

## Jessica Cooper Lewis Paralympian, Newsletter #5, 2021 - Tokyo part two



On the day of the 100m I was keeping an eye on the weather as it was starting to change from hot, sunny and humid, to overcast, a bit cooler and a chance of thunderstorms. Also because there were only 9 athletes registered to compete in the 100m, and it was a 9 lane track, the race got moved into a straight final. In one sense that was great as I could save energy (as it was supposed to be the heat in the morning and final at night) but in another it would have been nice to have an opportunity to get an extra one in and it made for a very long day waiting.

I was certainly stressed throughout the day but once we finally got to the track to warm up Coach Curtis helped me to relax and focus. It was drizzling as I was warming up so I made sure to put a bit of klister on my gloves to help me stick better. I was talking to Ken to tell him to sort out the weather so that when we raced it wouldn't rain, or become heavier rainfall. He came through and when we got on the competition track it was dry.



For the first time at these games, we were all introduced individually when we were coming out onto the track which was a really cool experience. It was nice though to have been in a lane that I got introduced early on so that I have a few moments to get to the start line, take a few deep breaths, and block out everything except getting across that finish line. I felt that I had a semi decent start and was proud of how I was able to kick in a bit

more through the transition to power strokes. Coming away 4th in the race, while is something I am proud of as it was a 2 place advancement since the 100m in Rio, it is also an extremely tough spot to be especially when it is .37 of a second separating me from 3rd place. The hard part about the sport sometimes is that you train countless hours, and put in so much work, for 5 years (in this case) and it comes down to those 16 or 17 seconds on that day at that minute.

On the bus ride back to the village I will admit that I had a bit of a meltdown. All of my emotions were coming to the surface. Both happy and sad. I also became a bit overcome with the fact of missing Ken. We started the plan to get to Tokyo together and he wasn't there physically to see it through. Curtis and I both had necklaces with some of his ashes in it there with us though. Thank you so much to Curtis for listening to me, encouraging me and giving me the time and space to feel those emotions. As well as helping me to see all the good that came out of that race.



From Lorri: I was very fortunate to again be able to go to the games as the Chef de Mission. This accreditation allowed me to be at all of Jessica's races. It was sad to

see all the volunteers there and the stands empty. The Japanese people were so upbeat and happy to see us. While sitting in the stands waiting for Jessica's 100m final to begin, I thought back to when Dr Perinchief came to see me a couple of days after Jessica was born. He was very serious and explained that Jessica had a very severe spine problem. This was a shock as we had no idea that Jessica had a medical issue during the pregnancy. I remember laying in the hospital thinking, what am I going to do with this little girl? What kind of life is she going to have with a severe spine issue? Will she be able to lead a normal life? Well, Jessica has certainly answered all those questions! Here I was sitting in the stands in Tokyo, Japan waiting for Jessica to take the track in her 3rd Paralympics as one of the top para athletes in the T53 class in the World. It brought tears to my eyes with the pride I was feeling for her accomplishments. She is certainly a role model and not because she is in a wheelchair. She is a role model for her positive outlook on life, her determination to sacrifice and work hard to pursue her dreams, her kind and positive spirit and her overall awesomeness!

The 400m heats were the next morning and I had to push away everything I was feeling from the night before and get focused again. The weather was still rainy and cooler so I used some klister again to help me stick to the rims. I was a bit disappointed with how the race went (athletes can always be their toughest critics :)). I felt like I was just going through the motions of the push without putting in a lot of the power needed to carry you through the whole track. I was also disappointed that my time was not under the 1 minute mark. It was a big achievement this season for me to have been able to do that a few times and I was looking forward to repeating that against the girls at that level of competition.



But overall I do want you to know, now that I have had some separation from the raw emotions I felt there, I am extremely proud of how I raced. I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunities I have had to help prepare me for the games. And to represent Bermuda at my third Paralympic Games is something that I will always cherish.

We felt completely safe while in the village and at the training and competition venues. Everyone was really respectful of all the COVID protocols, such as wearing a mask at all times while out of your rooms. We were also all tested everyday. In our apartment we used one of the extra bedrooms as what we called "The Spit Room" where every morning we would meet up in there when we first woke up to spit into the tube for the test and check our temperatures. The dining hall, which was 2 floors, had plexiglass cubicles around each seat and were cleaned regularly.

The Japanese volunteers were all so kind, welcoming, and couldn't do enough to help you. You could just tell the immense pride they all had in finally being able to hold the games. I kept saying that it was such a shame that spectators were not allowed, not because of how it would impact the athletes, but that the Japanese



community couldn't be a part of the games experience as the host country.



Due to the covid restrictions we were not able to go anywhere besides the athlete village, our training venue, and our competition venue. We also had to leave the village within 48 hours of your last event to help keep the number of people as minimum as possible. It is a shame that we weren't allowed to sightsee at all, and we had planned for my whole family to come to the games. However, next year we will hopefully be going back to Japan for the World Championships. I hope by then we will be able to explore a bit more.

Now I have some much needed down-time. I am both physically and mentally exhausted, but so incredibly grateful for the support I have received over these last 5 years of preparing for Tokyo. It didn't look anything like I thought it would, with a lot of ups and downs but it made me into the athlete I am today and ended successfully. I love being an athlete and am so fortunate that I get to do what I love every single day. In October we begin the push to Paris 2024 - which is only 3 years away!

Love and hugs to all xx

Jessica