

Track star readies for dream event

A local Paralympic track athlete is approaching the London 2012 Games as 'a normal meet.'

BY TROY LANDREVILLE, LANGLEY ADVANCE AUGUST 9, 2012 3:31 PM



A local Paralympic track athlete is approaching the London 2012 Games as 'a normal meet.'

Photograph by: submitted , for the TIMES

July 31 was like any other ordinary midsummer morning at McLeod Athletic Park.

Before a heat wave flooded the region, an exercise enthusiast ran up and down the MAP grandstand stairs.

At the same time, a couple strolled leisurely along the track that hugs the oval turf field.

On that turf field a young man ran alone, practising his form.

Naturally, he went unnoticed by those around him.

For Braedon Dolfo, the morning workout wasn't to get in shape.

He already has the physique of an elite track athlete.

In fact, Dolfo was training for the upcoming London 2012 Paralympics.

At 18, the Langley Secondary grad and soon-to-be Trinity Western University student/athlete is the youngest athlete named to Canada's 2012 Paralympic track and field team.

In London, Dolfo is slated to compete in three events: the visually impaired 4 x 100m relay, along with the T13 men's 100m and 200m sprints.

"It's pretty exhilarating, actually," Dolfo said, before setting off to do his solo workout. "It's basically like a dream come true. You think about it as a kid and now it's become possible, so I'm pretty excited."

He is coming off a golden performance at the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Trials at Foothills Athletic Park in Calgary.

Dolfo, who has about five per cent vision, won gold in the T13 men's 100m and 200m dashes.

His showing in Calgary notwithstanding, Dolfo has compiled quite a resumé heading into the biggest meet in his life.

He is the Canadian T13 record holder in long jump (6.40 metres), high jump (1.83m), and 100m (11.34 seconds), the latter of which would have him ranked fifth in Canada among able-bodied junior athletes.

With his high jump of 1.83m, Dolfo claimed the bronze medal at the 2011 Paralympic World Championships in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Dolfo has come a long way over the past couple of years, in many aspects. His track and field aspirations ground to a temporary halt last summer when he underwent hip surgery at the University of British Columbia.

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

Thanks to loads of hard work and resilience, Dolfo said his hip is "100 per cent."

Going into London, Dolfo will face the same kinds of challenges as others in his category. He developed cataracts and chronic uveitis at age five and began competing in track and field at age 11 after he developed glaucoma.

He compares his vision to looking through the hole of a straw.

"The five per cent is in the central visual field, more in the middle," his dad Brent explained. "When he's running the 100, it's easy to focus and he can see straight ahead and see the lines. The challenge comes when he's running the 200 and running the corner, when the lines all intersect."

"You get used to it, and you start adapting to it," Braedon said. "Running the 200metres, it's definitely helped to figure out the corner. I usually run it by feel than just sight, usually. It can be challenging. It has its difficulties but it's usually pretty good."

All paths, metaphorically, lead to these fast-approaching 2012 Games.

Dolfo is keeping an open mind heading into London.

He and his Team Canada coach Laurier Primeau are not only focused on London, they're also aiming for the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"Just to have fun and enjoy the experience," Dolfo said, when asked about his expectations at this year's Paralympics. "If I have a great performance I'll be extremely happy but if I don't, just the experience to go to the Paralympics is great."

Primeau doubles as both head coach of TWU's track and field team and Canada's para-athletics head coach.

Coach and athlete will grow familiar with each other in the coming years, after Dolfo agreed to attend TWU and compete for the Spartans track team starting this fall.

"It's always been about 2016 for Braedon," Primeau said. "He's an 18-year-old athlete who is potentially going to do some unexpected things in London with respect to medaling."

The focus this summer is on process more than outcome.

"I will say that in both the 100 and 200 he'll be fighting for a medal, but we also know that statistically speaking as a country, we probably convert on about 50 per cent of our medal expectations," Primeau said.

Dolfo sits among the elite in world rankings when it comes to the T13 100m (fifth) and 200m (sixth) sprints and the Canada's visually impaired 4 x 100m relay team (Canada ranks fourth).

In that respect, he has a shot at bringing home a Paralympic home with him to Langley.

Even so, Dolfo doesn't put any added pressure on himself.

"I feel if I do the training, the results will come," he said. "But if I don't do the training, do the day-in, day-out work, then I usually put pressure on myself because I know I should have done that or done this. It almost feels like a normal meet, even though it's on a larger scale. It's just go out there, run, and have fun."

Brent said his son should be in his prime at the 2016 Games in Rio or the 2020 Games.

"In my view, a medal is possible, but making the finals is a good goal," Brent said. "There are a number of very experienced athletes who have qualified in the 100-metres [and will] will be entering the 200-metres, and vice versa."

Primeau describes Dolfo's training as "an evolution."

"He has had some really solid foundational coaching in which to build, so that's made my job much easier," he said. "Our biggest task is keeping him injury-free."

Physically, Dolfo is a 25-year-old with an 18-year-old's birth certificate, Primeau said.

"He's so well developed," the coach said. "Because of that, there's been musculature and bone growth that's happened so rapidly, that there's been a lot of tightness and mobility that we've had to work through to keep him healthy."

The journey to London has been an interesting one for Dolfo.

“I had the hip surgery last summer, just to be able to make it now, I’m quite happy,” he said. “I’m ready to go and I’m ready to give it my best.”

Dolfo can’t wait to soak in the atmosphere of his first Paralympic Games.

“Seeing friends from different countries, I think that will be the biggest thing for me,” he said. “Just being in the stadium alone, just to know that the Olympic athletes set the stage for the Paralympic athletes.”

Dolfo has one last competition in Canada, a Paralympic tune-up meet Aug. 15 in Coquitlam. On Aug. 21, Dolfo leaves for a pre-Paralympic training camp at Brunel University in London.

The Paralympics’ opening ceremonies are Aug. 29.

© Copyright (c) Langley Advance