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‘I FEEL INVINCIBLE’: HOW TEEN IDOL BRIAN DOUGLAS (USA) BECAME UIPM PARA SPORTS TRAILBLAZER



Brian Douglas, 15, is a double amputee who has been involved in para swimming in the United States for several years.

Now he has become a trailblazer for the UIPM Para-Sports movement, excelling in Swimming and adding Laser Run to his repertoire and, most impressively of all, learning Fencing to the point where he can compete with able-bodied athletes on the piste.

In 2019 Brian competed in the US Pentathlon National Championships at Youth A (Under 19) level. He also took part in the senior competition.

Rob Stull, President of the NORCECA Modern Pentathlon Confederation, said: "Brian participated in our training camp and US Nationals just like every other 15-year-old boy. He demonstrated to everyone including the staff and parents not what he couldn't do, but rather what he could do.

"Brian inspired everyone who witnessed his remarkable accomplishment. He is a shining example

of the International Paralympic Committee motto 'mind, body, spirit'. Brian lives this every day."

Radka Zapletalova, UIPM Para Pentathlon Project Manager, said: "Brian's story is truly inspiring and I believe he could give a huge boost to our UIPM Para Sports development."

Here Brian tells his story in his own words.



When did you first discover Pentathlon?

So this is a funny story. It was the night after the US nationals for para swimming had ended. Me, my mom, one of the other para swimming families and another athlete along with her coach Keith Beryhill went to a Mexican restaurant to celebrate the meet being over.

We are all at dinner and coach Keith starts talking about Pentathlon and how he runs his own regionals and training camps down in Georgia. So then he mentions that UIPM is branching out to the para world of sports and asks me if I would like to be sort of a guinea pig for the Para Pentathlon programme in the United States. So that was the night I first discovered Pentathlon.

What were your first steps to getting involved?

I went to coach Keith's mini training camp in Georgia to learn the basics of shooting and fencing and then went to his Atlanta regional later that month.

Have you taken part in any other para sports?

Yes, I have participated in wheelchair tennis and Paralympic swimming, and my main sport before Pentathlon was actually swimming.

Which discipline is your favourite?

Fencing and swimming are my favourite disciplines. Even though I am not that good at fencing I enjoy it the most. In my opinion it is the most fun and exciting, yet frustrating and infuriating, sport I have taken part in to date in my athletic career.

What has been your personal highlight so far?

My personal highlight so far has been every single time I have scored a touch during the fencing part of the competitions at nationals. When I score a touch on my fencing opponent I feel invincible.

What is your training regime like now?

Since my main sport before Pentathlon was swimming, my training regime is mostly based around swimming. My weekly training goes like this: on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursday I go to swimming practice from 7am to 9.30am and then again from 2pm to 4pm and on the other days of the week I swim only from 7am to 9.30am.

Now that I have someone to fence with I usually fence and shoot two or three times each week with a local athlete named Alex Guzman. Then on Saturday mornings I go to the gym for strength training. This is my summer training schedule – once I go back to high school in August it will change a bit, but I will be training every day.



What is it like competing against able-bodied

athletes?

Competing against able-bodied athletes gives me an insight into the huge world of sports instead of just keeping me closed in the para sports world. Competing against able-bodied athletes can sometimes be discouraging, but I never tell myself that I am losing solely because of my disability. That enables me to work harder and harder every day to perform at my best against able-bodied competitors.

What do your friends and family think about your involvement in Pentathlon?

My friends and family have been and always will be extremely supportive and helpful towards me, and it's no different when it comes to Pentathlon. My mom is very excited that Pentathlon found me. She feels that this will be a real test and showcase for my athleticism.

What are your competitive / development goals?

My main competitive and developmental goals sports-wise would be to compete in the 2020 Paralympics and/or the 2024 Paralympics. I would like to continue being heavily involved in para sports throughout my life – and not just as an athlete.

I also want to become a prosthetist. At school I would like to have a 4.0 GPA for my junior year of high school. I am not certain whether I would like to do an MD first and then move on to the development and production of prosthetics, but I am firm in my goal to become a prosthetist so that I can give back to other amputees in the same way that I have been given limitless opportunities by Amputee Blade Runners.

They are a non-profit organization that makes running legs available at no cost to amputees. In my case I also got my walking legs and the opportunity to pioneer AT Knees produced by a company called Legworks. My foot shells and blades have been made available by a company called Fillauer Orthotics and Prosthetics out of Tennessee.

How can we give more people opportunities to take part in UIPM Para Sports?

I really do think that this has a lot to do with publicity, especially in the US, because not many people know that there are Pentathlon programmes in the US far less for Para Pentathlon. Making Pentathlon more mainstream would help to raise its popularity among para athletes.



What are the benefits of taking part in this sport?

There is a plethora of benefits to taking part in this sport. The sport of Modern Pentathlon includes five disciplines that will work out everything from the occipital and parietal lobes of your brain right down to your ankles and feet. This sport encompasses every single health- and skill-related component of fitness, and not only does it include all of them it will develop every single one as well. This sport is also extremely rewarding physically and emotionally.

FIND OUT MORE

If you are interested in the UIPM Para Sports movement, please visit the UIPM website, contact your National Federation or email UIPM directly.