

# ParaSport<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

FALL 2020



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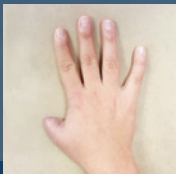
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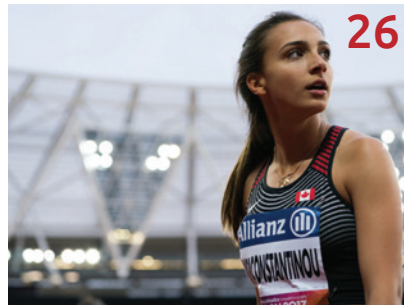
FALL 2020

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# WELCOME

## LET'S CONNECT

*We've all probably been following more media in the last 10 months than we ever thought imaginable. Last spring we looked to our political leaders just about every day for direction, security and hope. Medical experts then grabbed our attention with science and numbers, charts and projections. And as we move into 2021, pharmaceutical companies have shifted into the spotlight.*

I read something earlier this year that was trying to make the point that our community of people with disabilities already knows how to adapt, suggesting that we therefore have some sort of advantage during the pandemic. I do not agree. While many of us have emerged from difficult times in our lives, our community's leaders know that this has been much harder, and life-threatening, for some who are already living with challenges than for others.



Something else that caught my attention in my email Inbox was a graphic that depicted three general ways to describe how people are coping, or not, right now: Panic, Learning or Growth. Are we anxiously frozen in time, or have we utilized the time to learn about ourselves and others, or are we embracing this time as a growth opportunity?

Speaking for us here at ParaSport® Ontario, while we are washing our hands diligently, we are not sitting on them. We continue to assist anyone who needs our services the best we can, and we are ready to do more when we all emerge from this crisis, in whatever way it might look like.

One of the things that we worked hard to develop this year is a first-of-its-kind online ParaSport® Community Forum to bring our community together from all corners of the province. It's all about connecting – sharing in our sport and activity interests with photos, videos, discussions and groups – a great way to make new friends and share resources and solutions that can help others. Check it out at [www.parasportontario.ca/member-area](http://www.parasportontario.ca/member-area). Let's Connect!

Jeff Tiessen, *Executive Director*

**PS: If you picked this issue up in a clinic or at an event, or wherever, and would like to get on our mailing list simply sign up as a Member of the ParaSport Ontario Family, and we'll keep them coming to you, along with monthly e-newsletters and much more. And it's FREE. Join us at [www.parasportontario.ca](http://www.parasportontario.ca).**

# ParaSport® MAGAZINE

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## CANADA'S NEWEST FORM OF HOCKEY

# VOLT HOCKEY

Played in a Danish-designed Sport Chair, manipulated by only a joystick, Volt Hockey has become a game-changer in sport, breaking down barriers for youth with physical disabilities.



**"Volt equalizes the game of hockey for kids with disabilities."**

Sofia Caldwell from YMCA Middlesex

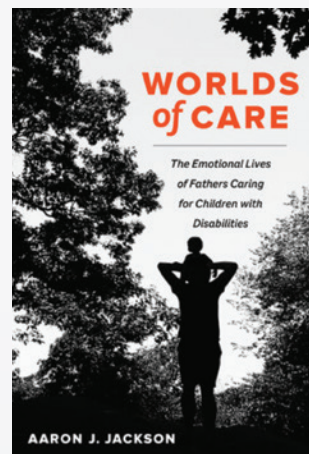
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## DADS AND DISABILITY

Many men are caring, supporting, champions of their children with disabilities. Aaron J. Jackson's warm, rich, and nuanced account provides a welcome window into



their lives and challenges us all to rethink who we are and who we can be in his new book *Worlds of Care: The Emotional Lives of Fathers Caring for Children with Disabilities*.

Jackson, a Melbourne-based anthropologist, retells the stories of fathers caring for children with major physical and intellectual disabilities and reflects on his own experience caring for a son with a severe disability. He provides an analysis on the relationship of masculinity and care and argues that caring for others can change how we relate and perceive others.

Jackson also explores the issue of how men develop their identities in the context of caregiving. The author combines ethnographic research and emotions from intimate real-life experiences to provide us with an account of what men must do to create some type of normalcy in life when their circumstances are anything but that.

*Worlds of Care* is available now as a pdf or downloadable e-copy on the University of California website at: [www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520379855/worlds-of-care](http://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520379855/worlds-of-care). The on-sale date in North America is April 2021.

## ParaSport® Online Community Goes Live

***Are you looking to learn more about Para-Rowing? Therapeutic Riding? How about some home fitness workout ideas during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic? Let's connect!***

ParaSport Ontario is proud to announce the grand reveal of a new social networking platform! Join us in sharing your interests, meeting others who share your interest, and participating in Group discussions. Share personal experience stories, photos, and videos. Pose questions and combine passions when connecting with others in the ParaSport community.

The Forum Groups have privacy measures and are monitored to

ensure inclusivity where everyone is welcome to participate in a safe space. Do you enjoy participating in Polls? The platform's polls connect participants to others who choose the same response. You can also create and host events and invite others to join.

Participants can easily navigate towards their interests and become part of any one of the many special interest communities within ParaSport Ontario. A huge shout out of appreciation goes to Social Architect and its founder Kimberley Barreda for her generous contribution to the creation, design and programming of this parasport community first!

# GET BACK in the GAME with Play to Podium

Many athletes with disabilities face the ongoing challenge of the cost of adaptive sporting equipment. In the effort to help, ParaSport® Ontario is proud to offer support from its Play to Podium Fund.

ParaSport Ontario's Play to Podium Fund provides equipment to deserving and dedicated athletes whose goal is to be active for the purpose of fun, fitness, or competition. Mississauga's Chris Pinto is a talented athlete with a passion to be the best version of himself each day. Pinto, a lower limb amputee, is the most recent Play to Podium Fund recipient and the beneficiary of a prosthetic running blade donated by Ossur Canada and supported by Prosthetic Energy Inc., a Toronto-based clinic.

While Pinto is very grateful to have received the running blade, he recognizes that there are so many other members in the community with goals and aspirations just like his, who could also benefit from the personalized adaptive sports equipment that they need to succeed.

There is a sport for everyBODY! Raise funds for the Fund in your neighbourhood, office, or network to give aspiring athletes in the disability community the "wheels" to be included... to participate and to play! Please donate online through the following link: [www.parasportontario.ca/donate/play-to-podium-fund](http://www.parasportontario.ca/donate/play-to-podium-fund). Contact ParaSport Ontario to nominate a potential Play to Podium Fund recipient.



**YAW KORSAH** – Yaw won gold in the first African Championship in 2011 and opened an orphanage in Ghana for physically challenged children with his winnings. During the 2016 Para-cycling World Cup, his handcycle's chain came off causing unrepairable damage. ParaSport Ontario presented Yaw with a new \$7,500 handcycle with contributions made to the Play to the Podium Fund.



## The Power of ParaSport Official Launch

A pioneer's path is rarely a straight one; it is a meandering course. And characteristically, settlers prosper in a land far removed from the trails traversed to get there.

Such is the case with the parasport movement in Ontario. Ontario's parasport pioneers charted a revolutionary new path for athletes with a disability in our province, our country and internationally. Is it possible for them to have imagined what the Parasport Movement looks like today?

Weaving through many obstacles, their achievements serve as the cornerstones of the movement as we know it today. Visionaries paved the way for new generations of parasport participants and athletes. The heroic stories, many previously uncelebrated, are shared in *The Power of ParaSport: Celebrating Five Decades in Ontario*.

An Ontario-focused project, supported in part by the Ministry of Heritage, Tourism, Culture and Sport, this legacy publication (tabletop-style book format) educates and motivates, and will inspire others to lead, compete, volunteer and advocate to ensure the continued awareness and growth of parasport opportunities for Ontario's youth and adults with disabilities.

Join us on February 18th for an incredible hour of power and inspiration at the official virtual launch party of *The Power of ParaSport: Celebrating Five Decades in Ontario*. The supportive network created over the past five decades made this publication and event possible. Let's celebrate excellence and achievements together.

An empowering, one-of-its-kind virtual event, *The Power Within* party will be a great way for everyBODY to reconnect with our community. Seats are not limited; we expect thousands to be joining us! For your official invitation and Zoom details, please email Ellie at [resources@parasportontario.ca](mailto:resources@parasportontario.ca).

# On Board with ParaSport Ontario

*ParaSport® Ontario is pleased to welcome five new members to its Board of Directors, exceptional and remarkably accomplished individuals in each of their respective fields. Here's to introduce: Rob Snoek, Todd Keirstead, Joanne Smith, John Oakes and Michael Trojan.*

**Rob Snoek Paralympian • Canadian • Disability Hall of Fame Inductee • Sports Broadcaster**

Rob is a former sprinter who competed for 12 years in para track and field events. He represented Canada in numerous Paralympic Games and World Championships and is a Canadian record holder. Rob is a CBC TV Sports commentator covering both the Olympic and Paralympic Games.



dedication to providing meaningful services to Canadians with disabilities is further validated by her extensive volunteer hours and is recognized with awards from numerous institutions. She, like Rob, is also a Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Inductee.

**John Oakes Lecturer • Former CEO • Director and President**

John joins the ParaSport Ontario Board after a fulfilling career as CEO at the largest manager of condominium corporations in the Greater Toronto Area. In his 44 years of management experience, he served numerous roles in the not-for-profit segment of the condominium sector including an instructor for service excellence and as a government advisor.



**Todd Keirstead Keynote Speaker • Leader of Inclusion Diversity • Professional Golf Entertainer**



Todd's *Bring Back the Game* initiative promotes and empowers individuals through the game of golf. He has helped raise millions of dollars for charities and wowed golfers all

over the world, including at ParaSport Ontario's annual Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament.

**Joanne Smith Certified Nutritionist • Nutritional Author • Entrepreneur**

Joanne is a Certified Nutritionist and the CEO of Fruitful Elements. She specializes in providing services to people with spinal cord and brain injuries, multiple sclerosis, and cerebral palsy. Joanne's



**Michael Trojan Sports Coach • Retired Chief Administrative Officer • Management Consulting**

Michael began his public service career over three decades ago in finance and budgeting. He rose rapidly to senior executive levels for the Niagara Region before taking on the role of chief administrative officer. Now retired, Michael continues to be involved in the community by coaching and volunteering at youth sporting events and serving on several committees supporting the Niagara region.



## CHARTING A NEW DIRECTION

In these strange times, we are delighted to watch and read inspiring stories from our contemporaries. Jess Silver, the Founder and Executive Director of Flex for Access Inc., has published a memoir titled *Run: An Uncharted Direction*, available on Amazon.

The book takes readers inside Silver's cultural roots, describing her childhood experiences and how they shaped her with reflections on her daily truths. She mirrors her experiences in her pursuit of fitness and details how that helped her make sense of the confusion faced in her reality. The memoir is a story of discovery of life's meaning, and the value of one's uniqueness by finding solace and purpose through the pursuit of sport and fitness.

Jess Silver lives in Toronto. She's a communications professional with a multifaceted journalism and medical writing and editing background. She hopes her story empowers others near and worlds apart.



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# LET'S MOVE!

*Get the Support  
You Need to  
be Active  
at Home*

*A program of the Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP), Queen's University and the University of British Columbia, GET IN MOTION is free, telephone-based physical activity coaching for Canadian adults with a physical disability such as spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, stroke, cerebral palsy, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, post-polio syndrome, or an amputation. Physical Activity Coaches can offer you support to start or maintain an at-home physical activity program.*

### **Who are the Coaches?**

They are trained volunteers and program staff with a background in motivating individuals with a physical disability to lead active, healthy lifestyles. Although knowledgeable about physical activity, Get In Motion coaches cannot provide a specific exercise training program.

### **Who can Enrol in Get In Motion?**

The program is available to adults living in Canada who have a physical disability and access to a phone or computer (for video or audio calls).

### **What to talk about with the Physical Activity Coach?**

It's all about your needs. Some participants might want to speak to a coach just once, about how to do strength-training at home, without specialized equipment. Some participants might want regular phone contact with a coach to receive ongoing physical activity support for:

- Goal-setting
- Planning/scheduling physical activity
- Overcoming activity-related barriers
- Finding resources

Most participants have contact with their Coach once a week at the start and then once every other week as they settle into their physical activity routine.

### **How Long will the Program Run?**

As long as CDPP has the staff and volunteers to support the program, the plan is to run until the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

### **How to connect with a Physical Activity Coach?**

Coaches are available by phone or through online platforms such as ZOOM or Skype.

### ***How to sign-up for Get In Motion?***

Visit <https://cdpp.ca/get-involved> or e-mail [getinmotion@sohealthyathome.ca](mailto:getinmotion@sohealthyathome.ca). Or call Kingston Revved Up at (613) 533-6000 x 79283 to leave your name and contact information. Allow up to five days for follow-up and a connection with a coach.

### ***What is CDPP?***

The Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP; [www.cdpp.ca](http://www.cdpp.ca)) is a team of researchers and community partners dedicated to promoting full and effective participation in physical activity for Canadians with a disability. The researchers leading Get In Motion are from Queen's University and the University of British Columbia – Okanagan. Get In Motion was first offered from 2008 - 2013 for Canadians with spinal cord injury and from 2014 - 2016 for adults with other types of disability. The service was suspended in 2016 due to a lack of funding.



### ***Will Personal Information be Shared?***

Your personal information will be used by the Physical Activity Coaches. It is possible that the researchers supporting Get In Motion will use some general information about your participation (e.g., number of calls you receive) to improve similar services in the future. This information will be anonymous. Your information will not be given to anyone outside of the Get In Motion team.



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# Para Pro-Am Tournament



By Emily Blackborow

Photo by Michael Schneider Photography



Photo by Auburn University Athletics

Meet **NATASHA STASIUK**, a 22-year-old from Oakville, who was introduced to the game of golf when she was just eight years old and now holds a 1.7 handicap index, playing out of Heron Point Golf Links in Ancaster. Stasiuk recently won her second straight Ontario Disability Championship at Woodington Lakes Golf Club, north of Toronto.



Photo by Scott Macleod

Meet **KURTIS BARKLEY**, a five-foot tall, world-ranked golfer from Chesterville, Ontario. Barkley was diagnosed with severe scoliosis as a child. His trail of accomplishments on the course is one of dreams for most competitive golfers. The two-time Ontario Disability Championship winner has ranked as high as #11 on the world stage with his sights set on the top eight in 2021.

*Meeting pandemic protocols, social distancing, new rules of play and a new host course, ParaSport® Ontario's 2020 Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament didn't disappoint. In fact it welcomed the strongest field of paragolfers that the province, and maybe even the country, has ever seen.*



# PUSHES THROUGH PANDEMIC

**TESS TROJAN**, a 29-year-old from St. Catharines and a member of the hole-in-one club, was a returnee to the Para Pro-Am in 2020. A high-performance athlete with Special Olympics Canada for 17 years, Trojan holds an impressive winning streak – the gold medal at the 2019 Abu Dhabi World Games to defend her gold at the 2015 World Games in Los Angeles... add in two gold medals at National Games sandwiched in between.



*Add to that even more remarkably talented paragolfers who teed-off on the morning of July 30th, 2020, at the Oshawa Golf and Curling Club. Competing alongside an equally impressive field of professional golfers in ParaSport Ontario's 3rd Annual Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament, teams consisted of a Paragolfer (golfer with a disability), a PGA of Canada Pro, and three players representing each corporate sponsor, together producing the atmosphere and competitiveness of a professional tournament.*



Professional motorcycle racer **ED URQUHART** needed just one year of intense rehab to return to his active life-style after an on-course crash took both legs below the knee. As the Canadian record holder for para bench press, the 30-year-old Hamilton-area athlete has his sights set on the Paralympic Powerlifting Team, while setting records on the golf course. Urquhart placed second in the adaptive division of the World Long-Drive Championships by launching his ball 380 yards.

And meet **CHRIS GARNER**, a 40-year-old below-the-knee amputee from Niagara Falls, a coach and multi-sport athlete competing at the national level. Chris only began paragolfing in 2020. After finding his swing throughout the summer, Garner joined ParaGolf Ontario, was on the Para Pro-Am's winning team, and is preparing to compete in provincial and national tournaments post-pandemic.



Event planning began with high expectations for the 2020 Para Pro-Am to be ParaSport Ontario's best tournament to date. Nature however, changed plans but not expectations. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Lebovic Golf Course, the planned host, made the difficult decision to remain closed for the 2020 season. Within hours of an official announcement, tournament committee co-chair Joe Millage reached out to Oshawa Golf and Curling Club's Mike Ridout and Dylan Welsh, General Manager and Head Pro respectively, to host an adapted version of the unique tournament.

Scheduling was a significant challenge. To maintain proper social distancing each golfer was scheduled to spend exactly seven hours and three minutes at the course. Restrictions included a limited number of individuals allowed on the patio, two-metre distancing, washroom guidelines and a Covid-complaint check-in. Aspects of a traditional golf tournament like hosting a sit-down dinner, silent auction and the prize table had to be rethought with safe protocol as the priority. On-course food stations, virtual auctions and touch-free prizing were coordinated with support from



Photo by Michael Schneider Photography

ParaSport Ontario's (PO) new apparel partner LevelWear, which also gifted attendees a three-pack of PO washable masks.

PO Ambassadors were on-site to meet and greet attendees and share the importance of PO programs. Aristotle Domingo (multi-sport athlete and double-leg amputee), Jeff Virgo (golf and seated volleyball athlete with a spinal cord injury), Robert Hampson (swimmer and public speaker who is blind), Brock Potter (youth ambassador excelling in seated volleyball), Nico Iemma (a competitive boccia athlete whose condition required him to stay home for the tournament) and Jeff Tiessen (Paralympian and PO Executive Director) were sharing their stories with participants and media outlets like CTV and local radio as well.

Pro golfer Todd Keirstead modified his trick-shot show from the standard 40 minutes to 28 twelve-minute performances – a total of seven hours that defined his support and commitment. Keirstead is an active advocate for the disability community through

## PGA OF CANADA PRO WINNERS

T1 Jake McNulty	3 Derek Gillespie	T5 Brad Kerfoot
T1 Sebastian Szirmak	4 Eddie Maunder	T5 Michael Blair
	T5 Max Sear	

his adaptive golf initiative, empowering all individuals to get involved in the game of golf. Derek Wasser and his team at Food Dudes provided a gourmet lunch and dinner safely delivered in individual servings. And WineOnline hosted a wine-tasting and graciously presented each player with a special departure gift.

The professional golfers showed a genuine appreciation for the opportunity to play in such an inspiring event, sharing stories of what motivated them to compete in this unique tournament. Derek Gillespie, a professional golfer commented, "It is wonderful to be playing and supporting a group who have lived with great challenges and still find excellence in a game that can certainly include everybody."

Team Niagara, the winning five-some with a score of -16, progressed to the Regional Finals of the RBC PGA Scramble to proudly represent ParaSport Ontario. Another highlight of the tournament was its two all-female teams, led by professionals Carrie Vaughan and Selena Costabile, with Vaughan's team posting a final score of -7.

"Thank you to our sponsors, players and volunteers for all you did to make the 3rd Annual ParaSport Ontario Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament our best

event to date," offered Millage, event Co-Chair, on behalf of the organization and his Co-Chairs Bernard Gluckstein and Rocky Lofranco. "Together, the excellence you brought forward will inspire persons with disabilities to find their excellence."

Supported by over 30 companies and corporations, PO aimed for \$100,000 in donations, goods, and services to support adaptive sports equipment needs in communities across Ontario. With contributions from the PGA of Canada and ParaSport Ontario's partners, sponsors, and event patrons, the impact of this year's tournament exceeded the \$100,000 goal. "Together we excelled," added Millage, "strengthening opportunities for others to rise above perceived challenges and find excellence, on their terms, in their community."

Proceeds from the Para Pro-Am Tournament go toward PO's Play to Podium Fund. The Fund assists Ontarians with disabilities improve their lives with adaptive sports equipment donated to them through the Fund, so that they can "get in the game" for fitness, fun and friendships.

*To nominate someone you know who would benefit from adaptive sports equipment to get back in the game, please contact Jeff Tiessen, Executive Director, ParaSport Ontario, at [jeff@parasportontario.ca](mailto:jeff@parasportontario.ca).*



Photo by Michael Schneider Photography

**TEAM TK** Todd Keirstead has become one of the world leaders in adaptive and therapeutic golf. In his interview with *Pro Shop Magazine*, Keirstead said Canada is "four or five years behind" the movement of paragolf seen throughout Europe and the United States. "But, we can catch up quickly."

Team TK is Keirstead's initiative to gather the best adaptive golfers in Canada as a single force. Golf can be an expensive sport and for players wanting to make the ranks of an elite paragolfer it is a prerequisite to play events throughout North America, Europe and Asia. To get funding on their own is difficult. Team TK is the means for these individuals to source sponsorships and access financial assistance.

Team TK is currently relying on virtual instruction and golf lessons to keep athletes' games sharp. Golfers send their training videos to Keirstead, who uses a mix of expertise, software, and side-by-side comparisons to analyze their performance.



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## **Caldwell Securities Ltd. is a Proud Sponsor of the Para Pro Am Golf Tournament**

Caldwell Securities Ltd. also supported bringing out young special guests – 10 ParaSport athletes and 10 junior golfers with disabilities. These individuals represent the next generation of athletes in inclusive sports for all.

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# SNOW BOUND

## *Adaptive Activities and Equipment to Keep You Active this Winter*

By Kimberley Barreda,  
Unlimbited.com

*No friends on a powder day. Every dyed-in-the-wool alpine skier and snowboarder knows this to be an absolute truth. Nothing compares to the feeling you get when you look outside and see endless pillows of fluffy, glorious piles of fun calling to you, teasing you with sparkling perfection, begging you to plow through it and bask in the ultra smooth ride that is FRESHIES!! There is nothing like it.*

So what are your options when Mother Nature invites you to play? You choose. With the right equipment for the conditions, we can all get outside and play in it.

Skiing... both alpine (downhill) and nordic (cross-country) are very popular, and there is equipment and programs for virtually all levels of ability, from sit skis to standing frames, ski bikes to extension assists, tethers, and more. Depending on your area,

you can rent a sit ski with outriggers or join a club or attend an intro session to test different setups to find your own perfect ride. Adaptive alpine is so popular that the X-Games, which had a monoskier-X event for a season, has brought it back as a full-fledged event.

If barreling down a mountain in a tiny metal bullet at warp speed, while dodging tourists, gives you second and third thoughts, but you still want

the experience of being outside and challenging yourself against the snow, nordic skiing gives you the same gliding fun and access to nature without the stress. And no line ups. Nordic clubs maintain thousands of kilometres of groomed trails and a nordic ski pass is a fraction of the price of an alpine one.

The price for equipment is about the same, with a good, average-to-advanced, user ski frame in the \$3,500 range. Ski poles and outriggers are extra and can run an additional \$200 to \$500 depending on material and your skiing level. If you're planning to compete or race, expect to spend more for custom equipment.

For arm and hand amputees, TRS Prosthetics (<https://www.trspro.com>)

## Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association

***Sport and physical activity help people of all abilities reach their full potential in life.***

To support this philosophy, OCPSA, the governing body for the sport of boccia in Ontario, has developed the Boccia Bratz program.

Boccia Bratz is an 8-session program led by trained instructors. Teachers, coaches, volunteers or community recreation leaders can deliver this inclusive program... training session, lesson workbook and equipment kit included!

It's great for therapeutic settings, summer camps, schools, municipal programs and more!




# Boccia Bratz

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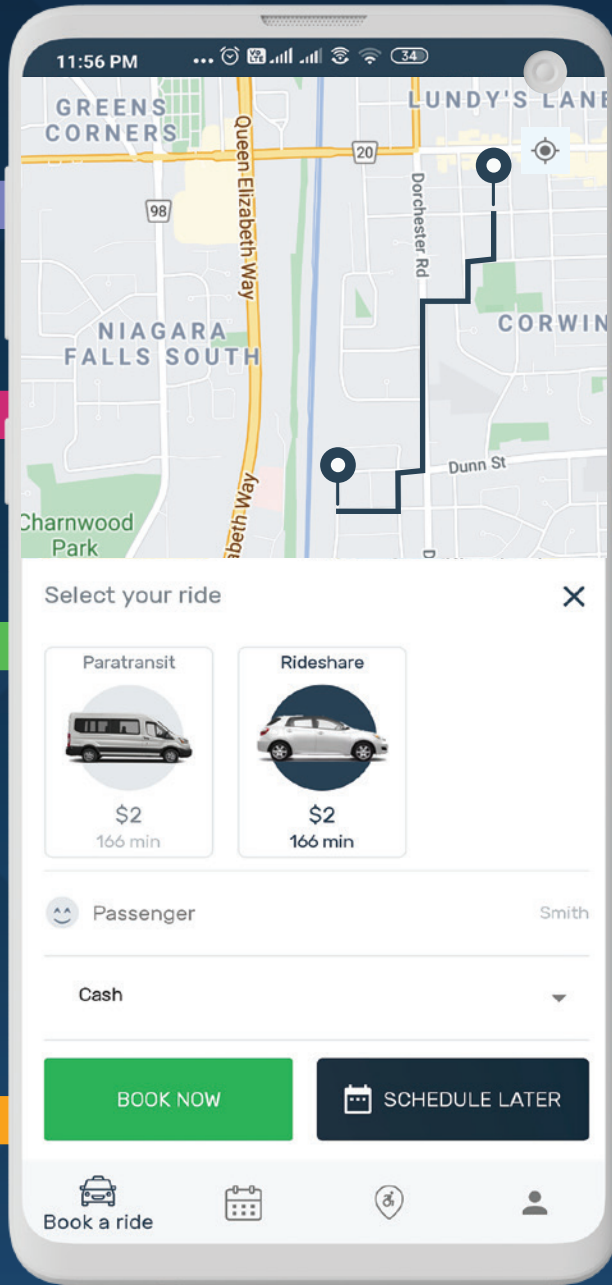
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## ONTARIO BLIND SPORTS ASSOCIATION

The Ontario Blind Sports Association (OBSA) promotes and sanctions events and activities designed to assist the development of sports programs for blind/visually impaired athletes in Ontario.

### Programs and Activities

- OBSA Summer Sports Camp
- OBSA High Performance Camp
- Regionals Open Goalball Tournament
- Provincial/Eastern Canadian Goalball Championship
- Equipment Loaning Program
- OBSA Sports Days
- OBSA Outreach Programs



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prosthetics.com/product/snow-skiing) has you covered with the DH Racer with pre-flexed poles using a quick release snap-in system for alpine skiing. TRS's Ski-2 pole mounting system is specifically designed for nordic and moguls, with or without a cable, giving you the leverage you need to skate or plant your poles quickly and precisely.

Snowboarding, once the bane of skiers and resorts everywhere, brings with it some additional accessible products with advancements in able-bodied equipment that crosses over to adaptive.

MadJacks (<https://www.madjack snowsports.com>) is a snowboard boot ski binding that uses roomier and less structured boots. They attach to regular ski binding mounts and fit any ski.

QuickSett rotators (<https://black-line.co/en>) let you set and release the position of your foot in your snowboard binding. So, if you've been holding off snowboarding because of not being able to have your foot and leg in the right position to ride the lift or to skate on flats, a simple blue-tooth command takes care of that for you. Combine them with some MadJacks and you're ready to go.

If back country exploring is more interesting, snow shoeing is a great (and ancient) option. A good set of lightweight shoes and trekking poles (<https://www.redfeather.com/product/trek-snowshoe-kit>) will get you out in the snow anywhere you like – your backyard or local park, and no lift ticket required.

Another option for snow shoeing is combining it with a snow slider, which is like a nordic passenger ski designed to be pushed by an ambulatory person on flat terrain (<https://dishon-ezdesign.com>). The handle takes the place of poles, maintaining stability for the driver.

A hockey sled – no mullet required – is one of the most affordable pieces of adaptive winter sports equipment with some sleds under \$1,000 (<https://www.uniqueinventionsinc.com>) and para ice hockey sticks in the \$100 - \$200 range. You can use them for hockey, recreational skating and even ice fishing. Add a push handle for younger kids or those with less mobility. Standing skaters who need support can go with a pre-made skate frame (<http://www.glidingstars.org/standard-ice-walker>) or easily make your own from PVC tubing and some YouTube videos.

Staying warm is a major part of winter fun and there are plenty of cozy choices. Good base layers are a must, and adding some heated gloves or coats (<https://firedupx.com>) will make your day toasty. The portable Torch Coat Heater (<https://anseris.com>) is another option, as it's just that, portable so you can use it in any coat. For gloves, Mobile Heat (<https://fieldsheer.com>) are very comfortable and padded as well, making them easy on your hands while using crutches or outriggers. Their line of heated socks (safer than heater packs in boots for those with limited sensation) are ideal for everyone.

Another important consideration is exposure. Winter light can be flat and deceptively dim, but can still cause sunburn and cold air quickly chaps exposed skin. Try a layer of Original Ski Balm (<https://originalskibalm.com>) for skin and lips to prevent wind and sun burn, even on those bluebird days.

*For more information, visit Adaptive Skiing.net and Accidentally Accessible.com (keyword WINTER) and ParaSport Ontario's club listings.*

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## MAKING MOVES

### Colette Cousins Finds Her Fun on the Dance Floor

*Dr. Iris Kulbatski had the pleasure of interviewing 11-year-old Colette Cousins and her mom Michelle Cousins before their debut performance at WHEEL DANCE's Fourth Annual Canadian Para DanceSport Competition and Showcase, and has shared it with ParaSport® Magazine.*

**Iris:** *What do you do at WHEEL DANCE?*

**Colette:** I do dances like Salsa.

**Iris:** *Do you dance together when you're there?*

**Michelle:** Sometimes and sometimes not. Colette likes her independence, so she gets to dance with lots of different people as do I.

**Iris:** *What do you like about WHEEL DANCE? How does it make you feel?*

**Colette:** I'm happy that I can do something that other kids can do who aren't in wheelchairs. I like that I can do different dances that I've never heard of... like Salsa.

**Michelle:** I think it also means a lot for her to be around other people

in wheelchairs doing something that she really loves, which there isn't, unfortunately, enough opportunity for that. So we're really grateful that WHEEL DANCE exists. Emotionally and physically it's always great to stay active – it's great for the body and great for the mind for sure. And I enjoy watching her. She just loves music and loves to dance. Having the opportunity to express herself through music and through dance is a big deal for her. She even follows some dancers on Instagram.

**Iris:** *Who do you like on Instagram... who are the dancers you follow?*

**Colette:** The LA Rollettes. I want to meet them.

**Iris:** *If you wanted the world to know one thing about your experience dancing, what would it be? What would you tell other kids who are thinking that they might want to start dancing?*

**Colette:** That anyone can do it.

**Iris:** *When you think about your time at WHEEL DANCE, what is it that puts a smile on your face?*

**Colette:** Being around other people with disabilities and wheelchairs.

**Iris:** *Do you have any goals with your dancing?*

**Colette:** I want to perform on stage.

**Iris:** *Can you describe what it's like to dance – what do you feel when you're dancing?*

**Colette:** Happy.

**Michelle:** I feel nervous and clumsy for sure. But it's a lot of fun. Once you get past being self-conscious about it and really start to learn, it's a lot of fun. I love doing it with Colette. It's really great to be with a community.

**Iris:** *How do you feel about dancing with your Mom?*

**Colette:** [smirking hesitantly]

**Michelle:** [laughing] I think the look says it all. It's ok. Is it lame? Am I lame? Am I a little lame? [laughing]

**Iris:** *Well, you have a big performance to get ready for so I won't keep you. Hope you have a lot of fun today!*

**Colette:** Thank-you.

**Do you know a child, youth, or adult who might enjoy WHEEL DANCE?**

Visit [www.wheeldance.ca](http://www.wheeldance.ca) or [www.facebook.com/wheeldance](http://www.facebook.com/wheeldance) or email: [wheeldance@outlook.com](mailto:wheeldance@outlook.com), or call (647) 297-3198.





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# MARISSA

# Papaconstantinou

## Canada's Rising Sprint Star is Back on Track

Reprinted with permission of *thrive magazine*, [www.thrivemag.ca](http://www.thrivemag.ca).

*Born without a right foot, Marissa Papaconstantinou began her para-athletic career soon after being fitted with her first running blade at age 11. At age 15, she made an impressive international debut finishing seventh in the 200m and eighth in the 100m track events at the 2015 World Championships. The following year, she made her Paralympic Games' debut in Rio De Janeiro.*

Now, at just 21 years of age, Marissa has lived the extreme highs and lows of competitive sport. A Canadian record holder in the 100-metre event and a Paralympian at just 16, the below-knee amputee sprinter has had seasons derailed with injuries forcing her off the track and out of competitions like the 2019 Parapan Am Games. But it was those experiences – perhaps the lows more than the highs – that prepared her for 2020 and the pandemic's postponement of the Paralympic Games in Tokyo. She spent some time with ParaSport® Ontario's executive director Jeff Tiessen to talk track, training and the trials of 2020.

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As the governing body for **wheelchair basketball**, **wheelchair rugby** and **wheelchair tennis** in the province, we offer:

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- Sport Wheelchair Loans Program
- GEAR (Girls Enabled and Ready)
- Education and Outreach Programs
- Leagues and Tournaments
- Team Ontario Development
- Quest for Gold
- And so much more!



**PO:** *Let's get right to it. Canada's athletics community had high hopes for you in Tokyo. Did you hold those same expectations for yourself?*

**Marissa:** I've had some real hardships leading up to 2020 in terms of injuries. Those tough times made me change my mindset and my focus. I'm now all about taking everything day by day, riding the wave and taking things that I can't control in stride. Putting too much pressure on myself started to wear me down, and wear me down early in my career as I see it, so I needed to start thinking more long-term instead of right here, right now.

**PO:** *That said, how did you respond to the news of the postponement of the 2020 Paralympic Games?*

**Marissa:** I think I've handled the pandemic quite well, all things considered. My training was going great and then the world started shutting down. And then came the uncertainty of the Games. And then, the stress and anxiety. There were no training facilities and no tracks to run on. We had no way to continue to train at an optimal level. If the Paralympics were going to happen we had no way to qualify, no way to be in the shape to perform at our best. When they pulled the plug, honestly, it was actually more of a relief than a disappointment for me.

**PO:** *Being on a four-year training and competing schedule this had to be pretty deflating too?*

**Marissa:** I was able to put the pandemic in perspective early on, thanks to my promise to myself to take things day by day. I saw how it was affecting so many people. It was bigger than sport. Being able to compete is a privilege, and so much in our daily life is a privilege. I saw myself as lucky; I was healthy, and able to train in my home and go out for runs.

**PO:** *As a high-performance athlete, how did you adapt?*

**Marissa:** It's been an interesting journey. With no competitions and no team to train with, it made it hard to stay motivated... but I rode the wave, day by day. It took patience. Through injuries I've learned that you can't always construct timelines. Mentally, I used to put myself into uncomfortable situations causing more stress and anxiety. When there were setbacks it was very challenging for me to deal with them. All of that learning, and mental training, has prepared me for what has happened in 2020... controlling the things you can control. Having perspective on the things you can't.

**PO:** *What about training? How have you managed that?*

**Marissa:** I'm a sprinter, but running on the road, on pavement, was not ideal and not good for my knees, particularly being an amputee. My training evolved through the pandemic. When I saw things trending toward shutting down, I had a conversation with my parents to ask them for some much-needed help. I asked them to help me with building a gym in our house. We got mats for the floor and a bar and plates for weight training. And really importantly, we got an indoor training bike for when the weather was bad. The opportunity for cross-training was something I was really fortunate to have. And I could keep up my lifting routine. I had online training meetings with my coach every weekday, to help with techniques. I connected with physiotherapists and chiropractors online as well. Overall, I maintained a good fitness level. I didn't want to lose all the hard work that I'd put in. But it's tough to make gains training that way, but I wanted to at least maintain.

**PO:** *How does your residual limb hold up to that kind of intensity?*

**Marissa:** Actually, my sound leg takes so much more load, and takes more of a beating, and it's that leg that has had most of my issues. My running socket and blade are great technology, and very comfortable. The gel liners are amazing to protect my limb.

**PO:** *You are in the Sports Media program at Ryerson University but train with the University of Toronto's Track Club right?*

**Marissa:** Yes. I train at U of T's Varsity Stadium. It works really well for me. I go to Ryerson for the program and career I want to pursue, but almost right next door is a great coach in Bob Westman, great teammates and a great facility.

**PO:** *Where or when did your Paralympic aspirations begin?*

**Marissa:** I started playing soccer when I was three years old. I had a passion for track and field through elementary and high school but my parents wanted me in team sports until I was a little older. I was involved in soccer and basketball until I was 11 years old. When I got my first running blade, that's when I joined a local running group. When I was 13 I broke the Canadian record in the 100 meter sprint for my amputee classification. That's when it dawned on me that, "okay, I think I can do something with this." But I still didn't know what opportunities I would have in Paralympic sport until I saw some coverage of the Paralympic Games in London in 2012 on TV. I was only ever associated with able-bodied sports, always in a space with able-bodied kids. It wasn't until I went to my first para meet that I was with a group of people who were like me. Before that I was always the only kid with a disability on the team. My first para event expanded my horizons to a whole other world that I never had been exposed to.



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Photo courtesy Athletics Canada

**PO: *Being that only kid on the team with a disability, how did your disability impact your life?***

**Marissa:** Being a congenital amputee, it's all I've ever known. But I'm confident in saying that it has influenced my life for the better. My difference has opened so many doors for me that otherwise I wouldn't have experienced. The biggest thing is that it has given me a platform to speak about things that I think are important. I hope I can be a role model for kids, not just for kids with disabilities but all kids... kids who don't have role models who look like them. I hope I can influence others by what I'm doing and accomplishing.

**PO: *Where does that motivation to help others come from?***

**Marissa:** I don't see my prosthetic leg as being a negative body image thing. I've been very lucky to be around people all my life who never looked at me differently, and that's why I feel good about myself. My whole life I've always had a determined attitude to show people what I can do. But at the same time, not caring what other people think. I do things I want to do unapologetically. My parents have always been very encouraging, and always pushed and motivated me to keep moving forward despite challenges and hurdles. They taught me to work hard, especially when things aren't going my way. And they always stressed the

importance of being grateful and to appreciate what you have.

**PO: *Frustrations?***

**Marissa:** Finding shoes. Finding shoes that fit my prosthetic foot properly. In grade 9, I was the only girl at the dance wearing flats because I didn't have a high-heel prosthesis at the time. I do now. I am an Ossur Athlete, meaning that I receive product from them. It's expensive technology and I'm really fortunate to have them as a sponsor. My prosthetic blade, the Cheetah Xtreme, doesn't define who I am, or make me who I am, but it allows

me to compete at the highest level and to strive for better and faster every day. But like with any of my prosthetic legs, when the technology isn't working at its best, it's one of the biggest inconveniences of being an amputee. Another frustration is public perceptions sometimes... when I'm looked at differently than an able-bodied athlete. Yes, I happen to have an extra challenge to overcome, but I am an athlete.

**PO: *What's next?***

**Marissa:** Now is my time to compete. I'm focusing my next years on track full-time. I want to compete until 2028. At the same time I'd like to get into public speaking and grow my platform. Then journalism and broadcasting. I'd love to work for CBC. That would be a great platform.

**PO: *Just for fun, any amputee life hacks to share?***

**Marissa:** I love wearing sandals. But without toes to grip a sandal, my mom and I came up with a hack for that... double-sided Velcro on the bottom of my foot and on the top of the sandal. It works really well!



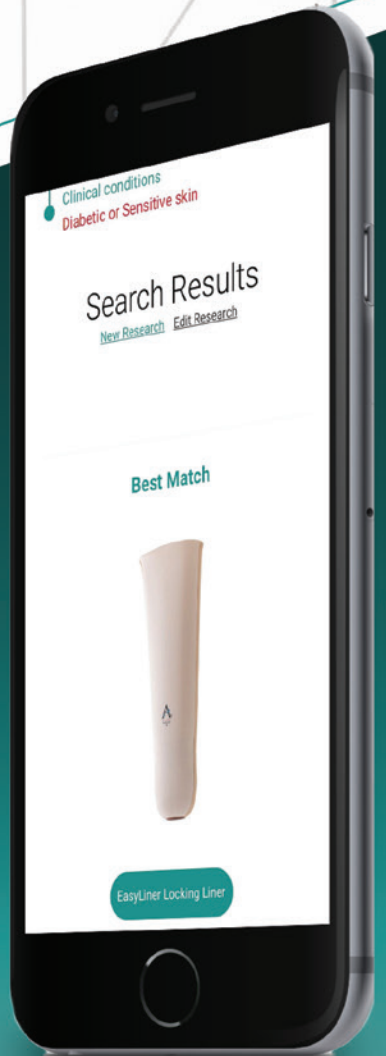


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Photo courtesy of Sunrise Therapeutic Riding and Learning Centre

# EQUINE THERAPY for Everyday Health

By E.S.



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*Karen van der Zalm, executive director of I CAN-T.E.R., and Ann Caine, president of Sunrise Therapeutic Riding and Learning Centre, are well-known leaders and role models in the therapeutic riding community. In interviews with ParaSport® Ontario's Ellie Speck, the two pioneering horse-women shared their passion for inclusive therapeutic, educational and recreational programs for riders with disabilities.*

---

The therapeutic riding community, as Ann states, is appreciative of one another and work together to support each other. Both locations share many similarities when it comes to meeting the needs of their riders and creating a fun experience.

I CAN-T.E.R. was among the first therapeutic riding locations in the Niagara region. Karen has been there for over 25 years. Her program provides individualized learning plans with one-on-one lessons providing fun experiences with a therapeutic result.

Sunrise was founded in 1982 by Caine who is also a founding member of CanTRA (Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association). Ann held presidency twice with CanTRA and is currently the chair of the Accreditation Committee. Sunrise welcomes individuals of all abilities. Sunrise also provides group and individual lessons throughout the year.



Photo courtesy of I CAN-T.E.R.

The primary benefits of therapeutic riding involve physical and psychosocial growth. On the physical benefit spectrum, the rhythm of the horse (a four-beat walking gait that mimics the human gait) demands the body to stabilize, strengthening the upper body and core, and improving respiration and even speech for some.

On the psychosocial side, therapeutic riding can improve social skills. It is also great for self-confidence, emotional control, independence and an overall sense of well-being.

As Ann explains, "Many people have always had people doing things for them – guiding them, showing them, making decisions for them – all their lives, and all of a sudden they are in control of a 1,000-pound horse and they have the reins. It is really a very empowering experience for them!"

A shared focus of the facilities is to include certified instructors as part of their programs. Karen and Ann agree that certified instructors ensure a safe and effective therapeutic riding experience.

Why are certified instructors so important? Instructors certified by CanTRA combine their knowledge of teaching methodologies and communication skills with their understanding of various disabilities. They can effectively manage a team and possess very strong horsemanship backgrounds.

The senior instructor at Sunrise has Coach 1 certification, knows how to train horses for therapy purposes, and is a CanTRA coach. The Sunrise head instructor is a dressage judge who is also very accomplished with her Coach 2 certification. The instructors at I

*"Many people have always had people doing things for them – guiding them, showing them, making decisions for them – all their lives, and all of a sudden they are in control of a 1,000-pound horse and they have the reins. It is really a very empowering experience for them!"*

– Ann Caine





*“Therapeutic riding really helps improve breath work and respiratory functions to articulate speech.”*

– Karen van der Zalm

CAN-T.E.R. have a wide variety of skills and qualifications that include riding, driving, horse handling, teaching, coaching and special education. Programs with certified instructors are also a reassuring asset for the parents of the riders with disabilities.

I CAN-T.E.R. is the only approved site in Ontario offering the Horse Groom Apprenticeship Program in partnership with the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development and the Ontario College of Trades. While learning their trade, apprentices provide safe handling, grooming and care for the facility’s nine therapy horses. Many of the trainees go on to become I CAN-T.E.R. volunteers, utilizing their new knowledge and skills to safely support participants.

Similarly, Ann holds an annual camp at Sunrise with certified instructors teaching and interacting with the

young riders and their horses. “The instructors do a fantastic job supporting the needs of all participants,” says Ann. The camp is an inclusive one that allows able-bodied youth to learn and play alongside children with disabilities.

So, what’s new at I CAN-T.E.R. and Sunrise? I CAN-T.E.R. recently received funding from the David S. Howes Fund Grant through the Niagara Community Foundation to expand its 70 acres of nature trails and provide an outdoor teaching shelter for recreational activities. Karen is thrilled to promote year-round outdoor activities on the new trail which will include trail riding, cart driving, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sled skiing, orienteering, eco camping and environmental education. “It’s all about providing opportunities for increasing wellness benefits that come with being in nature and outdoors.”

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Photo: Matthew Murnaghan/Canadian Paralympic Committee

The Rotary Club of Font Hill has also provided I CAN-T.E.R. funding, in this case to launch a new program called H.E.Y. (Horse Empowered Youth). Riders will learn about grass maintenance on the property with the use of a horse-drawn grass mower. Other horse-drawn equipment, such as four carts that can attach to different pieces of agricultural gear, has been funded by Wise Guys Charity. These carts, pulled by draft horses, will assist participants in managing small garden plots and maintaining the 87-acre property.

The equipment will also be used for woodlot management and logging in the forested sections of the property. Karen shared her excitement about the new equipment and its preservation of the environment. She explains, "Horses have minimal carbon footprints when they go into forests, so it is beneficial for the environment when they remove fallen trees or logs without the use of a machine." The horse-drawn equipment and recreational miniature horse carting has generated an overwhelming amount of interest for I CAN-T.E.R. and is offered for youth aged 8+ to seniors.

Ann is excited about a brand-new addition to the Equine Assisted Learning Program at Sunrise. Led by Sunrise's senior instructor, it leans toward frontline workers and first responders. The program offers individuals a mental/emotional well-being day. This exceptional opportunity gives hard-working participants an opportunity to be out, in an open space, with fresh air. They get to work with horses while doing team building and leadership activities. The program has a minimum age requirement of 12 years; however, participants meeting this requirement are encouraged to bring their families as well.

A long-standing Sunrise program is the Life Skills Program which acknowledges personal goals and needs for everyone involved. It activates cognitive, emotional, social and physical benefits by providing learning experiences through hands-on activi-

ties. The program engages youth and adults with disabilities and challenges them to reach their fullest potential.

As therapeutic riding continues to gain popularity, how do these facilities work to keep their participants safe? Karen and Ann both take safety precautions to ensure the safety and enjoyment of their riders. They agree that communication is huge between all participants. It is standard in both facilities to support the rider by having one leader and two side walkers as guides. Even though riding horses can be considered high-risk, Karen and Ann ensure that the horses are well trained and socialized. Ann mentions, "We respect them and know what they're giving us, and we appreciate it. It's a two-way street!"

Horses have an amazing way of communicating nonverbally with adults and youth alike. They respond to interactions in ways that humans cannot. Communication happens through their body language, eyes, posture, sounds and movement.

Ann explains that horses that are used for therapeutic purposes are often chosen by breed and temperament. However, horse temperament is often a product of their environment. "They are very intuitive and pick up on human behaviours and mannerisms which is why it is so

important to create a nurturing, safe, and respectful atmosphere." Karen and Ann also know that a therapeutic riding horse can change someone's life.

Karen tells two stories about the same horse, Thunder, which has had quite a meaningful impact on many riders at I CAN-T.E.R. Karen remembers a child with autism who was refusing to put his helmet on. Thunder stomped his foot and continued to stare at this young man until they made eye contact with one another. The boy immediately started laughing as he shared a connection with his horse. He then proceeded to get ready for the lesson.

In another instance with Thunder, there were seniors in wheelchairs passing by. Karen explains that Thunder walked around looking at each participant, stopping in front of a man who was nonverbal. The man had no expression on his face, but Thunder stood in front of him licking his own lips for several minutes to try and make a connection. Karen observes that the most interesting connections are between horses and seniors or individuals on the autism spectrum.

Ann shares two stories that have changed individual lives for the better as well. She explains how there is an autistic, nonverbal rider at Sunrise



Photo courtesy of Sunrise Therapeutic Riding and Learning Centre

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who volunteered at a public library. He did not speak to anyone at the library until he got involved in the grooming program at Sunrise. The parents of that young man told Ann what a remarkable difference it made in their family. The young man gained the self-confidence to start speaking and telling people at the library all about Sunrise's programs.

Ann also highlighted the progression of a three-year-old boy with no muscular strength. When he first started at Sunrise he could not hold his body erect. Two to three years later, Ann saw him walking across the parking lot holding his dad's hand. The father said to Ann that he has never seen his son have fun while doing any other therapy. He also add-

ed that there was nothing like riding therapy that has given his son the courage to want to stand and walk.

Ann explains that all parents want to see their child develop like any other. "Parents form their own sense of community through watching their children have fun while participating in therapeutic work. Therapeutic riding brings families together and encourages a celebration of growth."

Has the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic affected these programs? Both have experienced a devastating impact. I CAN-T.E.R. is operating at a much lower capacity and is doing everything possible to generate the revenue needed to support programming. Programs were shut down entirely and its major funding stream for horse care was cut. But, the community rallied to support I CAN-T.E.R. with a Buy a Bale of Hay Fundraiser to supply hay for the year for the therapy horses. Currently, the facility is only able to safely run therapy programs at about 20% capacity. Heading into winter, the annual Helping Horseshoes Pledge Drive was accepting charitable donations at [www.icanter.ca](http://www.icanter.ca).

At Sunrise, most of the programs have been put on hold as only 20 of the 120 riders with disabilities have been able to return. Only 20 riders can mount a horse independently. Sunrise is experiencing the same financial challenges with respect to the care of the therapy horses, and would welcome support at [www.icanter.ca/donate-now](http://www.icanter.ca/donate-now) or <https://sunrise-therapeutic.ca/support-opportunities>.

**About the Author:** *Ellie Speck began horseback riding at five years of age. She has had the opportunity to coach, part-board, and compete for over 15 years. "Horses and people share a remarkable bond through body language and emotion," she says. "They can sense how someone is feeling and the vulnerability of that person." Her relationships with horses have helped her overcome some of her own life's challenges for which she is grateful.*



Photo courtesy of I CAN-T.E.R.

A man with a goatee, wearing a black tank top and grey pants, is sitting in a wheelchair on an outdoor basketball court. He is holding a basketball in his right hand. In the background, there is a basketball hoop and bleachers. The scene is set outdoors with trees and a clear sky.

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# CHRIS PINTO

## ON BOARD FOR SUCCESS

By E.S.





***“Train as if your life depends on it’ is the mantra that I live by. My life does depend on it because my body functions differently than it used to.”***

**– Chris Pinto**

*Toronto’s Chris Pinto, 37, is the recipient of a running blade from ParaSport Ontario, in partnership with prosthetic manufacturer Ossur Canada and Prosthetic Energy, a facility with two clinics in Toronto. Pinto is a multi-sport athlete who uses the prosthetic blade for running, jet skiing, boating, and working out. Pinto also enjoys long walks or hikes with his wife of 18 years, their 13-year-old son, and their American Bulldog.*

Pinto experienced a traumatic injury from a motorcycle accident in 2017. Now a below-knee amputee, he doesn’t allow his amputation to inhibit his potential. Since the accident, Pinto found interest in other sports and ways to stay fit. He focused his energy on a growing adoration for snowboarding.

In 2018, Pinto attended a combine (an event where athletes are put through tests to showcase their athletic ability) in Scarborough. It was there where coaches from Para Snowboard Canada encouraged him to train for a spot on the Paralympic team. His first snowboard trip was to the Yukon Territory in 2018. This was Pinto’s first time back on a ski hill since losing his leg. Now, training at various ski locations this season, he will work hard to achieve the qualifications needed to compete in the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing, China.

Pinto is determined to avoid any excuse standing in the way of his goals. That is his nature. When the doctor mentioned the likelihood of an amputation, Pinto made that decision rapidly. He explained the frustration of “sitting out for the next six months with an injury” and would much rather “amputate and get back to what I have to do.” Pinto went on to explain,

“I follow two amputees on Instagram. One of them is Jose Luis Sanchez, an ex-military, below-knee amputee from Texas who owns a gym called Rise Above Hardship. He gave me the confidence to make the decision to amputate.”

Pinto has also found inspiration in Nick Charles, an above-knee amputee who received his U.S. Marines Underwater Operations Badge and was reinstated back into the military. The strong will and perseverance of both Sanchez and Charles are the qualities that Pinto admires most. He follows their daily workout routines to push himself not only to accomplish his personal goals, but also to maximize the use of the running blade.

The Ossur blade is Pinto’s first sports leg and he wanted something sleek. He attended several fittings with Marty Robinson, prosthetist and owner of Prosthetic Energy, for the correct measurements and quality of comfort. Pinto describes, “I was so active that I just wanted to get back out there, and Marty was great. The process was super easy. Everything was completed within a week or two. I did not have to wait a long time to have adjustments made.” He is grateful for Robinson’s proficiency and support during his prosthesis fittings.

Pinto also shared his appreciation for another individual, Aristotle Domingo, who has supported his personal journey. Domingo is the founder of the Amputee Coalition of Toronto, and put Pinto in touch with ParaSport® Ontario for the leg. Pinto was grateful for the opportunity and explained,



"I wish there were more people like him [Domingo] who would reach out to people and see what they need to succeed. There are a lot of people out there who are in worse situations than me and they need help."

Pinto acknowledges that while his circumstances are challenging, there are others who would benefit from more crucial support. Whether an individual needs a prosthetic device, sporting equipment, and/or assistive technology, a lot of these requirements are very costly.

In addition to drawing attention to the shortage of resources available, Pinto expresses frustration towards the lack of inclusion for the disability community. He states, "I didn't notice it until I became an amputee, but there is not a lot of inclusivity." In an effort to build inclusion, Pinto enjoys communicating with amputees on a daily basis. He gets involved with the disability community from a grass-roots level. Pinto admits, "I wouldn't take credit for pulling others out of a dark place, but I definitely help put

things in perspective." Through his mentoring, he helps motivate others to utilize their traumas and/or experiences to develop their best self.

Pinto's biggest accomplishment surfaced as a fortunate outcome of his trauma. Instead of allowing feelings of defeat to overpower him, he turned his emotions into fuel for success. Pinto explained that his experiences in life have shaped him into the individual he is today. "It is way too easy to lay down and give up," he says.

A few years prior to Pinto's accident, he lost his best friend on Victoria Day weekend to a motorcycle accident. His friend passed away in his arms. In memory of his friend, yearly for Victoria Day weekend Pinto participates in a Memorial Ride on his motorcycle. He experienced a lot of trauma in his life and the best advice he shares about growing from trauma is to keep pushing forward and never give up.

Pinto wanted to become a bodyguard, but he often felt as if his dream was unreachable. He was passionate about being a security personnel; however, it was always a continuous work in progress. He never actually pushed himself to reach his dream prior to his motorcycle crash. Explaining how his life changed for the better after his accident, Pinto states, "I was kicked into overdrive and any sort of risk, failure, or doubt was eliminated. There is no point of doubt when you have been through something so traumatic and your only way out is up."

Today, Pinto is a self-employed, security company owner, who manages and operates several venues across the city. He is a hardworking, career-driven individual striving to be the best version of himself each day. He connects with top security personnel and works with high profile celebrities and clientele.

Pinto is also proud of his "Get up and Go" attitude. He has an unrelenting drive for success, using his experiences for his own gain and for the benefit of others.

*"There is no point of doubt when you have been through something so traumatic and your only way out is up."*





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# SPORT IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER

## *Coaching an Athlete with a Disability*

*A Q&A with Faye Blackwood, Sport and Recreation Consultant for the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, King Clancy Award Winner, Paralympic Coach and Elite Athlete.*

### **Q** What qualities do you think make for a good coach of a parasport athlete?

**A** The willingness to understand and listen to the athlete, especially if they express concerns or fears of what will be expected of them. You need to tell the athlete that you may not have all the answers, but working together, the answers will be found.

The coach must be willing to think outside of the box and try just about anything, so the athlete can achieve the best results and the best performance he/she wants.

### **Q** What surprised you most about the community (adaptive sport) once you began working in it?

**A** What surprised me most was how supportive everyone was – parents, coaches, the organizations working for athletes with a disability and other athletes. Everyone is working towards the same goal so the athlete can be the best they want to be. Whether competing at the regional level or on the Paralympic stage, athletes just want to be the best they can be, period!

### **Q** What has been your most challenging experience – technically, emotionally, or both – and how did you resolve it and what was the solution?

**A** During one of our training sessions, one of the athletes I coached had a terrible fall. We decided to go to the hospital to ensure the athlete did not have any broken bones. Upon arriving at the hospital the emergency staff asked me what happened and I explained the situation. As the assessment continued, the staff addressed additional questions about how the athlete was feeling to me instead of asking the athlete directly. I then told the hospital staff that if they wanted to know how the athlete was feeling, or what happened, they needed to speak to the athlete directly. The athlete, in

my opinion, spoke very clearly and was very articulate, but because, at the time, people did not understand and assumed that the para athlete was not capable of speaking for themselves. I remember having to explain that that para athlete did not have an intellectual disability as well.

**Q Advice for those getting started on their own adaptive sport journey in general?**

**A** Don't assume anything and try everything, because it's not one-size fits all! Also please keep in mind that coaching is a partnership, so talking to the athlete and asking if they can do a certain skill or not is important to do during any training session. If they say they can't perform that skill, for whatever reason, you need to be creative and work with the athlete to find another skill that will produce the same end result. Keep an open mind, be willing to try anything and be flexible. It's important to keep your eye focused on athletic performance and the journey to get there, not the specific exercises found in a standard training manual.

**Q Most rewarding experience as a parasport coach?**

**A** It would have been in 1992, at the Paralympic Summer Games in Barcelona, where one of the athletes I coached was on stage and said, "I would not have made the team without you, thank you!" Those two simple words said it all, and these words still have the same impact today as they did then.

**Q What excites you about the future of adaptive sport?**

**A** There are so many more athletic opportunities available for an athlete to choose from, the sky is the limit. An athlete can do any sport, at any level, and find their passion that will allow them to be the best they want to be.

**Q What advice do you have for athletes in adaptive sport?**

**A** "If you believe, you can achieve!" Sport is the great equalizer and has a universal language that everyone understands.

**Q What is your greatest challenge in this work?**

**A** Finding more athletes. They're out there, doing sport, but where?

I believe the key to finding new athletes is to involve the school system, but how? There needs to be some type of campaign to find a champion who will work with the school boards. That champion will provide necessary assistance to help introduce parasports to all students and speak about the opportunities available for a person with a disability who wants to get into the sport system. It's extremely important to find the champion who can outline the steps that should be taken and then point the interested person in the right direction.

**Q What do you know now about parasport that you didn't when you began?**

**A** When I began to coach I was not really aware of 'parasport' per se.

I just saw athletes who wanted to run. I had just retired from competing in athletics and started to coach at Variety Village in Toronto. To me, I didn't see the difference. If an athlete wanted to train with me, that was cool. Working together we figured things out as we went along. There were no manuals on what to do, or what not to do. So the athletes just trained and trained hard, and that was it!

**Q Most important job lesson?**

**A** Nothing that is really worth it comes easily and communication is key.

**Q What do you want the parasport community to know about you and your work?**

**A** I truly believe that sport is a way of life, for life.

Working in sport allows me to work in an area that matters and that I'm passionate about. Sport teaches lessons that are applicable beyond sport – perseverance, goal setting, dedication, concentration and believing in oneself are all important sport skills. And as it turns out, these important skills are transferable to life as well.



# I AM A WARRIOR



# How determination and a strong support system helped wheelchair tennis athlete Candice Combdon find her inner strength.

By June Jang

*Candice Combdon, 33, is a Team Ontario wheelchair tennis athlete who sees herself as a warrior on and off the court. Growing up with spina bifida, a condition that prevents the spinal cord from forming properly, she knew that her life experiences were always going to be a lot different.*

"I do see myself as a warrior. It does really resonate with me because I did have to fight for things I wanted to do. I had to fight to be included, to be accepted by my peers because the world is not always inclusive, right?" Combdon says.

Despite being a subdued and shy person who doesn't like to be in the spotlight, she says she becomes a completely different person whenever she wheels onto the tennis court.

"When I get out onto the court, it's like this completely different person shows up. And I'm this athlete. I feel good. I feel confident and I feel happy. I can let out a scream and get angry. I can get excited because I made a good shot. It's fun for me," she says.

Her unquenchable thirst and zeal for life have been evident off the court as well. In fact, she really started to live life without fear and focused on following her heart ever since she had her leg amputated three years ago after living in chronic pain for seventeen years.

"After my amputation, I was a completely different person. I was so much happier, so much more positive, willing to go out and try different things," she shares.

And try different things, she did. Since her amputation, she has gone cliff diving, climbed behind a waterfall, was an extra in a Christmas movie on Netflix and so much more. But the biggest change took place a year and a half ago when she made the

decision to take tennis seriously.

One of the key things that distinguishes Combdon from other athletes is that she grew up with little to no experience in sports. Although she spent long hours on the weekends watching tennis games with her mom, a careless but cruel comment from one of her classmates when she was seven kept her away from sports until much later in life.

"When I played T-ball back when I was a kid, one kid pointed at me and literally said, 'Ha ha. You can't run.' And that terrified me and made me not want to play sports until I was in my twenties," she discloses.

People who know anything about Combdon will unanimously praise her for her amazing work ethic.

Michele May, who has been Combdon's private tennis coach since 2019, says coaching her stands out as one of her best coaching experiences because of Combdon's amazing passion, drive and yearning to learn.

"She's so passionate and so dedicated to improving that she's well above most of the other athletes that I have coached. She just wants to improve every single day, so she'll go above and beyond," May praises.

May also says Combdon's willingness to improve has been evident in her unwavering commitment to her training. In addition to two, two-hour training sessions per week with May, Combdon also joins May on court when she coaches at Barrie North Winter Tennis, sometimes three or four



*Combdon with coach Michele May and sponsor Robert Somerville.*

times a week for three to four hours at a time.

In fact, Combdon was on the court – albeit on the bench – a week or two after her amputation to watch a wheelchair tennis session. Her determination inspires many, including Laura Wilson, Executive Director at the Ontario Para Network (ONPARA).

“It’s been so easy to get on board and want to support Candice because she has such a great attitude and positive outlook,” Wilson says. “She works so damn hard. Here she is now, wanting more and more. She wants to climb as high as she can, and we want to support her every step of the way.”

While Combdon’s first introduction to wheelchair tennis was over 12 years ago at a ‘Have A Go’ Day hosted by ONPARA (then known as the Ontario

Wheelchair Sports Association), the lack of readily available resources in her hometown of Newmarket at that time prevented her from training more seriously. Combdon says the most beneficial support she received from ONPARA early on is through their Wheelchair Loans Program. The program allows participants to rent costly specialized sports equipment for a low monthly fee as a means of reducing some of the barriers that exist for those just starting out in wheelchair sports. A new sport wheelchair can cost upwards of \$5,000, making sport inaccessible to many.

“I would say an opportunity to have a sports chair was most beneficial for me because they’re not cheap. Had I not had the opportunity to rent a sports chair, there would be no

Candice playing wheelchair tennis,” Combdon says.

In addition to providing access to equipment, ONPARA was also able to support Combdon in other ways. When the application period opened for the Canadian Paralympic Committee’s 2019-2020 Paralympic Sport Development Fund, ONPARA jumped at the chance and sought funding to support development opportunities for its female wheelchair tennis athletes in the province. Their application was successful and, thanks to the Canadian Paralympic Committee, they were able to send Combdon and the women’s National Champion, Anne-Marie Dolinar, to the 2020 Indian Wells Tennis Garden Wheelchair Championship in Indian Wells, California, in early 2020.

Combdon says her exposure to an international tournament and coming back home with a doubles trophy in her division gave her the confidence she was lacking.

“I just came back with this drive to work so much harder because I did so much better than I expected to do. I came home and I was like, ‘I can do this. I think I can do this. Paralympics. If I really apply myself, I work hard, I can really do this,’” she says. “You know, that belief wasn’t there before. It was something to say, ‘Oh, I would like to go to the Paralympics,’ but another thing for me to really believe that I am capable of doing it. And Indian Wells played a huge part in my confidence and my belief in myself to make it, for sure.”

Being well aware that there aren’t a lot of opportunities for female athletes, whether it’s para-athletes or able-bodied athletes, Combdon says the support she’s been receiving from ONPARA makes her want to work harder. “I wouldn’t have the opportunity to be where I am and to do what I am doing, if it weren’t for the help I’m receiving. For sure, I can work as hard as I can work but if I don’t have that extra support, I can’t go anywhere, right?” she says.



Photo by Laura Joy Photography





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– Todd Keirstead

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Photo by Michael Schneider. Golfer pictured is Edward Urquhart.

Photo by Michael Schneider





Combdon says her support system is the driving force behind her motivation to succeed. She gives credit to the loving support of her family, her amazing teammates who would go out of their way – even if it means giving up points – to help her become a better tennis player, and her tennis sponsor, Robert, whom she has come to consider as a dear friend and a mentor.

“I give my support system huge credit for me working hard every day because I know I’m being watched, and people are wanting me to succeed. And that makes me want to succeed because I don’t want to let any of those people down. They’ve all just been amazing. I can’t credit just one specific person,” Combdon explains.

If there is one thing Combdon would like to share with people with disabilities who are looking for a way to get involved in parasports, it is simply to take a chance and try it.

“I can’t stress enough how much wheelchair tennis and taking that one chance twelve years ago has changed my life completely. I am a completely different person. I am in a completely different place than I would have ever been in had I not discovered wheelchair tennis,” Combdon emphasizes. “It’s just been a monumental, crazy, positive experience for me, and I will forever tell people if you’re not someone who plays sports, go and try a sport because it makes such a difference.”

**Follow @candice\_combdon as she continues her wheelchair tennis journey and cheer her on along the way.**

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# 10 VIDEOS

## You Need to Watch



**1. Chair Sun Salutations** (Search *Chair Yoga Sun Salutations with Robynn – Imagine Yoga & Wellness*) Imagine Yoga & Wellness offers accessible wellness services for adults and children of all abilities, online and in person. Watch Robynn’s chair yoga routine on ParaSport® Ontario Community Forum.

**2. Sitting Pretty in Quarantine** (Search *Tips for Disability by Sitting Pretty*) Although no medical professional, Lolo curated helpful tips for the disability community to relieve anxieties. Lolo tackles difficult discussions on YouTube including dating, disability fashion tutorials, and everyday challenges dealing with society.

**3. Young ParaGolf Pro** (Search *Inspiring One Arm Golfer Tommy Morrissey*) Tommy Morrissey was born without one arm but has worked hard to become one of the best young golfers in the game.

**4. The Amputee on Top** (Search *Double Amputee to Climb Kilimanjaro*) British Army Veteran James Rose became the first double above-knee amputee to climb the highest free-standing mountain in the world. An inspiration to many, he states: “It was to show people that anything can be done if you put your mind to it.”

**5. A Low Intensity Routine** (Search *Elderly & Older People – Seated Chair Exercise*) Follow Coach Kozak and Claudia through a full low-intensity workout routine – no weights required but are optional, with seated modifications shown.



**6. Equestrian Enthusiast (Search *Paradressage Champion Bettina Eistel*)** Para-dressage Champion Bettina Eistel finds her new Lusitano horse in Portugal with Lusitano World's support! A match made in heaven, that reminds us that nothing is impossible.

**7. The Costume King (Search *Baby Groot Halloween Costume Reveal!*)** Celebrate Halloween all year-round with Josh Sundquist. Josh is a single-leg amputee which he uses to his advantage for his sold-out comedy shows and legendary Halloween costumes.

**8. Sitting Fit (Search *Adaptive Yoga with Nina*)** This class is designed for wheelchair users and those who might not be able to take part in a full yoga class.

**9. Don't Stop the Feeling (Search *Justin Timberlake – Wheelchair Dance Fitness*)** A seated fitness dance for everyone is suitable for all levels! Remember to keep your core engaged and do the movements as full out as possible to get a sweat on.

**10. All Abilities Online (Search *Thank You Jumpstart Sport Relief Fund!*)** COVID restrictions shut down the Pickering All Abilities Soccer Program, but luckily there was a quick transition to a virtual space. Kids continued to develop their skills.



Photo courtesy of Canadian Paralympic Committee

# In Memory

## Barbara Vivian Montemurro 1938-2021

*Barbara Montemurro, one of the early founders and pioneers of wheelchair sport in Ontario, passed away due to complications from Covid-19 on January 11th. She was 82. Born and raised in Toronto, Montemurro lived in Georgetown since 1992.*

A former president of the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association (CWSA) and the Ontario Wheelchair Sports Association, Montemurro received numerous awards in recognition of her work. A member of the CWSA Hall of Fame in the Builder category, the CWSA also created the Barbara Montemurro Award, which is presented to outstanding volunteers.

She began her involvement in wheelchair sports as a volunteer at the 1976 Torontolympiad, launching an extensive career which touched

many facets of wheelchair sports. She was known for her outstanding spirit, sense of humour and dedication and established a reputation as an indispensable volunteer, administrator, and mentor to many.

Her international involvement also took her to the Paralympic Games in Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992) and Atlanta (1996).

Montemurro was also an extraordinary Toronto Argonauts fan, a season ticket holder for over 70 years.



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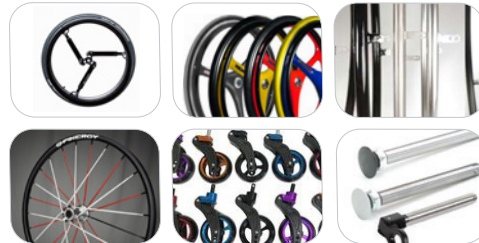
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