

# ADF Paralympic Sports: Striving to win against all odds

*Equality, courage, compassion, teamwork and initiative in overcoming adversity*



*Chief of Army LTGEN Ken Gillespie sitting down with one of the ADF paralympians who is wearing his prosthetic leg during a training session.*

To help support severely wounded and injured military personnel continue their career, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has established the ADF Paralympic Sports Program (ADFSP). The ADFSP and Association (ADFSPA) contributes to the rehabilitation and gaining of functional independence of ADF members by facilitating and supporting the attainment of physical fitness and an active lifestyle through the participation of adaptive sport.

## The Program

The ADF is partnering with the Australian Paralympic Committee (APC) to give Australian military personnel the support they need to meet their goals. Through this partnership, the ADF will be able to put into place a series of services which will assist these members to reintegrate and overcome their challenges.

The APC and the ADF are working together to develop week-long high performance camps, where members are brought together twice a year to undertake a variety of activities. ADFSP members will access:

- injury specific rehabilitation and physical fitness programs to again reach peak fitness;
- introductions to Paralympic Sports and talent testing;
- instruction on how to run, swim, handle weapons, and other fundamental military tasks again, without further injury;
- education on injury specific or more sports medicine orientated topics such as nutrition, recovery techniques, sports psychology or prosthetics;
- adventure training and activities that will stretch, challenge and develop members.

The ADF will be supporting local physiotherapists and physical training instructors in the delivery of programs by letting them draw on the ADF's expertise and experience. This is all supported by the APC's sports science and sports medicine department.

## Program members

ADFSP members are drawn from a variety of different backgrounds. Motor bike or motor vehicle accidents, injuries and wounds sustained while serving on deployment, and through illness. What members share and are united by is their choice to wholeheartedly pursue their remarkable 'abilities' rather than bow down to the challenges of acquired disability.

Membership to the ADFSP is restricted to currently serving ADF members who meet the national classification criteria for an Australian Paralympic Sport. The coaches and training partners of athletes are also welcome and eligible for membership.

In addition and based on the advice from ADF members, a whole series of information resources will be developed to support them and their families on understanding their injury,

the adaptations required, and how to access a wide range of ADF services. This will also include changes to some ADF policies such as equitable access to sport.

### MATES mentoring program

With a “been there, done that” attitude, one of the elements of the ADFPSP is the MATES mentoring program that is currently under development.

The MATES program will provide well-adjusted members who are living a full life with additional training on how to be a positive force as a peer visitor and mentor. They will receive training on effective communication, listening and sensitivity training; understanding the process of grief and loss; techniques for interacting with injured colleagues and health professionals; and obtain information resources on acquired disabilities and support services.

In the near future, it will be an ADF member with a similar injury who will be a MATES mentor and help a colleague through the rehabilitation process.

### Background

On 8 February 2010, the Chief of the Defence Force agreed to be Patron of the ADF Paralympic Sports Association. The ADFPSP / ADFPSA initiative is a result of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed between ADF’s Joint Health Command and the APC on 11 February 2010.

The signing of a MOU with the APC will see the delivery a number of services to further improve the physical rehabilitation of ADF members who have acquired a disability during their period of service. Through this partnership, identified ADF members will be aligned with Paralympic sporting pathways, which will provide them with equitable access to sporting opportunities through to the elite international level.

### Use of Sport in Rehabilitation

The modern day Paralympic Games dates back to 1948 when the Stoke Mandeville Games were held for severely injured World War II Veterans. Since then, modified sport has played a very important role in the rehabilitation of servicemen with significant impairments or acquired disabilities, enabling them to successfully return to an active life. The use of sport and outdoor activities has a proven track record in aiding physical and psychological rehabilitation through:

- the optimisation of functional independence and physical fitness;
- development of a positive self-image and self esteem;
- health promotion;
- sportsmanship;
- leadership and camaraderie;
- quality of life; and
- greater awareness among ADF personnel of the effects of and support for members with an acquired disability. ■

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