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UIPM PARA SPORTS SPOTLIGHT: BRIAN DOUGLAS (USA) ON UNIVERSITY LIFE AND HIS SPORTING OUTLOOK



In July 2019, UIPM News first explored the remarkable story of Brian Douglas, a double amputee who at the age of 16 had already become an inspiration as he blazed a trail for the UIPM Para Sports movement.

Douglas competed in the USA Pentathlon National Championships at Under 19 level and also took part in the senior competition and 12 months later told us how his unique journey was developing. Three years on, we checked back in with the 19-year-old to catch up on where life and sports have taken him since...

We last heard from you in 2020 when you were still in high school and recovering from a recent shoulder injury. Where are you at now?

I'm in my third year of my kinesiology degree at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (USA).

At first I really wanted to do prosthetics and orthotics but then I got more and more interested in the general biotech field. It's been a really enjoyable area of study for me.

Have your studies helped your athletic career?

Right now I'm in muscular and skeletal anatomy, exercise physiology and nutrition for the athlete. All those courses tap in to different things that have to do with exercising, optimal nutrition, optimal exercise, what happens to the body in terms of hormonal regulation, muscular-skeletal effects on the body of exercise.

It helps you imagine, almost, the motions and movements. That's what I've got from studying this major while playing sports. One general difference which kinesiology makes to the experience of an athlete playing sports is that you're much more intentional, you know the reasons and the scientific backing for what you're doing, whether that's movement or nutrition.

What does the sporting side of your life look like right now?

With Pentathlon having so many disciplines, it's not a sport that I felt I wanted to pick up and put down. If I am going to play a sport seriously, I am going to devote the most time I can afford to it to become the best I can in that sport.

I felt that I didn't have the amount of time in my budget right now to be competing in Pentathlon seriously. So currently what my sporting world looks like is, I am the president of the club wrestling team at the University of Virginia and I am on the wheelchair tennis club here too.

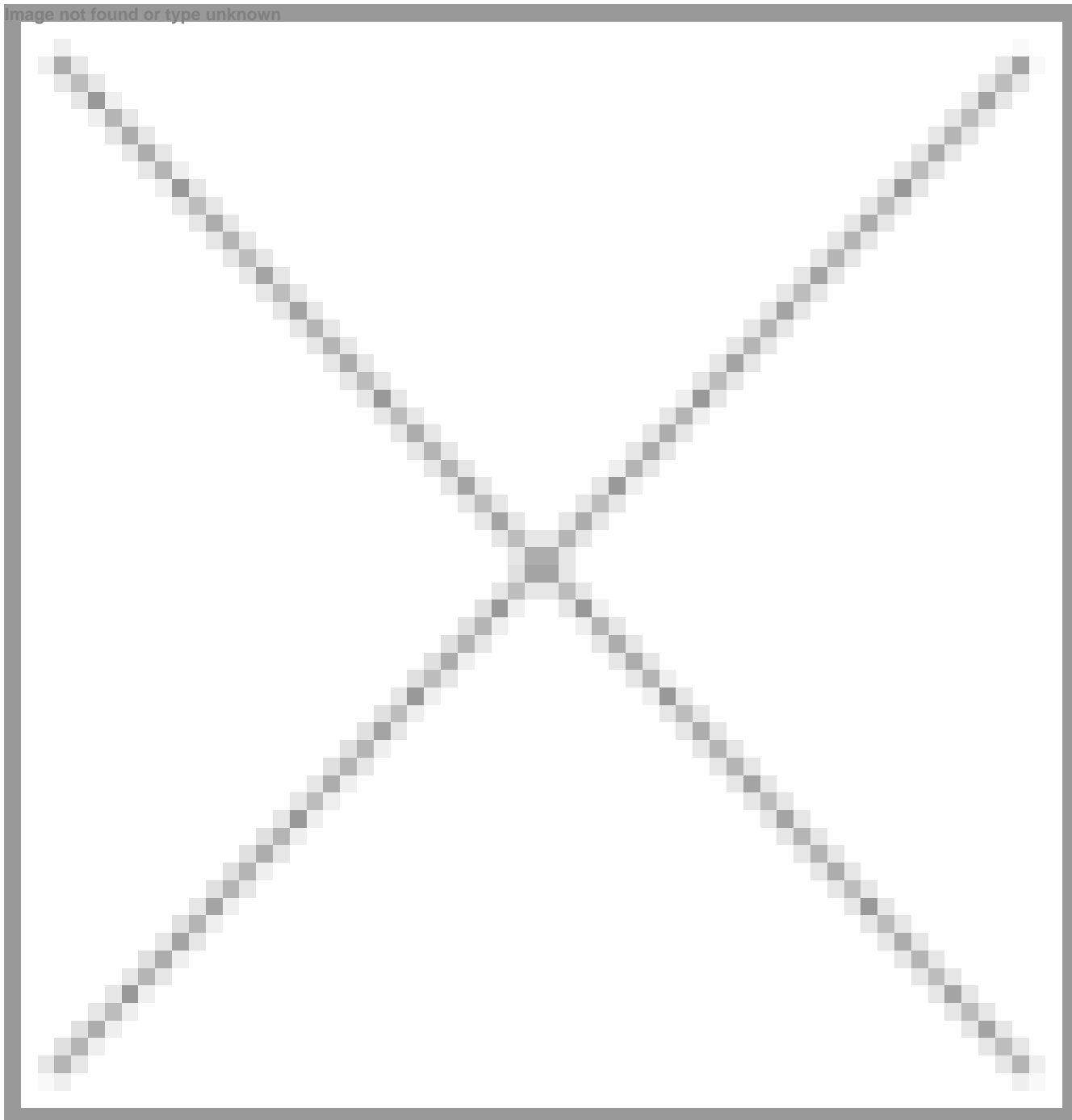
How are they going?

My shoulder injury has healed fully. There's no pain or side effects from that. With the wrestling club we're looking to get affiliated this year so that we can compete with other schools. As far as wheelchair tennis goes, the scene is pretty new in a collegiate sense. Wrestling helps me deal with a lot of my negative emotions. It's almost like a zen experience. You stop thinking, you live in the moment. It's almost therapeutic.

But it's a hobby, whereas wheelchair tennis is where my competitive edge comes back out. UVA [University of Virginia] started the team two years ago in my freshman year. The main barrier right now is funding. Because we're a new sport, we're not yet sanctioned under the university athletics.

We're a club sport instead of being varsity sport, which is where I hope we can and should be. We have six members and four of us travel and have at least three to four tournaments each semester where we go and compete for the University of Virginia.

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Do you see yourself coming back to Pentathlon and if so, do you think your current sports can be a benefit?

Like every other 19-year-old, I'm really not sure of the trajectory of the rest of my life around me. But everything is a possibility. I definitely think wheelchair tennis and even wrestling can have positive impacts on other sports. Wrestling helps with cardiovascular endurance and we all know that that's a really important part of Pentathlon for Swimming and Running.

Wheelchair tennis is amazing for hand-eye coordination so, you know, running into the booth and having to shoot right after you've just run is a challenge, but wheelchair tennis can have a positive impact for that. The same for tennis. It would make a huge difference to come back to Pentathlon and Fencing specifically after my work in wheelchair tennis.

Have you seen the addition of the Obstacle discipline? Would that make you excited to return?

Yeah, I haven't done a deep dive but have definitely seen some stuff on Instagram on it being added. The American Ninja Warrior aspect sounds cool. I'm not sure exactly how I would do with it, but I would definitely give it a try.

What are your goals as you look towards 2024 — and beyond?

I would say my goals are maybe less sporting-focused than they once were, because of where I am in my studies. My goal for now is to graduate with my kinesiology degree and hopefully pursue a graduate degree. My preferred Masters degree would be in commerce and biotechnology. That would be awesome if I can get that.

My main sporting goal for now would be to get wheelchair tennis sanctioned as a varsity sport under UVA athletics because I do think adaptive sport is very, very important. We should continue to put an emphasis on that in any environment where it is not present currently. I believe everyone has the right to sport and without the avenue to pursue a sporting activity, it is impossible to exercise that right.