



Tatyana McFadden on her way to the gold medal in the women's T54 400m. final.

USA Athletes at the VISA Paralympics World Cup 2007

Keith Vaughan,
FPSA, EPSA
Halifax, Nova Scotia,
Canada

Manchester Regional
Arena—Track and Field
Venue.

Membership in the **Photojournalism Division (PJD)** of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) has provided many challenges, not least of which is the motivation to take better pictures to compete in exhibitions. A favorite is sports action photography, which is among the most challenging photographic objectives, where one must recall all of the principles of good photography, such as finding the right angle, the right lens, and the appropriate film speed. Following the experience

of organizing the 2006 PJD Biennial Theme Competition, “*Overcoming a Handicap*,” where a large proportion of the entries were images of disabled athletes and the award winners were mostly such images, I was determined to attempt this aspect of sports action. An Internet search for competitive Paralympics activities revealed the website for the VISA Paralympics 2007 World Cup in Manchester, United Kingdom: with the assistance of the Canadian Paralympics Committee in Ottawa, I acquired media accreditation as a photographer for the event.

The VISA Paralympics World Cup, inaugurated in 2005 to bridge the four-year gap that exists between Paralympic games, provides elite disabled athletes the annual opportunity to compete at the international level. It is now the biggest multi-sport Paralympics competition outside of the Paralympic Games and was staged in Manchester, UK for the third year in succession in May 2007. Four sports—athletics, swimming, track cycling and wheelchair basketball—were featured and they took place at three world-class Manchester venues: the Manchester Regional Arena, the Aquatic Centre and the Velodrome. These facilities were originally constructed for the 2002 Commonwealth games, which afforded the city of Manchester a wonderful legacy of sporting facilities.



The VISA Paralympics World Cup is an important element in Visa's support of disability sports globally. VISA has sponsored the Paralympics Games in Salt Lake City, Athens and Torino, and will continue to do so, through to Beijing 2008, Vancouver 2010 and London 2012. The overall aim of these initiatives is to create more opportunities for Paralympic athletes to excel and to be seen to excel. In the 2007 event, 340 athletes from 47 countries competed for 143 medals and established 5 new world records: one in the pool, one on the running track and three on the cycling track.

The week of events started off with men and women's wheelchair basketball, which took place over four days in the National Cycle Centre Velodrome, which had been transformed into a basketball gym with much hard work, imaginative scaffolding, curtains and lighting. Photographically, the primary question at the outset was whether to shoot with film or digital. The decision to shoot digital on this occasion was a pragmatic one, arising from the fact that most of the activities took place indoors under relatively low light levels. A rule of thumb in digital action photography is that turning the ISO up to 800 yields satisfactory images; above ISO 800 the noise level in the image becomes unacceptable. For the indoor events at the Velodrome (wheelchair basketball and cycling) I set my Canon EOS 20D to ISO 400, which gave me a shutter speed of 1/250th sec at f2.8 with my EOS 70-200mm zoom



"Oscar Pistorius #1." The start of the men's T44 200-meter race; Oscar Pistorius (South Africa's world record holder) racing alongside #24 Ian Jones of Great Britain

lens. An added reason to shoot digital was the convenience of transmitting images by Internet.

From the Canadian perspective, the Gold medal performance of the Canadian men's wheelchair basketball team was the highlight of the Paralympics week in Manchester. The Canadians have dominated the world of men's wheelchair basketball for the last ten years, winning the Olympic Gold medal in Athens, and were the reigning VISA Paralympics World Cup champions from 2006. The Canadians under the experienced guidance of head coach, Paul Bowes, were definitely the team to beat in 2007. In the semi-finals, Canada defeated Great Britain comfortably by 53-41 points and Australia defeated the Netherlands to set up the Canada vs. Australia gold medal game. The final game was a real thriller

Jeremy Campbell on his way to the gold medal in the men's F44 long jump.

Photos © Keith Vaughan, FPSA, EPSA

Any mention of products or services in this article or anywhere else in the *PSA Journal* does not constitute an endorsement or approval of those items.

Casey Tibbs jumps for the bronze medal in the men's F44 long jump.



Keith Vaughan, FPSA, EPSA

with Australia in the lead comfortably by 37-29 after three periods. However, Canada staged a dramatic comeback, outscoring the Aussies by 20-10 in the 4th quarter to snatch a dramatic last minute 49-47 victory and take the gold medal.

The lone representative of the USA in cycling was Greta Neimanas of Chicago, Illinois; Greta was born without her left hand and forearm. In Manchester, she competed in the 500 meter time trial and in the women's LC1 Pursuit final. In the latter event, Greta won the silver medal.

The USA sent a strong team to the VISA Paralympics swimming event. Beth Kolbe, of Tiffin, Ohio competed in the women's MD 50m freestyle and in the women's S3 50m backstroke, in which she won the bronze medal. Miranda

Manchester Aquatic Centre



Uhl, of Alachua, Florida, also competed in the MD 50m. freestyle, and Jarrett Perry, of Wichita, Kansas won the Gold medal in men's S9 100m backstroke. Michael Demarco, who was born with cerebral palsy and lives in San Diego, holds seven US records in Paralympics swimming. In Manchester, he competed in the men's S3 100m freestyle. Amanda Everlove, of Wichita, Kansas competed in women's S8 100m butterfly.

The star of the US Paralympics swimming team is unquestionably the incredible Jessica Long, who was born in Irkutsk, Russia in 1992, and now lives in Baltimore Maryland. Jessica had both legs amputated at the age of 18 months and never had physical therapy; she never needed it. Jessica says "I did it all on my own." She holds no less than fourteen **world** records. She was selected as the USA 2006 Paralympian of the Year, and in 2007, she was selected as the USA's best amateur athlete; becoming the first paralympic athlete to win the AAU Sullivan Award. "Jessica is a role model and mentor for kids with physical disabilities," said Charles Huebner, Chief of US Paralympics. In Manchester, Jessica won the silver medal in the women's MD 100m freestyle and won gold in the women's S8 100m butterfly.

The athletics competition took place on the final day of the seven-day program at the Manchester Regional Arena: outdoors under gray skies, with frequent heavy showers. The light level was such that I completed the week's assignment shooting digital. The athletic program was dominated by the British media hype surrounding the final



Miranda Uhl gets set for the start of heat #4 in the women's MD 50m. freestyle race.



Jarrett Perry (lane 4) at the start of the men's S9 100m backstroke.

competitive race of wheelchair athlete Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, who had announced that she would retire after the 2007 VISA Paralympics World Cup; Dame Tanni has become a national hero in Britain during her 20-year Paralympics career. The presence of world record holder South African sprinter, Oscar Pistorius, also attracted a great deal of media attention.

In the track and field events, the USA team was outstanding with seven medals won. In the men's F44 long jump Casey Tibbs of San Diego, California won bronze and Jeremy Campbell of Perryton, Texas won gold. In women's F44 long jump, April Holmes of Somerdale, New Jersey won silver. On the track, Leann Sagmeister of Jacksonville, Florida won silver in the women's T53 400m and Jessica Galli of Urbana, Illinois won gold in the T53 200m for women. The highlight of the day was the double gold medal performance of Tatyanna McFadden of Clarksville, Maryland who won the T54 400m and 800m events

Attending these events was a new experience and presented a total challenge for my photographic skills. Many unique moments of athletic excellence were captured, and I am eager to go to more Paralympics events to apply newfound skills. But there remains the problem of location, proximity and travel. In July and August 2007, there are numerous events on the Paralympics calendar. Athletics (the Canadian Track and Field championships),



Greta Neimanas on her way to the silver medal in the LC1 women's pursuit final.

sailing, marathon, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis, bocce, and goalball are taking place in cities across Canada—Windsor (ON), Toronto, Saskatoon, Hamilton, and Calgary, and organized Paralympics sports events are on the rise in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Wheelchair Sports Federation and the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Nova Scotia) are working together to encourage participation by disabled athletes in sport at all levels. Some day soon, I may not have to travel thousands of miles to find these shooting opportunities.



April Holmes feeling the strain in the long jump event.

Footnotes:

Disability classes

- *Swimming*: S3, S8 and S9 refer to the level of disability, the higher number implying lower level of disability.
- *Cycling*: "LC" refers to Locomotor disability. "LC1" refers to minor or no lower limb disability.
- *Athletics*: "F" = field event; "T" = track event. "F44" field event, amputee. "T53" and "T54" refer to different levels of spinal cord injuries and amputees.