

Shayne Smith and Paul Rosen are star attractions at Sport Aurora's second ParaSport Event at SARC



The dynamic presence and inspirational messages of Shayne Smith and Paul Rosen were at the heart of Sport Aurora's second ParaSport Event at SARC on Monday afternoon.

Over 23 attendees benefitted not only from the encouraging words of Smith and Rosen, but by their introduction to four sports at the 'Try It' event: bocce, volleyball, basketball, and sledge hockey.

Quadruple amputee Smith explained the satisfaction he derives from ParaSport events.

'People with cognitive disabilities are some of the happiest people I know. Look at those smiles out there. Sports changed my life and I want to help them understand the value of sport. Many of the guys are so quiet coming into the gym and then you can't get the smiles off their faces.'

Smith described his longtime connection to a variety of ParaSports: 'I started off with sledge hockey, but I fell in love with Wheelchair Basketball through Variety Village. I was given a chance to play and started to score, so I made the Ontario Junior team and then the Canadian team in 2003. I played so well in the provincial championships that I competed in two Canadian championships. I retired at 25 and wanted to focus on my public speaking and I went on to play in the world wheelchair rugby championships. I broke a few ribs.'

Smith's motivational words were the driving force behind not only Rosen's recovery from the trauma of a leg amputation, but also to his rise as a stellar goaltender on the Olympic Gold medal-winning Canadian Sledge Hockey team.

'I met Paul when I was 12 and he was 39. He was whining about his amputation and I challenged him by asking, 'Do you still have your heart?' Next thing I know, he was the best sledge hockey goalie in the world.'

Rosen, whose connection to Smith and all the attendees was evident as he worked through the bocce, volleyball, basketball, and sledge hockey activities, applauded Smith's timely encouragement that helped him cope with the setback of an amputated leg in his late-30s.

The Olympic champion offered a significant tribute to Shayne Smith at the Olympics in Utah: "Inside my blocker, I stitched SS inside it for the Salt Lake City Olympic games."

The 65-year old broadcaster and motivational speaker looked resplendent in his Olympic jersey and gold medal as he posed for photos and acknowledged the best part of his role as an exemplary figure to so many.

"Getting kids to believe in themselves. I lost my leg at 39. Next week, I'm going to my seventh Paralympic Games: three as an athlete and four as a broadcaster. I try to encourage everyone that we need to separate ability from disability and that greatness can be found in participation."

The Sharon resident explained how these themes have motivated him in both his athletic and broadcasting career.

He was the oldest rookie in Paralympic Winter Games history at age 41. Rosen was the starting goaltender for Team Canada in the Olympics of 2002, 2006, and 2010 and has worked as a broadcaster at the 2014 Games in Russia, the 2018 Games in Korea, the 2022 Games in Beijing, and was flying to Italy on Friday to work for CBC, TSN, and OBS at for the 2026 Games in Milan.

His globetrotting adventures are captured in his biography entitled *Never Give Up: The Meaning of My Life* co-written with FAN 590 Radio voice, author, and lecturer Roger Lajoie. Rosen's life story is filled with engaging anecdotes, including his connection to an Order of Canada broadcaster and legendary Hockey Night in Canada personality.

"Don Cherry was such a huge part of reclaiming my stolen gold medal. In February 2007, Don went on Coach's Corner and said that 'The rat that stole Rosey's gold medal has to give it back. Drop it off at the police station, in a mailbox' no questions asked.' Don's plea worked. I got it back."

Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, expressed his satisfaction at seeing Smith and Rosen in the Desjardin Gym and that ParaSport events have gained traction in the community.

"This all got started off a chance meeting with Community Living's Andrew Fagan. I was telling him that we don't have a ParaSport program to offer. He was all on board. We met with ParaSport Ontario and this is our second event this time with 23 participants; 24 last time. Community Living brings their supervisory staff and we have a few of our volunteers to help out, including Anthony Garramone and Laurie Mueller. We'll be doing a feasibility study about ParaSport and would like to offer an annual program."

Fagan, the CEO of Community Living Central York, echoed Weese's insights about the value of the event and loved seeing its impact on the participants: "The best part of this is the energy in the room. In such a small amount of time, it's great that they have pulled off this event for people with diverse abilities. To feel that energy with so many partners in the community and to see twenty-three participants having fun through sports is very satisfying."

The long-time director applauded the progress of ParaSport in Canada: "I've been in the sector for 25 years and it's great to see the skills in the room today especially from the Ambassadors who bring so much to events like these. However, as much as communities say they're diverse, we still have a lot of work to do."

Fagan praised the presence of York Region Police Officers and Central York Firefighters in the Desjardins Gymnasium who were participating fully in the events.

"It's more than just the energy they're bringing to the gym this afternoon it's about how they're building these community relationships. Overall, our vision coincides with Sport Aurora and we're happy that over twenty-three families are involved today and thriving in the moment."

By Jim Stewart Local Journalism Initiative Reporter