

Local Paralympian Receives New Chair, Preps for 2024 Paris Games

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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GODFREY - A local Paralympian is gearing up for the Paris 2024 Games with a new wheelchair.

Eric Newby, who lives in Godfrey, plays wheelchair rugby and is co-captain of Team USA. He recently received a new titanium chair via a grant from the Kelly Brush Foundation (KBF), an organization that helps fund adaptive sports equipment for people who are living with spinal cord injuries, and the Disabled Athletes Sports Association (DASA), which offers adaptive sports training. As he prepares for the Paris 2024

Paralympics, Newby is ready for another active year on the rugby court with the help of his new equipment.

“It’s the best tool I’ve ever had to do my job, which is very exciting,” he said. “I’ve never been the most talented rugby player or anything, but I’ve definitely worked the hardest and I’ve had a lot of luck that’s led me through my career, so it’s been very special.”

Newby started playing rugby in 2006 after a spinal cord injury left him partially paralyzed. He was on a day visit from rehab, lifting weights in a St. Louis gym, when a woman approached him. She was the coach of the St. Louis wheelchair rugby team, and she wanted to know if Newby had ever considered playing.

He decided to give it a shot. Newby left rehab and went directly to training camp, then began attending practices for the St. Louis team. He quickly fell in love with the sport.

“I started playing about five weeks after I got hurt and it just developed into a giant passion of mine,” Newby said. “Rugby itself is the only full-contact wheelchair sport. We play four-on-four on a basketball court and kind of just try to kill the guy with the ball. If you have the ball and you flip over at the turnover, the other team gets rewarded for knocking you out of your chair. So it’s super exciting and super fun to watch.”

And Newby is an impressive player. As a Team USA athlete, he has competed in the Rio and Tokyo Paralympics, where his team took silver both times. He has been working hard to prepare for the Paris Games, though Newby says he isn’t nervous as much as he is excited.

“It’s definitely hard because we only get our biggest competition every four years, and so a lot of work goes into it and a lot of blood, sweat and tears go into it and it’s a long wait,” he explained. “So when we’re finally gearing up and going into Paris, it’s pure focus for me. I don’t have a ton of nerves. I’ve been through it and it’s just pure excitement. I wake up every morning super motivated and just ready for it to be here.”

Already a powerful player on the court, the new chair will help Newby dominate in Paris. He noted that the grant from KBF was “life-changing” and means the money he might have spent on his chair can instead go toward his daughter, 4, and 7-month-old son. Newby plans to retire from Team USA after this year so he can focus on being a dad, but first, he will compete in Paris and urges US audiences to support the Paralympics.

“In Rio, we had like 20,000 fans cheering for us in our gold medal game and it was incredible, and I know Paris wants to put on a big show and do a lot of stuff,” Newby

said. “So I would just encourage people to get behind the Paralympic movement and really get into the Games and get ready for some excitement coming to the Paris 2024 Games.”

To follow Newby’s work as an athlete as he gears up for Paris 2024, check out his [Instagram page @Newby2006](#). For more information about the Kelly Brush Foundation, visit their [official website at KellyBrushFoundation.org](#). To learn about the Disabled Athlete Sports Association, visit [DASASports.org](#).