

Move United Serves as Pipeline to Paralympics

Two-Thirds of Team USA Athletes Have Participated in Move United Programs

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Sport showcases what's possible for people with disabilities. It can also be a platform to fuel conversation and confront ignorance. There is no bigger opportunity to do this than the Paralympic Games. This year, NBCUniversal will feature an unprecedented 1,200 hours of programming around the Tokyo Paralympics. This includes the first primetime broadcast in history as well as 200 hours on NBC, NBCSN, and

Olympic Channel. With more than four billion people across the globe that watched the 2016 Summer Paralympic Games in Rio, this is the largest stage to date for the disability community.

Move United serves as a significant pipeline to the Paralympics, particularly for athletes in the United States. Approximately 67%, or two-thirds, of the Team USA athletes have some connection to Move United.

Founded in 1956, Move United is one of the largest national multi-sport, multi-disability organizations in the U.S. The nonprofit organization's mission is to provide national leadership and opportunities for individuals with disabilities to develop independence, confidence, and fitness through participation in community sports, recreation and educational programs. Through a nationwide network of 200 local programs in 43 states and the District of Columbia, Move United serves over 100,000 youth, wounded warriors and adults each year.

Of the 240 athletes (and guides) representing Team USA in Tokyo, 161 athletes have participated in a Move United program, event, or local member organization activity. Let's get to know some of these athletes.



Paralympian Hannah Dederick recently competed at Move United Junior Nationals, held last month in the Metro Denver area

MOVE UNITED WARFIGHTERS PROGRAM

Move United Warfighters served 1,940 severely injured warriors and their families last year. Since 2003, over 16,000 severely injured veterans and their families have been provided access to more than 70 adaptive sports at no cost to them.

Thirteen athletes competing in Tokyo are warfighters. Terry Hayes, a Move United Warfighters Ambassador, served two years as a heavy equipment operator in the U.S. Army. At 63, she is the oldest athlete on Team USA and will be competing in para-fencing. She enjoys the sport because it is considered a combat sport. "It is kind of like a chess game as you have to figure out what are they (your opponents) going to do next. It is physical and mental and the combination of the two is very appealing to me," Hayes said.

MOVE UNITED ELITE TEAM

Move United Elite Team is designed to support and empower emerging youth athletes with disabilities, between 13-24 years of age, who are training competitively in sports featured in the Paralympic Games.

Sixteen members of Team USA have been a part of Move United's Elite Team, including swimmers Julia Gaffney, Ahalya Lettenberger, and Anastasia Pagonis; Triathlete Kyle Coon, Wheelchair Rugby Player Joe Jackson, Para-fencer Shelby Jensen, Goalball Player Amanda Dennis, Wheelchair Tennis Player Casey Ratzlaff, and Track and Field athletes Danielle Aravich, Hannah Dederick, Jenna Fesemyer, Jessica Heims, Ezra Frech, Joel Gomez, Desmond Jackson, Justin Phongsavanh, and Isaiah Rigo.

About 30,000 youth with disabilities are served annually through Move United's youth programs, which ensures that no one sits on the sidelines because of a disability.

MOVE UNITED COMPETITION SANCTIONED COMPETITIONS

Move United Sanctioned Competitions represent the best adaptive multi-sport competitive events in the United States, and are sanctioned by both Move United and applicable National Governing Bodies (NGBs). Each year, more than 20 sanctioned competitions in 18 states that reach nearly 2,000 adaptive athletes of all ages and performance levels each year, including Paralympians and wounded warfighters.

These sanctioned competitions also serve as a qualifying event for [Move United Junior Nationals](#), the largest, long-standing annual multi-sport event in the United States for youth with a physical, visual, and/or intellectual impairment who are classifiable under the International Paralympic Committee's classification system.

This weeklong national sport championship event, open to athletes through the age of 22, hosted 270 athletes in Denver last month competing in sports such as archery, para-triathlon,

powerlifting, shooting, swimming, and track and field.

A number of Paralympic athletes have used these sanctioned competitions or Move United Junior Nationals as a launching pad for their elite athlete journey. 4x Paralympian and medalist Amanda McGrory has been involved with the Great Lakes Games as well as Junior Nationals. "Regional games are not only fun, by they provide you with more time on the track, help you meet entry standards for national competition, and tryout out new things in a race scenario," McGrory said.

Tokyo athletes that have competed at Junior Nationals or another sanctioned competition are Aaron Pike, Jensen Van Emburgh, Darlene Hunter, Brian Siemann, Susannah Scaroni, Raymond Martin, Hunter Woodhall, Rose Hollermann, Scott Severn, and others already highlighted here.

MOVE UNITED'S MEMBER NETWORK

Three teams practice at and are hosted by Move United member organizations. For example, the USA Wheelchair Rugby Team is hosted at the Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama. In addition, both the men's and women's goalball teams are housed at Turnstone Center, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Last, but not least, the sitting volleyball teams are headquartered at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

Not to mention the athletes and coaches that hail from other member organizations. For example, warfighter and Paralympic Silver Medalist Melissa Stockwell co-founded Dare2Tri, a Move United member organization based in Chicago, Illinois. Dare2Tri has served as a training ground for many para triathletes including Kendall Gretsche and Hailey Danz. Other member organizations that have been the home base for Team USA athletes include Ability 360 (Jackson and Kaitlyn Verfeurth), Angel City Sports (Frech), Arizona Disabled Sports (Erik Hightower), BlazeSports (Bailey Moody and McKenzie Coan), Courage Kenny (Chuck Aoki and Joe Delagrave), Disabled Athlete Sports Association (Chuck Melton), GLASA (Sydney Barta, Sam Grewe, and Phongsavanh), Kennedy Krieger Institute (Daniel Romanchuk and Tatyana McFadden), ParaSport Spokane (Dederick and Jaleen Roberts), Turnstone (Jeff Butler and Tom Davis), and Sportable (Alexa Halko).

Paralympians Matt Scott, Oksana Masters, Rose Hollermann, Sophia Herzog, Breanna Clark, Haven Shepherd, Jessica Long, Mallory Weggemann, Ellen Geddes, Lia Coryell, Shelby Baron, and Dana Mathewson have all attended and/or participated in other Move United events or activities.

There are other ways to learn more about Team USA athletes. Each week, Move United's adaptive sports podcast "[Redefining Disability](#)" hosts athletes and leaders in the field. This week's guest is 5x Paralympian and medalist Lex Gillette. Subscribe and listen wherever you get your podcasts or check out stitcher.com/show/redefining-disability. In addition, [Move United magazine](#) is one of the nation's leading adaptive sports publications. Published three times a

year, the magazine is offered free of charge. The Fall 2021 issue includes interviews with Track & Field athlete Jeremy Campbell and para table tennis players Tahl Liebovitz and Ian Seidenfeld. Check out this issue at moveunitedsport.org.

Move United is an affiliate of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee. We are excited about the opportunities that may come from the Paralympic Games as this singular event can help to educate our community and the general public at large about the power of sport and incite action that can lead us to a world where everyone's included. The thirst and appetite for adaptive sports continues to grow. Help us shift the narrative from disabled to this abled. Join the Movement. And be sure to root on Team USA at the Summer Paralympic Games taking place in Tokyo, Japan August 24 to September 5, 2021. For more information on Move United, visit moveunitedsport.org.

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