



UNH Catches Paralympic Fever

Named Paralympic Academy; Three UNH Athletes Go For Gold At Paralympic Games In Torino
March 10 - 19

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DURHAM, N.H. -- In March, three University of New Hampshire students – mono-skiers Laurie Stephens and Tyler Walker and sled-hockey player Taylor Chace – will aim for the podium as they represent the United States in the Winter Paralympic Games in Torino, Italy.

A new program at UNH's Northeast Passage insures that there are more athletes where these three came from.

Northeast Passage, a self-funded program of UNH that provides recreation opportunities for people with disabilities, has been designated a Paralympic Academy by the U.S. Paralympics organization.

"Our role is to find young athletes and feed them into an Olympic program," says Northeast Passage founder and director Jill Gravink. As the Paralympic Academy for the state of New Hampshire, Northeast Passage will mentor and train young elite athletes with disabilities, as it did with Stephens, Walker, and Chace.

Indeed, the Paralympic Academy will tap UNH's paralympians to become role models for other elite disabled athletes, encouraging younger athletes to pursue higher education alongside their individual sports. While their demanding competition schedules make a patchwork of their academics, Stephens, Chace and Walker juggle semesters off with summer sessions to stay on track for an education that will be essential should they "go pro" in something other than sports.

"You don't have to choose between being an elite athlete and being a student," says Tom Carr, Northeast Passage program coordinator, noting that the Paralympic Academy parallels the NCAA in its support and guidance of student-athletes.

Paralympic fever will hit Northeast Passage and UNH as the university's three paralympians compete in Torino March 10 – 19, just after the Winter Olympic Games. Stephens, Walker, and Chace and the sled hockey team stand very strong chances of medaling. "They're not doing this for the experience," says Carr. "They're in this to win." This year, the Paralympic Winter Games will be broadcast via the Internet at www.paralympicsport.tv.

A member of the U.S. Disabled Alpine Skiing Team for three years, Stephens goes to Torino with a bulging medal chest: she is collecting World Cup medals at a breathtaking pace this year, winning six races in eight days as of February 3. She swept all World Cup titles in 2005, winning 10 of 16 World Cup races last year. Born with spina bifida, Stephens started skiing at

age 12 and competed at Loon Mountain with the New England Disabled Ski Team before joining the U.S. Disabled Team in 2004. Stephens, from Wenham, Mass., studies therapeutic recreation at UNH and has juggled her training schedule around that of a full-time student.

Stephens' teammate Tyler Walker, also a mono-skier, captured his first World Cup win in giant slalom in 2004 and was victorious in 2005 and 2006 World Cups. From Franconia, N.H., Walker began skiing in adaptive programs at Waterville Valley and Loon Mountain, eventually joining the New England Disabled Ski Team at Loon. A spinal birth defect led to the amputation of both legs above the knee when Walker was 4 years old. At UNH, Walker studies political science.

Taylor Chace, from Hampton Falls, N.H., had committed to play hockey for the UNH Wildcats when, while playing for the New Hampshire Junior Monarchs in 2002, he broke his back and sustained an incomplete spinal cord injury. He translated his hockey skills and knowledge to sled hockey with the Northeast Passage/UNH Wildcats, and he was named to the U.S. Paralympics Sled Hockey National Team in 2005. Chace, who deferred his admission to UNH to participate in the Paralympics, plans to study exercise science.

Editors and reporters – For interviews with Laurie Stephens, Tyler Walker, or Taylor Chace, contact Beth Bourgeois, communications manager for the U.S. Paralympics: Beth.Bourgeois@usoc.org or (719) 866-2039.