

## Column

### **Paralympic media coverage far from golden**

**By Craig Skinner**

The closing ceremonies for the 2000 Olympic Games have ended, however, unbeknownst to most Canadians, the party is far from over in Sydney.

While the Marion Joneses and Simon Whitfields of the world have long since left the Land Down Under, with their gold medals in tow, a new crop of athletes have come to say "G'day" to the people of Australia.

Athletes who have spent hours in the gym, shedding more than their fair share of blood, sweat and tears, giving everything they have in their quest to be the world's best.

Athletes who are just days away from gold medal moments, despite the fact that few people even know their names.

They are the world's Paralympians.

The Sydney Summer Paralympic Games are set to heat up Oct. 18-29.

Among the 4,000 elite athletes participating in the Games will be over 160 Canadians, including Centretown's Jeff Christy, who will take on the world in goalball. Canadians will also be gunning for gold in sports like swimming, wheelchair basketball and athletics.

The competition will be fierce, but these athletes have never shied away from a challenge. Having persevered through the daily trials and tribulations that come with living with a disability, they are well prepared.

As a 22-year-old born with cerebral palsy, a former competitive sledge hockey player and disabled skier who failed in his attempts to make it to the Paralympic stage, I know just how difficult it is to reach the summit these athletes have climbed. Early-morning practices and late-night workouts are all part of the daily routine for the Paralympian.

Unfortunately, I also know how precious little attention and recognition these athletes get for their momentous feats, whether it be Chantal Benoit, touted by many as the Michael Jordan

of women's wheelchair basketball, or American leg amputee Brian Frasure blistering through the 100-metre dash in 11.24 seconds.

While the CBC and TSN provided wall-to-wall coverage of the Olympics in Canada, no live coverage of the Paralympic Games will be offered.

The CBC will broadcast a series of highlight shows in November, after the Games are completed, leaving fans to watch WeMedia's Web-casts if they want to catch any live action. Newspapers that sent scores of journalists to write of Olympic triumphs and tragedies, will no doubt rely primarily on wire reports to get the Paralympic scoop.

Granted, the Paralympics do not generate the same excitement as their flashier Olympic cousin, but the sparse coverage for the Paralympic Games doesn't do these amazing athletes justice. This lack of recognition can even leave some, like former Paralympian Angelo Gavillucci, wondering whether all their hard work is worth it.

"You sacrifice so much, sometimes it's not worth it at all," the three-time Paralympian said in an interview last year. "You walk down the street and people don't recognize you."

One can only hope this year's Paralympians find their Sydney experience worthwhile and that someday soon these athletes receive the media attention they have earned.

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