

ROWED TO BEIJING



Scott Rand preparing for his training session on the dock.

A NEW SPORT IS COMING TO THE PARALYMPICS

BY LISA LYNAM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN LIGHT

AT THE 2007 World Rowing Championships in Munich, Germany, last September Scott Rand was part of the bronze-medal crew that secured a spot for Canada at the inaugural Paralympic regatta to take place in Beijing this summer.

Two thousand eight marks the first time adaptive rowers will join nearly four thousand other Paralympic athletes in twenty sports from 136 countries at the Paralympic Games. Over three days from September 9 to 11, four boat classes will race the one-thousand-metre distance at the Shunyi Olympic Rowing-Kayak venue.

Rand, a Calgary design engineer who trains at Alive Personal Training with support from the Canadian Sport Centre, has his eyes set on bringing home gold. His possible fortune, however, stems from an unfortunate accident on July 23, 1997. It was a day that would set his life on a new course.

Rand was an ironworker welding atop an unfinished building that day when the structure collapsed.

He fell to the ground and was left with his legs pinned beneath a mass of twisted steel. Two months in hospital and multiple surgeries later, he came away with a prosthetic lower right leg.

Being a below-the-knee amputee did not stop him from continuing his passion for sports like golf, racquetball, cycling. "Once my prosthetist had built the carbon-fibre leg with the knee brace cast into it, I was out snowboarding. I have never found a sport that I am not able to do with the new leg," said Rand, who then found his way to rowing in 2005.

After just four months he would be nominated for the 2006 national adaptive rowing team to attend the World Championships,

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but finances kept him from participating. In 2007, however, Rand raced at the World Championships in Munich, Germany, where his crew of four rowers and one coxswain—also known as the LTA 4+ or the legs, trunk, arms coxed four—was part of one of the most exciting races adaptive rowing has seen. Less than a second separated their crew from the Italians for the bronze medal, and they were only a second off silver.

Rand was joined on the podium by crewmates Meghan Montgomery and Tony Theriault (both of Victoria, British Columbia) and Victoria Nolan (Toronto, Ontario) and coxswain Laura Comeau (London, Ontario).

For 2008, they are aiming for spots in the boat to race in Beijing.

The demands of competing at this level mean that Rand trained three hours a day throughout the winter, and this summer will be no less rigorous. "In the final preparations for send-off I will take a four-month leave of absence from work to train more than five hours a day, six days a week. This winter and spring I had to back off at work to six hours a day to manage the training demands. It has been a grueling schedule beginning at 4:15 a.m. every day," Rand said.





The adaptive rowing team following a training day.

Theriault and Montgomery, who were both in the 2006 bronze-medal winning crew as well as the 2007 competition, are also accustomed to working hard and triumphing over their disabilities.

Theriault was struck by a car while cycling in Victoria in 1992 and left in hospital for eight months with a fracture-dislocation in his back and an incomplete spinal cord injury. The scholarship track runner with three Ironman finishes to his list of impressive achievements would eventually find his way back to swimming in 1996, and then complete three more full Ironmans despite his disability. In 1999, Sport BC recognized Theriault with the Harry Jerome Comeback Athlete Award.

Theriault's introduction to rowing and the national adaptive team came in 2005 from Gorge Rowing Club coach Paul Hawksworth. Theriault started rowing in Nanaimo. As he improved he moved to Victoria City Rowing Club to train alongside able-bodied rowers and in a pair with Montgomery, using a seat adaptation to compensate for his lack of balance due to his back disability.

"I am still playing around with equipment and adaptations. Right now I am using a prototype seat that Queen Alexander's [Hospital in Victoria] made for me for crew boats. I seem to manage okay in the single-scul boat," Theriault said.

Montgomery was born with only three fingers (a congenital disability also called syndactily), so she too needs adaptive equipment—a hand strap—to be able to hold on to the oar and row. When she

started rowing, her coach, Karen Strychack, from the Winnipeg Rowing Club, was getting involved in adaptive rowing in Canada and investigated whether or not Montgomery classified with her disability.

Montgomery's physical disability met the number of points to allow her to be eligible to row in the legs, trunk, arm four (LTA 4+) category. Other eligible rowers for the LTA 4+ include amputee, spinal impairment, cerebral palsy, blindness. Many different types of disabilities can be accommodated within the same crew, allowing for integration among disabilities and, ultimately, integration into regular programs within a rowing club.

"I never have believed I'm disabled," Montgomery said. "I have to make adapta-

tions to what I do, that is all. My adaptation is a hand strap that has been taken from the idea of a weight strap, that is all. I can do anything able-bodied rowers can do, except chin-ups."

Rand has found that he has had to customize his training a little more than Montgomery to adjust to his prosthesis. He hired personal fitness trainer Damir Mulaic from Calgary's Alive Personal Training to develop strength exercises that account for the power demands of rowing and his below-knee amputation capabilities. His regular gym routine now includes a challenging exercise, with 150-pound weight plates tied to his waist, that helps him mimic the squat, a key exercise for rowers.

So far, the results have been promising

Web sites for Paralympic and Adaptive Rowing

ROWING CANADA NATIONAL ADAPTIVE ROWING TEAM

www.rowingcanada.org/national_team/adaptive/

CANADIAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

www.paralympic.ca

SUPPORTERS OF CANADIAN PARALYMPIANS

www.Paralympicfriends.ca

INTERNATIONAL PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

www.paralympic.org

BOCOG PARALYMPIC

<http://en.beijing2008.cn/paralympic>

Provisional Program for Rowing Events at the Paralympic Games

SEPT 9 HEATS, SEPT 10 REPS AND SEMI FINALS

SEPT 11 FINALS FOR ADAPTIVE ROWING'S FIRST PARALYMPIC MEDALS

<http://www.worldrowing.com/display/modules/events/dspEvent.php?eventid=35031>

CANADA'S LTA 4+ BRONZE MEDAL PERFORMANCE IN MUNICH

<http://www.adaptivesportsdesigns.com/videos/videos.htm>

for Rand. He posted a personal best time for his one-kilometre erg test this May as part of the national team testing requirements and, after almost four months of the quad-burning squat simulations, has added two inches of muscle around both legs.

Canada's adaptive rowers will have a selection regatta June 8 to 15 in London, Ontario. Rand expects the competition to be the best adaptive rowing has seen in Canada as a result of the push for Beijing.

"Competition is a great motivator, but nothing in sport is guaranteed, so I take nothing for granted," Rand said. "I will have to tap into resources that previously I haven't had the strength or acquired knowledge to do."

Montgomery also welcomes the competitive push for a sport she is passionate about. "With or without adaptive rowing, I would be rowing. The adaptive team, and the competition gets better and better all the time. This pushes me to be better. I'm chasing gold. I want to watch my flag go up the pole and sing the anthem."

I'm chasing gold. I want to watch my flag go up the pole and sing the anthem Meghan Montgomery

In 2005, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) announced that rowing has been accepted as a new sport on the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games program. Although adaptive rowing has been part of the World Rowing Championships since 2002, Canada sent its first National Adaptive Team in 2004.

Theriault feels that this inclusive aspect gives the sport a real boost. "I don't think there are many sports out there where the able-bodied athletes and the adapted athletes share one World Championships. I'm stoked to have the chance to row for the first-ever Paralympic rowing medals," said Theriault, who trains six days a week, two to three sessions a day, that can include rowing on the water or indoors on a Concept 2 rowing machine, weights, core, and other dryland activities.

The history of the Paralympic Games goes back to 1948 when Sir Ludwig Guttmann staged the International Wheelchair Games at the same time as the 1948 London Olympic Games. Now the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games are the premier international competition for world-class athletes with a disability. They are linked to the Olympic celebrations every two years and athletes must meet strict qualifying standards in order to compete.

Rowing Canada's national adaptive rowing team coordinator Allison Sheard sees the sport coming of age with the Paralympic leap in Beijing. From talent identification to technique development to equipment modifications, countries have been making a push for higher levels of

performance along with funding support. Adaptive rowing receives funding from Sport Canada and the Road to Excellence, as well as Rowing Canada Aviron.

While less high profile than Olympic rowers, adaptive rowers are also eligible for carding. Some provinces have sport funding programs that have also provided funds to support athletes in their training.

Sheard, who will be the team manager for the Paralympics in Beijing, said she has seen competition levels improving dramatically as well as interest from rowing clubs around the world to offer adaptive programs.

"The launch of adaptive rowing at the Paralympics will bring on some very exciting and close races. Athletes who have been training for a number of years have had an opportunity to develop their technique, hone race plans, and work on adaptations to equipment. The Paralympics should see some interesting developments in rigging within the fixed-seat categories," said Sheard.

Those with more restrictive disabilities participate in the fixed-seat rowing categories—the arms-only single-scul for men or women, or the arms and trunk mixed double-scul with one male and one female in the crew. Sculling boats are different than the *four*, which is a sweep-style crew, and rowers have one oar, whereas scullers row with two oars.

Vernon's Joan Reid was a member of the national adaptive team last year competing in the World Championships in the women's arms only single scull after starting in a learn-to-row program at the Vernon Rowing and Paddling Centre in 2006.

"I showed up to try, and fell in love with it. I have always loved being on the water in kayaks or canoes, but this was quite different from that. It seemed more graceful and is much faster too!" said Reid, who is currently focusing on her primary sport, para-nordic skiing, for the 2010 Paralympics.

"Because I am a nordic skier, rowing is a very complimentary cross-training sport. I have stopped rowing competitively for now because of a rowing-related injury at the World Rowing Championships that was caused by the chest strap that arms-only athletes are required to use while competing. We have not been able to fix the strap so that it will not continue to injure me. I am hoping to work on this a bit this summer so that maybe I could be ready to compete at the 2012 Paralympics." Reid is helping the Vernon club, along with June Hawkins, to organize an introductory course on adaptive rowing this fall.

With the integration of adaptive rowing

into club programs across Canada and the spotlight expected to shine on Canada's Paralympic rowers this fall, adaptive rowing is set to grow and allow people with many kinds of disabilities the opportunity to pursue a healthier lifestyle and outdoor fitness and recreation, or even the chance to represent their country at the Paralympics.

Meghan Montgomery, Scott Rand, and Tony Theriault have clearly demonstrated how the benefits of rowing can be life changing. ■



Rowing Clubs with Adaptive Rowing Programs

CALGARY ROWING CLUB

Blair Rassmussen
calrow@telusplanet.net

GORGE ROWING CLUB (VICTORIA)

Gavin McKay
info@gorowandpaddle.org

VANCOUVER ROWING CLUB

Kristina Molloy
rowing-membership@vancouverrowingclub.ca

VICTORIA CITY ROWING CLUB

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VERNON ROWING CLUB

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ARGONAUT ROWING CLUB (TORONTO)

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BARRIE ROWING CLUB

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OTTAWA ROWING CLUB

Craig Law

HALDIMAND ROWING CLUB

ST. CATHARINES ROWING CLUB

Jane Jarvis

ISLAND LAKE ROWING CLUB

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Julie Driver
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WINNIPEG ROWING CLUB

Theo Jarrett-Enns

BLUE WATER ROWING CLUB

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