

# Dolfo has goals clearly in sight

**Mustangs runner gallops off to Florida with Canadian Paralympic team**

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Times Sports

Some athletes talk about being in the 'zone'.

They describe it as not seeing anything around them, blocking everything else out and focusing on the end goal, whether it be a finish line, target, goal, or whatever.

In some ways, this describes Braedon Dolfo perfectly.

He is a driven, motivated and talented.

But while his vision is limited in the field of play, it has more to do with something else and less to do with focus.

The problem first popped up when he was a toddler.

He was just a little three-year-old at the pool for his swimming lessons.

Looking around, he could not find his instructor, despite the fact she was standing right in front of him.

This startling realization prompted his family to get his eyesight checked out and he was diagnosed with glaucoma, an eye disease which over time damaged the optic nerve and impairs vision. It can deteriorate to the point of complete blindness.

After several surgeries to try and correct the problem, Dolfo's eyesight took a turn for the worse at age 11, when he lost the majority of his field of vision.

None of that deterred Dolfo when it came to athletics.

Imagine lining up to compete against someone who has their full peripheral vision.

This is what Dolfo has been doing, going

up against athletes who have no vision problems whatsoever.

Dolfo describes his eyesight as trying to peer through a straw: that is the extent of all that he sees.

Yet he excelled.

Two years ago, he won bronze in high jump for Grade 8-9 boys at the B.C. high school track and field championships.

Last year, he was part of the bronze-medal winning relay team from Langley Secondary in the 4x100 relay.

And then there are the countless medals he has won at the club level, competing with the Langley Mustangs.

Dolfo excels at the 200m, 400m, relays, high jump, long jump and javelin.

His coaches marvel at what he has been able to accomplish despite not competing on an even playing field against athletes will full vision.



John GORDON/Langley Times

Braedon Dolfo left for Florida last week where he will spend two weeks training with the Canadian Paralympic track and field team. The 16-year-old is working towards qualifying for the world championships this January in New Zealand.

*"But I never thought it would happen. It is just one of those little kid dreams."*

**Braedon Dolfo**  
track and field athlete



"Basically before, he would just try to adapt on his own, and hope things worked out," said Kim Chapdelaine, his club coach for the past two years with the Langley

Mustangs.

"You can imagine what it takes for an athlete to long jump or high jump when they can't see; he can't see the board, there is very limited eyesight when he jumps, so he is basically jumping on faith.

"But once we figured out where it was he sat in terms of eyesight, it was kind of like giving him a set of wings; he was free to really perform."

"Up until this year, I think he was in denial," said Nicole Purney, who has coached him at the high school level at Langley Secondary for the past three years.

"He tried to hide that he had a disability with his eyesight.

"He just seems happier now than he did before and really excited about the opportunities he has. Really gung-ho."

Purney described him as an amazing athlete who works just as hard off the track as he does on the track.

With his visual impairments now identified, Dolfo has also caught the eye of the national team program.

Vision impaired athletes are identified in three levels, B1, B2 or B3 and Dolfo is a B2.

After going to Ottawa back in November to train with other members of the Canadian paralympic track team, Dolfo piqued the coaches' interest. On Friday, he left for Florida, where he will train for the next two weeks and take part in a pair of meets.

Dolfo will run a leg in both the 4x100 and 4x400 relays.

"It is going to be a great experience," Dolfo said.

Judging by what she has seen, Chapdelaine figures he has the potential to break four Canadian national records while he is in Florida.

He is trying not to get ahead of himself, but representing his country would be a dream come true.

"Right now, I am not thinking too far ahead," he said.

"The biggest goals right now are probably worlds (championships) in New Zealand and 2012 (Olympics) in London, which the Canadian coach said we have a god chance to make if we keep improving our times."

The world championships are in January 2011.

Dolfo said he has always dreamed about

representing his country and being an Olympian.

"But I never thought it would happen," he said.

"It is just one of those little kid dreams."

He also expressed gratitude for all the help along the way, especially from his coaches.

"Without them, I would not have had the opportunity to make the Canadian Paralympic team," he said, giving special thanks to Chapdelaine, and another pair of Mustangs coaches, Dwayne Lotnick and John Lovett, and for the help from Purney.

The feelings are mutual.

"He really understands the sacrifices people are making for him and he really gets it; that is pretty cool for a kid his age," Chapdelaine said.

"There has to be a trust and respect factor both ways and I think he draws off the relationship we have.

"We have the utmost faith in him and believe he can do it, and then it is basically building that confidence in him."

"We have just tried to encourage him to live life to the fullest," said his mom, Diana.

"For him, it is a way to have something bad in his life — it has been a total struggle with the adjustments at school and in life — to have a great opportunity from something terrible in life.

"For him to have this opportunity, it is really neat."