

ParaSport[®]

MAGAZINE

SPRING/SUMMER 2025



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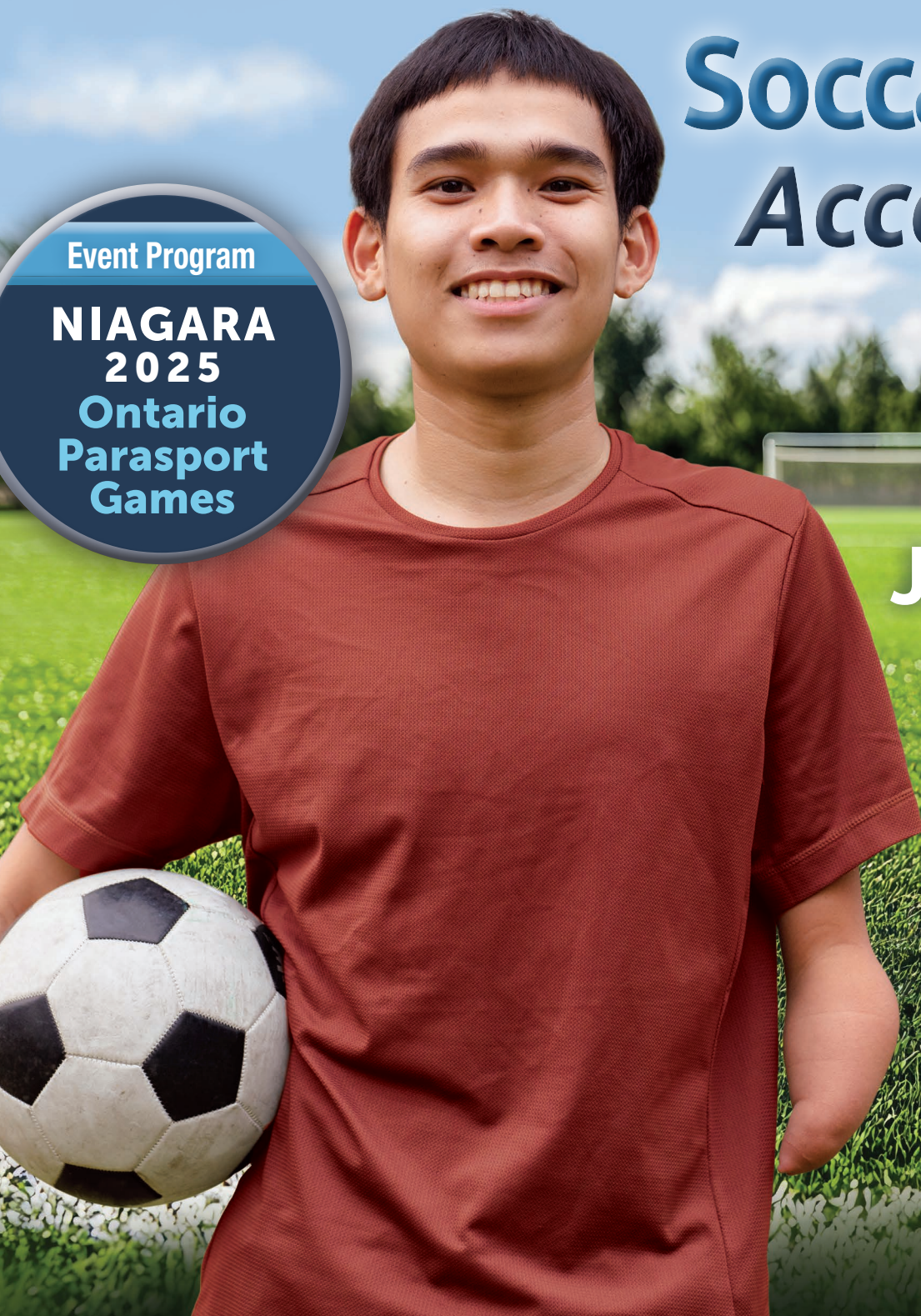
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WELCOME

From Playground to Podium

What we must all understand and appreciate, disability (in all its forms) is the only minority group that anyone can join at any given time across their lifespan. This is one of many reasons why accessibility and inclusion practices should continue to be implemented and supported by everyBODY in all communities and municipalities.

This starts with accessible play spaces, playgrounds, community centres, and all fields of play so people of all abilities can participate without barriers.

Youth and adults, who may be wheelchair users for example, should always be able to find accessible play spaces to participate with friends and family. This will help to improve physical literacy, and continue with adapted physical activity to improve quality of life and well-being.



This is why it is so important for the organizations that plan and build these physical spaces to include people with disabilities in planning councils and decision making. This will ensure that new or renovated spaces meet current AODA standards for accessibility and inclusion.

In this issue of ParaSport magazine, we feature several organizations that are great examples of holding true to these standards and principles for accessibility when supporting and building new spaces for people with disabilities. This advocacy will have a sustainable impact for everyone to feel included in their community, reducing the all too frequent barriers to participation.

As we aim to continually improve and create more accessible and inclusive play spaces, it is our hope that this becomes the new normal for design, budgeting, and development for people with disabilities to be able to participate and feel included. This should then translate to a more active disability community, taking part in more adapted sports and recreation.

We also need to support and ensure parallel increases in adapted programming and positive first point of contact for people with disabilities. Starting with grassroots participation and the creation of more consistent pathways for competition and development, over time, more people with disabilities will showcase what is possible when and if they aspire to compete at higher levels. A great example of this is the **2025 Ontario ParaSport Games** hosted by Sport Niagara through the Ministry of Sport's Games Unit. Hosting opportunities to showcase excellence for Ontario's para-athletes is always needed, to continue on their parasport pathway and achieve planned milestones.

And importantly too, parasport opportunities provide athletes with confidence and transferable skills for success in whatever their life goals may be around work, family and friends throughout their lifetime.

James Murphy

Executive Director, ParaSport® Ontario

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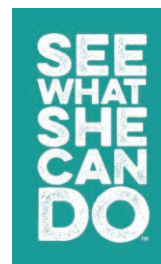
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RENOWNED PARALYMPIANS ANNOUNCE RETIREMENTS

Wheelchair rugby stalwart Mike Whitehead has retired after nearly a quarter century in the sport. Whitehead, 49, earned two silver medals and a bronze over six Paralympic Games (2004 - 2024). He also competed at six World Championships (one gold, one silver and two bronze) and three Parapan Am Games (one gold, two silver).

"It was on my mind, and in my heart for a couple years," said Whitehead, injured in a car crash in 1999 at age 24. "The last few years my body was like, 'hey you know, I've been good to you'... but playing with the best in the world for 24 years, I started to feel the toll," Whitehead explains. "I'm just a small-town kid from Ontario (Harrow, near Windsor), who saw the world after falling in love with wheelchair rugby at my very first practice," he adds.

Equally notable is the news of the retirement of Patrick Anderson, considered to be the greatest wheelchair basketball player that the sport has ever known. After a storied four decades representing Team Canada, including six Paralympic Games, Anderson has officially retired from the Senior Men's National Team.

"Patrick not only elevated wheelchair basketball to new heights but has also inspired countless individuals around the world," stated Wendy Gittens, Wheelchair Basketball Canada CEO. "Patrick's retirement signals

the close of a transformative chapter, but his legacy will continue to inspire athletes for generations."

Anderson, 45, is a three-time Paralympic gold medalist (2000, 2004, 2012) and a 2008 silver medalist. Most recently, he represented Canada at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, playing a key role in the team's best finish in 12 years.

Born in Edmonton and raised in Fergus, Ontario, Anderson discovered wheelchair basketball after a life-changing accident in 1989 that resulted in the loss of both legs below the knee. Anderson's journey in the sport began with the Twin City Spinners. He made his international debut with Canada's Junior National Team, leading the squad to back-to-back Under-23 World Championship titles in 1997 and 2001 – earning tournament MVP honours on both occasions.

At the collegiate level, he was a standout for the University of Illinois from 1998 to 2001, capturing three national titles. His professional career took him around the world, competing in leagues in Australia, Germany and Türkiye. He led German club RSV Lahn-Dill to three consecutive European Champions Cups. He also played eight seasons with the New York Rolling Knicks, winning four National Championships.

Photos courtesy of Canadian Paralympic Committee





DURHAM COLLEGE SERVES UP CANADIAN FIRST

A quick look back at what has cultivated the parasport landscape and a few areas shine as catalysts for growth. The first was the leadership of the late Dr. Robert Jackson who returned from a medical internship at England's Stoke Mandeville Hospital with a desire to create competitive athletic opportunities for persons with disabilities similar to what he had witnessed in England.

Competitive games quickly developed for athletes with spinal cord injuries, vision loss, amputations and cerebral palsy. In 1976, with Montreal as the host of the Olympic Games, Jackson led the 1976 Toronto Olympiad for the Physically Disabled, the precursor to the Paralympic Games.

Toronto Sun sports editor George Gross reported on the Toronto Olympiad sharing the excellence he saw on the track, on courts and in the pool. His portrayals of athleticism prompted enthusiastic support for para-athletes from Reg Bovaird, Robert Hall and Jack Donohue who together, initiated the building of Variety Village, a centre for parasport excellence.

There are many commonalities in the successful efforts of other parasport visionaries like the Northern Lights club in Alberta, the Defi Sportif in Quebec, and many others all across the country. And parasport continues to be re-innovated by leaders of today.

The Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA), in partnership with ParaSport® Ontario, has buoyed development in the sport of sitting volleyball. Thanks to Kerish Maharaj and James Murphy, respectively, more than 3,000 newcomers

to the sport have played the game in the last year alone, with more than 20 teams participating in tournament play.

History repeats itself. A first-ever event recently came to be thanks to Rotary President Danielle Harder, a journalist and professor as well, when she introduced Durham College's Athletic Director Scott Dennis to Joe Millage, ParaSport Ontario's former Board Chair. Dennis was extremely receptive to the proposition of Durham College (and adjoining Ontario Tech University) including sitting volleyball at the 2025 Women's Canadian Volleyball Championships this past March. In addition, both institutions would develop extramural sitting volleyball teams and encourage other post-secondary schools to do the same.

Humber College was quick to reply. The University of Toronto followed. Then students from Toronto Metropolitan University and Queens University confirmed interest.

OVA was committed, providing tournament expertise, technical support, equipment, referees and players. In fact, Louis-Pierre Mainville, OVA's Director of Sport Development and Technology, and former Team Canada athlete, took to the seated version of the game and played in the event.

At the event's Closing Ceremony, it was proudly announced that Ontario would make Canadian history as the first province to create a Team Ontario sitting volleyball program, providing advanced development for players striving to earn a spot on the National Team. The task now turns to continued growth at the college and university level.

Three of a Kind and a Full House

The title reads like a poker game and when Paralympic bronze medalist Jolan Wong leads a project, it's a safe bet that it'll be a winner.

Wong had a vision to create a sitting volleyball program in Renfrew County. She recruited teachers Angela Bergeron and Damian Solar to host an event that would see nearly 300 Grade 7 and 8 students, 24 Grade 10 student referees and a strong contingent of teachers, support staff and community sponsors come together for a tournament that would put Pembroke, Ont., on the map as the capital of inclusive sport in 2025.

This project also received support from the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA), ParaSport® Ontario and the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, particularly Minister Raymond Cho, MPP.

"When opportunities arise, the Ontario Volleyball Association will do all it can to support growth and awareness of programs that enrich life experiences through volleyball," said OVA's Kerish Maharaj. "In the past six years our partnership with ParaSport Ontario has expanded inclusion and accessibility, and leaders like James Murphy, Joe Millage and Jolan Wong have influenced development on many levels," added Maharaj.

Wong, who lives in Petawawa, has a long-standing relationship with ParaSport Ontario, teaching and engaging communities in Niagara, Toronto, Ottawa and Renfrew County. She's been heralded as the world's best Libero and was a member of the women's team that earned Canada its first-ever sitting volleyball Paralympic medal in Paris in 2024.



Wheelchair Basketball Learning Hub

Wheelchair Basketball Canada (WBC) offers a comprehensive suite of in-house e-learning resources designed to enhance technical knowledge and foster greater involvement in the sport, across the country and beyond. WBC's educational resources are accessible to everyone, encouraging individuals to learn, play and share – everywhere. Visit wheelchairbasketball.ca to access WBC's resource library and elevate your game as a player, coach or official.



FAYE Blackwood

A STORIED CAREER

By Nicole Dunn
*Manager, Sport Programs Unit
Ministry of Sport*



It is with a mix of admiration and heartfelt gratitude that we [Ministry of Sport] announce the retirement of Faye Blackwood after 21 years of service. Faye is a distinguished figure in the world of athletics and coaching, and her career has been marked by extraordinary achievements and unwavering dedication to sport and her athletes.

Faye Blackwood's journey in athletics began at the University of Waterloo. During her collegiate career, she won six OUAA gold medals and eight silver medals in events ranging from the 50m to the 300m. She was a member of the Canadian national athletics team from 1983 to 1987. In 1986, she represented Canada at the Commonwealth Games and became the Indoor and Outdoor National Champion in the 60m and 100m hurdles.

Faye began working with athletes with disabilities as a coach in the mid-1980s at Variety Village. Faye's innovative coaching techniques helped her athletes achieve remarkable success. Her career includes staff coach positions at multiple World Championships and Paralympic Games from 1992 to 1996. She was rewarded with the 3M Coaching Award, Ontario Female Coach of the Year, and the Wittnauer Coaching Excellence Award.

Her contributions to athletics extended beyond coaching, as she took on various roles including Manager of Paralympic Programs for Athletics Canada before joining the Ministry's Sport Division as a Sport Consultant. She is also a certified Paralympic Physical Impairments classifier for athletics. Faye was honoured earlier this year in the House of Commons in Ottawa as part of Black Leaders in Sports Day.

Faye's legacy is one of kindness, inclusivity, and inspiration. Her impact on the lives of her athletes and the broader sports community is immeasurable.



LACROSSING BARRIERS

By Daniel Vieira



What started out as a six-week program with eight participants quickly grew to multiple programs in Alberta. Backed by funding from Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, Lacrossing Barriers was brought to Ontario with programs now in Oakville, Grimsby, Ottawa, Peterborough, Orillia and Scarborough.

Lacrossing Barriers was launched in 2018 by Scott Godfrey, a former Program Coordinator with the Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary. Godfrey was leading adaptive and inclusive sport programming when he conceived the idea of adapted lacrosse. With over 50 years of experience in lacrosse as a player and a coach, from grassroots to professional levels, he was thrilled to open up Canada's national summer sport to people of all abilities. Add to that, his late daughter Megan was a wheelchair user who loved the sport.

Combining wheelchair users with ambulatory athletes playing together in the same program, Lacrossing Barriers modifies the sport to allow for everyone to play on an equal playing field. "The program is centred around learning skills through having fun," says Godfrey.

As Godfrey grows Lacrossing Barriers across Canada, he hopes to eventually have mixed ability teams and wheelchair teams compete internationally. "But first," Godfrey explains, "we need to develop the passion for wheelchair lacrosse and recruit players to participate before we compete." For more information, visit lacrossingbarriers.org, or hashtag #yeswecan.



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20 Years of Jumpstart

The Measure of a Mission

By Jeff Tiessen, PLY

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities has been a cornerstone of youth support in Canada for precisely two decades. From its humble beginnings 20 years ago, Jumpstart, as it's known to most, is celebrating its milestone anniversary and immense influence on Canadian communities with the humility that is rooted in the values it shares with iconic partner, the Canadian Tire Corporation.

"We are not a boastful organization, neither the corporation nor Jumpstart," emphasizes Marco Di Buono, President of Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. "We're quite humble in our approach," Di Buono adds, which mirrors its early days in fact, a quiet endeavor that materialized in one community at a time by Canadian Tire dealers willing to champion the initiative. The charity, in its fledgling

years, was just trying to reach as many kids as it possibly could.

More than twenty years ago Martha Billes – the daughter of one of the two founding brothers of Canadian Tire over 100 years ago and still the controlling shareholder of the corporation – enlisted her son Owen, an associate dealer in Welland, Ont., to join her in developing the idea for Jumpstart.

Prior to 2005, when Jumpstart was formally established, the corporation supported a separate entity called the Foundation for Families which had a much broader mandate in supporting kids and communities. With a more focused vision, Billes and her son convened a group of stakeholders, mostly from the Niagara Region, to imagine how sport itself could serve as a powerful vehicle in youth development.

The troupe tested the idea of helping kids from underprivileged backgrounds access free sport and recreation programming. The positive impact of that foresight was quickly realized and so was Jumpstart Charities with its tight affiliation, by design, with Canadian Tire Corporation.

"Martha being the great advocate that she is," Di Buono explains, "is still the catalyst that encourages corporate leaders to fully embrace Jumpstart." Canadian Tire's current president Greg Hicks is no exception. "Greg makes it a personal and organizational priority that Jumpstart is the North Star for the corporation to ensure that we are making life better for Canadians from coast to coast to coast."

Fast forward to today... this past year alone, Jumpstart invested \$30 million into sport, physical activity and recreation programming for children and youth with disabilities and from underprivileged backgrounds across Canada. The total number of children and youth impacted by participating in sport and recreation provided through Jumpstart programs tops four million as the charity crosses the 20-year-mark, including 39,000 youth with disabilities in Ontario over the last two years.

Add to that, Jumpstart has proven itself to be a trusted ally to decision-makers within the sport system, including government and sport and

community leaders.

"What's most important to the organization today is making sure that children and youth are at the center of every decision we make," Di Buono qualifies. "We are constantly and continuously seeking input from the kids we serve. Our State of Play Survey has already collected the voices of 3,000 youth across the country to understand what they want to do, why they're motivated to do what they do, what they wish they could do, and why they're not able to do it."

Stuart McReynolds, Associate Vice President, Programs & Advocacy at Jumpstart, expands on that precept in sharing that the charity is also determined to use sport to unlock the potential of children and youth. "We want to make sure that Canada is raising generations of happy, healthy and productive children and youth," maintains McReynolds. "And quite frankly, there isn't any better vehicle to do that with than sport."

McReynolds's work in accessibility and sports over the last 20 years of his career has spotlighted, for him, the need for system change. "If we want

to remove barriers at the community level, if we want to drive more investment, if we want to drive more impact, we have to be able to do that from a position of influence."

In McReynolds's opinion, Jumpstart is one of the best-positioned organizations to do that with its influence and engagement with communities across Canada. "I know first-hand how tough it is on the front lines, delivering programs, raising funds," he tells. "Part of my responsibility at Jumpstart is to engage with leaders across the country to make the process easier, and to make sure that we can leverage Jumpstart's resources and networks to drive more resources to the areas where they are needed most."

One of Jumpstart's foremost strengths is its close connection to



STATE OF PLAY SURVEY In partnership with Project Play, Jumpstart is conducting a nationwide survey of youth ages 8 - 18 to ensure that every Canadian youth has access to quality sport opportunities. Insights from the survey will help Jumpstart make sure its work reflects the interests and needs of the kids it supports. Visit <https://jumpstart.canadiantire.ca> to have your voice heard!

community. "It really matters to us," emphasizes Di Buono. McReynolds agrees. "As we navigate the economic headwinds around us, we want to make sure that we can continue to provide support where and when community organizations need it," he says. "We're constantly engaging in consultation with community partners to identify needs, and design programs and granting frameworks to meet them. It's also about measuring impact," he adds. "Are we driving change? Are we removing barriers that were identified in those consultations? It's not an exact science by any means, but that close connection to communities is what matters most for the charity."

How Jumpstart measures that impact is very diversified. It starts with how the charity comes to market. "We don't offer one type of grant or investment," McReynolds explains. "We have program grants, operational grants, infrastructure-related grants... we look at impact holistically, and in terms of the results or outcomes that individuals want to see through participation in sport."

This year, Jumpstart is projecting to impact over 500,000 children and youth across the country, driven by its team of relationship managers in communities in every province. "Our managers are our 'boots-on-the-ground'," describes Di Buono, "to ensure that the groups that can benefit from Jumpstart funding are

aware of it, and have access to our tools and volunteers through our relationship with Canadian Tire."

Many milestones are being celebrated by the charity this year as its team, partners and beneficiaries reflect on Jumpstart's journey to 20 years. That includes the monumental \$50 million commitment to the Inclusive Play program. But for both Di Buono and McReynolds, what moves them the most is the personal experiences of witnessing the Jumpstart mission in play, in real-time.

"One particular moment that I'll never forget," starts Di Buono, "happened when we were opening up one of our first inclusive playgrounds... a 15,000-square-foot space we built in Calgary. After the ribbon cutting and the fanfare and the speeches, I noticed a young boy sitting in front of the ASL panel that was part of this playground. He was teaching himself sign language. I was overcome with emotion in that moment. It dawned on me that we were creating spaces that were not just about accessibility, but truly about inclusion."

Says McReynolds, "soon after I joined Jumpstart I met a young man who was with one of our partner organizations that was requesting an investment in power wheelchairs for powerchair soccer. Unfortunately, a lot of children, particularly those with complex disabilities, don't have access to equipment that enables them to participate in sport. When kids use their everyday powerchairs

for sport and they break down, they're not able to leave the house or go to school. This young man articulated this need so professionally and passionately. His advocating for our investment in him and his community was just remarkable. For me, personally, that's an investment in a young leader, the future of this country."

"There are projects, like the designing of the Inclusive Play program back in 2017, that are important learning experiences for us too," inserts Di Buono. "We engaged with existing partners and some smaller grantees in our network to help us develop the framework. We've put mechanisms in place for a continuous journey through education and learning that is representative of the lived-experiences of participants with disabilities."

Jumpstart intends to leverage the education gleaned from the past two decades to do more with the resources it has at its disposal. "We are forecasting that we'll be able to help as many kids in the next five years as we did in the first 20," Di Buono offers. "Our projection is to reach close to four million kids by 2030."

That said, Di Buono is quick to acknowledge the essential role that Canadian Tire plays in that plan. "We could not do what we do if it wasn't for the commitment of Canadian Tire's senior executives and the 500 dealers across the country who believe in the work that we do and see it manifest in their communities," commends Di Buono. "In my entire career I have never seen this kind of widespread, wholesome adoption within an organization, which gives us the energy and enthusiasm to tackle challenges we see at the community level every day." Another measure of the mission.



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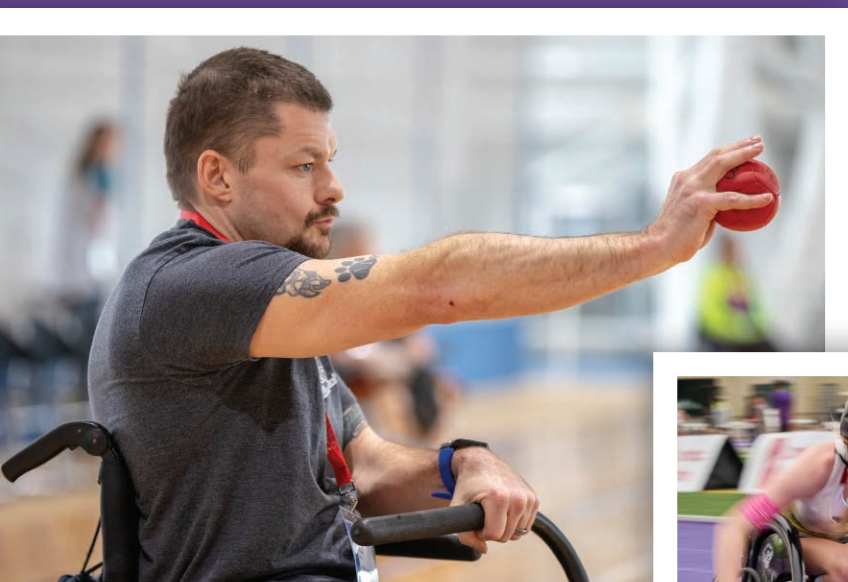
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May 30, 2025

I wish to extend my warmest greetings to everyone involved in the 2025 Niagara Parasport Games.

These Games are a powerful reflection of what we value in Ontario: inclusion, perseverance, and the conviction that every individual deserves the chance to thrive. Events like yours also remind us that sport is about so much more than results; it is about connection, shared purpose, and the sense of belonging that strengthens communities across the province.

To the athletes: your dedication, focus, and passion are truly remarkable. Through your hard work and spirit, you continue to break barriers and inspire others. You are the heartbeat of these Games, and your presence speaks volumes about courage and determination.

To the coaches, volunteers, families, organizers, and supporters—thank you. Your tireless efforts have helped create more than a competition: you have fostered an environment where people come together, where diversity is embraced, and where sport becomes a celebration of inclusion.

À titre de représentante de la Couronne en Ontario, je tiens à souligner la portée de ces Jeux, qui rassemblent des collectivités de tous horizons dans un esprit de respect et de solidarité. Ces rencontres nous rappellent avec force que le sport peut être un véritable vecteur de changement, en favorisant l'émergence de communautés plus ouvertes, bienveillantes et accueillantes, où chacun et chacune a sa place. De tout cœur avec vous!

Salutations distinguées,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edith Dumont".

Edith Dumont



MAY 30 – JUNE 1

*Greetings from the Honourable Neil Lumsden
Minister of Sport*

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, welcome to the Niagara 2025 Ontario Parasport Games!

These Games provide highly skilled athletes with the opportunity to come together and demonstrate their skills in competition with their peers from across our province. This event is sure to thrill spectators of all ages and spread the powerful message of inclusion, celebration and access to sport for all Ontarians.

Our government is proud to support this event through the Games Ontario Program and to welcome visitors from near and far to this spectacular part of our province. While you are here, I encourage you to get out there and explore everything that the beautiful Niagara Region has to offer.

Thank you to Sport Niagara, Brock University, the participating host municipalities in the Niagara Region, and to the organizers and volunteers for your tireless efforts to make these Games a success.

I look forward to seeing you all at the Games!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Neil Lumsden".

The Honourable Neil Lumsden
Minister of Sport

Welcome to Niagara!

It is with great pride and excitement that we welcome all of you – our outstanding athletes, dedicated coaches, supportive families, and enthusiastic fans – to the Niagara 2025 Ontario Parasport Games.

These Games are more than just a competition. It's a celebration of hard work, determination, and the unbreakable spirit of sportsmanship. Each of you has trained tirelessly, pushed limits, and overcome challenges to be here – and for that you should be proud.

This tournament is not just about winning medals or setting records. It's about respect – for the game, for your opponents, and for yourself. It's about building friendships, sharing unforgettable moments, and representing your sport with pride and integrity.

As you take to the ice, court, track, mat, pool, field, or green – remember that every cheer, every effort, and every challenge overcome is a victory in and of itself. Play with heart, compete with honour, and most of all – enjoy every second.

On behalf of Sport Niagara and the organizing committee, we wish each of you the best of luck. May this tournament bring out the best in all of us!

Dan Kennedy
Executive Director
Sport Niagara – Host of the Niagara 2025 Ontario Parasport Games



Nothing for Us Without Us

As a 12-time participant in the Ontario Parasport Games, it was a tremendous honour to lead the Steering Committee for these Games, a group balanced with a wealth of lived-experience and expertise from Niagara's disability community.

My personal mandate as the Chair of the Steering Committee was to ensure athlete representation in all aspects of the event's design, including the Steering Committee, consultants and suppliers.

To this end, we created an Athlete Council, with its members representing different sports and regions of Ontario, to share past Games experiences and make recommendations for the Niagara event... the very first Athlete Council in the Ontario Parasport Games' 44-year-history.

Add to that, the Games website was developed by former para-athlete and multi-time competitor in these Games, Kimberley Barreda. We turned to Paralympic nordic skier Christina Picton and her graphic design company for the medal design. From Niagara-based accessibility consultant Donna Herrington to our exciting line-up of Opening Ceremony performers and presenters with disabilities, our community is equitably represented.

Niagara has such a rich parasport history, and I'm very excited for even more adaptive sport opportunities to come through the creation of the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund and its commitment to the disability community's mantra of "Nothing for Us Without Us" as well!

Jeff Tiessen, PLY
Chair, Games Steering Committee



Games Organizing Committee

The 2025 Ontario Parasport Games was led by Sport Niagara and supported by a Games Steering Committee of enthusiastic community leaders, an Athlete Council and a dedicated volunteer team of Committee Leads, all committed to creating an exceptional games experience for athletes, participants and spectators from across Ontario.

Sport Niagara

Dan Kennedy, Executive Director

With over 30 years of working experience with professional sporting events, including MLB All-Star Games and NFL Super Bowls, Dan leads Sport Niagara, the legacy organization of the Niagara 2022 Canada Games.

Kimberley Barreda, Website Developer

Mathew Milne, Sponsorship & Marketing

Courtney Roffel, Games Project Director

Kevin Tang, Games General Manager

Daniel Vieira, Games Sport Manager

Steering Committee

Jeff Tiessen, PLY, Committee Chair

A three-time Paralympian, gold-medalist and world record holder, Jeff is the founder of Disability Today Publishing Group, Inc. Much of his work is focused on parasport, adapted recreation and physical activity.

Donna Herrington, Accessibility Consultant

As someone living with a disability and over 20 years of experience in senior management and accessibility consulting, Donna leads the Herrington Group – experts in the field of accessibility services.

James Davis, Athlete Council Representative

Co-founder of the Brock Niagara Penguins, “Jim” is a two-time national and provincial boccia champion. With NCCP coaching certifications, Jim is the head coach for three sports with the Penguins – wheelchair basketball, boccia and handcycling.

Dr. Maureen Connolly, Community Relations Consultant

A long-standing Brock University faculty member, Maureen is a Professor of Physical Education and Kinesiology with her life’s work materializing in the Brock-Niagara Centre of Excellence in Inclusive and Adaptive Physical Activity.

James Murphy, Parasport Consultant

James has a diverse background in sport and community partnerships, program leadership, and advocating for the benefits of physical activity and inclusion for everybody. He is the Executive Director of ParaSport® Ontario.

Daniel Vieira, Parasport Consultant

Daniel is the Community Events Manager at ParaSport® Ontario. In that role he facilitated a large-scale activation at the Niagara Parasport Festival, serves as the coordinator for the Niagara Sledge Hockey League, and delivers ParaSport Ontario’s Try-It programming.

Faye Blackwood, Technical Consultant

Faye is an Athletics Classifier and a National Coaching Certification Program Level III coach. An athletics coach for cerebral palsy sports at the provincial and national level, she was a Paralympic Games staff coach from 1992 – 2004.

Gerry McIlhone, Transportation Consultant

The operations superintendent with City of Hamilton Transit, Gerry’s experience with sports events in Niagara includes the 2022 Canada Games, OFSSA Championships and FIBA’s under-18 men’s basketball Americas Championship.

Chris Charlebois, Volunteer Consultant

Chris is COO of Tournkey, a firm that has had a hand in the growth of the sporting landscape across North America for over 20 years. An event professional, Chris has built digital products and services for large-scale, sporting events and conferences.



Volunteer Lead Chairs

Amanda Benitez, Special Events

Alyssa Benitez, Medical

Brett Farrelly, Volunteers

Lucas Ferrante, Accommodations

Donna Herrington, Accessibility

Andrew Meloche, Food Services

Phoebe Miksic, Marketing/Communications

Carol Phillips, Administration and Registration

Carson Terry, Logistics and Transportation

Athlete Council

Jim Davis, Co-Chair (Niagara)
Boccia, Coach – Brock Niagara Penguins

Daniel Vieira, Co-Chair (Hamilton)
Community Events Manager, ParaSport® Ontario

John Azlen (Windsor)
Wheelchair Basketball, Rose City Riot – President and Founder

Nasif Chowdhury (Waterloo/Toronto)
Wheelchair Basketball – U23 Men's Team, National Sitting Volleyball Team

Ashlee Dag (Niagara)
Karate, Committee Member – Centre for Adaptive Physical Activity

Sheena Darnley (Niagara)
Para Ice Hockey – Women's National Team

Tiffany Gaudette (Mississauga)
Athletics – Mississauga Cruisers

Joshua Gautier (Niagara)
Boccia – Brock Niagara Penguins, Team Ontario

Hisham Mohammad (Hamilton)
Wheelchair Tennis – internationally-ranked

Brice Parker (London)
Goalball – London Phantoms

Hilary Scanlon (Peterborough)
Blind Soccer – Team Captain, National Women's Team

Jolan Wong (Pembroke/Petawawa)
Sitting Volleyball – 2024 Paralympic Games Bronze Medalist

Ministry of Sport Representatives

Josée Matte
Lead Program Consultant

Sarah Smith
Program Consultant

Rayann D'Aguiar
Program Officer

OLG is a proud sponsor of the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games, celebrating the strength and determination of every participant.

Let's unite in the spirit of inclusivity and empowerment – because every game is an opportunity to inspire and be inspired.



BRING Home THE WIN

Play Smart



The Games Story

For the first time in the 44-year-history of the Ontario Parasport Games, it is the Niagara Region that welcomes athletes, managers, coaches, officials, and volunteers to this prestigious provincial event.

Sport Niagara, the not-for-profit organization established to carry on the sport legacy from the Niagara-hosted 2022 Canada Games, was thrilled to be selected as the host of 2025 Ontario Parasport Games. Sport Niagara is utilizing sporting facilities across the Niagara region for the Games, including Canada Games Park and Brock University in Thorold, Cardinal Lakes Golf Club in Welland, and Port Colborne's Vale Health and Wellness Centre.

The Niagara 2025 Ontario Parasport Games was made possible with funding and support from the Government of Ontario and Sport Niagara. "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 provide a significant impact for the local economy... and inspire a new generation of athletes."

"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."

The Ontario Parasport Games were first delivered in 1975 by the City of Cambridge. Since then, the Games have grown to a record-setting number of over 500 participants competing in 11 sports here at the 2025 edition in Niagara. The last Ontario Parasport Games were held in Durham in 2023.

Sport Niagara's mission is to support sporting events in Niagara, as a partner or host, and promote sport through various programs focused on advancing high-performance and community sport. For more information, visit sportniagara.ca.

Games Ontario is a brand under the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Sport. The 2025 Ontario Parasport Games are supported by the Ontario Government through its Games Ontario program. This program delivers and supports multi-sport events, including the Ontario Winter and Summer Games for youth, the Ontario 55+ Winter and Summer Games and the Ontario Parasport Games.

To learn more about the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games, visit niagara2025ontarioparasportgames.ca.

Thank-You to Our Sponsors

The Games Organizing Committee extends our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the sponsors of Niagara's 2025 Ontario Parasport Games.

Your generous support has made these Games possible and demonstrates a powerful commitment to inclusion, accessibility, community spirit, and to our athletes and volunteers.



SPORTS PROGRAM & PROFILES



5-A-SIDE SOCCER

The rules of 5-a-side soccer are similar to the rules in indoor soccer with a few distinct modifications: the ball is audible and makes noise when it moves; the four outfield players are legally blind and wear eyeshades while the goalkeeper is fully sighted and also acts as a guide for players in their defensive zone. In the attacking zone, a Goal Guide helps direct the attackers towards the net. Ontario Soccer is the recognized governing body for the sport of 5-a-Side Soccer in Ontario. [Learn more at ontariosoccer.net](https://ontariosoccer.net).

BOCCIA

Boccia is a sport originally designed for those with severe cerebral palsy, but is now enjoyed by athletes with various disabilities. It's a co-ed game of control and accuracy, similar to curling, where players propel balls towards a target, or "jack" ball – the closest ball to the jack scores. Players can throw, roll, kick, or use a ramp and/or head pointer if needed. Played indoors, boccia demands precision, focus and coordination and strategy. The Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association is the governing body in Ontario. [Learn more at ocpsa.com](https://ocpsa.com).



Jean-Baptiste Benavent © Défi sportif AlterGo 2024

Paving a Path for Parasport Athletes

JOSHUA GAUTIER doesn't hesitate when naming his most memorable parasport moment. It was winning gold at the Canadian Boccia Championships last year. "This was my first individual medal at the national championships and it took a lot of hard work and perseverance to get there!" he explains. "I am very proud of this accomplishment!"

Gautier is also committed to encouraging the development of his sport in Ontario. The Niagara resident is doing that as a high-performance athlete and as a member of the Athlete Council for the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games. "I am very excited that the games are coming to Niagara. I've always looked forward to competing at the Ontario Parasport Games which is a great showcase of Ontario athletes and parasports."

Competitive by nature, is how Gautier describes himself. "I hold myself to a high standard," he shares. "If I set a goal, I give it 100 percent. I've experienced a lot of challenges in my life, and I know that it's essential to adapt to the challenges that I encounter. There is

always a path forward", he maintains. "It just might not be the one that you first anticipated."

Gautier has set his sights on representing Team Ontario again, and defending his gold medal at the 2025 Canadian Boccia Championships. Off of the boccia court, Gautier is passionate about collecting hockey cards, a hobby he thoroughly enjoys as a self-professed all-around sports fan.

NIAGARA 2025

PARA KARATE

Para karate is focused on developing the ancient discipline of “kata” – Japanese word meaning “form” – for wheelchair athletes, visually impaired athletes and athletes with intellectual disabilities. Kata refers to a choreographed pattern of martial arts movements. Karate Ontario is the governing body for para karate in Ontario. Learn more at karateontario.ca.



Para-Karate Athlete is Energized by Accessibility

St. Catharines’s **ASHLEE DAG** will never forget her first karate tournament. “I felt so accepted,” she remembers. “As a power wheelchair-user I’m the only seated karate athlete in my region. And I won two bronze medals in that tournament.”

Her second tournament, the Nationals this past November, rewarded her with a gold medal for her Kata. “I have never won in any sport in my life,” she shares. “It was so sweet.”

Her parasport success has not been without its challenges. The most difficult perhaps, was finding a wheelchair-accessible dojo. “I started in karate over twenty years ago but was never thrilled about the number of stairs that I had to climb up. And my Sensei was not educated about disability at all.”

After a twenty-year break from the sport, Dag is back. Much has changed as her renewed enthusiasm for karate will attest. “Fast forward twenty years and my Sensei is amazing,” she touts. “She will go to the ends of the earth to make sure I can take part in the tournaments, making sure that they are accessible. I have found my sport again and I love it.”

With her fresh zest for her sport, Dag has reset her parasport goals. “I want my 2nd degree black belt, and I want to have my own dojo that caters to athletes with autism and athletes with medically-complex disabilities like myself. This is a way of giving back to something that has given me so much in just one short year.”

Dag serves on the Brock-Niagara Centre of Excellence in Inclusive & Adaptive Physical Activity Committee as well as volunteering her expertise to the Athlete Council for the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games.



WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

The sport has various clubs and programs for youth and adults available throughout the province. Wheelchair basketball is a fully inclusive sport, with able-bodied athletes permitted to compete at the provincial level. Mixed-gender teams are also common among club teams. The Ontario Para Network is the governing body for the sport in Ontario. Learn more at onpara.ca.



Medals Make Memories

Medals make for memorable parasport moments. That's certainly the case for Windsor's Rose City Riot wheelchair basketball athlete **JOHN AZLEN** who brought his team to its first Ontario Parasport Games in Mississauga in 2022 to return home with a bronze medal.



Apart from Azlen's individual parasport goals, he's committed to developing upcoming athletes so they too can reach their highest potential. That commitment includes being part of the Athlete Council for the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games in Niagara. "Sports are for the athletes, and it's important that the athletes have input on these events so that we're provided with the amenities we need that might otherwise be overlooked," he says.

For Azlen, a great Games experience also includes athletes from other sports coming together and socializing at the same event. "Parasports create an environment where everyone is welcome, regardless of disability," he asserts. "It's where we are able to try something new without judgment."

Aside from sport, and his day job as a frame specialist in the eyewear industry, Azlen is busy with other interests too, like camping, kayaking and photography.

SPORTS PROGRAM & PROFILES

SITTING VOLLEYBALL

Players must keep contact with the floor at all times except when making a defensive play in the back or front zones. The game is played the same way as traditional volleyball, only the court is smaller and the net lower, which makes for a fun and fast game. The Ontario Volleyball Association is the governing body in Ontario. [Learn more at ontariovolleyball.org](https://ontariovolleyball.org).



NIAGARA 2025

Medalist Jolan Wong

For Paralympian Jolan Wong, the “sense of community” is what makes for a great Games experience. On the heels of returning from the 2024 Paris Paralympics with a bronze medal performance in the women’s sitting volleyball event, her next parasport goal is to achieve another podium finish at the 2028 Paralympics in Los Angeles.

Self-described as optimistic and determined, Wong is a full-time mom of three. She home-schools her children while finding time to be active in her community of Pembroke, Ont., teaching sitting volleyball in schools and public speaking. She has also studied to be a personal fitness trainer.

For Wong, the most challenging part of competing in parasport is the lack of resources and established parasport communities outside of major city centres. But she strives to be part of the solution to that problem by teaching the next generation. “That, and creating inclusive environments where everyone can play, are what I consider to be my best accomplishments in parasport,” explains Wong.

As a member of the inaugural Athlete Council for the Ontario Parasport Games, she joined the advisory team for Niagara’s Ontario Parasport Games to share her experiences and expertise that comes with 16 years as a national team member and three-time Paralympian.

“Sport is sport,” she asserts. “I want people to know that parasport is played in an adaptive way that can include everybody, and not just people with a disability. Every adaptive sport has skills that cross over between the traditional sport and the adaptive sport.”



SPORTS PROGRAM & PROFILES



GOALBALL

From opposite ends of the court, each three-player team takes turns hurling the ball across the court to score into the opposition's nine-metre net. Players wear eyeshades to ensure a level playing field as they listen for the ball, dive to block it, and throw it back. A sport that calls for crowd silence during play, bells in the ball enable players to track it while tactile tape on the floor orientates them to their location on the court. Goalball is specifically designed for athletes with a visual impairment. The Ontario Blind Sports Association is the governing body for the sport in Ontario. Learn more at ontariogoalball.com.

BRICE PARKER Giving Voice to the Silent Sport



Winning gold in an overtime shootout at the 2023 Ontario Paraspport Games stands as Brice Parker's most memorable parasport moment. That makes perfect sense for an athlete who describes himself as confident, optimistic and very goal-oriented.

A goalball player, Parker cherishes the medals he has won but also appreciates the acknowledgements he has received for being a role model for the next generation of athletes with vision loss. Mentorship comes naturally to him. "I love the atmosphere of elite competition and connecting with all types of athletes," he says.

Parker is a member of the Niagara Games' Athlete Council to help, in part, promote the sport of goalball to generate more participants. "Goalball is still an unknown sport to many," he shares. "I want to help grow experiences in parasports for everyone."

An Algonquin College graduate, now working as a registered massage therapist, Parker also loves hiking, baking and playing with his furry babies.

PARAGOLF

Adapted for athletes with a wide range of disabilities, paragolf is played on courses that accommodate diverse needs. Governed by the official rules of golf, paragolf ensures fair and competitive play across all disability categories and celebrates inclusivity and the relentless pursuit of excellence. Golf Ontario is the governing body for the sport in Ontario, in partnership with ParaGolf Ontario. Learn more at golfontario.ca or paragolfontario.ca.



On Course for Greatness

As a self-described “laid-back, keep-it-light, funny guy”, **Ethan Warcop** is pretty serious about his golf game. The 21-year-old from Mississauga is kicking off his fourth competition year in ParaGolf Ontario events this year which will include the Ontario Adaptive Open, Golf Canada All Abilities Open, ParaSport® Ontario’s Para Pro-Am and the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games.

While each of these events has had memorable moments for him, Warcop says it’s the Para Pro-Am that he really looks forward to every year. “It’s always a great experience playing alongside the tournament sponsors, where I can showcase my abilities while having fun, building connections, and helping grow the game!”

Growing the game is something else that Warcop is serious about. “My goal is to help gain enough attention to where paragolf will be added to the Paralympic program like other sports,” he shares. “I want to compete for my country in my sport on the largest stage and hopefully bring home a medal.”

Warcop maintains that the most rewarding part of competing in paragolf events is meeting new people and making friends who share similar challenges and interests. “On top of that,” he adds,

“I’ve had the incredible opportunity to work with companies I never thought I’d ever collaborate with. I’ve been fortunate to represent Titleist for the past few years, and I’m now working with TaylorMade.” It’s been a game-changer for him, he says. “It allows me to pinpoint my focus and enhance my game every day.”

Off the course, a quick trip to a cottage with friends to relax and unwind is something Warcop enjoys too. He works as a film production catering chef, “delivering the best on-set catering to all of the top film productions and events in the Greater Toronto Area,” he states without reservation.

NIAGARA 2025

SPORTS PROGRAM & PROFILES

PARA ICE HOCKEY

Para ice hockey follows the same rules and structure as ice hockey. Players balance on a sledge consisting of a metal frame, “bucket”, and two skate blades. Players manoeuvre using two specially-constructed sticks, each with a pick at one end for propulsion of the sled, and a blade at the other end. The Ontario Hockey Federation is the governing body for the sport, in partnership with the Ontario Sledge Hockey Association. [Learn more at ohf.on.ca](https://ohf.on.ca) or ontariosledge.com.



Team Canada's Sheena Darnley Advocates for All

As someone who has lived with a disability all of her life, Sheena Darnley is very familiar with the challenges that come with being recognized as equal to those without disabilities. “I want those who don't know much about parasport to understand that para-athletes are athletes first and foremost,” she says. “We are hardworking and deserving of all the same benefits that sport affords others.”



Darnley's hard work took her to Norway in 2024 for the World Challenge. She was a member of Canada's Women's Para Ice Hockey Team which returned home with a silver medal. “It was a great opportunity to perform on a global stage and showcase the skills that I've worked so hard to develop,” she shares.

Being named to that team stands as Darnley's greatest athletic accomplishment. Now 18, she's been part of the national team since she was 15 years old. She relishes the chance to play at a highly competitive level and make her country proud. “My number one goal is to become the best para-hockey player I can be. I'd love to compete at the Paralympic level but unfortunately there is a significant amount of gender inequality in my sport,” Darnley reveals. “The Paralympics needs to include a women's team.”

Darnley is a member of the Athlete Council for the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games, a platform she wants to use to “educate all athletes on the diversity of parasport and the joy it brings to countless communities. I want to help create an inclusive, fun environment that is engaging for everyone who is competing,” she adds.

Currently in her last year of high school at Notre Dame College School in Welland, Darnley plans to study accounting at Brock University with her intention of earning a Chartered Professional Accountant degree.

PARA SWIMMING

Para swimming includes 14 officially recognized classifications within the Canadian swimming system. Swimmers with physical impairments compete in classes S1 to S10, visual impairments compete in classes S11, S12 or S13, and swimmers with an intellectual impairment compete in the S14 class. Swim Ontario is the governing body for the sport in Ontario. Learn more at swimontario.com.



Ian Steadman is Doing It Differently

When Ian Steadman takes to the ice at the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games, he'll be competing in his seventh edition of these provincial games. His first was in Huntsville in 2012 where he competed as a swimmer and was an alternate for para ice hockey.

The multi-sport athlete from Campbellville, Ont., now 26, was introduced to sledge hockey when he was just five years old by a therapeutic recreation specialist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto. The centre offered "learn to play" sessions on Saturdays. Two years later, Steadman joined the Mississauga Cruisers and its Junior sledge hockey team and today stills plays with the club on its Intermediate team.

"I've participated in parasports since I was a toddler," says Steadman. "My family gave me opportunities to participate in horseback riding, water sit-skiing, downhill sit-skiing, para-nordic skiing, wheelchair tennis, paragolf, and recently, I tried wheelchair curling. I've competed in high school wrestling and varsity para-rowing too."

But it is para ice hockey and para swimming that has Steadman's full attention right now. One of his most memorable parasport moments came last year at the Ontario Swim Championships when he heard his name announced for breaking a long-standing record in the 100 breaststroke for his classification.

Steadman's long-term parasport goal is to achieve a gold medal at the Paralympic Games one day. But in the short-term, he's intent on breaking more provincial swimming records enroute to qualifying for the national swim championships.

When it comes to challenges associated with parasport, Steadman says that what he finds most difficult is getting people to understand that "parasports are equal to able-bodied sports and take the same, or maybe more, effort to compete at a high-performance level. We just might do sports differently."

He explains that para-athletes not being treated equal to able-bodied athletes can mean not receiving equal training times and the same training environment without restrictions. "There are often less opportunities for para-athletes," Steadman emphasizes. "Personally, I've had coaches who were not enthusiastic about coaching me because of my disability and some lacked knowledge in coaching a para-athlete. That often means lesser expectations for





us compared to able-bodied athletes. And in sports like para ice hockey where there is no classification, the least disabled players qualify for national teams more easily. That limits someone like me with cerebral palsy."

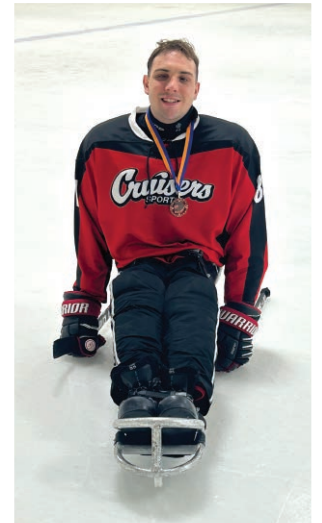
Despite the challenges, the rewards provided by parasport are plentiful for Steadman. "The most rewarding part about competing in parasports for me is participating with teammates... other athletes

with physical disabilities who understand each other. Making new friends is great," he adds, and "the encouragement I get and give is really rewarding too."

Sport has been the theme in Steadman's work and education worlds as well. For more than six years, he has worked as a Sports Monitor for the Town of Milton, overseeing and enforcing rules and safety protocols in recreational programs. This past year, he volunteered with a First Shift hockey program which introduces para ice hockey to physically disabled youths. He has a Sports Administration diploma from Niagara College, and is graduating with a Recreation and Leisure Studies degree from Brock University this year.

"For someone with a disability," Steadman starts, "I'd like them to know that there are many different parasports to participate in. For someone without a disability," he adds, "many parasports can be inclusive and fun for able-bodied athletes, such as sitting volleyball, para ice hockey, tennis and curling."

Steadman sums it up this way: "I would like people to know that parasports are parallel to able-bodied sports, just played differently. Like one of my favourite slogans – the famous Nike slogan "Just Do It" – as I just do everything, but I do it a little bit differently."



GOLF ONTARIO ANNOUNCES
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HOLE 18



CONGRATULATIONS
*to all those
competing at the*

**2025 Ontario
Parasport Games
in Niagara**

*showcasing excellence
from across Ontario!*



PARA ATHLETICS

Para athletics for athletes with physical, intellectual, or vision loss includes running, wheeling, throwing and jumping. Athletes are classified according to their level and type of disability. The rules of Paralympic track and field are almost identical to those for able-bodied athletes with some allowances to accommodate certain disabilities. For example, visually impaired runners compete with a guide runner. Athletics Ontario is the governing body in Ontario, in partnership with the Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association, Ontario Para Network and the Ontario Blind Sports Association. [Learn more at athleticsontario.ca](https://athleticsontario.ca).



Tiffany Gaudette is Passionate About Parasport

Tiffany Gaudette's parasport goals have always focused on having fun doing what she loves to do. Her medals at the Canadian Track and Field Championships

in para-seated field events added to that fun before turning her passion to coaching boccia athletes toward their parasport goals.

Gaudette describes herself as "a compassionate individual who loves to give back to my community." She received her Child and Youth Worker Advance diploma with Honours from Humber College and volunteers with her hometown Cruisers Sports parasport club in Mississauga and the Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association. She says winning gold "on home soil" in Mississauga at the Ontario Parasport Games is her most memorable parasport moment.

Her volunteering extends to the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games as a member of its Athlete Council. "Representation matters," she maintains, "so when I was asked to be an athlete advisor to these Games, it was an absolute 'yes'." The power of parasport brings opportunities to keep fit, heal, build life-skills and be part of an amazing community. I want all of that to be part of the athletes' games experience."

Away from the field of play, Gaudette loves to travel and is an avid reader and gamer.

SPORTS PROGRAM & PROFILES

WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

Just like its able-bodied counterpart, wheelchair tennis requires power, speed, finesse, precision and strategy. It can be played with and against stand-up players. There are no modifications to the court size, and the only rule change is the allowance for a double-bounce before playing the ball. The Ontario Para Network is the governing body in Ontario. [Learn more at onpara.ca](https://onpara.ca).



Coach Paul Rylett is a Niagara Legend

Respect from his players, shares Paul Rylett, was the greatest reward in his 36-year-tenure as coach of the Sport By Ability Niagara Thunderblades sledge hockey team, now the Brock-Niagara Thunderblades.

With recent health problems necessitating Rylett to step away from coaching, his son Kyle has stepped in to take the job. Rylett's foray into para ice hockey – known to many as sledge hockey – began in the late 1980s when he was accompanying his late son Kellan to sledge hockey games. Kellan didn't play, but was accompanying his friend Ryan, who has spina bifida, to sledge sessions.

Rylett was called on to drag hockey bags and lug 25-kg first-iteration sledges from storage to the ice. Then the Thunderblades needed a coach. Rylett sourced a coaching course in Hamilton and volunteered for the job. "I was really the chief cook, bottle washer and coach," he laughs.

Ever unheralded, but never unappreciated by his players and Ontario's para ice hockey community, Rylett says he found great joy in seeing his athletes band together as one. "I'm proud of what I accomplished and proud of my athletes," he assures. "They are the reason for it all," he adds.

Among a number of his players who progressed to national para ice hockey teams, like Christina Picton, Sheena Darnley and Jessie Gregory, was Paralympic bronze medalist Kevin Rempel who was introduced to para ice hockey by Rylett. "Playing for Paul is where I learned how to push myself on the ice and get to know the sledge hockey and disability community after my injury," Rempel explains.


"Paul has been relentless in promoting and growing the game of sledge hockey which inspired me to do the same when I retired from Paralympic sport," shares Rempel. "People like Paul make such a difference in their community and in the lives of so many. They create a ripple effect that lasts for years."



Photo Courtesy of Kevin Rempel

Coach Rylett (left) and Paralympic Para Ice Hockey player Kevin Rempel

NIAGARA 2025



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Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund

In association with the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games, Sport Niagara has proudly created the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund in partnership with the Niagara Community Foundation. The Fund will be managed by a Board comprised of representatives from Niagara's disability sport community.

"Sport Niagara, as the legacy organization of the Niagara 2022 Canada Summer Games, is excited to welcome Ontario's para-athletes to compete in Niagara," states Dan Kennedy, its Executive Director. "Our vision is to leave a lasting and sustained legacy for our disability sport community."

The Niagara Community Foundation (NCF), in operation for 25 years, is one of 200 community foundations across Canada under the umbrella of Community Foundations of Canada. NCF helps connect donors to causes, and charities to resources, through the creation of permanent endowment funds, like the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund.

"This partnership with the NCF will ensure that the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund is positioned for continued growth through investment and future contributions which is critical to the long-term success of the Fund and its programming," adds Kennedy.

"After the success of the 2022 Canada Summer Games, our region is extremely fortunate and excited to welcome the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games to Niagara," enthuses Bryan Rose, Executive Director of the Niagara Community Foundation. "NCF is honoured to extend our collaboration with Sport Niagara to the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund. The endowment fund will create annualized revenue that will have an enduring impact by providing vital funding for adaptive sports here in Niagara for the generations ahead."

The Fund will be supported by surplus revenue generated from the Niagara 2025 Ontario Parasport Games and legacy donations.

"On behalf of the Ontario government, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Sport Niagara and the Niagara Community Foundation for sharing our commitment to growing opportunities for participation in sport for people of all abilities," said Neil Lumsden, Minister of Sport. "The creation of the Niagara Para Games Legacy Fund will ensure ongoing benefits from the 2025 Ontario Parasport Games for years to come."



About the Niagara Community Foundation

Established in 2000, the Niagara Community Foundation has raised over \$86 million and has granted over \$31 million to charities working in the arts, heritage, environment, social services, health, education and community development sectors. NCF turns intent into impact. **To learn more, or to donate to the Fund, visit niagaracommunityfoundation.org.**



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Recipient BRODEN NAGLE

By Daniel Vieira
Community Events Manager, ParaSport® Ontario

Through the Play to Podium Fund, ParaSport® Ontario was proud to award Broden Nagle of London, Ont., with a new wheelchair basketball chair.

Broden got started in wheelchair basketball thanks to a chance meeting while out shopping for shoes in early 2020. Wheelchair basketball coach Paul Bowes was shopping at the same store when he noticed Broden's disability and asked if he had heard of parasports. Broden had "no clue" about parasport at the time, but was willing to give it a try with the London Flyers. He's been hooked on parasport ever since.

Broden was born with bilateral clubfoot and hip dysplasia. The 19-year-old first-year Laurier University business major has been a quick riser through the wheelchair basketball ranks despite some discouraging setbacks. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted his play just three months after he got started in the sport.

Broden broke his leg during the pandemic which prevented his return to wheelchair basketball until the summer of 2022.

But since, he has taken his game to the next level as a member of the Twin City Spinners in Waterloo and has been rewarded with selections to the U23 Team Ontario and Team Canada squads. "Qualifying for the world championships with the U23 Canadian team is one of my greatest accomplishments so far," Broden notes.


But more success awaits him in the sport. Broden is transferring to the University of Arizona in 2025 with a scholarship and the opportunity to join the U.S.'s reigning national championship wheelchair basketball team.

The rising star is grateful for his new sport chair from ParaSport Ontario, in partnership with Sunrise Medical, explaining that "in wheelchair basketball, chairs need to be fine-tuned to each individual player" and the chair he has was old and not made for him.

"The opportunity to have a new chair that is fit for me is big because it will be a stepping stone to help me improve in the sport," says Broden. His goals for his game include winning a national championship with his new school team. He also aspires to secure his spot on Canada's Senior Men's National Team and help qualify the team for the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympic Games.

Broden can also see himself playing professional wheelchair basketball in Europe after he graduates. And outside of wheelchair basketball, he looks to graduate with a degree in Business Management with his sights set on a career in investment banking and private equity. ParaSport Ontario looks forward to following Broden on his journey to the top of his wheelchair basketball game and beyond.

For more information on applying or donating to the Play to Podium Fund, contact James Murphy at info@parasportontario.ca.

A person wearing a yellow shirt, white shorts, and white socks is using a long-handled soccer stick to move a white soccer ball on a green grass field. The person's legs and arms are visible, showing they are in motion. The background is a blurred green field.

Soccability PATHWAYS to the Pitch

Soccer for players with a disability has been around in Canada much longer than many people are aware. Early programs were offered almost 20 years ago at soccer clubs in Stoney Creek and Pickering, for example, as well of course by Special Olympics.

But little has happened over the last two decades to build player pathways and coach education, or to deliver programs across the country at the grassroots level. Yet, despite the persistent dormant years for accessible play across the Canadian soccer landscape, dynamic change is on the horizon thanks to Soccability Canada, an innovative vehicle for inclusive and accessible soccer.

Soccability Canada was envisioned and created by Whitby-resident Matt Greenwood, a former Manager of Club Development with Ontario Soccer. Driven by his educational background in Sport Science and equipped

with a Masters in Sociology of Sport, Greenwood has been an accomplished sport administrator and soccer leader in the United Kingdom, the U.S., and Canada with Ontario Soccer and in his current role as Executive Director of the Pickering Football Club.

Consensus among his fellow soccer leaders across Ontario and Canada is that Greenwood's most profound legacy rests on his significant contributions to the advancement of accessible soccer in all of its forms. ParaSport® Ontario (PO) sat down for a chat with Greenwood about Soccability and the state of the game in Canada for players with disabilities.

PO: Let's talk about "the beautiful game." What is it that you find so special about soccer?

Matt: For me, soccer really is for everybody. It has so many great opportunities for connection on and off the field. I've played all my life and just know how powerful it is as a connector, let alone the physical fitness side to it, and improving yourself and your own abilities. As a coach, you problem solve. You find solutions for success. It's no different with the adapted game to ensure that you find a way for a child or an adult with a disability to get on the field and play one way or another.

PO: So, why have so many doors been closed to adapting the game for so long?

Matt: First, why wouldn't we want to open the door? I don't think people come from a bad place where we don't want people with disabilities to play. It's more of a fear of what we don't know that creates the attitudinal barriers. "Is someone going to get hurt?" "Are we going to get sued?" "Are we going to say the wrong thing?" And so, for me it's really as simple as having a good conversation with people and reassuring them. It's amazing how quickly that removes some of those barriers and turns people's thinking around.

PO: What are some of the important talking points in those conversations?

Matt: As we started to introduce accessible programming as one of the expectations in our [Ontario Soccer] Club Excellence program, we got resistance from clubs saying, "oh, there isn't a registration category for these players and where would we put them," or "none of our coaches are qualified." Or, "what's the liability on



this?" We help clubs understand that it's not black and white. There's a lot of gray in there in working out how you might get a certain player onto the field for a positive experience instead of simply putting up barriers. The worst thing we can do is to say "no", and turn somebody away. It's all about finding the right level of play for that particular player and the right coach to support them. Sometimes it just means asking more questions.

PO: How or what defines disabled, adapted or accessible soccer as different from other community leagues or programs?

Matt: Soccer is structured in two distinct levels. The first is grassroots club programming, the lifeblood of many communities and the bedrock for everything else that the soccer system does. At the grassroots level we see what is described as pan-disability soccer programs where players with a range of different needs join on the field for soccer practices and games. Sessions are heavily focused on fun, friendship and fitness – everything that a good soccer program should achieve while players build up their skills.

PO: What prompted, or necessitated, the idea for Soccability Canada?

Matt: There's always been a general endorsement of disability soccer, warm comments about it being "really

important" and "a great program for clubs." This doesn't lead to system development or wider inclusion and accessibility. Evidence from experiences at Ontario Soccer shows that having staff tasked with focusing on this area of the game can grow programs. Soccability Canada is built on unparalleled knowledge of the accessible soccer landscape in Canada and the trends and developments globally. That knowledge comes from years of supporting accessible soccer in the United Kingdom and Canada, and working with organizations including FIFA, Canada Soccer, United States Soccer Federation, Special Olympics, Ontario Blind Sport Association, and many more.

I have some great connections within the soccer community. I've had a lot of conversations with Canada Soccer about them taking the lead on this. I got a lot of reassurance, positive emails to say: "keep doing what you're doing, and we'll do what we can to help if we can." But it just didn't seem strong enough. So Soccability was a way for me to say: "Here's where a club that needs advice can come, or a parent struggling to get their child into a program, or a provincial association needing some answers." And thanks to Canada Soccer, we delivered 10 workshops across the country last year which validated to us that there are already some clubs out there with some really good programs.

Matt Greenwood, Soccability Canada



PO: What is some of the high-level advice that you give to soccer clubs and communities?

Matt: I advise clubs that we talk to, to not set up disability-specific programs, like a hearing impaired soccer program, because you may only get one or two or three people to start. It'll be a really slow burn to get to a point of success. Open your doors as wide as possible and see where the athletes come from, and what their needs are, and then in due course grow just like you would do with any other soccer session. Make it a pan-disability program to begin. The one caveat is Special Olympics which has a really strong system, from grassroots community chapters right up to the international level.

There are nuances though. Players who have vision loss can usually work on a field with other players. But for players with complete vision loss, that wouldn't be safe. So, what are the unique needs of your athletes? And this is what I love about Canada's Sport for Life and Long-Term Athlete Development models – a wider sense of what each specific player in a program needs.

We also remind clubs that the physical literacy that we offer in soccer clubs is often missed at school for so many kids with disabilities. For many, their Phys. Ed. teacher didn't know how to include them so as the horror

stories go, kids got sent to the library to read or sit in front of the computer, or keep score on the sidelines instead, which is really sad. So, we try to make sure that those kids do get the opportunity to get on the field. We play an active role in that, when they're not getting it in a school system.

PO: After five years of Soccability, success stories must be mounting. Anything surprising?

Matt: I did have one club that was really concerned that one disability group – players with autism – was taking over their accessible soccer program and how would they manage that? We suggest building out a separate program for a larger group of athletes, just as we would if it was a group of players with cerebral palsy or blind athletes. Now they can set up a standalone program for that group and nurture their needs even more specifically. So, instead of viewing that amount of participation as a problem or as a negative, it's a positive thing that they're doing something right that's attracting so many parents to bring their kids out to play soccer. Keep growing it.

PO: Disability is complicated with all the variants and diversity within the community. And you know, people spend a lifetime learning the different nuances. You've got coaches, and program and club leaders, who are well-intentioned but this could be quite fearful for them. How do you help them get past that? How do you give them confidence?

Matt: First, it's not all game, game, game. And it's not running them into the ground with drills. It's lots of fun exercises and challenges, sometimes throwing the ball or catching the ball, and not always just kicking and

dribbling. It's getting players to build up that one-on-one relationship. It's informing and encouraging coaches to ask questions and build relationships. And that's quite interesting, because in the Safe Sport world we really discourage that one-on-one coach-athlete relationship. So, providing coaches with different kinds of nuances, specifics, that come with working with athletes with different disabilities is important. But still, nothing gets done in isolation. Everything is in plain sight of parents on the sidelines and supporting coaches on the field. Yes, it can be quite disconcerting, particularly for new coaches. You're right. It is a complex world.

PO: What's the long-term game for Soccability for Canada and our disability community?

Matt: Two parts. One would be grassroots programming in just about every community, and making sure that players and families know where to go to find that accessible program. We shouldn't have families trekking 50 to 100 kilometres to find a program. And more programs doesn't have to be more leagues. It just needs to be an opportunity each week for athletes to get on the field and kick a ball around and participate.

Two. We need pathways for provincial and national teams. Amputee soccer... there is nothing in Canada, no system and nothing for them to aspire to. Powerchair soccer is starting to show some strong signs in three or four provinces and is starting to build out a pathway. Blind soccer is one of Canada's best kept secrets. There is a national program for males who have cerebral palsy, stroke or traumatic brain injury, but nothing at the provincial or regional levels... not really anything at a grassroots level. So, we're trying to do both things at the same time... building that base of athletes and mapping out what those pathways for competition can look like.

To learn more about Soccability Canada, visit www.soccability.ca or email: inquiries@soccability.ca.



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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

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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



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ENABLING CHANGE

Para Ice Hockey and Recreational Sledging

By Joe Millage

For more than two decades, the Government of Ontario has promoted inclusion and accessibility. Most noteworthy is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) which was groundbreaking work and resonated far beyond the Province's borders.

The AODA brought into law the directive to open communities up for all by reducing barriers for people with disabilities – which in the long-term means all of us.

ParaSport® Ontario (originally Sport for Disabled Ontario) has been a proponent and partner for inclusion since 1981. The provincial sport organization is a recognized leader in supporting individuals in their quest to enjoy the activities and sports of their choice, in the communities where they live, and for supporting groups and communities in the provision of those opportunities.



The list of inclusion leaders in Ontario is lengthy and the list of participants, stars and even superstars is very impressive – to learn about them check out ParaSport Ontario’s book *The Power of ParaSport*.

Dino McDonnell from Niagara Parks summed up the difference between accessibility and inclusion quite succinctly when he stated: “You can legislate design but it is desire that creates inclusion.” And so, with support from the Ontario Enabling Change grant program and the Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, and guidance from a dozen men and women who have achieved excellence in parasport design and desire, ParaSport Ontario developed a new pathway toward greater opportunities in para ice hockey and recreational sledging.

The purpose of the project is simply to increase opportunities.

1. Making equipment available – the correct size and weight, and necessary accessories (push bar when requested), proper strapping, quality sticks, etc.

2. Encouraging a quality start in the sport – detailed instructions to guide users through their first experiences.

3. Drill and skill data base. There is a lot of good information in existence already. ParaSport Ontario (PO) has sourced it and shares it on its Resource Hub (<http://parasportontario.ca>). PO is also working with a team of experts to create new drills and lesson plans and fill gaps to support athletes and coaches on their pathway from play to podium.

4. Training the teachers, coaches and volunteers – leadership training to ensure that the first skate is fun and safe. “Understanding that with the diversity amongst para-athletes, no one leader will have all the answers, but together we have the solutions and desire to resourcefully create pathways for new situations that arise,” states James Murphy, Executive Director of ParaSport Ontario.

5. Acknowledging the excellence of those who have led the way – compared to many sports, para ice hockey is still in its infancy. But PO has access to the experience and expertise of people who have done the ground-work. People like Ken Hall, ChPC (Cruisers Sports), Todd Nicholson, PLY (Ottawa Abilities Centre), Paralympian and educator Kevin Rempel, Jamie

Titmarsh of the Ontario Sledge Hockey Association, Niagara Sledge Hockey League leader Daniel Vieira, Women’s National Para Ice Head Coach Tara Chisholm, para ice sled innovator and manufacturer Laurie Howlett (Unique Inventions) and para ice hockey’s Captain Canada and now Team Canada Coach, Greg Westlake, PLY. Westlake has lent his name to a program designed to make sleds available in rinks across the province. And for representation across all demographics, there is PO’s youngest Ambassador and future para ice hockey star Maddux Kerr.

Thanks to Mike Forman (McDonald’s Whitby) and the Rotary Club of Whitby, the first set of “Westlake” sleds is now available at no cost to users at the Iroquois Park Complex in Whitby which is also the home arena for the Whitby Steelhawks sledge (para ice) hockey team.

The foundation has been poured for a pathway that will lead to greater inclusion and access and PO looks forward to hearing from coaches, players and potential players and everyBODY who wants to strengthen programs in their community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Formerly the Chair of ParaSport Ontario’s Board of Directors, Joe Millage has amassed more than four decades of sport leadership that includes coaching, facility management, community engagement, fundraising and rehabilitation. Millage has been recognized internationally for driving organizations and individuals toward the extraordinary.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

What are your favourite activities? What new activities would you like to try?... common questions posed to families in communities across the province. When mobility, cognitive, sensory, communication or other atypical considerations are in play, essential activities of daily living are prioritized and the fun stuff gets put on a side burner. Often times, families don't even know what options are available.

In the hockey world there are more than three dozen versions of the game. Para ice hockey was introduced in Canada in the 1980s. The sleds were heavy and the stick's picks were literally ice picks. Today the game is fast and the equipment is light and sleek, largely due to feedback from athletes and the ingenuity of Canadian entrepreneur/inventor Laurie Howlett at Unique Inventions. Many more kids are starting "sledge" hockey at a young age and the sport invites family members to join in the fun.

Jamie Titmarsh, president of the Ontario Sledge Hockey Association (OHSa) has been involved in the game for three decades. His love of the sport was supported by his father and brother who got involved too. "I found it fun, challenging and there was a pathway to excellence that my competitive nature embraced," explains Titmarsh. "Having my dad and brother in the same program gave us lots to talk about around the dinner table or while watching the Leafs on Saturday night."

Interested in para ice hockey or recreational sledging (pleasure skating), visit OSHA at ontariosledge.com or email events@parasportontario.ca.



Back Row (L-R): Michael Titmarsh (Coach), Mike Leblanc (Trainer), Luke Brunner (Assistant Coach). Middle Row (L-R): Noah Brunner, Xander Hartley, Jeremy Booker, Christian Titmarsh, Riley Timofejew, Andy Labrosse, Hailey Halik, Rob Forbes, Matthew Miller, James Titmarsh. Front Row: Joe Granerio.

ParaSport Ontario's FIRST AMBASSADOR OF PLAY

There have been plenty of young para-participants who exude joy when they play. When ParaSport Ontario started the Enabling Change Para Ice Hockey program, one of the longest-serving Paralympians introduced the organization to Maddux Kerr who was eight years old at the time.

Maddux, now 10, has amazing positive energy and loves showing others what can be done in a sled with his high-level skills. His passion has been supported by his parents Allan and Jessica, brothers Eli and Isaac, and his hero Greg Westlake who has congenital limb loss too. Maddux and Greg were introduced to each other by their prosthetist Amy Richardson at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Maddux has found his role model and a sport he loves. ParaSport Ontario was pleased to announce Maddux Kerr as its first Ambassador of Play.



ENABLING CHANGE

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*This initiative is made possible through
the support of The Ministry for Seniors and
Accessibility and the Enabling Change program.*

Ontario 



¹ The stylized word everyBODY (with uppercase BODY) has become a designation of inclusivity, of being open to including everyone regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, sensory, health/illness, financial or other uniqueness.





FIELDS OF DREAMS

MBTW's Legacy of Inclusive Design

By Jeff Tiessen, PLY

The MBTW Group is a dominant player in community planning, and park and open space design. Since its beginnings 50 years ago, the firm has been involved in close to 4,000 Canadian and international projects.

What's also very impressive about The MBTW Group is the firm's inherent sense of importance of creating accessible landscapes and urban spaces that everyone can enjoy. "It's not just about adhering to accessibility standards and legal requirements," explains Kevin Holmes, MBTW's Principal, Greenfields. "It's about fostering inclusivity and ease of access in every project we undertake."

MBTW integrates essential accessibility features such as accessible paths, ramps, seating, and signage into all of its design projects with the belief that accessibility is necessary at every level to make our communities more inclusive. From MBTW's sporting landscape, this can be soccer fields, playgrounds, water play, tracks, courts and skate parks, as examples.

Jonathan Joyce, Principal of Sports and Recreation at MBTW, has translated his lifelong passion for sports and recreation into a 30+-year-career with the landscape architecture and urban design firm. "What I really enjoy about working on accessible projects is the stakeholder engagement and going through the design process," shares Joyce. "I'm always reminded that it's not just a place for people to go and



play a game and then go home,” he says. “It’s the community that these facilities build. We design for the public and the public includes people with various disabilities.”

Joyce is also reminded of the importance of inclusive spaces every time that he sees kids playing on accessible playgrounds or ball diamonds or basketball courts. “Whatever the disability may be, seeing families and kids out there as part of the community, it reminds us all about what we really enjoy doing in sports and recreation.”

That sentiment resonates with Holmes as well, and very personally. “My sister is a quadriplegic from a car accident 35 years ago,” he shares. “When that happens in your family, it really affects things that you do moving forward. I got involved with the Spinal Cord Injury Ontario Ski Day and have been supporting that event for over 20 years. When I got invited to participate in ParaSport Ontario’s Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament, I started thinking about MBTW taking a golf course and making it completely accessible. I don’t think there’s a golf course that is specifically designed for people with disabilities.”

As MBTW celebrates a milestone anniversary and reflects on its first 50 years, the firm is highlighting several legacy projects. One of those involved a City of Toronto initiative and taking

an existing well-loved park and making it more inclusive and accessible. That included a baseball field. A rubberized playing surface was installed. Modifications to the dugout areas were made. Accessible bleachers were added. “It was probably the first park renovation we worked on where the focus was all about accessibility and inclusivity,” notes Joyce. With funding support from the Jays Care Foundation, it came to be named Roy Halliday Field, and saw the late Toronto Blue Jays pitcher’s wife and two kids on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Another legacy project for MBTW includes the Empire Sportsplex in Welland, Ont., a one-of-a-kind facility in the province that combines multiple sport uses into a hub of courts and play spaces. “What was unique about this project as well was the involvement of Canadian Tire’s Jumpstart Charities which heightened the inclusive and accessible play aspect,” acknowledges Holmes.

ParaSport® Ontario supported the launch celebration of the Empire Sportsplex in 2022 by hosting six parasport activity areas to showcase each sport and the accessibility and inclusivity of the facility. It is a recent recipient of the

Parks and Recreation Ontario Park or Facility Design Award for excellence in design and showcasing innovation and creativity.

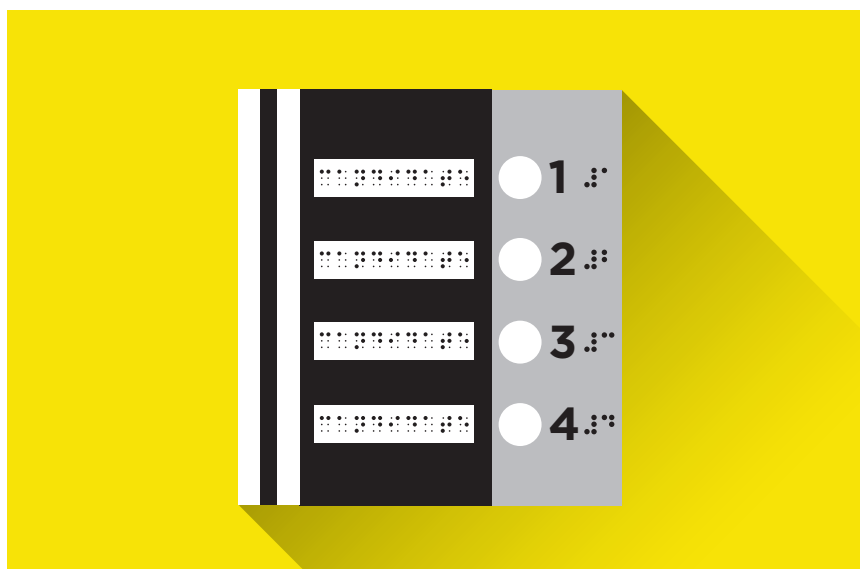
Despite MBTW’s commitment to inclusivity for those with disabilities, designing for accessibility is not without its challenges. “Cost is often a barrier,” shares Joyce. “Building wholly accessible surfaces for a baseball diamond, for example, comes at a higher cost. It’s not the same for every project, but with opportunities to have more inclusive facilities, cost can become a bit of a barrier.”

Continuing with barriers, Holmes adds that, “there’s a lot of community awareness around the need for inclusive design, but in all honesty, sports user groups can sometimes be very selfish about what it is that they want or need. And what some have in mind with respect to what the facility should be or look or feel like, sometimes just doesn’t work from an inclusive standpoint. It’s not that people are intentionally trying to exclude others from playing. It’s a lack of understanding of what accessibility really is, and what makes a community sports and recreation facility truly inclusive, that can be a barrier too.”

And although it is much less celebrated publicly, the impact of The MBTW Group’s community education in project planning should too be heralded as a 50-year legacy pillar and a pathway to more fields of dreams for all.

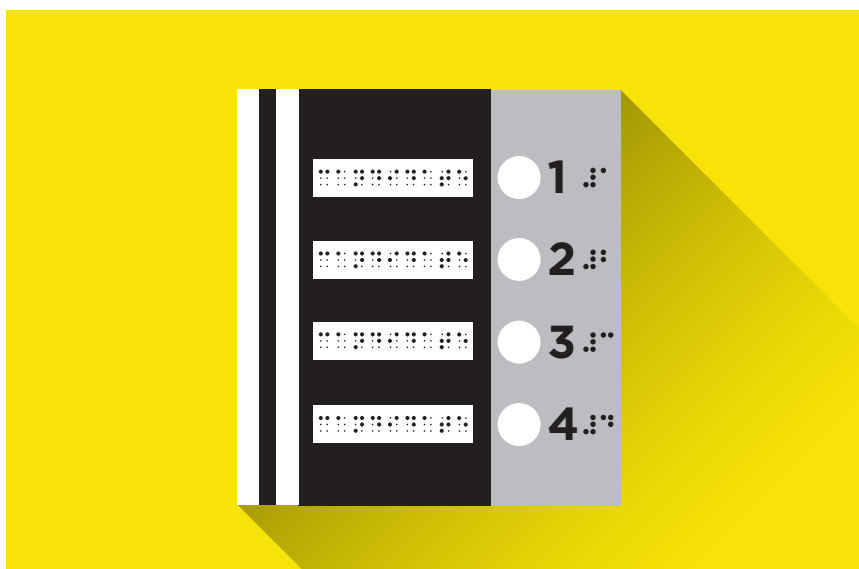


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By Jeff Tiessen, PLY

Athlete Awareness is HIS PROJECT

For more than four decades Vim Kochhar has annually stepped to the Great Valentine Gala stage to say "thank-you"... thank you to his supporters and to those whose achievements were making a difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities.

An event launched by the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) in 1985, the Gala supports CFPDP's mission of increasing access, awareness and community involvement for Canadians with disabilities. Through more than 50 projects since its inception, including the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame, the CFPDP has raised more than \$35 million in support of the disability community.

But to understand how and why the organization strives and thrives as it does, it's best to understand the

same of its founder and enduring Chairman Vim... the Honourable Vim Kochhar, the first Indian-born appointee to the Senate of Canada, a York University Honourary Doctor of Law and founding Board member of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. "Just call me Vim," he insists with a sense of humility rooted in his deferential upbringing and unprivileged beginnings in America.

Born in 1936, Vim left India at age 18. He arrived in Boston in 1955 with \$300 in his pocket. Take away his \$30 Greyhound bus fare, his \$50 semester

tuition fee to the University of Texas in Austin, and some groceries, and he was left just shy of \$100... for the year.

"Working harder than everyone who works with me has always been my guiding principle," Vim says. "I'm the first one here in the morning and the last one to leave... and I never get a raise," he laughs, "because I never get a paycheck. My father used to say that making a living is not an accomplishment; it's what you do for others that matters in life."

Working for Intercontinental Hotels, travelling the world, working seven



days a week and doing extremely well financially, he arrived in Toronto in 1967. He did some remarkable engineering work that was touted internationally, but by age 36 he had had enough. "I'd made enough money to retire and do things that I really wanted to do," he discloses.

What he really wanted to do was reply to his charitable callings. In 1983 he joined the Board of Directors of the Cheshire Foundation and enlisted with the Toronto–Don Valley Rotary Club. One year later he raised \$239,000 at the inaugural Great Valentine Gala. "I fell in love with fundraising right then and there," Vim confesses. "But it was a different time," he qualifies. "Companies didn't have their own foundations or programs like they have now. They were looking for charities to support."

Vim then created the CFPDP to continue with his revenue-generating Galas and serve as an awareness organization with its own projects. For example, Vim saw that Canada's Olympians were getting government and corporate support, while Paralympians received little to nothing. "We established the Podium Fund to support Paralympic medal winners."

With our team's ability to go to the 2000 Paralympic Games in Australia in jeopardy, CFPDP wrote a check for \$100,000 to the Canadian Paralympic Committee to help get them there.

CFPDP events have provided a compelling platform for promoting Canada's Paralympians and the broader issues and ideals associated with the movement since the inaugural Great Valentine Gala in 1985. Vim was

incensed that the 1984 Paralympic team had returned home with 222 medals and a second-place finish but no one seemed to care. The first Gala was a tribute to these athletes and came with an invitation to each to be honoured by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

In speaking to the achievements of the CFPDP over its 40+ years, Vim has difficulty naming its most significant accolade. The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame is the CFPDP's flagship awareness project and permanent public tribute to the achievements of people with disabilities and others who have served the community's cause. "But the most challenging was the WhyNot Marathon," Vim admits in reference to his dream project – the epic 11,000-km cross-Canada torch relay in 1996 that enlisted 8,000 torch bearers and 150,000 runners in over 700 communities in support of the Paralympic Games.

In financial terms, the 60-day odyssey raised \$2 million, well short of its initial objectives, with 50 percent of the funds raised by Rotary clubs used for projects in their communities. But in the end, the success of this journey was not to be measured in dollars and cents. In terms of its awareness goals, the WhyNot Marathon was an unprecedented success. There were over 3,000 media reports attributable, in large part, to the fact that the ensuing Paralympic Games received more than 1,500 articles across Canada. "We tackled what Petro Canada did with the 1988 Olympic Torch Run and \$37 million in taxpayers' money with

virtually no financial support."

But Vim is also quick to reference the CFPDP's role in establishing the Rotary Cheshire Homes, the world's first truly barrier-free housing complex for people who are deaf-blind, as well as the Canadian Helen Keller Centre, Canada's first training facility for the deaf-blind community.

What's most remarkable maybe is the extraordinary amount of productivity that emanates from the organization with just three staffers, only two with a salary and one, their leader, a volunteer. "We have an incredibly active and engaged Board of Directors," Vim explains. "We work hard and make it happen. And we're fortunate to have incredible volunteer support. We're selling awareness," Vim adds. "That's what really separates us from other organizations. There aren't many, if any, other organizations doing what we do."

Over the decades the CFPDP has grown and evolved in ways that no one could have predicted back in 1985 and that vitality has truly made a difference in the way Canadians with disabilities are regarded today. "We have changed the way people think about disability," Vim asserts. "Whether it's recognizing that a Paralympic medal is worth the same as an Olympic medal, which the federal government now does financially, to helping Canadian corporations identify qualified people with disabilities for their Board of Directors through our Seat at the Table project, we have been fighting for these changes, and will continue to, until all Canadians understand this message."



HEALTH RISKS of Chronic Inflammation

By Joanne Smith, B.A., BRT Dip, CNP

Inflammation is a natural response of the immune system that helps protect the body from harmful invaders like bacteria and viruses.

When the body detects foreign micro-organisms, immune cells such as macrophages (often referred to as “big eaters”) are activated. These cells engulf harmful microbes and release substances that not only contain the infection but also trigger changes in nearby blood vessels. This results in increased blood flow and the entry of additional immune cells. This cascade of events causes the hallmark symptoms of inflammation: redness, swelling, heat, and pain.

In the short term, inflammation is beneficial – it’s a key part of the body’s defense mechanism. However, when inflammation becomes prolonged, it can lead to serious health issues. Chronic inflammation is particularly common in individuals with certain disabilities, who often experience

systemic inflammation. This persistent inflammation can contribute to a variety of health problems, including:

- **Weakened immune function, making the body more susceptible to infections (e.g. colds, flu, respiratory infections, and urinary tract infections)**
- **Difficulty losing weight due to altered metabolic processes**
- **Neuropathic pain (nerve pain) and discomfort**
- **Mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety**

Several factors contribute to chronic inflammation, including stress, ongoing pain, certain medications, and poor diet.



The Role of Diet in Inflammation

Certain foods can exacerbate inflammation in the body, leading to higher acidity and worsening immune responses. To reduce inflammation through diet, it's important to avoid foods that trigger this process. These include:

- **Sugar:** cakes, cookies, candy, soda and refined carbohydrates
- **Artificial additives:** flavours, colours, and sweeteners
- **Trans fats:** prepared salad dressings, packaged foods, and fast/deep-fried foods
- **Red meat:** high consumption can increase inflammation levels

Instead, focus on incorporating foods and spices with alkalizing or anti-inflammatory properties. These can help combat inflammation and improve overall health. Some examples include:

- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** fatty fish (like salmon and mackerel), fish oil and flaxseeds
- **Green leafy vegetables:** rich in antioxidants and nutrients
- **Fruits:** especially those high in antioxidants, like berries
- **Ginger and turmeric:** known for anti-inflammatory properties
- **Lemon water:** alkalizes the body and reduces inflammation

Anti-Inflammatory Turmeric Tea

A simple, tasty way to incorporate anti-inflammatory ingredients into your routine. Combine these ingredients in a mug. Stir well and enjoy!

- 2 cups hot water
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- Fresh lemon juice (squeezed)
- ½ tsp honey

By making small changes to your diet and lifestyle, you can help reduce chronic inflammation and improve your overall health and well-being.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR Joanne Smith is a graduate of the Institute of Holistic Nutrition in Toronto and holds a degree in psychology from York University, as well as a diploma in Radio and Television broadcasting from Seneca College. As a Certified Nutritional Practitioner, she runs a successful nutrition business called Fruitful Elements (fruitfulelements.com) specializing in optimal nutritional health for people with disabilities, with a special interest in spinal cord injury. Smith lives with a spinal cord injury and co-authored *Eat Well, Live Well with SCI and Other Neurological Conditions*. For more information, visit www.eatwelllivewellwithsci.com.



Photo courtesy Canadian Paralympic Committee

Darda Sales is passionate about parasports, fueled by her experiences as a three-time Paralympian in swimming – a gold and silver medalist – and one-time Paralympian in wheelchair basketball.

Darda is also a coach and a classifier in the sport of swimming. She consults to national and provincial sport organizations to assist in enhancing their parasport programming.

She recently completed her doctoral studies at Western University with a research focus on para-athlete development.

Now managing the Canadian Paralympic Committee's Athlete Services & Engagement Team, in everything that she does, Darda is committed to making sport more accessible and equitable for athletes with disabilities.

DARDA SALES



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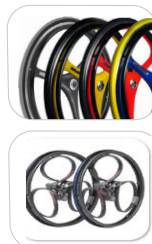
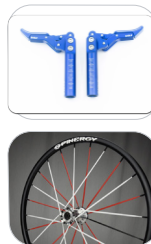
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