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## Wheelchair basketball paralympian aiming high

by Scott Sowers

write the author

October 16, 2007

Gavin Cloy suffered a tragic train accident more than a decade ago that left him with two prosthetic legs but he did not allow that to ruin his life.

Instead, he is living his life to the fullest. The Cumming citizen and Roswell native overcame this disability to instead become one of the top wheelchair basketball players in the country.

Cloy has represented the United States several times in international competition, including the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, Greece and the 2006 World Championships in Amsterdam. Playing as a forward due to his tall stature has allowed Cloy to travel the world competing at the highest level of wheelchair basketball.

"One of my favorite moments at the Paralympics was the opening ceremony where there were more than 100,000 people in the stadium," Cloy said. "There were more than 500 American athletes there but it was really neat being there in the Olympic Village and meeting people from all over the world."

That team ended up winning the silver after losing to Canada in the finals. Our neighbors to the north once again proved to be a nemesis by downing the USA in the finals of the World Championships in 2006.

Cloy says he hopes to make the team that will compete in the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing, just two weeks after the Olympics end.

When Cloy is not donning the red, white and blue he spends every November through April playing in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association's Milwaukee Wheelchair Bucks, affiliated with the NBA's Bucks. This team competes every weekend in four game mini-tournaments around the country.

Although Cloy says they didn't do as well last season as he had hoped, he anticipates his team to get back to their winning ways this season.

"I can't wait to get back with my team. I've been training really hard every day going to the gym to work out and training with the Atlanta Steelers club team," he said.

Cloy spends his weekdays as P.E. teacher at Sweet Apple Elementary and Mountain Park Elementary in Roswell. There he teaches the children that he is just as capable as they are in playing sports.

"Some of the younger children think I'm a robot, but they soon get used to it after I explain to them my situation," said Cloy referring to his prosthetic legs, one attached below the knee and one above.

But perhaps Cloy's biggest accomplishment is what he does in his spare time with Blaze Sports, a legacy organization founded in part by the Paralympics in Atlanta in 1996. This organization operates 63 clubs in 29 states teaching children and adults with disabilities how to play sports.



(SPECIAL/Herald) Paralympian and resident of Cumming Gavin Cloy, center, provides instruction to children with physical disabilities at a BlazeSports America wheelchair basketball clinic held Sept. 23 at the Marcus Jewish Community Center in Dunwoody, Ga. (click for larger version)



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Cloy serves as a wheelchair basketball instructor at their many camps, including a recent one in Dunwoody. He also instructs basketball when the camp makes its annual retreat to Warm Springs.

"Gavin is one of the best wheelchair basketball players in the country," said Dan Humphries, the manager of coaching and competitions for Blaze Sports. "He's got a great personality and has always been a pleasure to be around. The kids absolutely love him."

Cloy's first taste of the sport came a few months after his accident in Colorado, where he slipped off a train and had his legs injured beyond repair. Cloy came back to Atlanta for treatment and rehab and soon became turned on by the sport after finding out about leagues at the Shepherd Spinal Center.

Basketball came naturally for him, a former wrestler and football player. Soon he was contacted by the University of Illinois wheelchair basketball coach, where he accepted a scholarship to play at the highest level in the country.

"I would say that 99 percent of paralympians have played in college programs because the training you get is unmatched," he said.

Clearly Gavin Cloy has found his calling, as one of the premiere wheelchair basketball players in the country. His hopes ride high that in 2008 he can bring home the glory for his team in Milwaukee and truly all the nation by earning the gold in Beijing next fall.

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