

Speedster back on track

Braedon Dolfo is preparing for the Paralympics in London after winning a bronze medal at a prestigious event in Mexico in mid-November

BY TROY LANDREVILLE



Langley teen Braedon Dolfo's Canadian record-breaking run earned him a bronze medal in the 100m sprint at the Parapan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Photograph by: Troy Landreville, Langley Advance

Braedon Dolfo went from hobbling around on crutches in late July, wondering if he'd ever run at the same level again, to capturing a bronze medal at the Parapan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico.

And, in the process, he earned a guaranteed ticket to the 2012 Paralympics in London.

"It feels absolutely amazing," said Dolfo, who was honoured by BC Athletics as the Male Athlete of the Year with a Disability at its annual awards banquet on Saturday.

"Before I had the [hip] surgery, my first thought was, 'I'm probably not going to be able to run again.' I didn't know how bad it was; it's great to be back on my feet and running again."

On Nov. 15, Dolfo broke his own Canadian 100-metre (T13 visually impaired) record while winning the bronze medal in the event final at the Games in Guadalajara.

His time of 11.34 seconds was also a London 2012 Paralympic Games "A" qualifying standard mark.

Dolfo initially set the Canadian record Nov. 14.

That's when he took the next step in his recovery from the aforementioned July 23 hip surgery, establishing a new Canadian mark of 11.36 in finishing second in his 100m qualifying heat. He shaved .13 seconds off the previous record of 11.49 seconds.

His Nov. 15 effort gave Dolfo the A standard time for the 2012 Paralympics, which means he'll be competing at the prestigious multisport in London which runs Aug. 29 to Sept. 9.

The time was also the fastest in the world this year by a visually impaired junior aged athlete.

"I will be going [to London]," said Dolfo, who celebrated his 18th birthday on Nov. 28. "I'm pretty excited about that. It didn't sink in while I was there but when I got back it was kind of like, 'Wow, I actually made it.' It was like a free ticket, already."

Considering who he was up against in the final, Dolfo was happy with a bronze medal.

"The guy who came first was a bronze medalist [at the 2008 Paralympics] in Beijing, and the guy who came second was a Brazilian who has been around for quite some time," he said.

Two days after his bronze medal run, the Grade 12 student at Langley Secondary School was scheduled to race in a 200m heat, but during warm-up realized he had strained a hamstring, so he pulled out of further competition.

"I just stuck with the 100m bronze medal," he said.

Dolfo developed cataracts and chronic uveitis at age five and began competing in track and field at age 11 after he developed glaucoma.

He has represented Canada at the 2011 IPC world championship, where he brought home bronze and set a Canadian record in the high jump.

Dolfo also anchored the visually impaired 4x100m relay team to a fourth place finish at the worlds.

His track and field aspirations ground to a temporary halt over the summer when he underwent the procedure at the University of British Columbia.

Dolfo said the injury was a culmination of wear and tear, and wasn't the result of something that happened suddenly.

"It was over probably a year-and-a-half of training," he said. "It was all scar tissue, basically."

He called the surgery, "A pretty major setback."

Dolfo took four months off from his training as he waited to go under the knife. He was expecting to miss the Parapan American Games as he healed up, but he managed to get right back up to speed, one tender step at a time.

"It was pretty painful," Dolfo said. "I started out trying to walk and it was pretty hard, but all I thought about was trying to get to [the 2012 Paralympics in] London. That was the only goal I had in mind. If I kept on thinking about the pain, then [I knew] I'm not going to get to London."

Two days after the surgery, Dolfo was using his affected right leg.

He began a strengthening and rehab program designed by his coaches as well as physio and massage, and then started light jogging about a month after surgery. A month-and-a-half after that, Dolfo graduated to sprinting.

"I was progressing from that point because it was all technical - just trying to get the leg used to all of the movement I had before," he said.

Nowadays, Dolfo believes he hasn't lost a step - in fact, based on his recent times, he's as fast as ever.

"It feels brand new," he said. "[Doctors] did a great job."

In Guadalajara, Dolfo felt like he had an advantage because he trains on a very windy track.

"It's more difficult to breathe here than it was to breathe there," he said.

The atmosphere, not weatherwise, but rather the vibe of the Games, was "quite insane," Dolfo said.

"The stands were probably filled every single day except for maybe 100 seats," he said. "The Mexican community came out and supported everybody, really."

He called the robust crowd, a "boost."

Next up for Dolfo is a trip to London in May, for a staging meet for the 2012 Paralympics.

"That's probably my biggest meet I have coming up," he said.

And while he has already earned a trip to the Paralympics, Dolfo isn't easing his foot off the accelerator as he prepares for his next meet.

"I'm going to train as hard as I can here, before I get there," Dolfo said. "Just to drop my time a little bit more so I can have a shot at a medal in London. That's my biggest dream, there."

Following London, Dolfo said he is looking down the road at the 2016 Paralympics.

"I'm just taking it day-by-day and seeing how everything progresses," he said.