

Blades of Glory

Kevin hopes his dream of making speed skating a Paralympic sport for the visually impaired will gain momentum

Born in Victoria in the mid '70s, I was active as a youngster. I played many sports and I also refereed hockey for 25 years. As an adult, I worked at a local grocery chain for 16 years, a job I loved. Then, at age 32, I was diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a condition that causes hearing loss at a young age and loss of vision later on. It was like hitting a cement wall. What now? What would I do in the future? With the diagnosis came many changes. I lost my driver's license, my job with the grocery chain and even my hobby of refereeing.

With the help of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, as well as my family and friends, I decided that I didn't want to sit around and do nothing. I had to get on with my life.

I became involved with disability-sports groups and joined a blind dragon-boat team called Dragon Eyes. We finished first in our division against able-bodied paddlers. I also took up rowing—I'm now rowing with Canada's national adaptive rowing team and am ranked third in Canada.

Getting my guide dog, Nemo, from Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind in Manotick, Ont., was wonderful. Nemo has given me back my independence.

I'd always had a passion for speed skating, and even though I had only four per cent vision and ten per cent hearing left, I got myself back on my blades. I'd been doing it for a year when my coach said, "Why don't you compete against able-bodied speed

skaters?" Nine years later, after 220 races in short and long track, I've won ten gold, eight silver, and 12 bronze medals.

In 2009, I attended the International Long Track Championships in Richmond, B.C., where I won a bronze medal. I hope someday to travel the world competing.

I spend 15 to 20 hours training each week for speed skating and rowing. The training consists of three hours of core training, three hours of weights, two hours of balance and 12 hours of on-ice and on-water training. My speed skating coach for the last three years has been Mike Rivet, who has 25 years of experience in the sport. My rowing coaches are Craig Law and Greg Brown. These coaches are helping me make my dreams come true.

My biggest dream is to try and have speed skating sanctioned as a Paralympic sport—maybe even in time for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. The Olympic committee can vote to add speed skating as a demonstration sport at any time. Although I haven't seen any movement yet, the great news is that at the time this article went to print, I'd just been informed that the Russian Speed Skating Federation would be holding a Paralympic Open Blind Cup for blind and visually impaired speed skaters—the first of its kind in the world. For a sport to be recognized by the Olympic committee in a particular country, that country first has to hold a national championship. Russia is holding this event because the 2014

Olympics are to be held there. This is what I've been pushing for six years! I'm working on obtaining the necessary funding to attend this amazing event and I'm already halfway there.

My sweetheart, Lise, and my children, Madison, Montana and Mitchell, as well as my stepchildren, Monica, Melanie and Marie, have been incredibly supportive. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all of my sponsors who've helped me get this far. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

My other goals include motivational speaking, as well as educating schools, businesses and the Ottawa police force on dealing with deaf and blind people, and their guide dogs, in everyday life. We all need to understand how to interact with disabled people in our community.

When my journey is done, I'm going to open a foundation with the funds that have been raised in order to help other disabled people achieve their Olympic dreams, too. To follow my progress, please visit my website at www.deafblindspeedskater.com or read my blog at www.kevinfrost.wordpress.com.

Kevin Frost & Nemo,
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Blog

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