

# USA Wheelchair Rugby Wins Gold at the 2026 WWR World Championship

BIRMINGHAM, AL, UNITED STATES, August 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For the first time in 16 years, USA Wheelchair Rugby ([USAWR](#)) can once again claim to be the best in the world. The U.S. national wheelchair rugby team bested longtime rival Australia 57-51 in the final match of the 2026 WWR World Championship, once again cementing USAWR as the world's elite wheelchair rugby team.

"We have a long history of gold medal games throughout our 16-year drought," said Head Coach Joe Delagrave of Prairie du Chien, Wis., regarding the lead-up to the team's match against Australia. "It's easy to get introspective on what it means — is it going to happen, are we erasing a drought? We have to minimize some of those narratives that can play in your head. Our mental performance provider Meg does a lot of work on that and trying to minimize those things. I think they bought into that. They bought into the plans that (Eric) Newby and I put together and what we had for them, and that transpired over the game, as well."

In addition to winning the championship, Alex Pabon, of Guayama, Puerto Rico, was named Best in Class in the 2.5 class, while co-



Chuck Aoki and Sarah Adam celebrate after USA Wheelchair Rugby won the 2026 WWR World Championship in Brazil on Sunday, Aug. 23, 2026. Photo: Marcello Zambrana



Kory Puderbaugh, Chuck Aoki and Sarah Adam celebrate after USA Wheelchair Rugby won the 2026 WWR World Championship in Brazil on Sunday, Aug. 23, 2026. Photo: Marcello Zambrana

captain Chuck Aoki, of Minneapolis, Minn. was named Tournament MVP.

The championship match was the latest in a long series of gold medal matches against the Australian Steelers, dating back to the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney. USAWR also faced the Steelers at the 2008 Beijing Games, as well as the 2016 Rio Games, which went into double overtime and is widely considered one of the greatest wheelchair rugby matches ever played. The teams also faced off in gold medal matches at the 2010 World Championship and, most recently, at the 2022 World Championship.



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Photo: Marcello Zambrana

With LA28 less than two years away, Delagrave is optimistic about the momentum the team now has heading into the first U.S.-based Paralympic Games in 30 years.

“It’s huge. To be reigning world champions going into the final two years of the quad, especially going into LA. We want to be on top of that podium, but a lot of other teams do, as well. For us, we can still get so much better and continue to build our depth,” Delagrave said.

“We are incredibly grateful for the support here and back home from our family, friends and fans. We’re incredibly grateful to NBC, who streamed the entire tournament on Peacock — the first time in the history of our sport. We are excited about the momentum of all this heading into the final two years before LA. We are thankful for every staff member here and back home who helped us get here. All those little things comprise the big things that helped us get to the top of the podium. And, of course, to the athletes. They were incredible all week, and it has been amazing to watch them be such a tight unit,” Delagrave said.

All of USAWR’s matches from the 2026 WWR World Championship can be streamed on demand on the Peacock app.

Athletes for USA Wheelchair Rugby are:

Sarah Adam (Naperville, Illinois)  
Chuck Aoki (Minneapolis, Minnesota)  
Travis Baker (Hamilton, Ohio)  
Clay Brackett (Birmingham, Alabama)

Chris Fleace (Tucson, Arizona)  
Lee Fredette (East Moriches, New York)  
Brad Hudspeth (Stillwell, Kansas)  
Mandy Marchiano (Colonial Heights, Virginia)  
Josh O'Neill (Colorado Springs, Colorado)  
Alex Pabon (Guayama, Puerto Rico)  
Kory Puderbaugh (Boise, Idaho)  
Mason Symons (Hershey, Pennsylvania)

## About Lakeshore Foundation

With roots dating back to 1925, Lakeshore Foundation, a Birmingham, Ala. nonprofit organization, has emerged as a world leader in health promotion, research, fitness, recreation, and sports advocacy for people with a disability, veterans, seniors and parasport activities. As a U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Site, Lakeshore is home to the Lakeshore National Adapted Sports Organization (LNASO) which serves as the National Governing Body for USA Wheelchair Rugby, USA Para Powerlifting and Boccia United States. For more information on Lakeshore Foundation, visit [www.lakeshore.org](http://www.lakeshore.org).

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