



# Local para-canoeist eyeing the next Paralympics

Graham Paull from Randburg made South African sports history last year when he became the very first Para-canoeist from the African continent to represent his country at the Paralympic Games.

By doing so, he proved that there are no boundaries in sport as long as you are prepared to put in the long and hard hours. Paull's dedication definitely inspired the 19-year-old Jonathan Wing from TuksCanoeing to such an extent that he is looking forward to 2020 and he believes it will be his "big year".

Wing lost his foot when he was six years old. This happened while he was riding at the back of a small tractor lawnmower. He fell off and the lawnmower reversed going over his leg. The doctor advised his parents that their son's quality of life would be better if the foot is amputated. And so it was. There is not a moment that Wing regrets the decision as he is too busy living his life to the fullest.

The big turnaround in Wing's sports career happened when he was in grade 8 at Hilton College. A friend convinced him to give sprint canoeing a chance. He did and enjoyed it from the very first stroke.

After his participation at the South African School's Sprint Championship his coach at the time hinted that Wing might just have what it takes to compete at the Paralympic Games. That made his decision to become a serious

canoeist so much easier.

Wing is quite realistic about his 'Road to Tokyo'.

"Physically I am not yet strong enough to compete against the best. In Para-canoeing you don't get to compete in a junior category and then go on to the senior category. There is just one category and one distance for us. Our Olympic distance is 200 metres and as a youngster you get to compete against canoeists that are ten years older than you and physically so much stronger. This means I still have to bulk up in the gym and put in the long, hard hours on the water. I think once I turn 23 I will be ready to race the best. That will be in 2020," he explained.

The second year Mechanical Engineering student at Tuks represented South Africa at the Para World Championships in both Moscow and Milan. He is quite chuffed with his performance in Milan as he qualified for the C-final while he was only 17 years old.

Asked how rowing with one artificial limb affects him as a canoeist Wing said it is a disadvantage because in canoeing it is not just about upper body strength.

"A lot of power comes from the hips so you have to kick with your legs while rowing," he said.

"It is sort of a kick and pull action. When you're in the canoe your feet are strapped in 'pedals' sort of like a cyclist."



Jonathan Wing from TuksCanoeing dream of participating in the Paralympic Games in 2020.  
 Photo: Reg Caldecott

