

Episode 44 | Nathan Bragg Pt. 2

Sarah Smith 0:10

And I think also, like you were talking earlier about the physical and like mental health benefits of sport and activity, and then the other big thing being that connection piece. And like you were talking about earlier sharing experiences with someone who maybe has a similar disability to you and you're trying to overcome something, or that you're trying to solve a problem, like you were talking about being able to share those stories and that, like shared perspective and lived experience, I think can be really valuable as well.

Nathan Bragg 0:35

Oh yeah, absolutely. I think the one big example in sport that to me, sticks out is, is that notion of travel. Because oftentimes, a lot of my first early traveling experiences without my parents were in a sport context, and so being able to go on trips with my team, with my coaches, with my teammates and, you know, the first few times you travel with a disability, if you're not used to it, I'm not going to sugar coat it, there is sometimes gonna be problems that arise. There's gonna be some situations that pop up where you might not know how to handle it. And it's really nice to have other people around who have been through those things and have done those things already, because then you can lean on them and be like, "Oh, hey. Like, this bathtub isn't the greatest. How do I do this transfer? Like, what do you do?" And then someone will talk you through it, or they'll show you how to do it, or they'll provide advice that way. Or, like, for me, when I was looking for accessible housing in the city, it was a couple of my teammates who were the ones who sent me the listing, and being like, "Hey, there's this spot open to this building where one of us lived, or used to live. I think you should take a look at this to apply for it," right? So it's having those sort of connections where, like, not only can they answer your questions about, like, "Hey, how do I make this pass on the court?" Or, "My hand isn't quite open, how do you catch the ball?" But also, like, "Okay, I'm trying to learn how to cook again. Like, how do you hold a knife?" You know, it's those little things like that that aren't sport related, but that you learn through sport, that I think are really cool and it's interesting for me now having, you know, been involved in it for 15 years, having been on the other side where now I'm one of the people who answers questions, as opposed to being the like young kid who was like, asking all the questions, or having my parents there whose minds were just blown. Because, you know, all these guys and girls are, like, driving to practice and like having kids on their lap and doing all sorts of different things, right? Like, it kind of opens up a whole

new idea of what's possible that, I think is, is really important, and then, and then you gotta have it connected to, like, a fun activity and an outlet is really great.

Sarah Smith 2:41

Yeah, that's amazing, sort of using that like sport and team environment to create, like that network of general life, friendships and support and yeah, that everybody needs. Amazing. Do you want to talk a little bit more about any of the other programs or events that BC Wheelchair Sport offers?

Nathan Bragg 3:02

Yeah, so we've got, we actually we offer a lot. So we have a range of weekly programs across our three sports that run in different communities throughout BC. So like I said, tennis, athletics and rugby, you can always reach out to any one of our program coordinators for more information on programs that might be in your area, in addition to like weekly programs and some of our high performance programs, for say, our more competitive athletes who are training really hard or on a more competitive pathway, we also run a lot of like major events. So what's coming up soon, for example, is we have our Vancouver Invitational Wheel Tournament at the end of March, which brings the top club teams from across Canada and the Pacific Northwest to the Richmond Olympic Oval for three days of competition in two divisions. We're going to have 10 teams again this year, which is our largest field since the pandemic happened. So we're back up to kind of our pre-pandemic level for that. So that's going to be really exciting, and we're really looking forward to having all of those teams back in our backyard again. That's great. In the summer, we run two international tennis tournaments, one in Vancouver and one in Kamloops, which are both part of the International Tennis Federation's Uniqlo Wheelchair Tennis Tour. So that provides a good opportunity for some of our competitive global players to get an opportunity to play a tournament close to home. And usually we have athletes come from all over the world to compete in that one, which is really great. And those run annually. And then we run the Canada Cup International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament every two years. That's probably our big flagship event. It's where we bring in, like, the eight best basketball teams in the world, before World Championships or Paralympics, and they play in a really big tournament that's going on, which is great, yeah. And then our next, our closest big event coming up is our fundraiser, which is called Push for Impact, where corporate or community teams can enter a group of individuals in, they raise money for our organization, and then they get to compete in a fun, charitable wheelchair rugby tournament with some of our athletes as coaches. So they kind of coach them for the day, and they play about five or six games. And yeah, this is, I believe, our fourth or fifth edition this year, so which has been slowly building that over the past few years. Yeah, but the big

thing, like I said, is, like our weekly and our Bridging the Gap programs, and then we also have an Indigenous Bridging the Gap program where we're working on increasing our cultural awareness and also going into more building stronger relationships with Indigenous communities and sharing sports with them to kind of similar to the standard Bridging the Gap program to break down those barriers and make sure that more people have access and knowledge around wheelchair sports and the benefits that they can provide to people. So yeah, we've got a lot going on. It's definitely a busy place to work, but it's really cool when everything comes together, and it's just great to see, you know, more people get involved, and more of those light bulb moments happen. And yeah, we're always looking for more members and more volunteers. You can always kind of get in touch and reach out to us. We never really have a point where we're turning people away from our programs. Obviously, certain sports are in seasons at different times, but yeah, we're always kind of open to more people joining and getting involved.

Sarah Smith 6:31

Wow, okay, lots of very exciting things happening over there.

Nathan Bragg 6:35

Yeah, we have a lot going on. So it's going to be an exciting year, especially like the past couple years it's coming out of, you know, lockdown and some of the challenges that that had on sport. We're in a really kind of exciting phase now where things are starting back up again. We're getting more of our regular programs back up and running to this kind of state that they were in pre-pandemic. And, yeah, really kind of focusing again on that, like, recruitment piece and getting more people involved. Because, yeah, the biggest challenge is you don't know what you don't know about. So trying to find ways to bridge that gap and get more people aware of what we're doing, and hopefully get more people having a good time.

Sarah Smith 7:15

Amazing, love that, yeah, back to sort of pre-pandemic levels of of engagement. That's exciting. And so talking about sort of recruitment and all of these things, what is the best way for people to find you? Could you maybe drop the website or any social media that might be out there?

Nathan Bragg 7:31

Yeah, so the best way to get in touch with us is to we're on pretty much every form of social media you can imagine. So we're on Facebook, under BC Wheelchair Sports. Same with Instagram, same with Twitter. You can get in touch with us through that. We have a website

at www.bcwheelchairsports.com. We're also currently in the process of building a new website and updating that, so we should have a new website launched within the next month or so, which we're really excited about, looking forward to. And then, yeah, you can just, you can email us at any time at info@bcwheelchairsports.com, or you can check the contact us page on our website, contact the individual coordinator responsible for the support that you're interested in, because we have one staff member for each of those sports who will kind of be the direct contact for that. And then they'll point you in the right direction, either towards the program you're looking or the local club, because we are province wide, so we do have programs in a number of different communities across the province.

Sarah Smith 8:32

Amazing. Thank you for sharing all of that, and as we're wrapping up here, I just want to thank you for taking the time to share both your personal experience as well as all of the amazing things that are happening at BC Wheelchair Sports. Are there any final thoughts that you want to leave us with?

Nathan Bragg 8:48

Yeah, I hope I was able to answer all your questions as well, as well as we could there. And then the last thing I want to just kind of leave people with is, if you're thinking about trying a wheelchair sport and you're just not sure, or you're worried about it, the best advice I could give you is to just come out and try it. Come out and hop in one of the chairs, try out the equipment, meet some of the people and see if it's for you. And you know, if that first sport doesn't quite work out for you or doesn't feel like it's a great fit, don't be afraid to try something different. I think that's one thing that I like about our org, is that we have, you know, we have our three sports, but we're also not afraid to help connect you with some of the other orgs in the area that might cater to this specific sport you're looking for. You know, there's SnowSports that does incredible things up on the mountains. Like I said, SportAbility does Boccia, they do power soccer, and they do paralyzed hockey, so sledge hockey. There's BC Wheelchair basketball. So yeah, if there's something you're interested in finding out about, even if it's not directly our sports, you can always ask the question, we'll point you in the right direction. But obviously we do hope that you get involved in tennis, athletics or rugby. They're all great, fantastic outlets, and I feel like we were really trying to build supportive, open and inclusive programs for everybody to get involved and have a good time. You know, whether you're, you know, a parent of a child with a disability looking for youth programs, or you're somebody in their 50s and 60s trying to get active a little bit more, or you're somebody who was maybe really active and athletic before their

injury, and now you're trying to find an outlet again. We've got a place for all of you, so come and I'll give it a try.

Sarah Smith 10:36

Lovely. That is really great advice. I think that's a beautiful note to end on. So thank you again for taking the time to join me today.

Nathan Bragg 10:43

Thanks, Sarah.

Sarah Smith 10:44

And to all of our listeners, thanks for tuning in today. We hope you join us next time on Discover Stories.