

1 EARLY DAYS

I injured my back – I was 18, I had a spinal injury – and that was just a huge change in my life. In a way a traumatic change in my life. So some of the things I had been doing before, were no longer open to me so there was a big change to find an outlet for myself. How to express myself. At that point I was looking around to find something that I could do – a lot of my friends were getting into things like yoga. I was still swimming – I would do a lot of swimming but I'd heard of basketball in the spinal unit don't know how or where, I'd just heard about it. So I went along to one of the training sessions and it was a bit rough, a bit of rough and tumble. I thought it was a bit of a scramble. And it wasn't – it didn't appeal to me the first time I went so I went a couple of times and it didn't really grab me in some way or other. And I didn't return for a year. Then a year later I thought, I'll go back and look again.

When you're using a wheelchair, and I use a wheelchair in my daily life to get around and I turned up at the training session with a daily use wheelchair and everybody is zipping around you because it's ... they're not really set up to be fast and mobile – certainly in those days. This was probably about 1980 when I was getting first involved.

Some other people were at this training session that played for another team and they said, "Come and play for us" and I liked them, I got on really well with them. So I travelled – I was living in Glasgow, I was born and brought up in Glasgow – and instead of playing for a local Glasgow team; I went off and played for an Edinburgh team to begin with.

2 TRAINING

We would pile into a car, 3 or 4 of us and head through to Edinburgh. A car full of wheelchairs and head through to Edinburgh. So it was a bit of a trek, about an hour there and an hour back. But in those days I was still – well I was just in my 20's – so I was young, and lots of energy. So it was OK to do a day's work and then drive through to Edinburgh, do a few hours training session and then come back to Glasgow.

Wheelchair basketball has got a combination of aerobic and anaerobic strength so the game last for – four quarters these days of 10 minutes but that can last for two hours so you need stamina for wheelchair basketball but you also need explosive strength. So something like swimming was very good for stamina and aerobic workouts. With wheelchair basketball you're using a lot of upper body strength and we would go to the gym and do some weights workout. We would do marathons as well as play basketball – so you're upper body especially your arms would develop and you had to be careful not to over ... not to lose your flexibility.

The wheelchair game is more technical because when you're playing basketball, you're feet – to get round when you're on your feet there's a lot more space but when you're protecting something with a wheelchair, there's more – a wheelchair takes up more area. And so the wheelchair game is a more technical game than the running game and so when you're a wheelchair basketball player, technically you have to be more proficient.

One of the first things that I was very fortunate, one of the people I was travelling through to Edinburgh was Ian Ray and he would cannibalise NHS wheelchairs and transform them into something that was akin to a basketball wheelchair. So you would take him and old frame of a wheelchair that you had and he would weld this bit on and that bit on, change this and change that and you would have a wheelchair you could play in. And that made a

phenomenal difference. So in those days people were just beginning to evolve wheelchairs for sport.

We talk about mind and body becoming one but for wheelchair basketball it's mind, body and wheelchair become one and there's a tremendous grace and beauty when that happens. It can be so powerful, and graceful and fantastic to watch because you're getting a whole fusion of everything and so when there's a coming together of that intention of what you'd like to do with your mind and your body and your wheelchair is just moving together and so it's a great sport to watch because of that.

One of the things with disabled sport is that when you have a disability you can sometimes experience your body as being rather clumsy and bits of it aren't working. So when you get that moment of, or when you get in that situation that where you're sitting in a wheelchair and the wheelchair itself instead of being something you have to use and you're lumbered with, it's become a way in which you can move phenomenally fast and agile. It's a beautiful moment. So to move from having this body that isn't working very well to sitting in a wheelchair that's really agile and moving and responding to what you would like to do – a lovely moment. So I think many – many athletes, especially wheelchair athletes, basketball players, comment on that. You get your wheelchair set up right and it's great.

3 SELECTION

I think the highlight of my career was going off to Melbourne in 86 for the Basketball world Championships. So I was playing for the Edinburgh team and we were a good team – we were up near the top of the first division. And one of the top trainers in Britain returned – he was Glaswegian he returned to Glasgow and formed a new team – so I thought it would be a good idea as a younger team to start a younger club and move over and have a new trainer. So this new trainer turned out to be – it was Mick MacReady – and he was at that point the coach of the Great Britain men's team and so Mick was a very good coach and really quite a mentor as well. He was someone who knew the game very well, he played wheelchair basketball himself and to a high level and so he became my coach and I think I really blossomed under him and I started to get invites to go along to some of the international training sessions.

For the next 10 years I was always involved with squads that were preparing for major championships, I never went to another major championship as a player. And because I'd been getting so much from the sport, at one point the Great Britain Basketball Association were looking to develop some new classifiers. And so I thought OK I'll do that I'll give something back. I've really enjoyed – continue to enjoy – playing for my club so I'll be able to give something back so I became a classifier gradually.

We have evolved a classification system that used to be a medical classification and of course when you have a disability you don't want to be treated as a patient – you want to be treated as a sportsman or sportswoman. So we evolved a functional classification system that was there to create a level playing field for the different players. So we have players come to play wheelchair basketball that have a minimal disability – so that might be somebody who in their daily life might not use a wheelchair and they may have a medical condition that prevents them from running and jumping or pivoting safely and normally.

So for a wheelchair game as long as you have a permanent disability in your lower limb then you can play basketball. And how we grade that, how we classify that is that we look at the different areas around our body that you can move in and as you have more and more

ability to move in different areas around the body – more functional ability - then your classification rises. So the most limited functional players are Class 1 and then it goes up by half a point 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5. And each player is given a class according to the level of functionality. And on the court – on the basketball court – at one time there's five players and the sum total of all those classes in international games is not allowed to exceed 14 points.

You have to have a balance – you have to have a spread amongst the different classes or the different disabilities and in that way we allow the players of different degrees of disability to play together and to be involved in the game.

4 THE GAMES

One of the criteria for the Beijing Paralympics was that – accessibility, disabled accessibility was on the agenda. This woman – who all her life had lived, she wasn't a sports person she was disabled, had a disability lived near the Forbidden City for the first time in her life when the Paralympics came to Beijing, the Forbidden City became accessible because they were putting in ramps. Its changing peoples lives, its changing peoples perceptions and broadening peoples horizons so that ... some people don't have anybody with a disability in their life but then –and they can't imagine what it would need just to make something possible and so something like a few ramps in the Forbidden City – and this woman can wander around, just enjoy the beauty of that, of her culture, heritage.

5 FUNDING

With wheelchair basketball, the main bit of equipment one uses is the wheelchair and gone are the days when you get Ian Ray to cobble together an old National Health Service wheelchair and you could use that on court. That would be like a Ferrari racing against an old Hillman Minx or something – so these days a purpose built wheelchair is really required to take part in wheelchair basketball. And we are very fortunate; we've got a very good wheelchair maker in – a basketball wheelchair maker – in this country. But the last time I bought one of them which was 5 years ago, I think I paid about £2500 for it. So I had been given some money from my family to buy that but that's quite expensive, quite an expensive bit of equipment and if you're playing at the top level then every maybe 3 years you're wanting to upgrade your wheelchair.

The tyres don't last that long – things happen. Wheelchair basketball you don't get bodies colliding but you get wheelchairs colliding and sometimes you'll go on court with a new wheel and you come into collision and it gets buckled and so its quite expensive from that point of view. And then there's all the training costs, travelling to training and hiring of the facility. These days if you are playing at the top – if you are in the top elite squad for Great Britain you will get some Government funding through the Lottery Funding. But below that top elite squad everybody has to fund it themselves.

Nearly 30 years I've been a practising Buddhist and part of me as my life as a Buddhist is about living a full life and bringing out my humanity in a way, you know the fullness of my humanity. Part of that is about going beyond limitations. And some of those limitations are self inflicted – it's our minds and sometimes its just circumstances so I see that tying up

quite a lot with my involvement in sport in that – especially in wheelchair sport – people are ... we are going beyond perceived limitations. Some people with disability can only do this much, somebody with disability is very fragile. I think as human beings we have a fragility but we've also got a great strength and great resilience and its remarkable what we see people doing. If you give them the opportunity, if you don't ... if you don't put any extra shackles on people its remarkable what is possible.