55 YEARS
1971-2026



BC WHEELCHAIR SPORTS

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BC WHEELCHAIR SPORTS ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES 55 YEARS

Wheelchair Sports have a long and illustrious history in BC, from the early days of the Dueck Powerglides to BC's first Paralympians like Eugene Reimer, Karen McPherson and Walter Schmid, to the group of athletes and builders in Harry Beardsell's basement in 1971, through to the present day, where we've evolved into a strong organization with a reputation for excellence and leadership.

In this booklet, you'll find a collection of our highlights through the decades and get a chance to see the changes, growth, and evolution of both our organization and of our sports over the years.

TOP LEFT
Stan Stronge and Kathy Newman at Rick Hansen's send off on his Man In Motion Tour. Stan was a co-founder of BCWSA and played a pivotal role in organizing Canadian teams for the early Paralympic and Para Pan Am Games throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

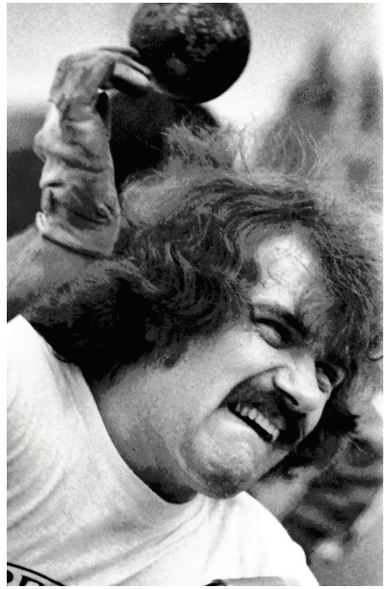
TOP RIGHT
Dennis Cherenko was BCWSA's first official Executive Director and played a crucial role in developing the organization throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He was also an accomplished athlete who achieved great success in Athletics.

MIDDLE LEFT
Tom Parker was part of the first group of athletes with a disability to be inducted to the BC Sports Hall of Fame. A two time Paralympian, Tom medaled in both archery and swimming at the Paralympic Games.

MIDDLE RIGHT
One of Canada's greatest ever athletes, Eugene Reimer won three medals (2 gold and 1 silver) at the 1972 Paralympic Games in Germany which earned him recognition as Canada's Male Athlete of The Year.

BOTTOM
1970s Wheelchair Marathon. BC was the first in Canada to offer a full distance wheelchair marathon sanctioned by CWSA.











the 1970s





BCWSA was officially founded in 1971 as the BC Wheelchair Sports and Recreation Association. Throughout the 1970s, the organization continued to grow and develop through the dedicated efforts of hardworking athletes and volunteers, including Dennis Cherenko, our first Executive Director.

The 1970's also marked an important period of growing mainstream recognition for wheelchair sports. In 1979 the first set of athletes with disabilities and pioneers of wheelchair sport were inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame.

HIGHLIGHTS

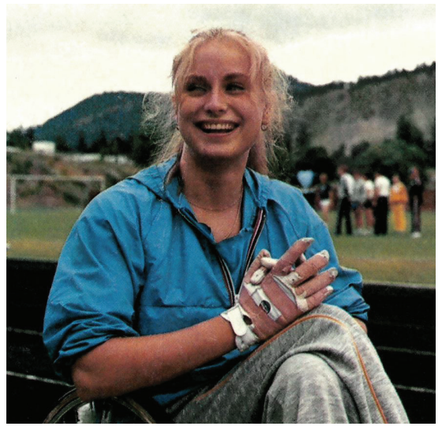
The BC Wheelchair Sports and Recreation Association officially forms.

Dennis Cherenko is hired as our first Executive Director.

First BMO Vancouver Wheelchair Marathon in 1976.

The introduction of Quad Ball which becomes Murderball and then Wheelchair Rugby.



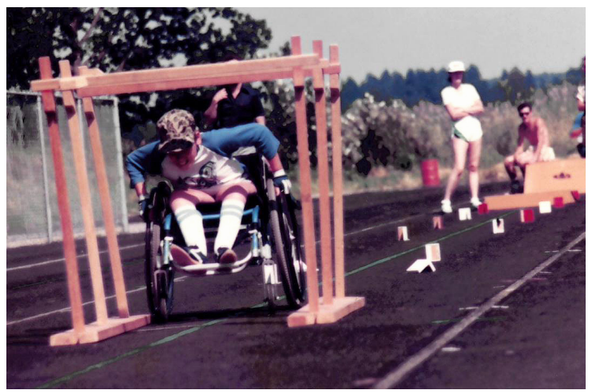












LEFT TOP
Most Canadians know Terry Fox for his incredible Marathon of Hope but he was also one of BC's great wheelchair basketball players.

LEFT MIDDLE
Rick Hansen won gold in the pentathlon at the 1972 Paralympic Games and later became close friends with Terry Fox through wheelchair sports.

RIGHT TOP
Diane Rakiecki was the first woman to push a marathon in a wheelchair and was one of Canada's most decorated para athletes through the 80s and 90s.

RIGHT MIDDLE
Disability Games - The BC and Canadian Games for the Disabled were major highlights of the 1980s with many sports on offer.

BOTTOM LEFT
Tim Frick trains Rick Hansen for Man in Motion World Tour.

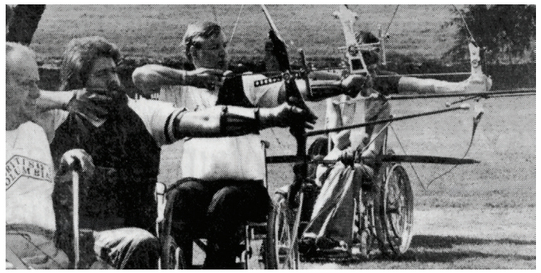
BOTTOM RIGHT
We hosted our first Junior Sportsfest in 1981, this would eventually evolve into our annual Junior Sport Camp and be the first of many youth programs that have become a pillar of BCWSA.

the 1980s

The 1980's were a decade of tremendous growth for BC Wheelchair Sports with an incredibly large number of sports under our umbrella including basketball, table tennis, archery, shooting, volleyball, swimming, scuba diving, track and field, kayaking, murderball, motosoccer, tennis, racquetball, canoeing, sledge hockey, frisbee competitions, badminton, square dancing, and sit ski.

During this time period, we launched our first Junior events and there was also significant growth in the BC and Canadian Disability Games which served as both intense competitive gatherings and incredibly social events with many athletes competing in multiple sports.

BCWSA athletes excelled on and off the field of play and captivated the public throughout the 1980s as Terry Fox's incredible Marathon of Hope for cancer research and Rick Hansen's Man in Motion World Tour inspired many and changed perceptions of what people and athletes with disabilities were capable of.





HIGHLIGHTS

Wheelchair tennis arrives in BC.

Starting in 1981 wheelchair athletes first recognized as top calibre athletes at both the Federal and Provincial level through the High Performance Athlete Assistance Program.

Diane Rakiecki completes the Vancouver International Marathon in 1983 becoming Canada's first female wheelchair marathoner.

Rick Hansen begins his Man in Motion tour in 1986.

BCWSA's first Junior Sportsfest.

Rick Hansen and fellow Canadians Mel Fitzgerald and Andre Viger competed in a 1500m exhibition track event at the LA Olympics, the first time ever that wheelchair events were a part of the Olympics.

















TOP LEFT
Marni Abbott and Jamie Borisoff made their national team debuts in the 1990s and were among the world's top class 1.0s throughout their careers.

TOP CENTER
Have-a-Go Days - Duncan Campbell recruited many Wheelchair Rugby players out of the GF Strong Gym.

TOP RIGHT
Marni Abbott

MIDDLE LEFT
Paul Johnson

MIDDLE RIGHT
Wheelchair sports including Athletics, Tennis and Basketball joined the Canada Games during the 1990s, integrating into the national multisport games.

BOTTOM LEFT
Longtime BCWSA board member and future president Laurel Crosby was the chef de mission at the 1992 Paralympics in Barcelona.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Steve Milum (pictured) co-founded the WC Race Series with James Hustvedt.

BOTTOM RIGHT LOWER
Yuka Chokyu, Sydney Paralympics.

the 1990s

The 1990s were a time of excellence at BCWSA, as BC athletes found success at the national and international levels across basketball, rugby, tennis and athletics.

The Canadian Women's National Wheelchair Basketball Team began a decades-long undefeated streak, led by head coach Tim Frick and key athletes including Marni Abbott, while the BC Men claimed their first National title in over a decade at GM Place.

Wheelchair Rugby was growing by leaps and bounds and held its first World Championship in 1995. BC's Garett Hickling won MVP, a feat he repeated in 1998 – the same year fellow BC athlete Ian Chan joined the team. The two would form a dynamic duo that brought many trophies to Team BC during the 1990s and 2000s.

Victoria hosted Canada's first event on the World Wheelchair Tennis Tour where Yuka Chokyu pushed her way into the world's top ten. Meanwhile, Paul Johnson dominated the national championships through the decade and would be part of the first Canadian Paralympic Wheelchair Tennis team in 1992, as well as for the next three Paralympic Games.

The launch of the WC Race Series took road racing to a new level in BC, as a circuit of races across the province started up and quickly grew in popularity.

BCWSA also launched a new program called Bridging the Gap, focused on recruiting more people with disabilities into sport through Have-a-Go Days, a wheelchair loan program and enhanced outreach with GF Strong.

HIGHLIGHTS

BC dominance in wheelchair tennis and rugby.

1992 Paralympic Games and Laurel Crosby.

Wheelchair tennis joins Paralympic program.

Growth of wheelchair racing and WC Race Series.

First Canadian Open on the Satellite Tour.

Launch of the Bridging the Gap and Wheelchair Loan Program.

Wheelchair Sports join the Canada Winter and Summer Games.

Yuka Chokyu reaches 6th in world rankings.

The National Women's Wheelchair Basketball team begins its undefeated streak and wins gold at the 1992 and 1996 Paralympics, plus the 1994 and 1998 World Championships.













TOP LEFT
BCWSA created the Canada Cup in 2004 to enhance international competition and help teams prepare for Worlds and Paralympics. It has become one of our signature events. Trevor Hirschfield plays defense at the 2006 Canada Cup against Australia's Brad Dubberly.

TOP RIGHT
Sarah Hunter and Brian McPhate finished 4th at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, the highest finish for Canada in Wheelchair Tennis.

MIDDLE LEFT
Michelle Stilwell won gold in Wheelchair Basketball in 2000 before switching to wheelchair racing which she would then dominate throughout the late 2000s and 2010s.

MIDDLE RIGHT
Chris Trifondis Sydney Paralympics.

BOTTOM LEFT
Kelly Smith was one of the top Wheelchair Racers of the 2000s and won a silver medal at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Ken Hall was one of several BC athletes who won gold in wheelchair basketball at the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney.

the 2000s

The new millennium brought plenty of opportunity and optimism to BC Wheelchair Sports. Team BC and Team Canada were both thriving on the basketball and rugby courts, wheelchair tennis was continuing to grow with provincial, national and international circuits, and the WC Race Series kept pushing forward.

This was the decade when BCWSA really made strides to become a leader in event hosting as we launched the Canada Cup International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament, added an ITF international tennis tournament to the Stanley Park Open, hosted multiple national championships in BC, and hosted the 2009 IWBF Americas Cup and Canadian National Wheelchair Rugby Championships at the Richmond Olympic Oval - a location that would later develop into a significant hub for wheelchair sports in BC.

The 2000s saw the Bridging the Gap program continue to grow and succeed in its mission to get people with disabilities physically active and involved in sport. The program also recruited multiple athletes into our teams and programs who would go on to have an immense impact in the community.

BC athletes continued to build on a legacy of international excellence with incredible performances on the world stage. The men's and women's wheelchair basketball teams both took gold at the 2000 Paralympics in Sydney, and the national wheelchair rugby team claimed their first world championship in 2002 – all with key contributions from BC's best. Meanwhile, Sarah Hunter reached new heights as the World No. 2 in wheelchair tennis, the highest ranking ever achieved by a Canadian, while racers Michelle Stilwell and Kelly Smith sped to success on tracks around the world.

HIGHLIGHTS

Sydney 2000 wheelchair basketball gold medals.

Vancouver Invitational Wheelchair Rugby Tournament.

Garett Hickling, Ian Chan and Adam Frost help Canada win the 2002 World Wheelchair Rugby Championship.

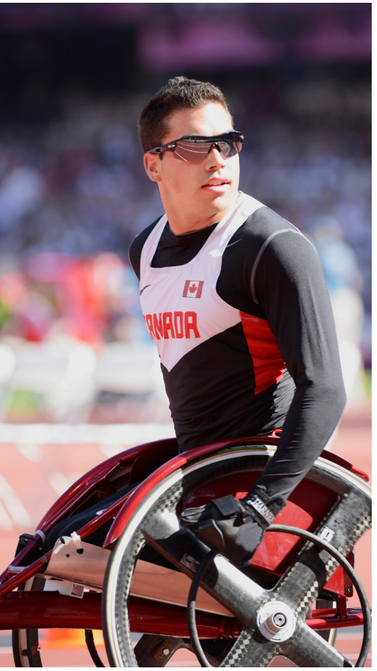
Kelly Smith burst onto the international wheelchair racing scene.

Sarah Hunter and Brian McPhate.

Creation of Canada Cup International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament.

Wheelchair Tennis joins the Stanley Park Open.

2009 IWBF Americas Championship and Canadian National Wheelchair Rugby Championships.

















TOP LEFT
Nathan Dewitt went from BC's Junior Wheelchair Racing programs to two Paralympic Games.

TOP RIGHT
The 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championship featured sold-out crowds, our first global webcast, a surge in media coverage and truly exciting action on the rugby court.

MIDDLE LEFT
Thomas Bourassa, Thomas Venos and Coach Steve Manley represented Canada at the 2017 BNP Paribas World Team Cup.

MIDDLE CENTER
Kathy Newman

MIDDLE RIGHT
2010 Rugby Worlds School Program.

BOTTOM LEFT & CENTER
The National Men's Wheelchair Basketball Team won gold at the London 2012 Paralympics avenging their 2008 loss to Australia. BC's Richard Peter and Bo Hedges were standouts alongside star Patrick Anderson.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Tristan Smyth at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio where he won bronze.

the 2010s

The 2010s started with one of our most exciting ventures as we hosted the 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships at the brand-new Richmond Olympic Oval. These championships were a genuine success, as we sold out of tickets most days and brought a new level of media attention and public awareness to the sport.

BCWSA athletes shone at the two Paralympic Games during this decade, as Michelle Stilwell followed her incredible Beijing campaign with three medals at the London 2012 Games and two more golds at the Rio 2016 Games, capping off an incredible Paralympic career.

Nathan Dewitt was our first racer to go all the way from a junior program to the Paralympics, competing in London and Rio, while Tristan Smyth won a bronze medal in 2016, adding to BC's Athletics success. Meanwhile, Ian Chan, Garett Hickling, Trevor Hirschfield and Travis Murao helped Team Canada to a silver medal in London and a silver at the 2014 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships in Denmark.

This decade was also an exciting time for Junior Wheelchair Tennis as BC sent two juniors and Coach Steve Manley to the World Team Cup where they tied Canada's best-ever finish.

It was a transformational decade for BCWSA as Wheelchair Basketball fully broke off into the BC Wheelchair Basketball Society and longtime Executive Director Kathy Newman retired, with Gail Hamamoto taking charge and leading the organization into a new era full of excitement.

HIGHLIGHTS

BCWSA joins BC SCI Community Services Network.

2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Tournament.

Return of Seated Throws.

BC Wheelchair Basketball Society separates from BCWSA.

Kamloops Legacy Wheelchair Tennis Tournament.

Michelle Stilwell's Paralympic success.

Tristan Smyth at Rio 2016.

Canadian Junior World Team Cup appearance.

Kathy Newman's WAC Bennet Award and BC Sports Hall of Fame induction.

Launch of Push4Impact.















LEFT TOP
John Chen is one of the many BC athletes now competing on the World Wheelchair Tennis Tour.

LEFT MIDDLE
Julia Hanes has been rewriting the Canadian record books so far in the 2020s and won bronze at the 2025 World Para Athletics Championships in Shot Put.

LEFT BOTTOM
BC hosted the 2025 Birmingham National Wheelchair Tennis Championships at UBC. Thomas Venos captured his sixth straight Singles and seventh consecutive Doubles titles.

RIGHT TOP
Cody Fournie raced to two gold medals at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.

RIGHT MIDDLE
Jessica Kruger, Julia Hanes and Tiana Hemsert and coaches Teri Thorson and Kendra Todd were all part of Canada's first Women's Cup Wheelchair Rugby Team in Paris.

RIGHT MIDDLE LOWER
The Indigenous Bridging the Gap Program aims to remove barriers to participation in sport for Indigenous individuals with disabilities across BC.

RIGHT BOTTOM
BCWSA hosted the 2020 Paralympic Qualification Tournament at the Richmond Olympic Oval. Team Canada booked their ticket to the 2020 Paralympics right before the world shut down.

the 2020s

The 2020s got off to a strange start as we opened the decade by hosting the 2020 IWRF Paralympic Qualification Tournament, where the Canadian Wheelchair Rugby Team booked their ticket to the Tokyo Paralympics. That would, however, be our last event for a while, as our organization and the wider world faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We emerged from that challenging time more resilient and resolute than ever as programs, events and sports resumed and BCWSA picked up where they left off, pushed towards the future.

This decade has seen our largest number of tennis athletes active on the world tour, the creation of our first Junior Rugby programs and a strong push to create more opportunities for girls and women in Wheelchair Rugby. We have also increased advocacy for Athletics within meets and track and fields clubs across the province.

The 2020s have also seen us work to connect with more people through the Bridging the Gap program, with considerable efforts being made to grow our Indigenous Bridging the Gap program and strengthen our connections with clinicians, educators and community organizations.



HIGHLIGHTS

2020 IWRF Paralympic Qualification Tournament.

Thomas Venos's seven consecutive national singles titles.

First Canadian Junior Wheelchair Rugby programs.

Canada's first-ever women's Wheelchair Rugby team.

Julia Hanes's 2025 World Para Athletics medal.

Michelle Stilwell's Canadian Sports Hall of Fame induction.

Sport Through the Years

Sports

wheels to marathon win

Darryl Hyatt of Nelson, B.C. one hour, 28 minutes, 20 seconds.

Best time in the 'over 40' category went to Barry McFarlane of Burnaby, B.C. and the novice trophy went to marathon entrant Mike Touchie of Port Alberni, B.C.

The Golden Wheel Award was presented to Stephen Rogers, MLA, Vancouver South for winning the final heat in the 60-yard "Celebrity" wheelchair race. Other heat winners were Vancouver's Mayor Jack Volrich, Don Rogelstad of the Vancouver Whitecaps, and Bill Kohler, CFMI Radio, who won the 'media heat'.

Canadian wheels to Olympic wins

Reimer captures 2nd gold medal

HEIDELBERG, West Germany (CP-Reuter Eugene Reimer of Abbotsford, B.C., captured hi ond gold medal at the 21st international Whee Olympics here, as he won the men's pentathlor petition for his disability class Wednesday.

Reimer, Canada's top male athlete at the Canadian Wheelchair Games in Calgary this year, picked up a gold medal last Monday by breaking the discus record.

His latest award brings to five the number of gold medals won by Canada at the Wheelchair Olympics, which

the 60-metre wheelchair in 16.3 seconds.

Richard Wasnock couver managed a place finish in the me tathlon for his disabilit Wasnock got a gold Monday by winnin 75-metre individual

Stilwell leaves them laughing, in her dust

HEELCHAIR | Racer has fun with comedian before winning go

BY GARY KINGSTON

COACH CALLS IT A

er ball' now called wheelchair rugby

uding Canada, qualified for with U.S. the hot favourite.

which is the shape and size of a volleyball, across an opponent's end line to score a point.

Blocking and contact between chairs is legal, but physical contact between players is outlawed.

All wheelchairs are custom made, most defined by big bumpers at the front to guard the feet in collisions. They're built to take a beating, says U.S. player Norm Lyduch.

Lyduch says the game could shock some spectators.

"Some people have the wrong idea about quadriplegia – they don't know we can get in these chairs and actually hit each other," he said.

Cliff Chunn, who was 15 when he started playing in 1990, is one of three survivors on the U.S. team from Atlanta.

He said the sport grew in

EDITOR MIKE BELL 604-605-2156 FAX: 604-605-2524 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 200

sports

Yuka Chokyu, the world's 13th-ranked women's wheelchair tennis player, trains on the clay court her father built.

photo Randall Cosco

Elite athlete honing backhand on Richmond court of d

Y GARY KINGSTON
VANCOUVER SUN

hether he's striding on his prosthetic, bounding down a dressbalfway on his stumps or g an opponent into the his sled, Greg Westlake us immutably pleased. a smile lyrics like the fantastic 21-year-old with an men's sledge hockey

call it cheery, a sign of hess. But it also conveys achievements like he's od and feeling smug

he and linemate Billy e at their shift disturber opponents in the mauver Canuck agitator

plies teams off a little spoon-feeding, but Westlake grew up at least ds. Most of the guys, they hate getting hit ink we're out there ing penalties."

seen their share of but along with Brad also form Canada's scoring line and are the Turin 2006 Par-

Canada off to promising start at Olympic

Host nation defeats Great Britain to open round-robin play at World Wheelchair Rugby Cha

Canada has wasted little time in proving why they are among the favourites at the World Wheelchair Rugby Championships.

The host nation and the tournament's third seed defeated ninth ranked Great Britain 48-41 in front of a sold out crowd of school children waving signs and cheering, *"Go Canada Go!"* at the Richmond Olympic Oval on Tuesday.

The championships continue all this week with the gold medal game scheduled for Sunday at 3 p.m.

"It was a great first win for us against a very quality opponent," said Canadian head Coach Kevin Orr. "We felt that (Great Britain) was one of the strongest teams here at the tournament, so for us to come out with a win was very good."

Co-captain and hometown favourite Ian Chan provided early leadership for Canada, scoring the bulk of the goals and using his speed to stymie the British offense.

Each line-up Canada subbed in maintained aggressive full-court pressure and by halftime,

Team Canada's Mike Whitehead fends off a pair of Great Britain players during Tuesday's opening round game at the C

llins and Alan Ash, the British ced some turnovers of their m to come within four at the d of the third quarter. Canada's ld ball-handling, however, ade it impossible for Great itain to gain any momentum. nada continued to roll with all ylinders firing despite multiple e changes

"We ran 11 (of 12) players

and no other team will do that this week," said co-captain Dave Willsie.

Wheelchair rugby is a team sport for male and female quadriplegics. It is full-contact and played on a hardwood basketball court between teams of four players. It combines some elements of basketball, handball, and ice hockey, and was created in Canada in 1977 by a group of athletes with a disability in Manitoba.

The rounding out the 12 competing nations are New Zealand, USA, Australia, Japan, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Poland, Finland and Argentina.

The Canadian line-up also features another local player — Travis Murao.

Wheelchair Sports laun new participation drive

B.C. Wheelchair Sports is launching a new program, Bridging the Gap, that organizers hope will inspire people to participate in wheelchair sports and get physically active again.

Recognizing that a gap exists between the initial introduction of sport and recreation in the rehab setting, and the continued involvement of individuals upon their return to the community, the program attempts to help individuals regain motivation, independence and

wheelchair sports includin
ketball, quad rugby, floor h
soccer, wheelchair racing a
sports. After the sessions, t
Wheelchair Sports will run
programs that will focus o
how to play the sports on

The first introductory p
held Saturday (Oct. 23) at
Mitchell Elementary, 1209
from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Wheelchair athletes wi
strations of each of the di
and then everyone will ha

Championship. Murderball

Michelle Stilwell wears a golden smile after winning the women's T52 wheelchair race and setting a Paralympics re

MARK BALDERSON/CP PHOTO

Team Canada's co-captain Ian Chan gets knocked over as he crosses the goal line at the Richmond Olympic Oval yesterday. Story, page 3.

Rocking rugby rolls into Ri

The 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby

Rugby rolls into Richmond Oval

Tickets still available to World Wheelchair Rugby Championships, at Richmond Oval until Sunday

JEFF HOGSON
@VECTRONICS.CA

Canada's wheelchair rugby team will draw on their conditioning and depth of talent as they try to roll the world's best wheelchair rugby players off the court in Richmond this weekend.

"We like to run an attack offence and play defence," said coach Kevin Orr, following the Canada 48-41 win over Great Britain yesterday during the opening match of the 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships, a four months of the chair ing even a local teammates,

"When you can get out there and smack some metal with the guys ... it's a lot of fun for the fans."
DAVID WILLSIE
TEAM CANADA CO-CAPTAIN

against the Brits at the Richmond Olympic Oval yesterday. Orr, the former coach of Team USA, said the depth of talent speaks to a greater awareness of the sport in Canada, where it originated.

"It was a blast," said co-captain David Willsie about playing before the enthusiastic crowd. "It's a lot of fun for the fans."

Canada's Travis Morao, right, battles Troye Collins of Great Britain in the opening match of the 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships.

Murderball legend Hickling keeps

Indian rugby star Garett Hickling manages to fire a pass Tuesday although he is surrounded by team Great Britain.

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PHYSICAL DISABILITY

B.C. pair receives wheelchair awards

Two British Columbians were among four Canadian students to receive the first Ada Mackenzie Memorial Foundation Awards for

student wheelchair athletes.

Gary E. Birch of Mill Bay and Diane Rakiecki of Penticton will receive cash awards to assist them with their schooling expenses so they will be able to spend

the university transfer program at Okanagan College in Kelowna.

The other two recipient of this year's awards ar Daniel Palamarek, Edmonton, a third-yea

Gold for Reimer at 'wheel' games

HEIDELBERG, West Germany (CP) — Canada won two gold ay at the 21st Wheelchair Olympics.

Doug Bovee of Edmonton won the men's 60-metre wheelchair slalom in the Class 1A competition with a time of 76.9 seconds.

Eugene Reimer of Abbotsford, B.C., won the discus vent in the men's Class competition with a toss of .91 metres.

Reg Muise of Hamilton, t., won a silver medal in shot competition in men's 1B with a put of 4.9 res. Bovee picked up hi nd medal of the day i Class 1A shot, a bronz placing third with a put o metres.

all, 36 Canadian paraple

Athletes to artists, the disabled find their turf

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND

Sarah Hunter, Connell Tennis Centre, North Vancouver, 1:14 p.m., Tuesday, May 8, 2001

"It's a lot different from being in an ice arena," National wheelchair tennis competitor Sarah Hunter picked up a racket after an on-ice spinal injury ended her double-A hockey and national lacrosse careers. "It was instant love with tennis. I went to B.C. Wheelchair Sports Move A Go Day." They phone people who have been recently injured and come out and try new sports. "I couldn't believe how much fun it was. It's exactly the

Chan of Canada, left, and Ryley Batt, right, of Australia try to get control of the ball as they compete in the Wheelchair Rugby match between Australia and Canada in the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, China.

- Getty

Rocking rugby rolls into Ri

The 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby

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Tickets still available to World Wheelchair Rugby Championships, at Richmond Oval until Sunday

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PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Cherenko scores pentathlon record

Vancouver's Dennis Cherenko set a world record in the pentathlon Tuesday at the 11th annual National Wheelchair Games being held all this week in Vancouver. Cherenko, competing in category Quad 1B, scored 3,576.2 points to be old standard by 20.2 points.

Cherenko also established a Ca record in the shotput (5.52 metres) the pentathlon's five events. The re: archery, 60-metre dash, clu and 25-metre freestyle swim.

Two more national records were

of Halifax sco while Mark F n the 25-metre conds.

ONTARIO BOUND

mances in the dartchery and ar- ent B.C. Games for the Disabled. h board) was selected to join the

Kent and the 35 other athletes that were selected for will travel to Scarborough, Ont. to meet Canada's

FINISH

ski Nendaz

Wheelchair sports roll to phenomenal growth

By ELLIOTT PAP

"We want the B.C. Games to be a vehicle of awareness. We want to get people thinking about wheelchair sports."

The words belong to Dennis Cherenko, executive director of the B.C. branch of Canadian Wheelchair Sports. For three and a half years, Cherenko has been at his post witnessing what he describes as the "phenomenal growth" of wheelchair sports in this province.

Cherenko, of course, is the man who makes much of it happen. A University of B.C. graduate in economics, the self-spoken Cherenko was once a hot junior hockey prospect in Nelson. Fourteen years ago, at age 16, he went into the boards head first and emerged with a squashed spine.

It took a while, he says, but he picked up the pieces and is now helping others to do the same. The B.C. Games for the Physically Disabled are an integral part of his

"This makes it tough to schedule because most competitors are in more than one event. Almost everybody will enter an individual sport as well as a team sport."

But Cherenko will also tell you that scheduling is a minor irritation. The Games themselves are absolutely worthwhile.

"The athetes love the competition," he smiles. "They love being together and travelling together. We have an open skill level so everyone can participate.

"The guys who do well are the ones who like to train and I'd say there are about 40 or 50 serious athletes. The others are newcomers or those who don't have aspirations above the regional level."

Wheelchair athletes compete in a variety of sports with track and field ranking at the top. Other major events include basketball, archery, swimming, table tennis, volleyball, riflery, snooker, weightlifting, fencing and a new one affectionately

"We want people around the province to know that wheelchair sports are available," he says. "That's why we've taken the Games out of the Lower Mainland. We hope to move them to Kelowna next year and get things going there. We want to hit these areas and then follow it up."

The Games also serve as qualification meets for the more competitive athletes. There are national championships to pursue and Olympic medals to be won. The Disabled Olympics are a quadrennial event held the same year as the regular Olympics and usually in the same host country.

This year's event won't be in Moscow, though. And, no, boycotts have nothing to do with it.

"Russia didn't claim to have any disabled athletes," chuckles Cherenko, eyes a twinkle. "They said they didn't have a program. In fact, we've never had any representation from any communist countries at these games."

The 1980 Disabled Olympics, edition six, are thus awarded to the Netherlands, where they will be contested June 21-July. Nearly 50 countries and 3,000 athletes are expected to compete.

Dennis Cherenko, by the way, will be among the 3,000. As of last August, he was



Burnaby resident Tom Parker displays his skills at table tennis during the B.C. Games for the Handicapped at B.C.I.T. over the weekend. Parker won a gold





d Champions Walt Petko, centre, and Chad Craigen, right, repre The Enterprise, accept their award from Dennis Cherenko of dian Wheelchair Sports Association after they beat out all o from TV, radio stations and newspapers in the Lower Mainlan

WHEELCHAIR ATHLETICS

Push fast and throw far. What seems like a simple pursuit involves lot of technique, training and persistence. Wheelchair Athletics has been part of BCWSA since the beginning. From the early races and throwing events at the BC Disability Games, to the Vancouver Marathon and establishment of WC Race Series, to sold-out stadiums at the Paralympic Games, there's been no shortage of incredible moments on the track and in the field.

Early pioneers like Doug Wilson and Eugene Reimer established BC as a force in athletics during the 1970s. The next decade would see Rick Hansen and Paul Clark put in golden performances at the Paralympics. Meanwhile, Diane Rakiecki became the first woman to wheel a marathon in 1983, and Dan Neff would become the first quadriplegic to accomplish the feat a few years later in 1986.

The 1990s saw a boon in the local racing scene as James Hustvedt and Steve Milum created the WC Race Series, giving racers multiple road races per season and ensuring athletes of all levels had the opportunity to enjoy the thrill and challenge of racing.

In the new millennium, Kelly Smith burst onto the international scene and pushed his way to the podium in Athens, while Michelle Stilwell swapped her basketball chair for a racing chair and went on to become one of the sport's most decorated athletes in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

The 2010s marked the return of Seated Throws programs to BCWSA, with great interest and growing popularity across multiple disciplines. BC athletes achieved plenty of success at local meets, nationals and the Canada Summer Games. Most recently, Julia Hanes became the first Canadian woman to win a World Championship medal when she won bronze in shot put at the 2025 World Para Athletics Championships in India, adding another chapter to BC's long and proud history of wheelchair athletics.



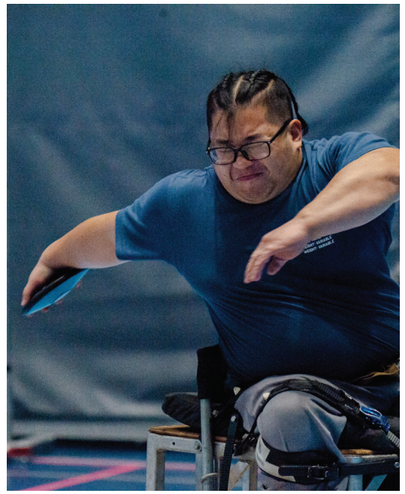


James Hustvedt has dedicated years to developing Wheelchair Racing in BC. He helped co-found the WC Race Series in 1990s and continues to be a consistent presence in the Athletics community.

James is a longtime Wheelchair Racing coach who has mentored and supported many athletes over the years. In 2024, he was honored as viaSport's Competition Coach of the Year.











TOP LEFT
Teri Thorson at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens.

TOP RIGHT
Diane Rakiecki

MIDDLE LEFT
The return of Seated Throws programs in the 2010s has been a hit with athletes.

MIDDLE CENTER
Julia Hanes trains in Shot Put.

MIDDLE RIGHT
The Vancouver Sun Run has become a popular road race for BC Wheelchair Racers.

BOTTOM LEFT
Kelly Smith 4x400 Sydney Paralympics.



WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

Wheelchair Tennis started relatively late compared to many other para sports but has grown into one of the most popular and well-known sports adaptive sports in recent years. The sport has been part of BCWSA's offerings since 1980, and our athletes and builders have played a major role in growing the sport in Canada and around the world.

The sport really took off during the 1990s as both a Canadian and World Tour emerged. Victoria hosted the first Canadian Open event on the World Tour in 1990 and BC athletes began achieving incredible success. Paul Johnson racked up National Titles throughout the 1990s and would go on to compete in three Paralympic Games.

Two BC athletes have cracked the world's top 10. Yuka Chokyu was first when she hit a career high of no. 6 in 1999 and was followed by the trailblazing Sarah Hunter, who successfully fought and won the right for women to play in the Quad Division and would go on to be the world No. 2 (the highest for any Canadian in any division) and achieve a Canadian best finish of 4th at the 2004 Paralympic Games alongside the late Brian McPhate in Quad Doubles.

BCWSA has continued to host yearly tournaments on the world tour, and an exciting new generation has taken up the mantle of success, with multiple BC athletes currently active in international competition and junior programs that are both getting kids to fall in love with the sport and producing athletes that are striving for more; tennis continues to be a real ace.













TOP LEFT
Brian McPhate

TOP RIGHT
Paul Johnson encouraging a junior player.

MIDDLE LEFT
The 2002 Canadian Open in Stanley Park.

MIDDLE RIGHT
BC's new dynamic duo - Thomas Venos and Barry Henderson at the Vancouver International Wheelchair Tennis Tournament.

BOTTOM
Sarah Hunter at the 2008 Paralympics in Athens.

OPPOSITE LEFT
Yuka Chokyu at the Birmingham National Wheelchair Tennis Championships.

OPPOSITE RIGHT
Mitch McIntyre at the 2023 Parapan Am Games in Santiago.



WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

From the early days of "Quad Ball" and "Murderball" to today's wheelchair rugby, the sport has been a key part of BCWSA since shortly after its creation in 1977.

BC's first Wheelchair Rugby team was the BC Blue Devils, and over the years BC would develop into a true force in the sport.

One of the sport's founders, Duncan Campbell, moved to Vancouver from Manitoba and was an excellent recruiter, encouraging many to take up the sport, including stars like the late Ian Chan and Garett Hickling.

Garett Hickling was one of these greats who helped BC build a Wheelchair Rugby dynasty, winning many national titles throughout the 1990s and 2000s and earning MVP at the first three World Wheelchair Rugby Championships, including the 2002 tournament in Sweden, where Canada took the gold. His teammate on the 2002 World Championship squad and fellow BC star, Ian Chan, would be a fixture on Team BC for over 20 years and later play a significant role in developing the next generation as a coach.

BC Wheelchair Sports has also played a crucial role in growing the sport and hosting multiple signature events, including the Canada Cup, the 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships, and the Vancouver Invitational, now one of the world's longest-running tournaments.

BC continues to lead the sport forward and has made real strides in increasing participation among women and youth in recent years as Wheelchair Rugby enters its next chapter.



Founders of Murderball. l-r Randy Dueck, Gerry Terwin, Chris Sargent (joined the team a year later), Paul LeJeune and, in front, Duncan Campbell.









TOP LEFT
Garett Hickling scores a try at the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

TOP RIGHT
Duncan Campbell and Garett Hickling at a rugby practice in the 1990s.

MIDDLE LEFT
Junior Rugby programs are getting the next generation involved in the sport.

MIDDLE RIGHT
The Women of the BC Wheelchair Rugby Program celebrate winning at Nationals in 2022. l-r Gail Hamamoto, Julia Hanes, Jackie Patatas, Jessica Kruger, Kendra Todd and Tiana Hesmert.

BOTTOM LEFT
Adam Frost at the first Vancouver Invitational in 1999.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Ian Chan





EQUIPMENT: THEN & NOW

As the organization and our sports have evolved over the years, so too has the equipment used by our athletes. Each decade has brought greater innovation and customization in sports wheelchairs as the pursuit of speed, agility, balance and efficiency continues.

In the early days of wheelchair sports, it was common to see E&J wheelchairs on the basketball court or at the track. Throughout the ’80s and ’90s, they gave way to lighter, more maneuverable, sport-specific chairs, followed by a wave of titanium in the 2000s and, today, custom buckets and carbon fiber. Across all of our sports, wheelchairs have changed dramatically over the past 55 years.

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

In what may now be a familiar story, wheelchair rugby chairs have gone from standard day chairs into highly customized, reinforced chairs that some would describe as mini-tanks. Today, they come in two distinct styles: high-point chairs that are more rounded and built to push through contact, and low-point chairs, which feature a large pick bar on the front that can be used to lock onto and hold opposing chairs. As wheelchair rugby has expanded to include athletes with a wider range of disabilities than when the sport was primarily played by people with spinal cord injuries, there are now far more seating options and individualized chair setups seen compared to the early 2000s.







WHEELCHAIR ATHLETICS

The standard wheelchair of the 1970s gave way to the early racing chairs of the 1980s, many of which were built by the athletes themselves. These evolved into the three-wheeled racing chairs we still see today, though they are now much lighter and more aerodynamic. More recent advancements include highly customized seating buckets and greater reliance on sports science to inform decisions about set-up and positioning.







WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

Tennis chairs, like many sport chairs, started out as standard day chairs and have evolved into highly agile, stable, and cambered custom sport chairs. Today’s tennis chairs typically feature extended front castors, significant camber and larger wheels along with one or two rear castors to enhance mobility and stability and provide a sharper turning radius. Athletes also use a variety of strapping options to maximize power, balance, and their ability to use every possible muscle.





ADDITIONAL BCWSA SPORTS

In the early days of adaptive sport, almost every wheelchair sport fell under BC Wheelchair Sports, with as many as 22 sports in the 1980s. As the years went on many sports broke off into their own organizations or folded into other existing groups. From basketball and sit-skiing to scuba diving, there has been a real variety of offerings throughout our history.

Though now only Wheelchair Athletics, Wheelchair Tennis and Wheelchair Rugby are under our umbrella, all our previous sports have contributed to our larger story. Here's a bit more on some of the biggest sports from our past.

SWIMMING

In the early days of the BC Games for the Disabled and their national counterpart, it was common for athletes to compete in both Wheelchair Athletics and Swimming events. Several of BC's first Paralympians excelled in the pool, including Joyce Murland, Gunther Schuster and Richard Wassnock, among others.





TARGET SHOOTING

Target Shooting has been part of the Paralympic Games since the Toronto 1976 Games, and several BC athletes have excelled on the world stage, including Doug Blessin and Chris Trifondis.



Chris Trifondis competes at the 2012 Paralympics in London.

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Wheelchair Basketball was the first wheelchair sport to be played in British Columbia, when Stan Stronge founded the Dueck Powerglides in 1950. Wheelchair Basketball is one of the most popular parasports in the world and has a thriving community around BC through the BC Wheelchair Basketball Society. BC athletes, coaches and builders have made incredible contributions to the sport at all levels and continue to do so today.

BCWSA and BCWBS still partner on multiple initiatives and programs and are both members of the BC SCI Community Services Network, which aims to make BC the best place for people with disabilities to live, work and play.



Marni Abbott - One of Canada's most decorated Wheelchair Basketball players, Marni was an elite point guard who has pushed the sport forward on the court and off of it.



Tim Frick coached the Women's National Wheelchair Basketball Team to four Paralympic gold medals and three World Championship titles from 1992-2006.



Richard Peter - The first Indigenous athlete to represent Canada at a Paralympic Games and a 2x gold medalist.

POWER SOCCER

The first team sport for athletes using power wheelchairs, the sport originally called Motosoccer was part of BC Wheelchair Sports throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It is now run by our friends at SportAbility.



PEOPLE BEHIND THE ORGANIZATION

Running programs, organizing events, and advocating for meaningful change takes a lot of hard work and effort. Throughout our history, BC Wheelchair Sports has been fortunate to have many dedicated staff and volunteers willing to go the extra mile and make a difference.

Our staff has grown over the years from one or two people to more than ten located across the province, while our board has gone through multiple transformations. At one point in the 1980s, the BCWSA Board of Director consisted of more than 25 members, leading to a multitude of spirited debates.

These individuals connected with the organization in different ways and contributed a wide range of skills, insights, and perspectives

Beyond our board and staff, we've always had a strong group of enthusiastic volunteers who support our range of programs and events, including students, clinicians, friends, and family members.

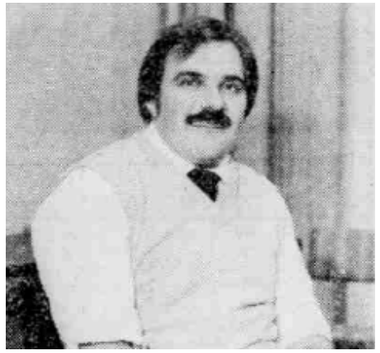
BC Wheelchair Sports isn't just an organization; it's also a community. We have a rich history of athletes of all levels, from lifelong recreational athletes to Paralympians, who give back and share their knowledge, time, and skills to help others.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

1977-1981	Dennis Cherenko
1982-1983	Berry Tibbett
1986-2012	Kathy Newman
2012-2023	Gail Hamamoto
2023-present	Michelle McDonell

BCWSA PRESIDENTS

1971	Harry Beardsell
1972-1973	Tom Parker
1974	Maurice Whalley/Mike Charko/ Duncan Kendrick
1975	Sheila Mannell
1976	Harry Beardsell
1977-1978	Sam Moojalsky
1979-1980	John Evans
1981-1982	David Blair
1983-1985	Marshal Smith
1986-1988	Norm Haw
1989-1990	Carole Brown
1991-1994	Bill Morley
1995-1997	Corinne Amber
1998-2013	Pat Harris
2013-present	Laurel Crosby







DENNIS CHERENKO
BCWSA's first Executive Director, Dennis was also an accomplished athlete in Athletics. He played a pivotal role in steering the organization through our early years.

KATHY NEWMAN
Kathy spent over 30 years with BC Wheelchair Sports and continues to play a significant role in Wheelchair Basketball and Wheelchair Rugby, serving on national and international boards. She's one of the architects of our hosting strategies.

GAIL HAMAMOTO
Gail worked for BCWSA for 25 years and has become one of Canada's leading voices in disability sport and was one of the co-creators of the Bridging the Gap program alongside Kathy Newman and Sian Blyth.

LAUREL CROSBY
Laurel started volunteering with BCWSA as a track coach in 1978 and has served on our Board of Directors since 1980. Laurel was also one of the masterminds behind our highly successful Wheelchair Rugby Schools Program leading into the 2010 World Championship.

PAT HARRIS
One of our longest-tenured presidents and a driving force behind Wheelchair Sports in Northern BC.

DEAN MACKINNON AND ROSS ROBINSON
Dean was a longtime official in Wheelchair Basketball and Wheelchair Rugby. He is one of our longest-serving board members and a strong advocate for Wheelchair Sports.

Ross was an active wheelchair athlete for many years and has continued to give back and support wheelchair sports as a longtime board member.

STAN STRONGE
A co-founder of the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association, BCWSA and the Vancouver Dueck Powerglides Wheelchair Basketball Team, Stan was one of the most influential builders and pioneers of Canadian Wheelchair Sports.

RYAN SCHWEIZER
You don't have to be a Paralympian or a president to make a difference.



























defining moments











































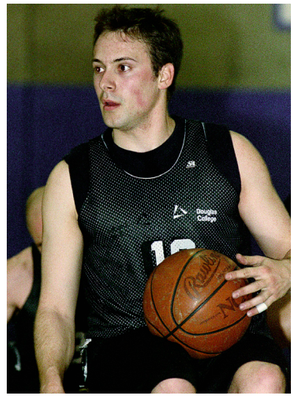






















BCWSA TODAY & LOOKING FORWARD

As we look ahead to our next decade and, hopefully, another 55 years, BC Wheelchair Sports is in a great place. Our programs now run in communities across the province, and athletes continue to find success across all our sports.

As we navigate the rising costs of living, equipment and sport participation, we remain committed to removing barriers to sport and increasing awareness of our programs and the potential of athletes with disabilities. We're building upon the legacy of past fundraisers like the Swim-A-Thon and Wheel-A-Thon with new events like Push4Impact that merge sport, fun and philanthropy in exciting ways that engage our community.

BCWSA athletes, coaches and staff continue to take on leadership roles domestically and internationally, helping to shape our sports and make an impact on sport and accessibility. We recognize that our sports can be a powerful tool to create positive changes that goes beyond the field of play.

We're investing more in gender equity and continuing to make our programs feel safe, welcoming and inclusive for people of all backgrounds and identities.

In sport and in society, youth are the future, and we're very excited with the recent uptick in our youth programs and the increasing awareness around the benefits of parasport for kids and youth with disabilities.

There are now many more options than ever for people with disabilities to get active, both within our organization and outside of it. Collaboration and community are vital as we work alongside other sport and community partners to help make BC one of the best places in the world for people with disabilities to thrive.

There will no doubt be challenges to come, but the examples from our past show us that BC Wheelchair Sports will adapt, evolve and continue striving to create better opportunities for the incredible athletes and people who make us who we are.























TOP LEFT
Max Arsenault and Joel Ewert.

TOP CENTER
Jessi Guerrier

TOP RIGHT
Paulo Guerrero

MIDDLE
Junior Sport Camps

BOTTOM TOP LEFT
Tiana and Bernie Hesmert.

BOTTOM TOP RIGHT
Executive Director Michelle McDonell at the 2024 Canada Cup with representatives from the government.

BOTTOM LEFT
Junior Rugby Exhibition at the Canada Cup.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Byron Green

OPPOSITE LEFT
Push4Impact

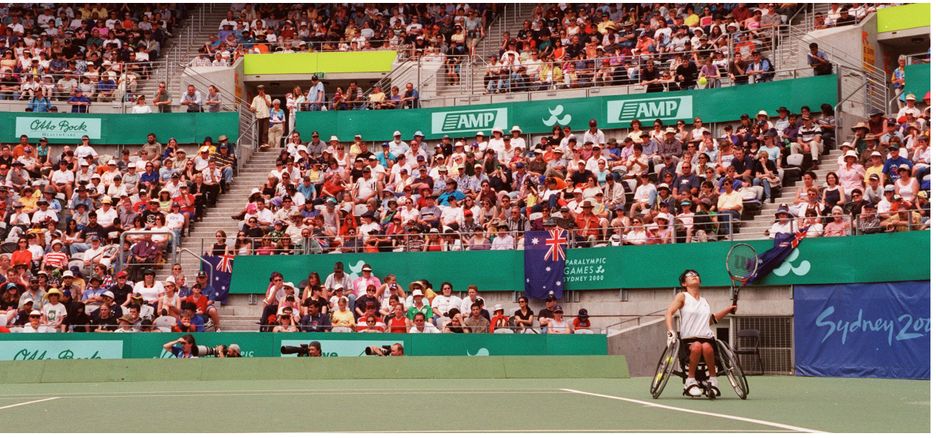
OPPOSITE RIGHT
Patrick Levis















TOP LEFT
Vancouver Invitational

TOP RIGHT
Lachlan Sandford

MIDDLE TOP LEFT
Junior Sport Camps

MIDDLE TOP RIGHT
Starting Line

MIDDLE
Yuka Chokyu at the Sydney Paralympics.

BOTTOM LEFT
Brandon Perger

BOTTOM RIGHT
Kelly Smith receiving an award.






2
