

# ParaSport<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

FALL/WINTER 2025



**PARASPORT**  
**ONTARIO**

parasportontario.ca

## Para Nordic Champions Collin Cameron & Christina Picton

**Sitting Volleyball**  
Skills *and* Strategies  
*for* Inclusion

**PLAY to  
PODIUM  
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**Meeting  
Adaptive  
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**The Flames  
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# WELCOME

## Opportunities for Accessible Participation 365 Days a Year

*As the temperature drops and snow begins to blanket regions across Ontario, we inevitably all fall into different routines of daily life, and arguably more challenges to stay active and involved in adapted sport and recreation.*

This seasonal end to summer parasport offerings, colder temperatures, and snowy days, are all factors that can increase barriers to participation for people with disabilities. Not to mention travel and accessible transportation through the winter months, which may seem impossible for some in certain regions. Another barrier is lack of awareness of adaptive sports that exist when snow begins to cover the ground.



In this issue, as always, ParaSport® Ontario strives to promote and showcase opportunities for people with disabilities to get involved with adapted sport and recreation all year round! This is always important for our mental health and quality of life, but even more important during the shortened days when social isolation becomes all too frequent.

The positive benefits of finding an adaptive sport you love, meeting new people and making new friends, and getting active, should not be forgotten. After all, as Canadians, bundling up in a warm outfit and braving the snow and cold is in our livelihood.

As you will read, there are many opportunities to get active outdoors, including a variety of adaptive snowsports like Para Nordic skiing, Para Alpine skiing, and there is recreational ice sledging at facilities and provincial parks too. This doesn't even include all of the indoor activities that run in the winter months like sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair curling!

Seek them out, ask questions, and connect with ParaSport Ontario's Resource Hub. We are here to help you find outdoor and indoor adaptive sports and recreational activities to keep you active and moving 365 days a year.

James Murphy

*Executive Director, ParaSport® Ontario*

**PS: Join us as a Member of the ParaSport® Ontario Family, and receive *ParaSport® Magazine*, our monthly e-newsletters and much more, for FREE. Sign up at <https://parasportontario.ca/join>.**

# ParaSport® MAGAZINE

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*The Official Publication of ParaSport® Ontario*

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Canadian Postmaster: Please send address changes to ParaSport Ontario, 3701 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, ON M1N 2G2.

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ParaSport Ontario acknowledges the financial support from the City of Toronto, cGaming, for ParaSport Magazine. The City of Toronto is committed to inclusion and accessibility.

Publications Mail Registration #10293  
Canadian Mail Agreement #40069170  
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## Newsletter News

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# ParaSport® Ontario Partners

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## 2025 ONTARIO PARASPORT GAMES AWARDED TO NIAGARA

**In late May 2025, Niagara will welcome athletes, managers, coaches, officials, and volunteers from across Ontario for the 44th Ontario Parasport Games. Sport Niagara, the not-for-profit organization established to carry on the sport legacy from the Niagara 2022 Canada Games, was selected as the host of this prestigious event.**

From May 30 to June 1, events will be held at sporting facilities across the Niagara region including Canada Games Park in Thorold and the Vale Health and Wellness Centre in Port Colborne.

With a focus on attracting and hosting sporting events in Niagara, Sport Niagara is thrilled to bring this event to this region. “We are extremely excited to continue to advance the legacy of the recent Canada Games in Niagara,” said Doug Hamilton, Board member of Sport Niagara. “Hosting sporting events like this will continue to support sport tourism and economic development in Niagara.”

Niagara resident Jeff Tiessen is leading the Steering Committee for these Games as its Chairperson. “As a 12-time participant in the Ontario Parasport Games, it’s a tremendous honour for me to be part of an organizing committee that includes so much lived-experience and expertise from Niagara’s disability community,” said the three-time Paralympian. “Niagara has a rich parasport history, and I’m

excited for these Games to create even more adaptive sport opportunities for our disability community.”

“The Ontario government was pleased to select Sport Niagara and the Niagara region as the successful bid to host the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games,” said Neil Lumsden, Minister of Sport. “These Games are an exciting opportunity for highly skilled athletes to come together in competition with their peers from across the province. The event will inspire a new generation of athletes.”

These provincial games were first delivered in 1975 by the City of Cambridge. Since then, the event has grown to over 500 participants (athletes and support staff) competing in 10+ sports including, in Niagara, athletics, swimming, wheelchair basketball, boccia, goalball, sitting volleyball, wheelchair tennis, cycling and more. The last Ontario Para Games were held in Durham in 2023. For information visit [niagara2025ontarioparasportgames.ca](http://niagara2025ontarioparasportgames.ca).



# CONGRATULATIONS

## to Ontario's 2024 Paris Paralympians



Photo courtesy of Canadian Paralympic Committee/Angela Burger.

*Canadian Paralympic Team Flag Bearers Brianna Hennessy and Nicholas Bennett at the Closing Ceremony of the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.*

ParaSport® Ontario congratulates Team Canada (126 athletes) on a successful Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. The Canadian Team brought home 29 medals – 10 Gold, nine Silver and 10 Bronze, among many other powerful performances. Ontario athletes won a total of eight medals – one Gold (Austin Smeenck – Para Athletics, Oakville), three Silver (Jesse Zesseu – Para Athletics, Toronto; Brianna Hennessy – Para Canoe, Ottawa; Tess Routliffe – Para Swimming, Caledon) and four Bronze (Austin Smeenck – Para Athletics; Katie Cosgriffe – Para Swimming, Burlington; Tess Routliffe – Para Swimming; Jolan Wong – Sitting Volleyball, Pembroke; Anne Fergusson – Sitting Volleyball, Carleton Place). Ontario athletes won 28% of Team Canada's medals at the Paralympic Games.

## QUICK FACTS

- **NICHOLAS BENNETT** won three medals (2 Gold, 1 Bronze) – becoming the first Canadian male swimmer, after Benoît Huot in 2004 (Athens), to win multiple gold medals at a single Paralympics.
- **LEANNE TAYLOR** became the first female Canadian medalist in Para Triathlon.
- **BRIANNA HENNESSY** won Canada's first-ever medal in the sport of Para Canoe.
- **CODY FOURNIE** (Gold), **REID MAXWELL** (Silver), **KATIE COSGRIFFE** (Bronze), and **LEANNE TAYLOR** (Bronze), each won a medal in their Paralympic debut.
- **AURELIE RIVARD** added three more medals to her collection at Paris 2024, becoming a 13-time Paralympic medalist across four Paralympic Games, beginning at London 2012.
- **GREG STEWART** repeats with Paralympic Gold (Men's Shot Put F46) less than a year after coming out of retirement.
- **MEL PEMBLE** broke the World Record in the women's C3 500m time trial in Para Cycling.
- Countless Canadian Records and Personal Bests were set by Ontario athletes in events that included Para Swimming, Para Cycling, and Para Athletics to name a few!

# Team Ontario Triumphs at Canadian Boccia Championships

By Jules von Cramon

Team Ontario delivered an outstanding performance at the 2024 Canadian Boccia Championships in Ottawa in November, securing a remarkable number of medals and showcasing their elite skills on the national stage. The event brought together top boccia athletes from across the country, and Team Ontario emerged as one of the most successful squads.

Boccia is a precision ball sport played by athletes with physical disabilities, requiring a blend of strategy, accuracy, and focus. Competing against the best in Canada, Team Ontario's athletes displayed exceptional precision, strategy, and determination, ultimately earning eight medals, including two gold, two silver, and four bronze.



One of the standout performances came from **Joshua Gautier** (St. Catharines), who clinched the gold medal in the BC3 individual competition. "Team Ontario 2024 was a great team to be a part of," said Gautier. "The group was extremely supportive of everyone, and the

whole experience was very encouraging! I was glad to be part of it and am extremely excited for the team's future!"

The competition also included breakout performances from new members of Team Ontario, one of which came from **Liza Puri** (London), who claimed a hard-earned bronze medal in the BC1 individual category. Another standout was **Julian Caverley** (Thorold), who claimed silver in the BC5 individual category. "It was a great learning experience being my first Nationals," said Caverley. "I hope there are many more to come!"

**Martha Gustafson** (Toronto), alongside her partner **Giovanni De Sero** (Guelph), earned a bronze medal in the BC4/5/Open pairs category. Team Ontario was supported by a number of experienced athletes returning to the national competition. Contributing their expertise and leadership were **Kyle Scott** (Hamilton), **Nico Iemma** (Oshawa), and **Jim Davis** (Thorold). Davis won bronze in the BC2 category, showcasing his steady approach under pressure. In the highly competitive BC1/2 Teams event, **Lance Cryderman** (Sudbury), **Dominic Gomez** (Toronto), and **Maggie Julien** (Sudbury) captured a well-deserved bronze medal. Cryderman also claimed the gold medal in the BC1 category.

"We fielded the largest boccia team in our provincial history, and they did not disappoint!" said Amanda Fader, Executive Director of the Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association. "This success is a direct result of our ongoing investment in the program, and the unwavering dedication of our Program Manager and coaching staff."



# Women Win Silver in Skien

A talented lineup of para ice hockey players representing Canada returned from the Women's World Challenge, held in Skien, Norway, with silver medal honours. The tournament ended with a loss to the U.S. Team in the gold-medal game. This is the first time that the Women's World Challenge was held outside of North America.



The roster featured 16 dynamic players from six different provinces including six from Ontario: Jessie Gregory (Wainfleet), Christina Picton (Fonthill), Mackenzie Spong (London), Claire Buchanan (Brampton), Sheena Darnley (Welland) and Aubree Clements (Bowmanville).

"It was extremely difficult to narrow down the roster, so I want to give credit to all the athletes who pushed themselves and the sport to the next level," said Tara Chisholm, Head Coach of Women's Para Hockey of Canada (WPHC).

WPHC is committed to enabling Canadian girls and women+ with disabilities to achieve long-term participation and excellence in para hockey through a sustainable national program. WPHC's mission is to contribute to the health and well-being of girls and women+ with disabilities by developing, promoting, and providing opportunities to participate in para hockey from grassroots development to the elite level throughout Canada.

*For more information visit [wphcanada.com](http://wphcanada.com).*

## COAST TO COAST

September 30th will always be a special day for Kevin Mills. It was the day, last year, when he cranked his handcycle up to the Breakwater Lighthouse in Victoria, British Columbia. Behind him was 8,400 kilometers of cycling. He finished his cross-Canada journey that began in St. John's, Newfoundland, four months earlier, an endeavour he called Pedaling Possibilities.

"This isn't something I could've done alone," credited Mills. "We were able to achieve what we set out to do – promote activity, accessibility, and inclusivity. We still have a long way to go but I was able to start conversations in places where accessibility was not on the radar."

Mills sustained a spinal cord injury in 2009 while swimming in the ocean off the coast of Cuba. Through activity-based therapy, a cornerstone of his neurological rehabilitation, Mills found handcycling and a new passion.

With the help of a Batec power-assist device attached to his wheelchair, and his best friend Nikki Davenport cycling

with him on her road bike, the duo averaged approximately 100 kilometres a day. A personal support worker accompanied them in an accessible RV (recreational vehicle).

"We shared our route each day in hopes of shedding light on accessibility across Canada," Mills explained. "I hope others with a disability feel inspired to get moving by finding an activity or sport that makes them feel good!" Mills assured that this is not the end of Pedaling Possibilities, but just the beginning. Learn more about Mills's new events at [pedalingpossibilities.ca](http://pedalingpossibilities.ca).





Photos by Michael Schneider

# Making an Impact On and Off the Course

## 7th Annual Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament & Awards

By James Murphy  
Executive Director, ParaSport® Ontario

*The 7th Annual ParaSport® Ontario Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament was held on a beautiful day in July at Deer Creek Golf Club and featured the largest field of golfers to date. Thirty corporate teams participated alongside a PGA of Canada Pro golfer and a paragolf athlete (that's 2,700 tee-offs!).*



*L to R: ParaSport Ontario Board Member Bernie Gluckstein and Minister Raymond Cho, MPP*

Over 250 attendees from rehab centres, community groups, provincial sport organizations joined corporate golfers and Paralympians for the morning brunch and Awards Ceremony. That included an opportunity to try out a variety of different parasports like sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball and sledge hockey, all led by ParaSport Ontario's Para Athlete Ambassadors.

These ambassadors inspired young attendees to explore what is possible when barriers to participation are removed, and to see how golf, as a sport, is welcoming to all. ParaGolf Ontario/ Golf Canada provided a First-Tee demonstration on the putting green.

Canadian Paralympic legend Greg Westlake joined Minister Raymond Cho, MPP, Scott Denis – Director of Athletics at Durham College, Danielle Harder – President of the Rotary Club of Whitby, Mike Forman – owner of McDonald's (Whitby), and Kerish Maharaj – Ontario Volleyball Association, in announcing new adapted programs that will dramatically increase visibility and access to inclusive sport and recreation.

As always, it was a great opportunity for supporters and champions of the disability community to come together to recognize great accomplishments and impactful experiences over the past year. ParaSport Ontario's Community Impact Award for Community Parasport Development was awarded to Variety – The Children's Charity of Ontario/ Variety Village. Archie Allison, Variety's Director of Access and Awareness, was on hand to accept the award. A world-



*Back to front: Natalie Sims, Leslie Allingham, Nancy Shaw, Amaya Athill and Natasha Stasiuk*



*ParaSport Ontario Ambassador Nasif Chowdhury and James Murphy, Executive Director*

class facility modelling excellence in accessibility and inclusion, Variety Village supports its community every day in programming for people with disabilities and hosting competitions to encourage high quality participation and excellence.

Nasif Chowdhury was awarded the Community Impact Award for Ambassador of the Year. Much deserved, Nasif showed unwavering commitment and support to ParaSport Ontario as an ambassador, attending over 20 Try-It events in the community including outreach in schools, the Canadian Armed Forces Parasport Day, as well as supporting training camps for Invictus Games Team Canada athletes. His enthusiasm is endless, with a keen sense and know-how about connecting with people of all ages and abilities to get the most out of their every experience.

ParaSport Ontario also had the privilege of announcing the new “Matt Maltese Legacy Award”, honouring the late Matt Maltese and his incredible life. His father Vito Maltese, a long-time Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament planning committee member, was adamant that this legacy award and funding was created to support recipients “for their dedication, perseverance, and finding joy in life through adapted sport.” Thank you to everyone from the Maltese family for supporting ParaSport Ontario and creating this legacy award to support the well-deserving recipients of the Matt Maltese Legacy Award: Madison

Ambos, Maddux Kerr, Christopher Doerner, Barbara Rayment, and Kurtis Barkley.

The largest tournament participation and sponsorship to date resulted in the largest Play to Podium Fund donation of adapted sports equipment ever in 2024. A record \$150,000 in equipment was presented to six individuals with a disability and six organizations to support their programming!

These recipients included Ibrahim Sheikh who received a prosthetic running blade in partnership with PBO Group – Toronto (Marty Robinson) and Ossur Canada. Ibrahim was incredibly grateful for this state-of-the-art prosthesis to allow him to run again and begin his path to excellence as a para triathlete. Broden Nagle and Erduan Solak, in partnership with Sunrise Medical, both received a new sport wheelchair. These two deserving recipients will utilize their

custom sport chairs to reach the next level of performance in their respective parasports, with Broden competing with the U-23 Canadian National Wheelchair Basketball Team at a recent tournament in Japan.

Community Living South Renfrew and Sledge Hockey Kenora both received new para ice hockey sledges to meet the demands of their programs and ensure proper-fitting equipment for current participants. The Town of Whitby received 12 sledges with sticks and a storage rack to be available at a local rink for people of all abilities to use to learn how to participate in sledge hockey and pleasure sledging. This was made possible in partnership with McDonald’s of Whitby (owner, Mike Forman), and the Rotary Club of Whitby. The donation will be supported by the Durham Steelhawks and Paralympic para ice hockey star Greg Westlake, ensuring sustainable usage and accessibility for all.

## ParaSport Champions 5 Years of Excellence Honourees

**Durham Medical – Natalie Sims**

**WineOnline – Daniel Bick**

**Accessible Daily Living – John Groe**

**Bridgepoint Financial – Tim Andrews**

**Diamond & Diamond – Diana Iakossavas**

These recipients have supported ParaSport Ontario for more than five years and have gone above and beyond to support the Play to Podium Fund and everything ParaSport Ontario does for people with disabilities to find, connect with, and stay involved with adapted sport and physical activity.



Back L to R: James Murphy, Maltese Family. Front: Christopher Doerner, recipient of the Matt Maltese Legacy Award.



L to R: Randy Millage, Brian Cvetovic, Mike Trojan and Glen Miller

Following the awards brunch was a first-in-class golf tournament experience with food stations and refreshments donated by long-time supporter Food Dudes (Derek Wasser). Food Dudes provided golfers with a wide variety of phenomenal food options throughout the day that were met with overwhelmingly positive food reviews. Lake of Bays Brewing Company stepped up to support again this year as a hole refreshment sponsor, offering their wide variety of drink offerings.

Congratulations to this year's winning team – Randy Millage, Jamie Millage, Mike Trojan, PGA of Canada Pro Brian Cvetovic and Paragolfer Glen Miller – which will compete in the

PGA of Canada RBC Scramble's Ontario Regional Final in 2025.

With the largest-ever field of golfers and attendees at the awards brunch, ParaSport Ontario was able to bring together a wide array of community groups and members of the disability community to celebrate parasport excellence. Not only was this an amazing event, but with the generous support of our teams and sponsors, there will be more opportunities for people with disabilities to participate through new adapted programming, parasport equipment availability in communities, and equipment to individuals and organizations to get in the game and achieve their goals and dreams for life.

## Play to Podium Fund Recipients

*Jim Davis      Erduan Solak*  
*Loretta Davis      Ibrahim Sheikh*  
*Broden Nagle      Shelley Gilbert*

*Community Living South Renfrew*  
*Sledge Hockey Kenora*  
*Town of Whitby*  
*Canadian Adaptive Snowsports*  
*Paratriathlon Ontario*  
*Peterborough Curling Club*

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*WineOnLine*

**If interested in entering a team or sponsoring next year's tournament at Deer Creek (July 2025) to support ParaSport® Ontario and the Play to Podium Fund, please contact (416) 426-7186 or email: [info@parasportontario.ca](mailto:info@parasportontario.ca). Check out ParaSport Ontario's YouTube Channel for the highlight video of this amazing day!**



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*Alec Denys lines up his shot at the Curling Ontario Wheelchair Doubles Provincials.*

# PROVIDING FOR Para-Athlete Pursuits

By Daniel Vieira  
Community Events Manager, ParaSport® Ontario

*Through its Play to Podium Fund, ParaSport® Ontario was proud to continue to donate a unique and wide variety of adaptive sport equipment in 2024.*

The recipients and equipment sponsors are traditionally celebrated each year at ParaSport Ontario's annual Awards Brunch held in conjunction with the organization's signature Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament, hosted in 2024 at Deer Creek in Ajax. All proceeds from the tournament support the Play to Podium Fund. ParaSport Ontario reached new heights in donations in 2024 with \$150,000 of adaptive sports equipment delivered to athletes with a disability and organizations providing adapted and parasport programming.

Mobility equipment donations included CheelCare Companions to Loretta and Jim Davis of Niagara Falls. The Companion is a power-assisted device for manual wheelchairs that aids users to move more efficiently.

The Davis couple has been instrumental to the growth of the Brock Niagara Penguins, a parasport club, for over 15 years. Jim is currently the boccia and handcycling coach, while Loretta is the club's coordinator. Additionally, Jim coaches the first-ever Volt hockey team in association with the Niagara Children's Centre. Jim and Loretta are also valued ParaSport Ontario Ambassadors.

All of their work in organizing and growing parasports in the Niagara region has not stopped the couple from competing as well. Loretta plays on the Penguins' wheelchair basketball team while Jim is a high-level boccia athlete, playing competitively for the past 10 years and winning a medal at every provincial competition in which he has competed. Jim captured team

gold and individual bronze medals at the Nationals two years ago and most recently Jim brought home a bronze medal from the Canadian Boccia Championships in Ottawa, with Loretta as his assistant.

For both of them, their CheelCare Companions have been great for getting around Brock University's campus, where they train, much more easily and quickly. Not only that, the Companions have been beneficial for meeting the challenges of travel that accompany competitions. "Getting around airports and train stations with luggage is now a lot more convenient," Loretta explains. Jim notes that the device also aids him in competitions saying, "it helps me stay loose. When I am away competing, I use it the whole time. It's so easy to use and so valuable for us."

Hisham Mohammad is a wheelchair athlete who was granted a new sport wheelchair through the Play to Podium Fund to help him continue his growth competitively in the sport of wheelchair tennis.

Hisham was born in India and moved to Saudi Arabia when he was just one year of age. As an eight-year-old, his family decided to move to Canada for a better life for Hisham who has spinal cord atrophy which has resulted in paralysis of his lower limbs. Hisham was introduced to parasport through Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and began with wheelchair racing and playing sledge hockey be-

*Jim and Loretta Davis, recipients of Cheelcare Companion mobility devices from ParaSport Ontario Executive Director James Murphy (back row, left) and Eugene Cherny, Cheelcare Co-Founder and CEO.*



Photo by Michael Schneider



*Hisham Mohammad competing at an International Tennis Federation tournament in Kamloops, British Columbia.*

fore joining the wheelchair basketball team at Variety Village. He was one of the top wheelchair racers in Ontario for his age group and was selected to the U23 Canadian Men's Wheelchair Basketball Team as well.

Hisham went on to pursue a degree in electrical and biomedical engineering at McMaster University in Hamilton and completed his Masters in sports engineering at the University of Waterloo. Throughout his post-secondary educational pursuits, Hisham took a break from parasport competition. But it was during that time that he created an iPhone app using AI [artificial intelligence] to help wheelchair basketball athletes

with their shooting form.

During the isolation of the COVID pandemic, Hisham took to wheelchair tennis, an individual sport, finding it a "humbling and technically challenging sport but a way to leverage skills from wheelchair basketball," he describes.

Previously playing in an old wheelchair that he had outgrown, Hisham says his new tennis wheelchair from Sunrise Medical "immediately impacted his performance thanks to its quality, light technology and compatibility for the sport." This is evident in his results at recent tournaments which include reaching the semi-finals in ITF [International Tennis



*Para Ice Hockey Paralympian Greg Westlake endorses the new ParaSport Ontario Sled Experience, supported by McDonald's (Whitby), Rotary Club of Whitby, and Durham Steelhawks.*



*Shelley Gilbert of the Niagara Sledge Hockey League, Brock Niagara Penguins and South Niagara Canoe Club receives safety eyewear for sitting volleyball from James Murphy.*

Federation] tournaments in both Kamloops and Vancouver. He was the runner-up at the Pacific Northwest tournament in Salem, Oregon, but took top honours in doubles at the same event. He was runner-up again at the Birmingham National Wheelchair Tennis Championships in Nova Scotia. These results have improved his International Tennis Federation ranking from 76th to 44th.

Hisham is not stopping there. Now working as an Amazon software engineer, he has his sights set on lifting his ranking to Top 10 in the world, participating in Grand Slams and representing Canada at the

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*Broden Nagle, recipient of a wheelchair basketball sport chair. A member of the Twin City Spinners, Team Ontario and the U23 NextGen Canada Team.*



*Erduan Solak receiving a new sports wheelchair for wheelchair tennis, supported by Sunrise Medical.*

Paralympic Games. “I want to be a mentor to younger generations as well,” shares Hisham, with the message of “own your abilities within your disability” and “strive to do the best in whatever you put your mind to.”

ParaSport Ontario also donated curling “delivery” sticks to the Peterborough Curling Club for its wheelchair curlers. Alec Denys has been part of the Peterborough Curling Club as a wheelchair curler since 2011, after retiring from sledge hockey. At the time there was only one other wheelchair curler at the club. Now, through his dedicated recruiting work, the program has grown to include 11 wheelchair

curlers. “A lot of the para-athletes come from outside of Peterborough, from Oshawa, Cobourg, Lindsay and even as far away as Prince Edward County, to play at the Peterborough Curling Club,” says Alec. “The club now has an annual wheelchair curling bonspiel called the Sticks, Stones & Wheels Bonspiel with the most recent event having seven teams in it,” he offers proudly.

The growth of wheelchair curling at the Peterborough Curling Club can also be attributed to the accessibility upgrades to the club’s venue in recent years. Alec appreciates how inclusive the club has become, mentioning “ramps to get to the ice, an

elevator to the lounge and automatic doors that have all been key factors in the success of the program.”

With the donation of the delivery sticks from ParaSport Ontario’s Play to Podium Fund, wheelchair curlers no longer need to share equipment with others during the twice-a-week Learn to Curl program. There is now equity with able-bodied peers at the club who also receive loaned equipment for the season through the program. “The donation will help us to continue to grow wheelchair curling at the Peterborough Curling Club with the hope of having two teams that will compete across Ontario in the future,” Alec acknowledges.

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# Canmore's PARA NORDIC Power Couple



## Christina Picton and Collin Cameron

An interview with Jeff Tiessen

*From sitting on gym class sidelines to creating a fundraising campaign for adaptive sport equipment in a community where there was none, Christina and Collin forged similar childhood parasport pathways for themselves with the help of others. Growing up in Ontario towns far apart, today the twosome share life together, traversing Paralympic pathways and championing parasport in communities across the country.*

**Christina Picton**, a multi-sport athlete, made her Paralympic debut at the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing and recently returned home with a para ice hockey silver medal from the Women's World Challenge in Norway. In Beijing, the para nordic skier attained top-eight performances in her four events, with her best result being sixth in the sprint event.

After years of involvement in developing para ice hockey throughout Canada as a player and a promoter, Christina discovered cross-country skiing through one of her participants in a "Learn to Sledge" program that she facilitated in Port Colborne, Ontario, near her hometown Fonthill. Notably, the captain of the Women's National Para Ice Hockey Team, she was the first female to try out for Hockey Canada's senior men's para ice hockey team.

Born with a congenital condition that affected both her legs and ultimately led to a right leg amputation at age 16, Christina moved to Canmore, Alberta, several years ago to pursue her para nordic skiing career.

So did **Collin Cameron**, an Ontarian as well, who grew up in Muskoka's Bracebridge. Teammates and training partners to start, and now a couple, the sit-skiing duo shares a passion for their sport, parasport in general, and among other things, video gaming, which both admit to being the spark that forged their personal relationship.

Collin captured three bronze medals in 2018 in PyeongChang, South Korea, in his Paralympic Games debut. He was third in the 7.5-kilometre and 15-kilometre biathlon races and helped Canada to third in the open cross-country relay. At Beijing 2022 Collin took bronze medals in the 1K sprint, mixed relay, and the 18K, becoming the first Canadian male sit-skier to reach the Paralympic podium in a cross-country distance race.

Collin was born with arthrogryposis, a condition that causes a shortening of the lower limbs, and an under-development of muscles and tendons in his legs. Always athletic, he started his parasport career playing sledge hockey for Sudbury's Northern Sliders before turning to cross-country sit-skiing. He first tried para nordic skiing at an identification camp in Canmore after seeing some photos on the Sudbury Accessible Sports Council Facebook page.



ParaSport® Magazine publisher Jeff Tiessen met with the couple via Zoom after a morning training session in Canmore just before the start of the para nordic race season.

**PO (ParaSport Ontario):** *I want to start by taking you both back to childhood, before you got involved in any kind of parasport. What did the sport or recreation landscape look like for you?*

**Christina:** Growing up with a disability, going through public school, parasport wasn't very prominent. You had to know someone to really know about it. And so, yeah, going through the public school system, and recess and gym class, I was on the sidelines a lot which was really frustrating.

I wanted to be active and out there with my friends and my schoolmates. But things just weren't adapted, and people just weren't super keen on trying to figure it out either. Really, it was pretty rare to have a teacher who was excited to figure out my role. I watched my older sister enroll in different sports throughout the years. I would try them too. The first one I did was karate at the beginner level. I watched her progress through the ranks, and then there was just a point when it got much more frustrating and limiting for me and not enjoyable. I didn't find parasport until I was 10 years old. My parents did the research and found a wheelchair softball league in Niagara. And once we met the community, other doors and other kinds of options opened up. I had a really good arm, but running around the bases was sketchy. I could really throw and hit, and it was really fun to be good at something.

**Collin:** A little different experience for me. I was raised in Muskoka and a good distance from any major hubs that had accessible programs. There was no accessible sport in Bracebridge when I was growing up. So, I just did whatever my brother was doing as

good as I could. Growing up hockey fans, I would always play goalie and my brother would just slap balls and pucks at me all day long. He was happy doing that. I can't wear skates because of my disability. There was really nothing else.

I remember one of our neighbours helping my mom fundraise, without me knowing, for a brand new handcycle. That was huge. I think I was 11 at the time and it was life-changing because I could do one extra activity with my brother. He was always out on his bike. We did everything together. When I got that handcycle, more opportunities opened up. I was fortunate to be part of a community that was so supportive, despite not having accessible sports programs at the time. There's a big program now, but growing up, people were willing and wanted to help. It still takes those people to make those programs what they are now.

**Christina:** I started my parasport journey with the Fenwick Lions Wheelchair Softball Club, and through that community I met a couple of kids who played with Sport By Ability Niagara's junior sledge hockey team. So yeah, it was through them that we learned about hockey. But I didn't want anything to do with it when I first heard about it. My dad was like, "No, we're setting you up." I was 11 years old. I've told this story a lot and it's the truth. Once I got on the ice, the freedom of not needing to use my legs was the most freeing experience that I'd ever felt. I knew that that was going to be where I wanted to be. I didn't want to be a softball player anymore.

**Collin:** I played sledge hockey for the Sudbury team at the time but due to how far away Sudbury is from all the other teams in southern Ontario, it just wasn't feasible after a while for us to travel that much. I got involved when a neighbour saw me, with my obvious





visible disability, and just came right up to me and asked: “Hey, do you play sledge hockey?” That was my introduction to sledge hockey. And I can really relate to that feeling that Christina described. As soon as I got on the sled and started ripping around, it was like, “Oh man, yes. This is totally for me. This is a sport for me.” That feeling was so special.

I loved sledge hockey, and being a part of the Northern Sliders was near and dear to my heart. I have so many fond memories, but soon after, the team folded. I was full of piss and vinegar, but everyone else had been part of the Sliders for 15 plus years, and had seen it, done it, and were ready to transition. So I started Googling and found the Sudbury Accessible Sports Council. I sent them a message asking what other sports were around. I heard back that they had sit-skiing which was similar to sitting in my hockey sled. Within two days I was at a session and it clicked for me. Again, there was a combination of feelings of freedom and excitement. It was roller sit-skiing because there was no snow yet. I was told that I was “a natural at this. You know, you can go places if you like this and put in the work.” Two months later I was on my way to Canmore, Alberta, the first time I’d ever been on an airplane. I was 26 at the time. It was just eye-opening.

**PO:** *It’s interesting how you both talk about these champions of parasport in your lives. Collin, your neighbour, and Christina, not just your parents but a sledge hockey player who introduced you to para nordic skiing. How important can that one person be?*

**Collin:** None of those people was closely related to me, like Christina’s family getting her involved in parasport. And whether it’s a dad or a mom or a person like Patti Kitler who encouraged me at my first sit-skiing session, they are certainly a catalyst. And you hear from people in the parasport community that there’s always that one person that was the “identifier.” That’s what has made our community the way it is. It takes people who are passionate about parasport.

**Christina:** I think that applies for anybody, not just for people with disabilities. I think it’s really easy to get stuck in what’s comfortable. So, it’s good to have people who care about you enough to push you out of your comfort zone and push you into something that they believe you can thrive in or learn something from. And it doesn’t have to be a 10- or 20-year-career in a sport. It could just be learning something over one or two sessions.

**Collin:** It wasn’t always non-disabled people who were the catalyst people for me. And I’m noticing a shift now to athletes who have been involved in parasport becoming coaches and getting involved in local clubs and communities... more former high-performance athletes or even recreational athletes with a disability. It is such an amazing resource for cities and communities and clubs to have that person who we can connect with. It’s a lot easier sometimes when a club has someone with a physical disability coming in who we can relate to. Yeah, peers, right? The importance of peers.

**PO:** *We know it’s a shallow pool in terms of numbers of athletes in some parasports. And sometimes multi-sport isn’t encouraged, especially at higher performance levels. Christina, have you experienced that? How does it work for you being a multi-sport national athlete?*

**Christina:** I did try to balance both sports back in 2018 and 2019 and that was pretty challenging. At that time, I was much more focused on hockey and I was using skiing as another way to train. I wasn’t super serious about it. My coaches really liked that I was working on cardio. So, the hockey coaches and the skiing people were very patient and understanding. I’ve been very lucky that that’s been my experience. And then with hockey, a lot of politics got to me. I was so burned out by 2020 when the pandemic started. Then, team sport, indoor sport, all of that was shut down. So, I was really fortunate that I’d already had the connection to an outdoor individual sport that is cross-country. It was easy to shift and that’s how the transition went.

I took a couple of years away from hockey with a goal of going to the Beijing Winter Paralympics as a para nordic skier and I put all my energy and effort into that, and I was feeling really supported. It was a really great environment which was what I needed... an outlet to be a high-performer that felt fully supported.

Now I'm trying to balance both again. Hockey was my first love, so to be back is good, but it takes a lot of communication with both programs, and people seem to understand the reasons why I do both, and they respect it. That's all I can ask for.

**PO:** *Another one for you Christina. You are a recognized advocate of women's sledge hockey, women in sport in general. Did you choose that campaign or did it choose you?*

**Christina:** That's a big, broad question. I don't know. I mean, I feel like I've been in a lot of spaces in hockey where it's been male dominated. I don't like it when people tell me that I can't do something. I like to prove people wrong. And maybe that's just it. I try to always prove that women deserve to be part of the conversation. That's just been my attitude towards parasport and para hockey over the years.

**Collin:** It's also that you are a real leader in your work ethic Christina. In hockey, being a top-level female in your sport, you were an inspiration for a lot of younger women on the team who now look up to you. You are a groundbreaking person in sport and made those opportunities a reality for other people. Things were happening because you were doing things that led to that. I know it's still a fight to have more inclusion, but you started it and created that belief for everyone else.

**Christina:** So yeah, I guess beyond the association boards and playing the sport and just trying to spread the word, it's about sharing the story. And not just the highlight reel, but to actually talk about where the barriers were and how hard they were to break down, and still are sometimes. That's what I'm trying to do for women in parasport.

It's been a fight. I was the captain of the national para ice hockey team

for six years, and we did a lot of really amazing benchmark work, all big milestones at the time. Being away from it for a while I watched how some of those milestones that we hit didn't count for this, or didn't count for that, on the checklist of getting to be a sport in the Paralympics. So, the fight isn't over but we're getting really close. It's been great to be a part of a lot of different firsts for the sport, which is cool.

**PO:** *Collin, your first Paralympic Games were in 2018, that being in Korea. What was that first Paralympic experience like for you, winning three bronze medals?*

**Collin:** It was pretty crazy. I didn't really know how to digest it because being on the podium wasn't my main goal in those races or events. I am a natural sprinter but didn't have the years of volume and distance and experience behind me like my competitors did. So, everything was so unexpected. Two podiums were in biathlon and I had very little training, being mostly in Sudbury at the time when the team was centralized in Canmore. The only time I ever shot was when I went to Canmore, which was twice a year. My focus in training was just to get to my first Paralympics as building blocks for the next ones. But that experience is one of my career highlights.

**PO:** *Then a year later, you are World Champion, right?*

**Collin:** Yeah, a pretty cool moment. In Canada too... Prince George [British Columbia]. That was the target in the sprint events, because it's what I'm best at. It's what I really enjoy doing too. And really special because I had the opportunity to not only be at a World Championships, but a World Championships in Canada which is rare for us.

**PO:** *As Paralympians, do you feel an obligation of ambassadorship when it comes to sport, or disability? Do you feel that you have a stage or a platform that you have to speak from?*

**Christina:** Gosh, I don't feel burdened by it. I think it's just the way that I was raised... to just be vocal and stand up for the things that are important to me. Gender equality and inequality for individuals with disabilities is important to me and so, I advocate for it.

**PO:** *What does the competition season look like for you?*

**Collin:** We'll have qualification races. Everyone's out there racing for potential selection for our first World Cup in Finland. So, it's focusing on racing and recovery. There's a whole lot going on this winter. We have biathlon World Championships in Slovenia. Then three days after that, we have cross-country World Championships in Italy. And then a few weeks after that we have





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*“... there’s always something that we can do to stay active and involved.”*

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aces in Scandinavia. And then there are cross-country sprint races at the able-bodied World Championships in Norway. It’s the first time they’ve ever done something like this. It’ll be the best athletes in the world in our sport, Olympic and Paralympic. The goal is to always have better performances as we move toward the Paralympics in 2026.

**Christina:** And then for me, on the hockey front, our season just ended with the Women’s World Challenge in Norway. Now I shift back to racing, and then back into hockey in March for a Border Battle with the U.S. in Niagara. I’ll put hockey on the back burner for now.

**PO:** *What kinds of things do you like to do outside of sport?*

**Christina:** We spend a lot of time in our kitchen cooking together. We focus on recovery from intense training. We watch movies together. We originally bonded over video games. We were just great teammates and lived far apart in Ontario, and then started hanging out more and playing

video games together because it was a common interest. We still do a lot of gaming.

**PO:** *Do you think much about life after high-performance competition?*

**Collin:** Sport never needs to end. I mean, there’s always something that we can do to stay active and involved. When I’m done racing, I’ll still be involved in the sport somehow, whether I’m coaching or back home with the Ontario program supporting para nordic and parasport in general.

**Christina:** I still pinch myself sometimes that I wake up every day in the mountains. But I miss being closer to family in Niagara. I never imagined I’d be living in Canmore, Alberta. As far as sport involvement, I can’t imagine being out of parasport completely either. I’ll always be a champion for parasport programs and help them grow. And I feel passionately about continuing the work with the women’s game in hockey. I want to see it reach our 2030 Paralympic goal. The checklist is getting smaller and smaller and I want

to keep pushing and developing the game. I’m not done with that one.

**PO:** *What can you suggest to others with disabilities who are hesitant about getting into sport?*

**Collin:** Two things jump out for me. The first is that you have to challenge yourself to take a risk. Whether you are young or old, or new to the disability community, take a risk and try it. Don’t be afraid regardless of your ability, because you never know. You might find something that brings you joy. That’s a huge thing that keeps me involved in sport at the high-performance level, and at a recreational level too. Cross-country skiing brings me so much joy. And if one sport isn’t doing that, try another one.

**Christina:** The only thing I’d add to that is that you can gain a new community. You can gain a new way to become more active and healthy. You can gain a feeling of freedom on the ice or snow. The pros list is so much longer than the cons. There’s just so much to gain from the community and an active lifestyle.

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# *Sitting Volleyball*

## *Strategies for Inclusion*

By Joe Millage

*I have been a coach for nearly half a century. It's a passion driven by opportunity and most importantly, the opportunity to witness people develop their excellence.*

As a multi-sport coach, I've witnessed a lot of transference. Transference is when skills in one discipline can be applied to other activities. A simple example would be how a sprinter's ability to accelerate would be an asset in sports such as football, basketball, baseball or soccer.

The world of parasports is no exception and transference is routinely witnessed when an athlete's abilities change after a life-altering injury such as an amputation, spinal cord injury, head injury or a neurological condition. The athletic mindset may remain the same, but there may now be a need to find a new way to apply their skills. So, ice hockey, is played in sleds, basketball in wheelchairs and volleyball sitting on the floor.

Ontario's Sitting Volleyball program showcases athletes who can adapt to a game that often relies on the ability to quickly change the plane of movement by stepping laterally to dig a ball, or to go vertical with power to spike or block a ball. When the vertical aspect of the game changes, many other skills gain greater importance. And when footwork is largely eliminated there is greater emphasis on learning to move on the floor in a way most haven't done since they were children.

In Sitting Volleyball, powerful and agile women and men can easily get above the net but have to work hard to move a couple of metres in any direction. The required athletic mindset, rules, teamwork, ball skills, serving techniques and overall athletic movements are very similar to the traditional game, but applied while seated on the floor.

Like all levels of volleyball, players need not be world-class athletes to have fun. But they can be... at the national level, Canada's women's team won the bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games, and the men's team is ranked 13th in the world.

If interested in giving Sitting Volleyball a try, the Ontario Volleyball Association and ParaSport® Ontario can connect you with a local program, and opportunities to join a team to compete at the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games in Niagara in May. Visit [parasportontario.ca](http://parasportontario.ca) or [ontariovolleyball.org/sitting-volleyball](http://ontariovolleyball.org/sitting-volleyball) to learn more.

**Special thanks to the Enabling Change Program from the Province of Ontario for supporting ParaSport Ontario in delivering sitting volleyball programs to schools and communities at no charge. For more information contact Joe Millage at [joe@parasportontario.ca](mailto:joe@parasportontario.ca).**



***ParaSport Ontario Ambassador Jolan Wong (#8) was the Libero on the bronze medal-winning Canadian Women's Team at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.***



***Durham College's Scott Dennis presented a school jacket to Ashley Green, celebrating the launch of a new collegiate-level sitting volleyball program supported by ParaSport Ontario and Ontario Volleyball Association.***

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## Strategies for Inclusion

*The following are specific strategies to think about when planning your lesson or activity. Strategies are ways in which you can coach or instruct to maximize learning for children and youth with disabilities.*

## Durham College Serves Up a First

Durham College has established Canada's first post-secondary program for a representative sitting volleyball team in parasport competitions. ParaSport Ontario (PO) is also looking to find other schools to be part of a ground-breaking opportunity to compete with other school teams in a Sitting Volleyball parasport event. PO's goal is to introduce more than 1,000 Ontarians to sitting volleyball with professionally-run practice sessions that welcome everyone from beginners to world-class athletes.

"One thing we learned is that we have these student athletes on campus already," said Durham College's Athletic Director Scott Dennis about the team, which came to fruition after Dennis met PO's Executive Director James Murphy and other PO representatives. "We talked about some great ideas, and one was getting sitting volleyball involved at the varsity level," Dennis recalls. "I went back to our co-ordinator and said, 'can we make this happen?' And the answer was 'Absolutely!'"

## Skills Overview

### Forearm Pass

- Start in Hurdler Ready position
- Elbows locked and thumbs together to form strong platform with arms
- Shoulders rotate so that they are square to where ball is coming from and then finish facing target after contact
- Power is generated through slight swinging of the arms and shrugging of shoulders





- Emphasize social interaction and assign “peer helpers” to act as guides and/or supports
- Allow for extra time to complete tasks
- Use positive reinforcement
- Incorporate written and oral language strategies
- Use explicit and repeated instructions
- Provide clear, defined examples of behaviour that is expected

- Be patient and allow for flexibility in your plans
- Break up tasks into smaller steps
- Use demonstrations at all times
- Play games over and over
- Provide ongoing prompts or visual cues
- Use mixed ability groupings

In order for inclusion efforts to be successful, teachers, coaches and community leaders need to

be aware of the type and severity of the participant’s disability and evaluate the type of activity to ensure that modifications to equipment can be made. Determine the needs for staff and/or peer support to ensure every participant is included in the activity or game.

Important Note: participants should always be included in the conversation when adapting activities.

Adapted with permission from Ophea, Steps to Inclusion, 2010. For more on strategies and modifications visit [www.ophea.net](http://www.ophea.net).

## Overhead Pass

- Start in Crab Walk Ready Position
- Move to position so ball is played in front of forehead
- Hands are big and in shape of ball with thumbs facing eyes
- Follow through with thumbs and palms facing target

## Attacking

- Start in Hurdler Ready Position
- Push with back leg and pull with front leg
- Non-hitting hand is on ground for balance and power
- Slide through ball, keeping elbow high and snapping at contact

## Serving

- Start in Hurdler Ready Position
- Ball is held in non-hitting hand and tossed in front of hitting shoulder
- Contact is made with a strong hand, high elbow and follow through to target

- VARIATION: Athlete can sit with both legs out in front for more balance and control when serving but may sacrifice power and slow entry back onto the court

## Blocking

- Start in Hurdler Ready Position
- Position as close to the net as possible without touching it (legs can go over the centre line but can’t interfere with opponent)
- Arms extended, hands big and strong and press into opponent space

## Defense

- Start in Crab Walk Ready position with hands on ground
- Just before contact, move into position and lift hands to play ball
- Keep hands around mid-body to play ball with either forearm or overhead
- Fall backwards to absorb contact and control a hard driven ball if needed

*Courtesy of Ontario Volleyball Association and Alberta Volleyball.*



# Skill Development Activities

Below are some examples of activities that can be used when playing sitting volleyball. When athletes first start playing the game, the two areas that need to be addressed are the ability to move quickly and efficiently on the floor using feet and hands, and then quickly pulling up the hands to play the ball. These example activities work on developing movement patterns and ball control before progressing to modified game-play.

For the FUNdamental stage, activities can be done using just toss and catch while moving and can progress to the use of a beach ball for contacts to provide athletes more movement time to play the ball. For the Learning to Train stage of sitting volleyball athlete development, activities can again be initiated with catch and toss but progress to actual contacts where the use of regulation volleyballs can be introduced.

## 1 Ball Control Shuttle

**Purpose of Activity:**  
Warm-Up/Movement/Ball Control  
**Number of Athletes:** Groups of 4

- Athletes line up in two lines facing each other about 2m apart
- Continuously tossing the ball back and forth they follow the ball, switching lines

### Variations:

- Underhand tossing and overhead tossing
- Athletes toss laterally to partner so partner has to move side to side

### Progressions:

- One line remains catching and tossing, other line progresses to overhead passing
- Both lines progress to overhead passing and then forearm passing

## 2 Triangle Drill

**Purpose of Activity:**  
Movement/Ball Control  
**Number of Athletes:** Partners

- Athlete starts in centre of triangle and moves to one corner about 1.5m away, catches a ball and tosses back to partner
- Athlete returns to the centre, catches a ball and tosses it back to partner then goes to next corner and repeats

### Progressions:

- Athlete overhead/ forearm passes each contact back to partner
- Athlete passes each contact with either left or right arm

## 3 W-Passing

**Purpose of Activity:** Movement/Ball Control  
**Number of Athletes:** Groups of 3 or 4

- Athlete starts on sideline and catches tossed ball and passes back to coach
- Then moves back to the second point, catches and tosses back to coach and then does the same for all five points of the W

### Progressions:

- Two balls at each point – once athlete plays first ball, toss a second, lower ball to them right away. Athlete catches and tosses
- Use overhead or forearm contacts at each point
- Two contacts at each point using overhead or forearm contacts



## 4 2 vs 2 Mini-Court

**Purpose of Activity: Game-Play**

- Court is split along the net into two or three 'mini-courts'
- Athletes play two versus two and must rotate positions every time they put the ball over the net
- Start with catching and tossing only to simulate flow of game and drill (simulate 'hot potato' so that athletes do not hang onto ball for too long)
- Progress to overhead and forearm contacts with the goal of maintaining rallies

**Progressions:**

- Forearm and overhead contacts with attacking but maintaining a continuous rally
- Attacking to score

## 5 Back Row Triples King's/ Queen's Court

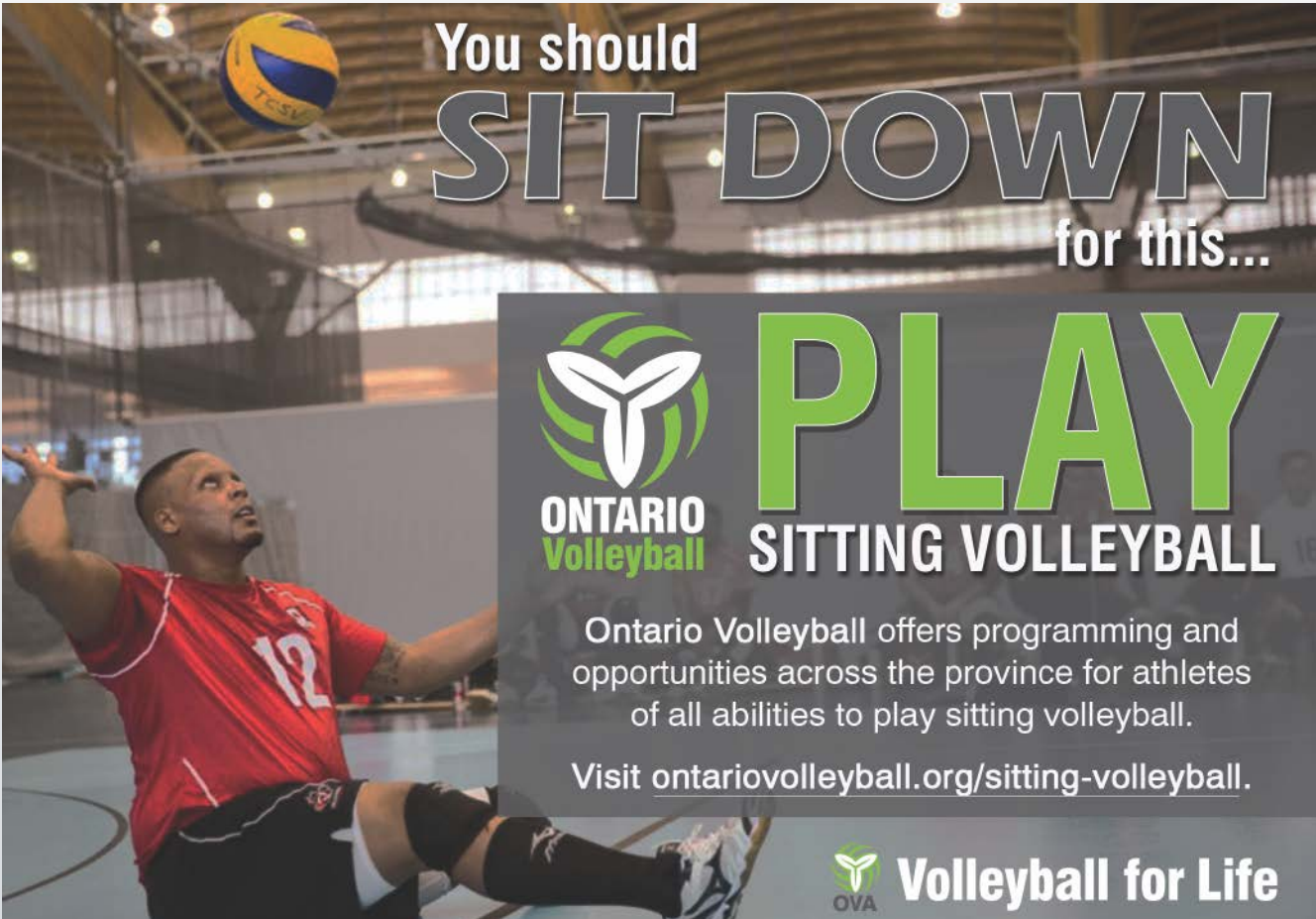
**Purpose of Activity: Game-Play**

- 3 players vs. 3 players with one or two teams waiting at the end of the court
- Designate one side as the King's/Queen's court
- Coach introduces the ball and players play out the rally without attacking
- Winning team moves to King's/Queen's court – if they are already there, they receive one point
- Losing team goes to back of line and new team comes in


**Progressions:**

- Teams serve to introduce ball
- Teams can attack ball during the rally

*Courtesy of Ontario Volleyball Association.*




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Visit [ontariovolleyball.org/sitting-volleyball](http://ontariovolleyball.org/sitting-volleyball).

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## Equal Access to Injury Info and Support

*ParaSport® Ontario is proud to announce a new partnership with Honsberger Physio+ to provide injury support, guidance, and educational resources to the organization's membership through an injury and performance "email hotline."*

Honsberger Physio+ is a trusted provider of rehabilitation, injury prevention, and sports performance solutions, proudly serving Aurora and Markham for over 37 years. Its diverse team includes physiotherapists, osteopaths, massage therapists, athletic therapists, and trainers, who collaborate to help clients enhance movement, recover from injuries, and achieve their goals. From pain management and injury rehabilitation to sports performance training and biomechanics optimization, Honsberger Physio+ tailors its services to meet everyone's unique needs.

"This is an exciting and unique partnership to share with members of ParaSport Ontario!" enthuses James Murphy, ParaSport Ontario Executive Director. "A trusted source to contact after an injury in adapted sport or recreation is very important for people with disabilities. This information and guidance to start will support better health outcomes so our members can get back to the activities they love to do."

Murphy continues, "In partnering with ParaSport Ontario, Honsberger Physio+ brings a commitment to inclusivity of athletes of all abilities. By addressing the unique physical challenges faced by para-athletes, they aim to enhance performance, prevent injuries, and empower individuals to surmount barriers in sport and life."

"Together with ParaSport Ontario, we're creating a more inclusive sports community where every athlete has

the opportunity to excel,” adds Kevin Honsberger, owner and founder. “With expertise in addressing the unique challenges of para-athletes, our whole-body approach combines advanced technology, evidence-based treatments, and personalized care to enhance performance, prevent injuries, and build resilience. Whether you’re new to sport or competing at the highest level, we are here to help you reach your full potential – on and off the field.”

### The ParaSport Ontario Injury & Performance Hotline

A resource designed for ParaSport Ontario members, ambassadors,

and affiliated sports organizations, Honsberger Physio+ is ensuring equal access to information and support for those who have sustained a sports injury and looking for guidance or recommendations.

The Honsberger Physio+ team of regulated health professionals brings extensive experience working with active individuals and athletes across a broad spectrum of injuries, disabilities, and performance goals, which is now available to ParaSport Ontario’s network.

### How It Works

The hotline is a dedicated email service where you can ask questions

about injuries and pain, muscle tightness, sports performance and body biomechanics. Simply email [injuries@honsbergerphysio.com](mailto:injuries@honsbergerphysio.com) and a team member will respond within two to three business days.

While the team can’t provide full medical consultations or assessments via email, it can offer guidance, recommend next steps (including follow-ups or diagnostics), and share educational resources tailored to specific sports and bodies.

“We are proud to support ParaSport Ontario in building stronger, healthier athletes and fostering an inclusive sports community,” assures Honsberger. “Let’s keep moving forward – together!”

**More information to come in ParaSport Ontario’s e-newsletter, on the website and social media.**

**PARASPORT ONTARIO**  
Resource Hub

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- Clubs by Sport
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- Sports & Activities by location
- Clubs by disabilities served
- Ontario Parasport Collective
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# The Flames



## Variety Village Provides the Spark for Swimmers of All Abilities

*Thirty-five years ago, Variety Village opened its aquatics wing to provide everyBODY™ with an accessible and inclusive space to swim and enjoy water activities. Adding to the 76,000-square-foot fieldhouse, cardio area, and weight room, the pool facility welcomed individuals, families, schools, and community groups to swim, play and compete.*

Since 1990, Variety Village's aquatics facility has been home to swimmers with disabilities and their able-bodied peers, offering programs that cater to a range of aquatic interests. Each program provides an ability-based pathway to participation, fostering inclusivity and supporting individual goals.

When the pool first opened, Steve Bialowas, Director of Programs, recognized the importance of creating inclusive opportunities. Bialowas brought coach Niv Shelef on deck to establish a grassroots training program to encourage athletes to try a new sport, build confidence, gain independence, and enjoy a team environment regardless of whether they swam recreationally or competitively.

Variety Village's FLAMES program is supported by a legacy of coaching excellence, including influential mentors and heroes in the sport such as Irene Van Eeno, Ryan Jones, William Kerr, Corinne Walker, Kathryn Haggis, Anna Atell, and Rafael Polinario. Vicki Keith, renowned for her legendary record-breaking marathon swims across the Great Lakes,

*Photo top left: Flames Coach James Berry with Zach Rayment*

the English Channel, and California's Catalina Strait, joined this esteemed list of FLAMES champions. Keith has been instrumental in supporting Variety Village's aquatics programs for decades. Today, Head Coach James Berry and Assistant Coach Blanca Gonzalez lead the next generation of swimmers in a welcoming environment of inclusion, motivating all swimmers to achieve their goals whatever they may be.

Every FLAMES swimmer is celebrated for their unique achievements, from competing in their first swim meet to representing their school, community, province or even Canada on an international stage. Notable FLAMES alumni include Elisabeth Walker-Young, Kaley McLean, Ally Van Wyck, Jessica Tinney, Meghan Sherwin, Keith Brettell, Carlos Costa, Ashley Cowan, Lesley Pollock, and Ruby Stevens.

*Flames Coach Blanca Gonzalez*



### **1:1 Sparks Swimming | Ages 4+**

The Sparks program is the para development arm of the Flames Swim Team, designed to support young athletes with physical disabilities in a one-on-one setting. The program focuses on basic skill development to prepare swimmers for success as they progress to the Flames Swim Teams.

### **Pre-Competitive Flames | Ages 8-12**

The Flames Pre-Competitive Program is an engaging introduction to competitive swimming for athletes ages 8-12. Setting the foundation for competitive swimming, swimmers learn the basics of the four Paralympic swimming strokes — freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly — as well as starts and turns.

### **The Flames Swim Team**

An integrated competitive team that includes athletes with physical disabilities and able-bodied peers, the Flames Swim Team offers training and competition opportunities for swimmers of all levels, ages and abilities. With a strong history of developing athletes to provincial, national and international levels, the program focuses on mastering fundamental skills essential to competitive swimming.

## Variety Village Athletic Club

For over 50 years, Variety Village has been a beacon of opportunity for athletes with physical, intellectual and sensory disabilities across Ontario and Canada. As an accessible and inclusive destination for sports, recreation, and social interaction, this distinguished facility has sparked interest in both recreational and competitive sport, fostering excitement for local, provincial, national and international events in para sport, Special Olympics, Deaf sport, dwarf games, and the Paralympics.

With world-class training equipment, specialized coaching staff, and comprehensive athlete development programs, Variety Village has been instrumental in elevating adaptive sports across Canada and beyond. Countless Canadian Paralympians, Special Olympians, and Deaflympians, have honed their skills in Variety Village's pool and on its courts and athletic track.

Athletes who are interested in the Variety Village Athletic Club (VVAC) teams can connect with a Variety coach to discuss goals and pathways to participate. Available teams include: Athletics (Track & Field), Challenger Baseball, Flames Swimming, Paragolf, Sunshine Swimming, Taekwondo, VOLT Hockey, Weightlifting and Wheelchair Basketball.



*Back row: Anna Atell and James Berry.  
Front row: Zach Rayment (left) and Liam Marriage*

**Whether you're an aspiring athlete or an experienced competitor, Variety Village offers exceptional opportunities to unlock your potential. Train in a world-class environment, learn from dedicated coaches, and join a vibrant community that shares your passion for parasport.**

**For more information on sports or teams, contact Archie Allison, Director of Access and Awareness, at Variety Village/Variety the Children's Charity (Ontario) at (416) 699-7167, ext. 236 or [aallison@varietyontario.ca](mailto:aallison@varietyontario.ca). To learn more visit [varietyontario.ca](http://varietyontario.ca).**





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1. Hollister Clinical Study, CLR-00847, 2021 2. Hollister Clinical Study, CLR-00847, 2021 3. Hollister Data on File, TR-00643, 2023 4. European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN), Evidence-based Guidelines for Best Practice in Urological Health Care – Catheterisation, Urethral Intermittent in Adults Dilatation, urethral intermittent in adults (2013), pages 25, 33, 47 5. Hollister Data on File, CL-001027 6. Hollister Data on File, CL-001015 7. European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN), Evidence-based Guidelines for Best Practice in Urological Health Care –Catheterisation, Urethral Intermittent in Adults Dilatation, urethral intermittent in adults (2013), pages 25, 33, 47 8. Hollister Data on file, CL-001017



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Para  
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# BLAZING NEW TRAILS for Cross-Country Skiers with Disabilities

By Jeff Tiessen, PLY

*Para Nordic skiing is the collective name for two different parasport disciplines: para biathlon and para cross-country skiing. It is all about fitness and style.*

Ontario's Para Nordic Program provides youth and adults with various types of physical disabilities with recreational and competitive opportunities. Skiers with lower body disabilities might use a sit-ski. Categories also include standing skiing for athletes with disabilities such as vision loss or limb loss for example.

For para biathlon, it's all about alternating physical endurance and shooting accuracy. Athletes with vision loss are assisted by a guide skier and acoustic signals when shooting which indicate when the athlete is on target.

Yet, the course is not the most significant challenge that Ontario's para nordic skiers have faced in recent years. The biggest barrier has arguably been the lack of availability of quality adaptive sport equipment. That shortage has been identified as not only a barrier to competition, but also to participation and development of para nordic participants and athletes.

But thanks to a grant from Canadian Tire's Jumpstart, Cross Country Ski Ontario's Para Nordic program has acquired a new inventory of equipment available for rent to ski clubs across the province for para nordic members. Equipment includes sit/kneel-skis and dryland roller sit/kneel-skis for use on various terrain from paved roads to gravel trails. The equipment is designed to be extremely adaptable to suit multiple levels of disability.

Huntsville's John Cowan is the chairperson of Cross Country Ski Ontario's Para Nordic committee and explains that building capacity across the province is a priority for the organization. "Part of that is identifying or developing community leaders



throughout the province," he shares. "A lot of clubs just don't have the tools to be able to support sit-skiers or skiers with vision loss even with the equipment. But it was a cart-before-the-horse situation for us. We had programming but not enough equipment. We needed the equipment to do the programming."

Cowan appreciates Jumpstart's supportive response. "The Jumpstart group saw the vision for building a provincial program and not just catering to one or two athletes in the province," he says.

With the equipment, clubs can build capacity. Cross Country Ski Ontario (XCSO) ships the equipment to clubs as requested. "Right now, we have sit-skis in Ottawa, Orangeville, Huntsville, Peterborough, and Sault Ste. Marie, with some going to Thunder Bay too."

According to Cowan, another gap for para nordic participants is skill progression. So, he and several other coaches in the province took the initiative of designing a program for clubs called the Eagle Para Nordic Skills Development Program.

The Eagle Para program runs parallel or is integrated into established Jack Rabbit and Bunny Rabbit programs. "This is a big piece in getting kids with disabilities onto the snow for the same experiences as their classmates," enthuses Cowan, a retired teacher. "That common bridge helps strengthen communities too." The program's lesson plans provide instructors who may not have any experience facilitating people with disabilities with understandings about different types of disabilities and the confidence to work with them.

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***"How cool is that for an athlete to now be able to say, 'I can do this activity for life'?"***

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XCSO also offers Try-It Days to member clubs and partner organizations for inclusive opportunities to try cross-country skiing in a supported and safe environment. Clubs are provided with a resource tool kit and the equipment needed for participants with a disability. "Building exposure and awareness is important," Cowan comments. "That's when someone says 'Hey, I can do that too!', which I know plays a big part in participation for someone with a disability... seeing others do it."

Cowan's vision for para nordic sport is all about paving more pathways for participation. "If a young enthusiast has a ski club in their community, great! But if they don't, is there a high school program that supports them? Because, now, OUA [Ontario University Athletics] has para nordic categories happening, so athletes can continue their athletic pathway after high school. This year, for the first time, the World University Games included para nordic and para alpine. How cool is that for an athlete to now be able to say, 'I can do this activity for life?'"

**For clubs wanting a Para Nordic Try-It Day, or to rent equipment, contact XCSO's Para Nordic Lead, Jen Niesen, at [para@xcskiontario.ca](mailto:para@xcskiontario.ca). For a list of para nordic clubs visit <https://parasportontario.ca/clubs/nordic-skiing-clubs>.**



## Arrowhead Park Pilots Canada's First Eagle Para Program

Adapted from an article by John Cowan  
Cross Country Ski Ontario



At the start of last year's ski season, Arrowhead Provincial Park hosted Canada's first pilot project for Nordiq Canada, integrating a Para Nordic Skills Development Program called the Eagle Para Program.

The Eagle Para program was developed to give children with disabilities, including wheelchair users, amputees and youth with vision loss, an opportunity to learn the skills to become competent and confident in skiing on trails around the Huntsville-area park. The four-week program began with a general information session and sizing of equipment before the first on-snow exercise.

The equipment was provided by Cross Country Ski Ontario, awarded to the provincial sport organization by Canadian Tire Corporation.

A Jumpstart grant supported the purchase of a fleet of both dryland and on-snow adaptive ski equipment... seated and kneeling, with customizable features to support the unique needs of each participant. The dryland sit-skis are equipped with wheels that are similar to a mountain board, and bicycle hand brakes.

Arrowhead also hosted the first integrated Coaching with a Disability program with the Community Coach

stream. Three-time Canada Winter Games para nordic medalist Tanya Quesnel worked with the para participants. Tanya is certified through the National Coach Certification Program, trained in participant development for athletes with a disability.

Program participants completed the first two levels of the Para Nordic Skills Development Program and look to continue to build their skills and even try some racing at local-level events this season.

Arrowhead Provincial Park is the first park to identify Para Nordic ski trails on the official trail map and to place trail signs at a lower height for sit-skiers to follow. As a result of the Eagles Para program, Ontario Parks purchased sit-skis for rent for this year's ski season. The park has a long tradition of offering rental sledges for its ice-skating trails and hosted the inaugural Ontario Para Winter Games in 2006.

The Eagle program was supported by the Arrowhead Nordic Ski Club, Arrowhead Provincial Park, and One Kids Place, a regional children's rehabilitation centre. Dana Murdy, pharmacist and owner of the Huntsville Shoppers Drug Mart, sponsored the inaugural Eagle Para program.





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# Para Nordic FAQs

With Patti Kitler  
Kivi Nordic Coach

**Q: How do I prepare for the cold?**

**A:** A lot of people with disabilities don't believe that they can cross-country ski. They get nervous about getting too cold. So, we start in May to build endurance and immune systems first so when winter comes they've already adapted to cold weather. We have a routine, training twice a week, either on roller skis or on bikes. We have a handcycle for people who use a wheelchair.

**Q: What do I need for equipment and where do I get it?**

**A:** Cross Country Ontario has equipment and will send some to start-up groups. So, if a ski club needed a sit-ski for example, they can contact our lead Jen Nieson (para@xcskiontario.ca) and she would send suitable equipment to try. You can train in the summer, dryland, right on rollers – sit-skis or stand-up skate skiing.

**Q: How do I get started if there isn't a program near me?**

**A:** Find like-minded people and start with dryland training. And contact Jen Nieson.



Photo courtesy of Melissa Lariviere

*Logan Lariviere (back); left to right: Christina Picton, Konan Blaise Koko, Collin Cameron and Patti Kitler, Personal Club Coach*

**Q: Do I need a club affiliation?**

**A:** You have to belong to a club for insurance reasons.

**Q: I need a coach and my club doesn't have one for para nordic. What do I do?**

**A:** We have a coach in southern Ontario, Perry Sakki, who travels to athletes or meets them halfway. We have a video from a few years ago and there's a free video analysis program called Onform. Anyone can put a video of themselves training or skiing on Onform and it evaluates technique to help them, and sends info back to them. If you join Onform, you can see video from other people who invite others to watch.

**Q: I want to get into para nordic skiing. What advice do you have for me?**

**A:** My favourite saying is, "Try it. You'll like it." Come on out. We'll start one-on-one at the beginning. We'll fit you with equipment. We slowly work on your comfort with us, because that's how it should be. It can't be, "I'm the leader and I'm telling you what to do." That just intimidates people. We nurture. Ask yourself, like we ask newcomers, "How do I feel and what do I think?" It's important to be as comfortable as possible before you try cross-country ski racing.





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



Photo courtesy Canadian Paralympic Committee

# ROB SNOEK

*When the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television handed out its 2024 Screen Awards for News, Entertainment and Sports, Rob Snoek was among the award-winners. He was presented with the Best Sports Play-by-Play Announcer for his work with the CBC, namely at the Paralympic and Olympic Games.*

Prior to his career behind the microphone, Snoek was a three-time Paralympian, a below-the-knee amputee sprinter at the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Summer Paralympic Games. After his retirement from competitive sport, the Orono, Ont.-native moved into broadcasting as a play-by-play announcer for Ontario Hockey League games, first for the Oshawa Generals and later, the Peterborough Petes.

Snoek retired from track and field athletics in 2001 and went on to play two seasons for the national amputee hockey team, competing in two World Championships. Snoek joined the CBC's Olympic team in 2002, covering both Olympic and Paralympic events ever since. He was inducted into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame in 2017.

When asked, "How has your disability impacted your participation in sport or recreation?" Snoek replied: "It opened doors. Growing up, I felt like the best I could do was high-end recreation if I stayed in the able-bodied world. And when I competed in parasport, for athletes with a disability, the goal was the Paralympics. It isn't for everybody, but it was for me. My disability no longer hindered me from what I wanted to do in sport. I was never going to be a football player, or anything like that, but I'd never aspired to anything like that."



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