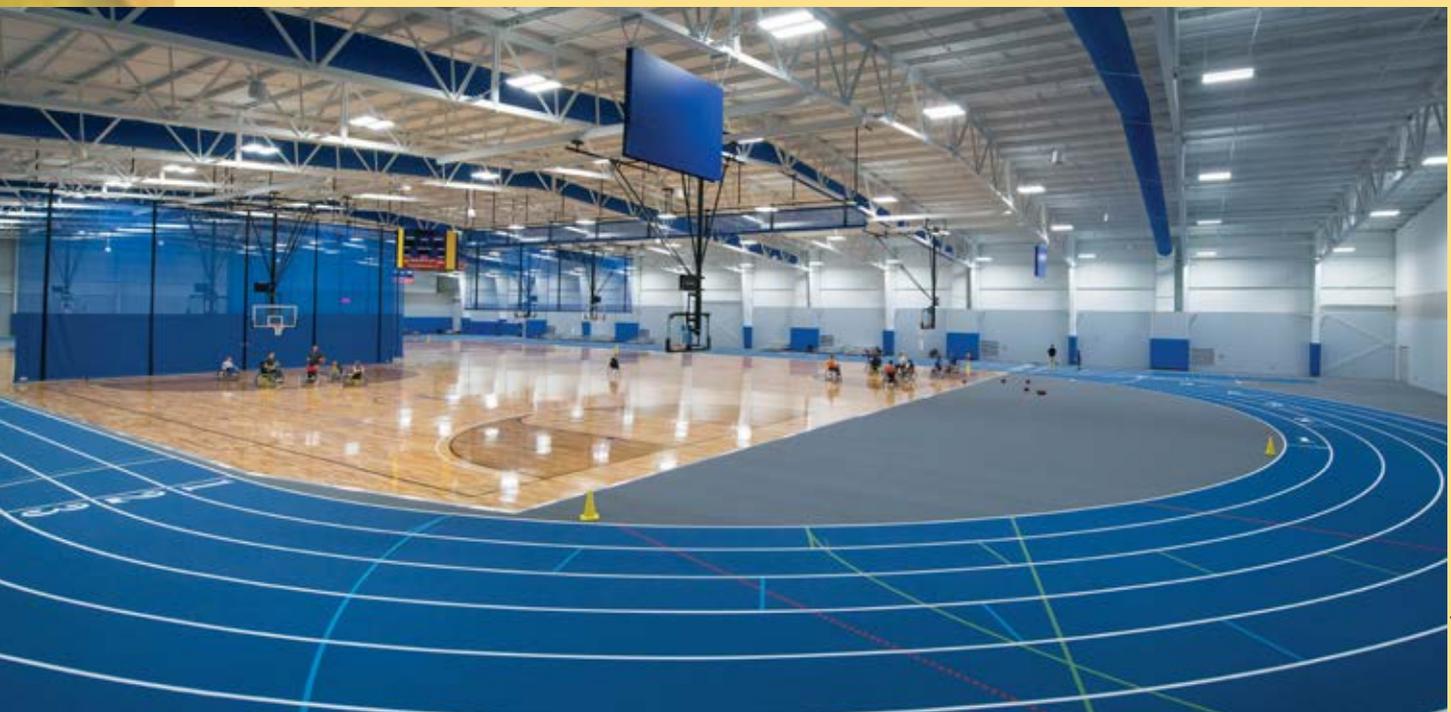
John Groth

National Wheelchair Basketball Association Wheelchair Basketball National Championships are becoming more attractive, especially to mid-sized cities such as Buffalo, N.Y.; Richmond, Va.; Tampa, Fla.; and Fort Wayne, Ind.

“The biggest thing we learned with hosting the sled hockey championships was

promoting the athleticism of the sport,” says James Adler, sports sales director at the Buffalo Niagara Sports Commission. “Instead of taking the angle of this as a feel-good event, we positioned it as a showcase of athleticism and skill. It’s very physical, hard-hitting hockey.”

Buffalo hosted the 2025 World Para Ice Hockey Championships last May, and the



Courtesy of Turnstone

Turnstone has helped Fort Wayne, Ind., showcase the city's universal accessibility.



Buffalo, N.Y., hosted the 2025 World Para Ice Hockey Championships at LECOM Harborcenter.

gold-medal match between Canada and Team USA was played in front of a raucous and fired-up crowd.

Fort Wayne, which has hosted two world parasports championships in six years, is using adaptive events to distinguish itself

That dynamic reflects Callahan’s objective in hosting LABS each year.

“The goal is to bring in folks who don’t necessarily work in parasports day in and day out,” she says. “We invite folks from tourism, philanthropy, youth sports, professional



The biggest thing we learned with hosting the sled hockey championships was promoting the athleticism of the sport. Instead of taking the angle of this as a feel-good event, we positioned it as a showcase of athleticism and skill. It’s very physical, hard-hitting hockey.



[James Adler]

from other destinations and sharpen its brand identity.

“We’re looking to have universal accessibility be one of the things we lean into the most,” says Jazmin Zavala, an official at Visit Fort Wayne. “It’s really just part of our DNA and what makes us unique. [The Sitting Volleyball World Cup] helped us showcase that at an international level, and the community really embraced that and rallied around it.”

teams, technology, coaches, universities and other business sectors. They are all important to helping us expand and grow our movement. We want everyone to come away after LABS focused on the fact that disability is an investment, not a cost center, in the sports industry. There’s ROI [return on investment] behind it. There’s dollars behind it. It’s a win for everybody.” 

BEST VER THEMS



U.S. adaptive skiers and snowboarders, wheelchair curlers and sled hockey players are prepped for the Winter Paralympics.

BY ALEX ABRAMS/RED LINE EDITORIAL

VERSION OF ELVES

© Getty Images/Alexander Hassenstein

Illustration by Kery Randolph / Graphics by Freepik
Paralympic logo courtesy of International Paralympic Committee



The U.S.' Oksana Masters, left, Brody Roybal, center, and Andrew Kurka, will compete in March's Milano Cortina Paralympics.

ANDREW KURKA IS PROUD OF the man he has become, and as odd as it might sound, he admits he's also proud of every bone he has broken in

his pursuit of becoming the best para alpine skier and version of himself possible.

Of course, Kurka would like to win another gold medal at this month's Paralympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 in Italy to go along with the one he earned in the downhill sitting event eight years ago in PyeongChang, South Korea. But to him, a gold medal is "just a gold medal."

"The journey is what matters," says Kurka, who celebrated his 34th birthday on Jan. 27.

The two-time Paralympian from Palmer, Alaska, had his character tested and had several more broken bones to be proud of after he crashed during a Super-G training run last season. He broke his sternum, his scapula and a few ribs during the crash, but he returned to the

snow a few months later with a good story to tell and more proof that he can overcome adversity.

"Yes, winning a gold medal at this next Games would be something that would be super cool. It's obviously something that I'm going for," says Kurka, who also earned a Paralympic silver medal in 2018. "But I'm focusing on being a better version of myself and being a better version of a ski racer every single time that I'm on the hill and in the gym."

Winter Paralympic History

Kurka is among the top American athletes who are expected to compete for medals at this year's Paralympics, which will have even more historical significance when the event opens March 6. Running through March 15, these Games will mark the 50th anniversary of the first Winter Paralympics held in 1976 in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden.

Approximately 600 athletes will compete in 79 events in Italy, showcasing just how much the Winter Paralympics



United States sit-skier Andrew Kurka will aim for his second gold medal at March's Milano Cortina Paralympics.

have grown over the past half-century. Fewer than 200 athletes competed in Örnköldsvik in 1976, including only 37 women.

As was the case at the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing, the 2026 sports program includes competitions in alpine skiing, Nordic skiing (biathlon and cross-country), sled hockey, snowboarding and wheelchair curling. The biggest change this year is the addition of a new mixed doubles event in wheelchair curling.

Coming off record-setting viewership of the 2024 Summer Paralympics in Paris, NBCUniversal plans to air more than 80 hours of television coverage across NBC, USA Network and CNBC. Peacock and the NBC Sports Digital platforms boast an additional 250 hours of programming.

Team USA brought 67 athletes to the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, and they won 20 medals, six of them gold. Nordic sit-skier Oksana Masters won three of those gold medals to go with four silvers, giving the multi-sport star 14 Winter Paralympics medals and 19 total medals for her Summer and Winter Paralympic Games career.

She's now the most decorated American Winter Paralympian of all time.

Like Kurka, Masters has dealt with a series of injuries over the past few years, but the

36-year-old now reports feeling healthy and motivated ahead of her fourth Winter Games and her eighth overall.

"We're training to be the best, to win. I'm not training for third place," says Masters, who was born in Ukraine and grew up in Louisville, Ky. "I'd be lying if I was. I'm not training just to make the team."

Vying For Skiing Gold

Masters' strong performance in Beijing came just six months after she earned a pair of golds in para cycling at the 2021 Tokyo Summer Paralympics. She's already accomplished part one of the repeat, having defended both cycling gold medals at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

One athlete who could challenge Masters for the top spot on the podium is American teammate Kendall Gretsch, who's a seven-time Paralympic medalist in Nordic

“
We're training to be the best, to win. I'm not training for third place. I'd be lying if I was. I'm not training just to make the team.

”
[Oksana Masters]



© Getty Images/Fred Lee

United States Nordic sit-skier and biathlon athlete Oksana Masters has recorded 14 career Winter Paralympic medals so far.

skiing and the triathlon. The fellow sit-skier showed her dominance while Masters was sidelined this past season.

Gretsch, 33, won the women's sit-skiing world cup overall title last March. The Downers Grove, Ill., native then decided not to compete in as many triathlons as usual in the offseason so she could focus on getting ready for the Winter Paralympics.

Masters and Gretsch are in a select group of Americans who have won a gold medal at both the Summer and Winter Paralympics. While their races will draw plenty of attention, Team USA will feature several Nordic skiers who have won Paralympic gold, including visually impaired skier Jake Adicoff and standing skier Sydney Peterson.

In addition, seven-time Paralympian Aaron Pike, who's engaged to Masters, will look to earn his first sit-skiing medal, which has eluded the world champion during his career.

Shooting For Five

Meanwhile, on the ice, Team USA enters Milano Cortina looking to win its fifth straight Paralympic gold medal in para ice hockey.

The Americans bring an experienced roster led by a group of veterans who know how to deal with high expectations, including four-time Paralympian and team captain Josh Pauls, as well as three-time Paralympians Declan Farmer, Brody Roybal and Army veteran Jen Lee.

© Getty Images/Wang He



U.S. para ice hockey goalie and Army veteran Jen Lee, right, is a three-time Paralympian.

"It is a great blend of high-powered forwards who can score, a solid, dependable defensive core and goaltending," says Dan Brennan, general manager of the U.S. team. "We're excited to bring this group to Milan."

In December, the U.S. sled hockey team competed at the 2025 Para Hockey Cup in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada, as a tune-up for the Winter Paralympics. The Americans outscored their opponents 27-8 and went undefeated at the tournament for the seventh consecutive time.

In doing so, the U.S. won the event for the 10th time in a row.



© Getty Images/Steph Chambers



Four-time Paralympian Josh Pauls will serve as the U.S. para ice hockey team's captain at March's Winter Paralympics.



© Getty Images/Ryan Pierse

Two-time U.S. Paralympian Noah Elliott will return to the Games after dealing with an injury the past two years.

Hopeful Redemption Tour

Paralympic gold medalist Noah Elliott is on a redemption tour heading into Italy.

The two-time Paralympian was considered among the medal favorites in snowboarding in Beijing, but he says he was quietly dealing with a “gnarly injury.” The injury forced him to walk with crutches and live with an oddly shaped limb for about two years, he says.

As a result, the St. Charles, Mo., native couldn’t perform as he had hoped in Beijing and failed to medal four years after winning a gold (in banked slalom) and a bronze (in snowboard cross) in PyeongChang.

Now that he’s healthy again after having surgery, he’s heading to Italy with plenty of confidence. He earned a pair of world championships medals last year, as well as the Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly Award for Best Athlete with a Disability.

“This is absolutely my redemption year. I’m so stoked,” Elliott says. “I’m going for gold again. I’m stronger than I’ve ever been, and yeah, just really excited.”

“
I think the best things that my teammates have given me is the respect to kind of be my own athlete, and they’re not treating me like I’m the youngest.”

”
[Audrey Crowley]

In addition, fellow snowboarder Brenna Huckaby, who had most of her right leg amputated due to osteosarcoma bone cancer in 2010, is looking to add to her strong Paralympic résumé this March. In her two appearances thus far, the Baton Rouge, La., native medaled in all four events in which she’s competed, winning three golds and a bronze.

Excitement Brewing

Thomas Walsh, an adaptive skier from Vail, Colo., won a silver medal in men’s giant slalom in Beijing. The two-time Paralympian and cancer survivor narrowly missed out on claiming another medal when he finished fourth in men’s super-combined.

There is also plenty of excitement for teenager Audrey Crowley, who’ll turn 19 on March 1. Despite being a newcomer to the Paralympics, the Eagle, Co., native made a name for herself during her breakout season this past winter.

Crowley, who was born without a fully developed right arm, earned a bronze medal in giant slalom at the 2025 International Ski and Snowboard Federation Para Alpine World Championships in Maribor, Slovenia. She admits she overcame some “excited



Seven-time U.S. Paralympic medalist Kendall Gretsck could challenge teammate Oksana Masters in sit-skiing events.



© Getty Images/Alex Livesey



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U.S. adaptive alpine skier and two-time Paralympian Thomas Walsh is a cancer survivor.

butterflies” heading into her first world championships to take third despite being the youngest skier in the field.

Crowley says she wants to bring that same nervous energy with her to Milano Cortina.

“I think the best things that my teammates have given me is the respect to kind of be my own athlete, and they’re not treating me like I’m the youngest,” she says. “They’re not babying me but instead helping me when I need it and kind of allowing me to learn and grow on my own.”

To keep up with this month's Winter Paralympic Games in Italy, visit sportsnspokes.com or check out paralympic.org/milano-cortina-2026.

Alex Abrams has written about Olympic and Paralympic sports for more than 15 years, including as a reporter for major newspapers in Florida, Arkansas and Oklahoma. He is a freelance contributor to Sports N Spokes on behalf of Red Line Editorial, Inc. 

© Getty Images/Michael Steele



U.S. sit-skier Aaron Pike will be competing in his fourth Winter Paralympics in March.

Reshaping SPORTS

BY RORY COOPER, PHD, PLY;
JONATHAN DUVALL, PHD;
JESSICA STEINBERG, MS;
JORGE CANDIOTTI, PHD;
AND IAN RICE, PHD

Driven by athlete-first design, technology is changing the parasport industry.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, technology has played a central role in expanding what athletes with disabilities can achieve on the court, on the track and in the community.

Today, advances in parasport technology are accelerating at an unprecedented pace, driven by new materials, digital manufacturing, robotics, sensing technologies, and, most importantly, by athletes themselves.

Not only are these innovations improving performance at the elite level, but they are also lowering barriers to participation, reducing injury risk and opening sports and recreation to a broader and more diverse population of people with disabilities.

From kirigami-inspired wheelchairs to 3D-printed adaptive equipment and wearable performance monitors, parasport technology is reshaping how sport is designed, experienced and shared.

'VOICE OF THE CONSUMER' APPROACH

A defining characteristic of parasport technology is participatory action design and engineering, an approach that places athletes and users at the center of the innovation process. Rather than designing equipment for people with disabilities, engineers, athletes and clinicians are increasingly designing together.

Athletes, coaches and therapists provide critical insights into comfort, fit, maneuverability, durability and real-world use that cannot be captured in a lab or fabrication facility alone. This "voice of the consumer" approach helps ensure that technology isn't only high-performing, but it is also practical, safe and meaningful.

When athletes are engaged from day one, equipment becomes an extension of the person, not merely a tool. This philosophy underpins much of the recent progress in parasport technology and has become a



Illustration by Kerry Randolph/
Graphic images by Freepik/
Photo courtesy of Rory Cooper

More affordable parasport wheelchairs could be made through a manufacturing process inspired by Japanese kirigami, where flat materials are cut and folded to create complex 3D structures.

cornerstone of research and development across adaptive sports.

EMERGING KIRIGAMI

Sports wheelchairs are among the most specialized, and expensive, pieces of parasport equipment.

Custom frames, high-strength materials and sport-specific geometry deliver high performance but often place participation out of reach for new or recreational athletes. A promising solution is emerging from an unexpected source: kirigami, the Japanese art of cutting and folding flat materials to create complex 3D structures.

The team at the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) at the University of Pittsburgh recently applied kirigami principles to the design of a rugby and tennis wheelchair fabricated from aluminum sheet metal.

Instead of relying on traditional tubular frames and extensive welding, the kirigami rugby and tennis wheelchairs are laser-cut from flat metal sheets and then folded and assembled using a press brake and rivets. This approach offers several advantages, including lower manufacturing costs, rapid customization for key athlete dimensions, reduced weight and simplified fabrication and repair.

Early prototypes were evaluated by experienced wheelchair rugby players, who reported positive impressions of the chair's concept, adjustability, maneuverability and overall feel. While further iterations are needed to meet the rigorous demands of high-level competition, the project demonstrates how rethinking materials and manufacturing can significantly expand access to adaptive sports.

Kirigami-inspired design may ultimately allow clubs, community programs and

emerging athletes to obtain sport-specific equipment that was previously unaffordable.

TRANSFORMATIONAL 3D PRINTING

Additive manufacturing, commonly known as 3D printing, has become one of the most transformative tools in parasport innovation.

Unlike traditional manufacturing, which often requires expensive tooling and long lead times, 3D printing allows designers to rapidly prototype, test and refine equipment at a reasonably low cost. This capability is especially powerful for sports and recreational activity assistive technologies, including devices

feedback. The goal isn't only to distribute devices, but to empower athletes, families and local makers to adapt and improve them. In doing so, technology becomes a catalyst for inclusion rather than a barrier.

CUSTOM-DESIGNED COMPONENTS

Access to sports and recreation isn't limited to courts and tracks. It also includes beaches, splash pads and water parks — spaces that have historically been inaccessible to people who use powered mobility devices.

Researchers at HERL have developed a pneumatically powered wheelchair designed specifically to overcome these barriers. Unlike conventional powered wheelchairs, this wheelchair's system uses sealed pneumatic power and actuation that allows safe operation in wet, sandy and splash-heavy environments.

The wheelchair can traverse soft surfaces such as sand, while tolerating repeated exposure to water, opening opportunities for inclusive play and recreation in settings previously considered off-limits.

These wheelchairs are currently in use at Morgan's Wonderland and Morgan's Inspiration Island, the world's first ultra-accessible

Courtesy of Rory Cooper



A kirigami wheelchair design offers reduced weight, as well as easier fabrication and repairs.

that enable participation in activities such as bowling, cycling, weightlifting, paddling and fitness training. Many of these devices fall into a gap between expensive commercial products and improvised homemade solutions.

Through initiatives such as the Power of Play project, researchers and students are developing and sharing open-source designs for easy-to-make sport adaptations. These devices are built using common materials such as 3D-printed parts, Velcro, straps, bolts and off-the-shelf components, and are tested with users to ensure safety and durability.

A growing online repository now houses dozens of vetted designs, complete with instructions and opportunities for user

Courtesy of Rory Cooper



A pneumatically powered wheelchair created by the Human Engineering Research Laboratories opens recreation opportunities to people with disabilities.



Pneumatically powered wheelchairs that allow safe operation in wet, sandy conditions are used at Morgan's Wonderland and Morgan's Inspiration Island in San Antonio.

theme park, in San Antonio, where they enable visitors with disabilities to independently access splash pads, water attractions and outdoor play areas.

While not a competitive sport device, this technology represents a critical expansion of recreational opportunities and community participation, reinforcing the idea that access itself is a form of performance.

While affordability and access are critical, parasport technology is also pushing the boundaries of high-performance engineering. Advances in materials science are enabling lighter, stronger and more responsive equipment tailored to individual athletes.

High-performance polymers such as polyetheretherketone, metals and carbon fiber-reinforced composites can now be manufactured using advanced additive processes. These materials offer exceptional strength-to-weight ratios, resistance to heat and fatigue and the ability to form complex geometries that were previously impossible.

In wheelchair racing, for example, custom-designed components optimize aerodynamics, steering response and power transfer. Close-fitting geometry improves efficiency while reducing strain on the athlete's body. Similar principles are being applied to prosthetic sockets, adaptive seating systems and sport-specific interfaces.

Looking ahead, metamaterials, which are engineered structures with properties not found in nature, promise even greater control over stiffness, damping and energy return. These innovations blur the line between equipment and biomechanics, enabling technology to work in concert with the athlete's body.

Kirigami rugby wheelchairs are laser-cut from flat metal sheets and then folded and assembled using a press brake and rivets.



Courtesy of Roy Cooper



Christopher Di Virgilio

Wheelchair athletes are helping inform the design of new parasport technology.

PERFORMANCE & INJURY

As parasport grows more competitive, understanding how athletes move and how their bodies respond to training is essential.

Wearable sensors and intelligent monitoring systems are increasingly being integrated into adaptive sports. Devices such as instrumented pushrims measure propulsion forces and stroke efficiency, helping athletes and coaches refine technique.

Pressure-mapping systems track seating and interface loads, identifying risk factors for skin breakdown and overuse injuries. Activity monitors provide objective data on training volume and recovery. Remote sensing and coaching platforms are expanding access to expert guidance, particularly for athletes in rural or underserved areas.

By translating data into actionable feedback, technology supports both performance improvement and long-term health.

Importantly, these tools reinforce the idea that injury prevention is a performance advantage. Sustainable success in parasport depends not only on speed and strength, but on preserving the athlete's body over years of training and competition.

THE RISE OF ROBOTS & ROBOTICS

Robotic and powered technologies are beginning to influence parasport in profound ways.

Powered orthoses, robotic-assist systems and advanced prosthetics are restoring and enhancing movement for athletes with a wide range of impairments. Recent breakthroughs in neural interfaces have demonstrated continuous, intuitive control of bionic limbs, enabling more natural gait and movement. While many of these technologies are still emerging, their implications for training, rehabilitation and future competition are significant.

Robotic wheelchairs capable of climbing curbs, navigating uneven terrain or adjusting seating dynamically may expand where and how athletes train and compete. HERL is advancing the design of omnidirectional powered wheelchairs, which have the potential to expand participation in dynamic court sports such as tennis and pickleball.

Traditional powered wheelchairs are optimized for forward and backward motion, with turning requiring space and time, which are constraints that limit agility in fast-paced, multidirectional sports. Omnidirectional systems use specialized wheel configurations and control



Courtesy of Rory Cooper

Robotic wheelchairs that climb curbs and navigate tough terrain may expand how athletes train and compete.

algorithms that allow movement in any direction without turning the chair's orientation.

This capability enables rapid lateral motion, precise positioning and smoother transitions, which are key elements for effective court coverage and shot preparation. As these systems mature, they could support new formats of inclusive racket sports and training environments, particularly for athletes who can't use manual sport wheelchairs.

More broadly, omnidirectional mobility challenges long-standing assumptions about how powered devices fit into sports, signaling a future where technology expands, not restricts, the range of athletic possibilities. As these systems mature, questions around classification, fairness and access will require thoughtful discussion within the parasport community.

A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE

Perhaps the most important impact of parasport technology advances is their ability to broaden participation.

Sports and recreation are strongly linked to physical health, mental well-being and social connection. Yet many people with disabilities still face limited opportunities due to cost, availability or lack of appropriate equipment.

By lowering barriers, embracing open design and prioritizing user involvement, modern parasport technology can help ensure that participation isn't reserved for a select few.

Community programs, schools, veterans' organizations and adaptive sports clubs all stand to benefit from innovations that are affordable, adaptable and scalable. Technology



Kerry Randolph



U.S. Paralympic wheelchair rugby player Chuck Aoki, right, tests out a wheelchair rugby chair inspired by Japanese kirigami.



Courtesy of Rony Cooper

An omnidirectional powered wheelchair might expand participation in court sports for athletes who can't use a manual sports chair.

alone isn't enough, but when combined with advocacy, education and inclusive design, it becomes a powerful force for change.

The future of parasport technology isn't defined by any single device or breakthrough. It's defined by a philosophy: Athletes with disabilities are experts in their own experience, that innovation should serve participation as much as podiums and that access and excellence are not mutually exclusive.

As materials improve, digital tools evolve and collaboration deepens between engineers and athletes, parasport will continue to redefine what is possible.

In doing so, it will not only elevate competition, but it will also inspire the next generation to turn adversity into advantage and action into accomplishment.

For more information on HERL, visit herl.pitt.edu. 

Skiing Trailblazers Earn Hall Of Fame Honors

BY JOHN GROTH

MARY ELLEN WHITNEY AND NANCY Gustafson both transformed adaptive skiing in different ways. And their achievements and contributions to the adaptive sports movement have earned them some major recognition, including induction into the National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame.

Whitney and Gustafson each received the honor Dec. 12 during a ceremony hosted by Move United during The Hartford Ski Spectacular at Breckenridge Ski Resort in Breckenridge, Colo.

Gustafson was inducted into the winter competition category as an athlete, while

Mary Ellen Whitney was inducted into the National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame (contributor category) Dec. 12 at Breckenridge Ski Resort in Colorado.

Courtesy of Mary Ellen Whitney



Courtesy of Nancy Gustafson

Adaptive skier Nancy Gustafson was inducted as an athlete into the National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame on Dec. 12 in Breckenridge, Colo.

Whitney was inducted in the contributor category, which recognizes an individual who has a minimum of five years of experience in adaptive sports as a coach, administrator, founder, event director or other leadership role.

She definitely has plenty of that.

After starting out teaching and then landing her dream job as an adaptive physical education teacher in Albany, N.Y., Whitney later officially founded the nonprofit STRIDE in 1985. The program started as a way to offer a skiing program for students with disabilities.

Whitney wanted to help those with disabilities and create equal access for them — from

education to adaptive sports. The program went from having just skiing to adding camping and bowling and now offers 20-plus adaptive sports year-round for little to no cost for athletes and their families. Later, Whitney also founded the STRIDE Wounded Warriors Snowfest, a yearly event for veterans and their families.

“

It was one of the most meaningful awards I've gotten in all my career. So, I'm pretty grateful.

”

[Mary Ellen Whitney]

“I started and introduced adaptive skiing and started a program at seven different small ski resorts in the Northeast, and some of them aren't even around anymore. But right now, STRIDE is operating at three,” Whitney says. “... And the goal is every ski area should have an adaptive program or offer services that make it equal for everyone. And there's still quite a few out there that don't.”

But what struck Whitney the most at the ceremony was the other people she joined as award recipients. Many of the previous winners, including Hal O'Leary (who wrote all the



Mary Ellen Whitney, above, standing left, founded the nonprofit STRIDE in 1985 to offer skiing and other adaptive sports to students with disabilities.

adaptive skiing books she studied), Geoff Krill and Gwen Allard, were people she either considered mentors or were athletes who helped push the adaptive sports movement forward over the past 30 years of the award's existence.

“It was one of the most meaningful awards I've gotten in all my career. So, I'm pretty grateful,” says Whitney, a Wynantskill, N.Y., resident.

The now-70-year-old retired as STRIDE's executive director halfway through 2024 but still remains president of the board and runs the snow sports program. She says she likes where new Executive Director Alex Brame is taking the organization.



Mary Ellen Whitney, right, is joined by Move United Executive Director Glenn Merry at the Dec. 12 National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Breckenridge, Colo.

Courtesy of Move United

“You know, my dream was that STRIDE would be sustainable when I stepped away. And it's definitely more than that,” Whitney says.

HUMBLING HONOR

Meanwhile, this marks Gustafson's second major hall of fame induction. Besides being inducted to the National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame, the 61-year-old will also be inducted into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in April at Snowbird ski resort in Snowbird, Utah — just 45 minutes from her home in Park City, Utah.

But neither are honors she expected or exactly hoped for.

During the March 1985 NCAA Skiing Championships in Bozeman, Mont., the then-20-year-old Gustafson was finishing her last training day run before the championships kicked off. She hooked the tip of one of her skis and slid into the chairlift tower, and the impact left her with a partially paralyzed left hand and arm and gave her a concussion. Of the five nerves that go to her left arm, she had two completely pulled out, two partially torn and only one fully intact. Later, a neurologist she was working with told her to never ski again or she'd lose her arm completely.

“So, over the next year, I did get a little bit of my arm back but never got my hand back,” Gustafson says. “... I had been skiing since I was 2.

I'd been racing since I was 6. And so, at the age of 20, you know, to be told that, it's just not something that really registers seriously in your brain. And, I don't know, I just never gave it another thought.”

The next season, Gustafson attended a training camp over Christmas, and one of her teammates ran into someone on what was then called the U.S. Disabled Ski Team. Later, she brought that person over to talk to Gustafson. A month later, Gustafson registered to compete in a regional race for the team in New Hampshire and won that to qualify for the March 1986 U.S. Nationals. Then, she won the U.S. Nationals to qualify for the April 1986 Winter World Championships for the Disabled in Sweden, where she won four gold medals in four events.

Two years later, Gustafson qualified for the 1988 Paralympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria, earning a silver medal. In 1990, she won five gold

medals at the World Disabled Championships in Winter Park, Colo., took three gold medals at the 1992 Tignes-Albertville Paralympics in France and won four gold medals at the 1994 Lillehammer Paralympics in Norway.

Gustafson finished with eight Paralympic medals, seven gold and one silver, in four disciplines (women's downhill, slalom, giant slalom and Super-G). She also totaled 40 U.S. and Canadian National Championship medals, including 33 gold, six silver and one bronze.

Gustafson, who's now a Level III certified ski instructor, says the honors are humbling.

“So, the things that run through your mind, you know, number one is, ‘Are you worthy?’ Yeah, I won a bunch of medals, but you know, at the time going through it, it was, I don't know, one could call it purely selfish, right? Because you want to ski. You're racing because you want to race. Are you doing it for your

Courtesy of Nancy Gustafson



Nancy Gustafson will be inducted into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in April at Snowbird ski resort in Snowbird, Utah.



Courtesy of Move United

Nancy Gustafson, left, is pictured with Move United Executive Director Glenn Merry at the Dec. 12 National Adaptive Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

team and for your country? Yeah, of course you are. But you know, it's individual dreams and goals that you're going after,” Gustafson says. “And so, you know, to be inducted into two halls of fame, it's just something that you don't dream of.” 



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BASKETBALL

NWBA Hall Of Fame

A PIONEER IN THE WOMEN'S DIVISION AND an influential leader with nearly three decades of impact are among the newest members of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Hall of Fame.

The NWBA announced Jan. 23 that players Kathy Miller and Eric Barber, along with contributors William Carson "Buddy" Barnes Jr., and Jim Glatch, will be inducted into the Hall of Fame March 28 in West Monroe, La.

Miller was introduced to wheelchair basketball after losing both of her legs in a car accident

in the mid-1970s and had a distinguished 17-year playing career. She earned multiple all-tournament selections, was a two-time tournament MVP and played internationally for Team USA.

Barber also began his wheelchair basketball career at a young age. He started playing at age 13 and went on to become a two-time recipient of the National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament (NWBT) Captain Ure Sportsmanship Award, a five-time NWBT Division I First Team selection

and a two-time Paralympic bronze medalist with Team USA.

Among the contributors joining the hall of fame, Barnes has worn nearly every hat within the NWBA, including serving as a coach, administrator and staff leader, as well as working as a referee since 1993. He will become part of the first father-son duo named to the hall of fame. His father, Carson Barnes, served the NWBA as both a player and head coach and was inducted in 2017.

Another longtime contributor, Glatch has spent nearly three decades as a coach,

administrator, mentor and advocate. As a coach, he helped elevate the Rolling Scots Adaptive Sports Program at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania into a national powerhouse. Glatch also co-authored the original bylaws for the NWBA Intercollegiate Division, helping establish consistent standards for collegiate wheelchair basketball nationwide.

To read the inductees' full bios or for information, visit nwba.org.

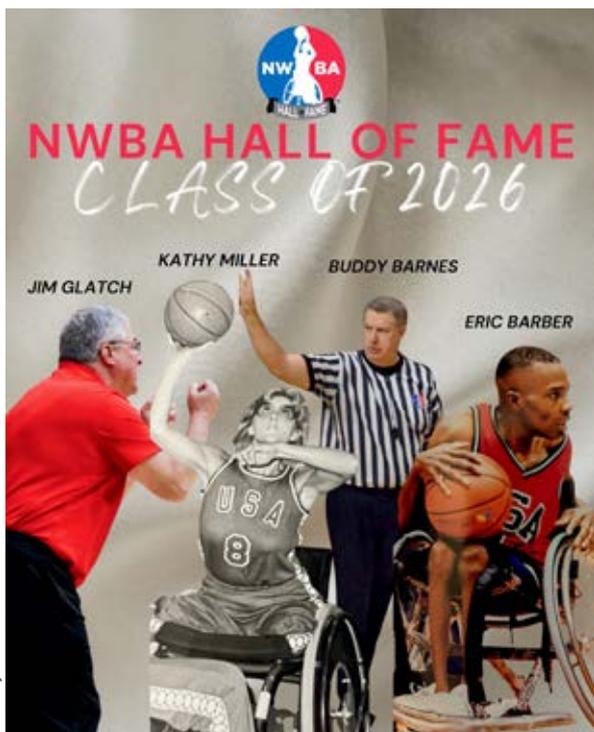
The UTA Mavs Are Moving

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-ARLINGTON (UTA) men's and women's wheelchair basketball teams are making a major move within the school that will bring them greater exposure.

The university announced Jan. 20 that the Movin' Mavs and Lady Movin' Mavs have now been placed under the umbrella of the school's intercollegiate athletic department. The move puts both teams among the UTA Mavericks' 15 other programs that compete at the NCAA Division I level.

Competing as part of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, the Movin' Mavs and Lady Movin' Mavs had previously been part of UTA's sports and recreation department. Among the changes with this move is both squads are now being included as part of the teams list on the Mavericks' official website, along with their schedules and rosters.

"For 50 years, our men's and women's wheelchair basketball teams have shown the nation what it means to compete with heart, discipline and championship-level determination — earning a combined 13 national titles in the process," says UTA President Jennifer Cowley, PhD. "Bringing these teams into our Athletics Department reflects our belief in their excellence and our excitement for what comes next. This move will strengthen both



Courtesy of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Hall of Fame



Courtesy of University of Texas-Arlington

TENNIS

Hall Of Champions

CELEBRATING THIS YEAR'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY of wheelchair tennis, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) has launched the Wheelchair Tennis Hall of Champions.

The digital platform celebrates the players, coaches and contributors who have played a pivotal role in the growth of the sport.

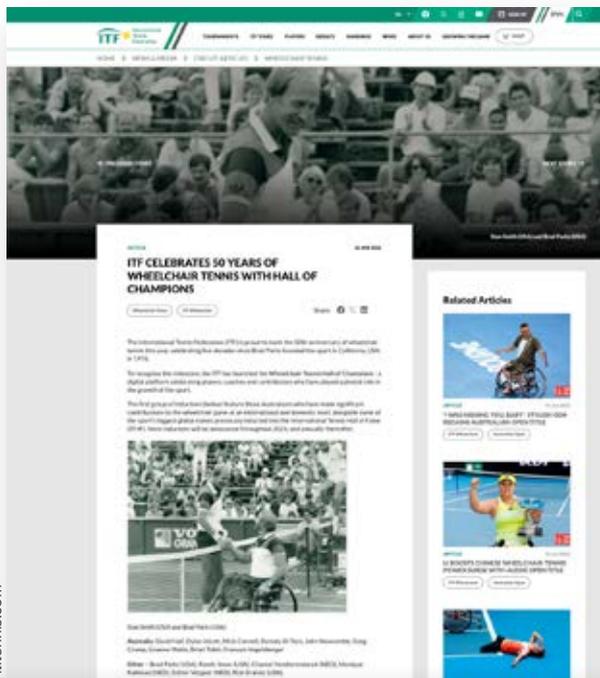
The first group of inductees include Americans Brad Parks, Randy Snow and Rick Draney, along with Chantal Vandierendonck,

Monique Kalkman and Esther Vergeer from the Netherlands.

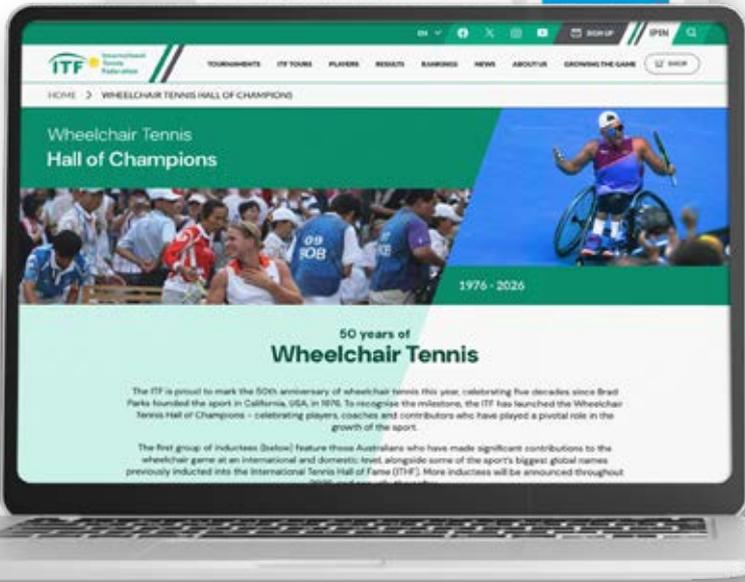
Also joining that group are Australians David Hall, Dylan Alcott, Mick Connell, Daniela Di Toro, John Newcombe, Greg Crump, Graeme Watts, Brian Tobin and Francois Vogelsberger.

Credited with starting the sport in California in 1976, Parks spent nine years ranked as the top player in the world and was a three-time majors champion. Snow won 22 major championships and was a two-time Paralympic gold medalist. A pioneer of the quad division, Draney was a seven-time US Open quad singles champion and won a pair of doubles titles there.

The ITF has also launched the 50 Years, 50 Milestones digital campaign to highlight the defining moments from wheelchair tennis' history. For more information, visit itftennis.com/en/wheelchair-tennis-hall-of-champions.



itftennis.com



WINTER PARALYMPICS

Watch The Games

NBC UNIVERSAL HAS RECORD-SETTING PROGRAMMING planned in the U.S. for this month's Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games in Italy.

The NBC broadcast network and streaming service Peacock will be the company's primary platforms for its coverage of the Games, which are taking place March 6–15.

The network says it has more than 80 hours of coverage set for the Games across NBC, USA Network and CNBC, including daily live coverage of every competition day on the USA Network and CNBC.

NBC itself will provide a record eight hours of Paralympic programming, including live coverage of the para ice hockey championship game March 15, when Team USA could be playing for its fifth straight gold medal.

Primetime broadcasts on NBC will feature the top stories and Paralympic moments. The network says special focus will be placed on Team USA, including athletes' personal stories, training, motivation and performance.



Courtesy of International Paralympic Committee



© Getty Images/Steph Chambers

U.S. goaltender Jen Lee, No. 32, in middle, celebrates with teammates after defeating Canada in the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics para ice hockey gold-medal game.

© Getty Images/Alexander Hassenstein



Norway's Jesper Pedersen competes in the men's sitting giant slalom on his second run at the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics.

Meanwhile, there will be roughly 250 hours of coverage of all six Winter Paralympic sports across NBCUniversal's streaming platforms, including Peacock, NBCSports.com and the NBC Sports app, throughout the duration of the 10-day event.

This month's Winter Paralympic Games are expected to include an estimated 600 para athletes from roughly 50 countries competing in 79 medal events.

For more information, visit nbcolympics.com/paralympic-games.

Celebrate The Games In Colorado

THIS MONTH'S WINTER PARALYMPICS MAY be in Italy, but there are several events here in the U.S. where fans can celebrate and enjoy the Games.

The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum in Colorado Springs, Colo., says it will be open every day during the 2026 Milano Cortina Games with a variety of activities and Paralympics coverage.

Festivities begin at 10 a.m. MST March 6 for an Opening Ceremony watch party and a live broadcast of the official start of the Winter Paralympic Games. The museum will also

hold a watch party for the Closing Ceremony March 15.

The museum will have several special activities, including Paralympic Day March 7 with live broadcasts of the Games and an opportunity to meet Paralympic athletes and the live creation of Winter Games-inspired art March 14.

Additionally, the museum has daily activities planned with guided tours highlighting iconic winter sport moments and stories from the Games and tours that take a closer look at its many Olympic and Paralympic artifacts.

The Winter Paralympic Games are set for March 6–15.

For more information, visit usopm.org. 

PVA Publications File Photo



The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum features 12 interactive and accessible galleries that combine the two events into one seamless experience.



Andy Nennann

Jason O'Rear





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October 2025

PVA Intro to Paracycling Series: Denver	October 3-4, 2025	Denver, CO
PVA Wheelchair Football Camp: Augusta	October 10-11, 2025	North Augusta, SC
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	October 16-18, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-South	October 17-18, 2025	Memphis, TN
PVA Pickleball Camp	October 18-19, 2025	San Antonio, Texas
Paracycling: High Performance Road Racing Camp	October 27-31, 2025	Colorado Springs, CO

November 2025

Intro to Paracycling Series: Phoenix	November 12, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Phoenix	November 13-16, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Buckeye	November 14-15, 2025	Westerville, OH

December 2025

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Nevada	December 4-7, 2025	Las Vegas, NV
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: New England	December 6-7, 2025	Brockton, MA

January 2026

PVA-USA Boccia Regional Tournament	January 24-25, 2026	Tampa, FL
PVA Wheelchair Rugby Invitational	January 30-February 1, 2026	Louisville, KY

February 2026

PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Bayou Gulf States	February 7-8, 2026	Gulfport, MS
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Central Florida	February 14-15, 2026	Orlando, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Florida Gulf Coast	February 25-27, 2026	Tampa, FL
PVA Outdoor Experience: Maine Winter Sports	February 25-March 1, 2026	Carrabassett Valley, ME

March 2026

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Tri-State Tournament	March 13-15, 2026	Beaverton, OR
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-Atlantic	March 14-15, 2026	Midlothian, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Southeastern Challenge	March 27-29, 2026	Appling, GA

April 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Bluegrass Bass Bash	April 10-12, 2026	Kuttawa, KY
PVA National Air Gun Camp	April 13-17, 2026	Centreville, VA
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	April 16-18, 2026	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Citrus Slam	April 17-19, 2026	Kissimmee, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Texas	April 22-24, 2026	San Antonio, TX
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-America	April 23-25, 2026	Oklahoma City, OK
PVA Wheelchair Pickleball Tournament	April 25-26, 2026	Franklin, WI

May 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Land of Lincoln	May 1-3, 2026	Sesser, IL
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Puerto Rico (Year-End)	May 2-3, 2026	San Juan, PR
Intro to Paracycling Series: Salt Lake City	May 4-5, 2026	Salt Lake City, UT
Intro to Paracycling Series: Milwaukee	May 20-21, 2026	Milwaukee, WI
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Vaughan	May 22-24, 2026	Elburn, IL
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Buckeye Bash	May 29-31, 2026	Cortland, OH
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Texas	May 30-31, 2026	San Antonio, TX

June 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Capital Clash	June 5-7, 2026	Marbury, MD
PVA Wheelchair Basketball Camp	June 8-14, 2026	Arlington, TX
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Wisconsin	June 12-14, 2026	Green Bay, WI
PVA Outdoor Experience: Teton	June 22-26, 2026	Jackson Hole, WY
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: National Championship	June 25-28, 2026	Omaha, NE
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Iowa (Year-End)	June 26-28, 2026	Cedar Rapids, IA

July 2026

National Veterans Wheelchair Games	July 9-14, 2026	Detroit, MI
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