

FOR LOVE OF THE GAME

An Interview with Scott Hogsett

While some sports in the Olympic Movement provide opportunities for participants to earn significant income, there are still elite performers who play for only one reward – their love of the game.

They are passionate about the game. They can't stop thinking about the game. They play for the joy of competing. They play for the satisfaction of winning and the opportunity of learning from losses.

Scott Hogsett, wheelchair rugby coach and player, is a prime example of playing for the love of the game. Among his claims to fame, Hogsett starred in the Oscar-nominated documentary "MurderBall". His secrets to success: communication, energy, passion, motivation and attitude, all of which have led him to a life he describes as being unbelievable.

Hogsett was first introduced to wheelchair rugby about eight months after his injury that left him a paraplegic. He credits his dad and recreational therapist for introducing him to the sport and encouraging him to stay active. Prior to his accident, Hogsett competed in many sports.

"After my accident, I wasn't really sure what was going to happen next, what was available to me, and what was out there for people with a disability," Hogsett said. "One day my dad approached me and said, "Yes, what happened to you was catastrophic, but you do have your mind and your mind will get you through whatever you need to get through."

At that time, Hogsett was not aware of the sports that were available to athletes with a disability. Wheelchair basketball was familiar to him as he had seen it on television. During a therapy session, his recreational therapist asked him if he had ever heard of "MurderBall" or quad rugby. Hogsett had not, but was open to any new challenge.

From the very first practice, Hogsett fell in love with the sport. That was 11 years ago and he has never looked back. "After the first practice," Hogsett recalled, "I realized that these were real athletes that were out here competing in a very physical and fun sport, and it was something I really enjoyed."

Wheelchair rugby fulfills Hogsett's competitive need, being one of very few sports which allows a high level of contact without getting a penalty. "It is an addiction," Hogsett says. "I can't remember how many times that I said I was going to retire but I am continually drawn back to rugby. I guess it really comes down to my passion, attitude and love for the sport that has kept me playing."

Hogsett's excitement for the sport stems from the fact that it's a team sport and he is working with other athletes who are in a similar situation. "We have all been through something very severe at some point in our life," said Hogsett. "We understand each other. It's a comradeship. We are there for each other."

With his players and team members, Hogsett instills passion for the sport both on and off the court. He is the voice of his teams. He is a leader and he knows his role with each of his teams to ensure that they are mentally prepared to play and win. He is loud and his teams feed off of

his energy. “I haven’t always been the fastest guy, but the fastest guy doesn’t always win the race. It’s the smartest.”

Smart and loud . . . two other ingredients in Hogsett’s recipe for success. “It’s not really flashy,” he says, “but a lot of people get tired of hearing my voice. The best way to be successful, though, is to communicate. My teams have always communicated well and that is why we have done well.”

As a coach and an athlete, competing clean is important to Hogsett. It is hard to keep up with the athletes who are doping, and that isn’t fair to the athletes competing clean. Hogsett believes sports should be played on an equal playing surface.

Athletes at all levels remember bits of advice from past coaches, mentors, friends, parents, etc. The best advice given to Hogsett was from a friend who said, “It’s not how you do it, just as long as you do it.” This is how Hogsett lives his life. He knows that he is not always “textbook” in his approach because of his wheelchair, but the way he gets it done doesn’t matter as long as he does it.

At the level in which Hogsett plays, what really excites him is that every time he goes somewhere new or does something new, something bigger and better always happens.

“Before my injury, I was not an Olympic- or Paralympic-caliber athlete. I started playing wheelchair rugby, and all of a sudden, I’m an elite athlete; trying out for a Paralympic Team; making the team; and then going to Athens (Greece) to compete in the 2004 Paralympic Games. Not in a million years is this something that I ever would have thought I would accomplish.”

Outside of his athletic career, Hogsett is a motivational speaker for The Hartford informing others about the opportunities that are available to people, with or without disabilities.

“When I was in rehab,” Hogsett remembers, “a guy in a wheelchair came to visit me and he really motivated me. Since then, I’ve always thought that I needed to give back to others. When you first come to the realization that you are disabled, you have no idea what options you have, and the way to learn is from someone else. I truly believe that learning from someone who has ‘been there, done that’ is the best way, and that is what I try to do through my mentoring.”

“I often say that I have perfected being a quadriplegic,” said Hogsett. “I’ve been very fortunate, and I’ve been able to accomplish a lot. Don’t get me wrong. I still have a lot to learn, and I’ve paid the consequences for some of the stuff I’ve done. However, I would not change one thing in my life. It’s been amazing so far and hopefully there is a lot more to come.”

A graduate of Arizona State University with a degree in Recreational Therapy, after rugby Hogsett hopes to work with children with disabilities in the field of sport, encouraging them to never give up because of a disability. Originally from Spokane, Washington, Hogsett currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona with his wife.

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