

## Episode 48 | Marni Abbott-Peter Pt. 2

### **Sponsor Message 0:00**

When your parents start needing even a little bit of help, contact Nurse Next Door. We can drive them to their doctor's appointments and pick up their prescriptions and make sure they take their medicine correctly whatever it is they need. Getting started with the nurse when you need only a little bit of help makes it easier to accept more help later on. Nurse Next Door provides in home elder care so that your parents can live happily at home and it's affordable. See for yourself at [nursenextdoor.com](http://nursenextdoor.com).

### **Sarah Smith 0:41**

So you've now, you've mentioned you're now shifted into coaching, and you're working with the BC Wheelchair Basketball Society. Could you tell us a bit about what you do there, and maybe some of the programs that are run?

### **Marni Abbott-Peter 0:53**

Sure, I've actually just transitioned into a new role with the organization. I've been working for the organization for many years in a variety of different capacities. One of the things that I really loved, in 2010, we started a program called Let's Play, which was a real unique kind of wheelchair sport equipment program, but targeted at kids 12 and under, and not necessarily basketball specific. It was just about physical literacy and developing fundamental movement skills and helping these children gain confidence and fitness through wheelchair, learning the skill of wheeling and participating at school, playing outside at recess, those kinds of things. And I've just recently, in the last year, transitioned to a new role where I'm more kind of overseeing that whole pathway that I was kind of talking about. So from their initial development into their transition towards that high performance pathway. So we have a very clearly identified journey, I guess. So we start with our Let's Play program, which we initially introduce children and families to the sport, the different para sport options, teach the kids how to wheel, just help them get active. And then they move towards BC Games, which will be heading up to Vernon next week with a crew of about 30 athletes from around the province. So those are sort of our younger juniors. And then they move towards Canada Games, which we just came back from the Canada Games in Prince Edward Island a couple of weeks ago, where Team BC won a gold medal, which was super exciting. And then from there, they move upwards to our provincial teams and junior nationals and those kinds of things. And if not, they can just go

to our club and be kind of active for life and participate in a recreational competitive environment.

**Sarah Smith 2:40**

Okay, cool. Very cool. So some of the programs are more competitive and others more recreational, just for like, the everyday. Love that, yeah, sort of something for everyone, depending on what you're looking for.

**Marni Abbott-Peter 2:49**

Sort of, yeah, yeah. And we have clubs all around the province, which is great. We would love to have more. I think we have around 10 that are active now. So in the North, in the Okanagan, on the Island, in the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley. So it's quite a robust kind of club system that we rely on too, to help support our athletes in the regions.

**Sarah Smith 3:12**

Yeah, that's fantastic. And in terms of the chairs that are actually used in wheelchair basketball, can you talk a little bit about those and whether they're different from what someone might use on a day to day?

**Marni Abbott-Peter 3:24**

Sure, that's a great question. The chairs and equipment, and it's not just unique to basketball, it's the same in every pair of sport have come so far in the last 20 years, and when I first started playing in '92, I played basketball in my everyday chair, like we just had one chair we used for daily living, and then we played sports in it, too. In some of the earlier photos you'll see of wheelchair basketball from the 60s and 70s, there's people that would pull up to the free throw line, put their brakes on and take their foul shot, and then take the brakes off and wheel away. And nowadays, the sport chairs are very high tech, made out of really lightweight metals and aluminums and titanium and materials like that they have. They're really specialized for each athlete in terms of what their abilities are and their size and how they like to sit. We really try and maximize depending on the person's abilities, their seating position can impact their speed in terms of wheeling, and also their shooting and shooting range and those kinds of things. So making sure that the sport chair has all the correct options for that particular person is important. And then the chairs themselves have cambered wheels, so they, they're sort of wider on the bottom than they're on top. They have anti tips on the back, which keep you from flipping over backwards. It's a safety item that was only added in I think, I think that started to come into play around 1996 but yeah, now the chairs are really important piece in terms of the success of the athlete. And they are not cheap. We at BC Wheelchair Basketball have a loan program so you can rent a

chair for \$10 a month, as opposed to purchasing your own chair, which could be anywhere from five to \$8,000 so it really helps newer people get involved in the sport. It also helps athletes kind of try a few different chairs before they do buy their own, so they make sure they get what they want.

**Sarah Smith 5:28**

Yeah, that's really cool. And I mean, when you're saying that all of the things you want them to be best fit for the person using the chair sort of customizable, that's a really cool program that you get to sort of try different ones and see what type of chair works best for you, and sort of what you need before committing to that financially, because that is a significant amount there.

**Marni Abbott-Peter 5:46**

Yeah, and with the Let's Play chairs, they're just a little sort of multi purpose sport chair. So they can be used to play basketball, fun games, wheelchair, rugby. They've been used on the track. There's lots of children playing tennis in those chairs now. So they're pretty versatile for that younger age group. So it's good that they don't have to have, you know, if they want to play tennis and they want to play basketball, they don't need to have a different piece of equipment for all of those at that young age.

**Sarah Smith 6:13**

Yeah, totally. That's that sounds like a really smart program to have available.

**Marni Abbott-Peter 6:18**

Yeah, it's been really successful, actually, and we're continuing to grow and just trying to carry on accessing more equipment. We have probably around 100 kids around the province who have their own chair but we also have what we call chair champions. So there's fleets of the small Let's Play wheelchairs in school districts, and they go to a different school every two or three weeks, and all the kids in the school have a chance to try it, and normally they include some of the Rick Hansen School's program lessons along with it, so they can do stuff in the classroom, as well as the physical activity piece. So it's a really good connection in terms of teaching kids about diversity and inclusion and disability and even just understanding how accessible their school is, and doing audits on the on accessibility and that kind of stuff. So really, it's a really great program in terms of creating a lot of awareness around that. And normally, when there's a child with a disability in a school, and we do go, it really impacts them and their self esteem. And, you know, just having other kids participating and playing with them in, you know, at their level, and with

their equipment that's needed, and it's really fun, and it's a good confidence builder. So, yeah, it's great program.

**Sarah Smith 7:30**

Yeah, I imagine that's really, really valuable for those kids. That's really cool. I love that. I'm wondering you've played sort of a number of roles within the wheelchair basketball community here, obviously, as an athlete, as a coach, as an employee, what do you value most about that community and being part of that community?

**Marni Abbott-Peter 7:50**

It's like a family. I mean, we, it is a smaller community, and we are one of the smaller provincial sport organizations, but we have been, you know, we really embrace and try and include everybody that wants to play, whether able bodied or have a disability. And that's one of the unique things about wheelchair basketball, is we do invite able bodied people to hop in a chair and play as well. And there is a classification system in place that would, you know, they wouldn't be taking away from someone with a disability in terms of a spot on a team or in a program. So with that sort of bit of uniqueness, and a lot of our programs are co-ed, is because we don't have the numbers on the woman's side to support programming there, and it's having that mix of gender and abilities. It's just a really unique sport. And yeah, our community really embraces new people that are coming in, anyone who's newly injured, and then also just, we have a really great sort of foundation and history here in BC, in terms of wheelchair basketball and the whole overall sport. So it's a pretty it's a small community, but pretty tight knit group, for sure.

**Sarah Smith 9:07**

Yeah, yeah, that sounds really, you've put that very beautifully when you say it's like a family that just gives such a nice sentiment and community so important. You know, it just, I, yeah, I can't say anything nicer than what you just said. So I'll leave it at that, as we're sort of wrapping up here, how would you suggest folks best get involved in some of the programs? What's the best way to find you?

**Marni Abbott-Peter 9:30**

Oh, okay, perfect. We are all over social media. So we have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and we have a website, bcwbs.ca, if you go in there and click on our calendar, it'll show any of our upcoming events. We're sort of nearing the end of our season. Our season kind of runs sort of September to May, but we do have a couple of big events coming up in Vancouver. We're hosting the CWBL, which is the Canadian Wheelchair Basketball League Championship in May at the Oval in Richmond. So there'll be teams from across Canada

out there competing. It'd be great to come and watch. We're looking for volunteers. If anybody has any skills in terms of score keeping or hosting, or any of those things. We have our annual fundraiser, Hoop Fest, which is a really fun event. Police, firemen, banks—we have a whole variety of corporate teams that sign up and come play for an evening. They have a little mini tournament, and we have fun food and prizes and stuff like that. And so that's also in May, and then that'll kind of be the end of our season. And then over the summer, we have junior sport camps, and we partner with our friends at wheelchair sports to offer a multi sport junior camp. And then we also do some basketball specific camps over the summer. So we're pretty busy. And what you can find most things definitely on our website and our calendar also shows when and where our clubs practice in each of the regions, so you can find that information if you're not located in the Lower Mainland.

**Sarah Smith** 11:08

Well, lots of very cool things coming up. Sounds very fun.

**Marni Abbott-Peter** 11:13

It is, you should try and come. And actually, on Monday nights, we have an introductory program at the Richmond Oval. And anybody's welcome to come and try it out. We have equipment there and everything, and it's free for first time tryers. It's a really fun environment to kind of try the sport and to meet a few other people and just to play at a level that suits people that are just learning and getting introduced to the sport.

**Sarah Smith** 11:36

Very cool, very cool. Lots of fun things to check out. Thank you so much for sharing all of this information as well as your story. Is there any final thoughts that you want to leave about either your experience with wheelchair basketball, or for any other athletes who might be new to sport.

**Marni Abbott-Peter** 11:53

I just, I'm very grateful for all the opportunities that wheelchair basketball has brought to me, and I would encourage anyone with a disability or otherwise able bodied to get involved with sport. Maybe it's not wheelchair basketball that's your passion, but some kind of involvement in sport is really helpful in terms of meeting new people, you know, making friends, being active, being healthy. I found that my participation in sport really leaned over a lot into my daily living and how, you know, I was able to to be stronger. And that really helped just the daily transfers and the getting in and out of the car and all those types of things. So it just really made life a lot easier early on, and I think it's continued to

be really valuable to me in terms of fitness and overall health, as I'm aging with a spinal cord injury, which is not easy.

**Sarah Smith** 12:54

Yeah, absolutely sounds like it's played a really great role in your life.

**Marni Abbott-Peter** 12:57

Yeah, so I encourage people just to give it a try, see how they like it. And yeah, look for us, or come volunteer or just be involved in our community. It's an awesome community to be involved in. So thanks so much for having me today.

**Sarah Smith** 13:12

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us and share about all of these cool things. And to all of our listeners, thanks for tuning in today. We hope you join us next time on Discover Stories.