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 Paralympics New Zealand

[Paralympian #134 Stacey Roche](#) may be best known for her achievements in [Boccia](#) but she has proved it is never too late to start after taking up the sport of [Wheelchair rugby](#) this year at the age of 46.

Based in Mount Maunganui, Stacey achieved her Boccia highlight some 24 years ago when finishing fourth as part of the four-strong New Zealand team in the mixed team BC1-BC2 event at the [Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games](#). Later taking up Boccia coaching she never imagined Wheelchair rugby would be her thing but after her fellow Parafed Bay of Plenty Board member Neil Cudby, who is also coach to the Bay of Plenty Steamrollers, suggested she give the sport a crack she decided to act on his words.

“I don’t think anyone has gone from Boccia to Wheelchair rugby, the sports are quite different,” explains Stacey. “I had tried Wheelchair rugby when I was younger, but I did not enjoy the experience back then. I was quite nervous about putting myself out there, but Neil was very good at taking me under his wing and I was surprised how much fun the sport was.”

Training twice a week for the Steamrollers, Stacey – who has a significant impairment and is a low point player as a 0.5 – has reveled in her new sport.

Already having clocked up more than 20 games in the past six months she has been blown away by the camaraderie of the sport.

“Wheelchair rugby is the ultimate team sport,” adds Stacey. “If I’m stuck or blocked, I’m reliant on the other players to help me out. Vice versa when they are blocked, I can help a teammate out, which is a great feeling. Everyone looks out for each other. The pureness of the teamwork is something I’ve never experienced in my life. For me, as an old lady at 46, it is magical.”

On a steep learning curve, she finds catching and passing challenging but over time she has improved that skill. Yet as a low point player with cerebral palsy she is just as an important part of the team as a high point (someone with more functional ability) player – in a game which has a points restriction per the team which can be fielded on court at any one time – and by playing the game she has discovered a hitherto untapped part of her personality.

“I didn’t think I could handle this cutthroat nature of the sport when you see people get tipped out of their chairs,” she adds. “But playing the game has really brought the mongrel out in me, I love that side of me, giving it hell!”

Encouraged by the first six months of her Wheelchair rugby journey she recently claimed a bronze medal at part of the BOP Steamrollers team – and was immensely proud of the achievement.

“The feeling after winning bronze in that tournament was something different to my Boccia career, I had accomplished something for my team and with my team.

Still in the early days of her Wheelchair rugby journey, Stacey, is excited by the future.

“At the moment I’m just enjoying the game,” she says. “It is fun and I’m liking learning about Wheelchair rugby and its intricacies. The sky is the limit. I don’t know whether they allow old ladies in the Paralympics, but you never know. Seriously though, I just love playing for the Steamrollers.”

Yet whatever happens in the future, she hopes to prove to others it is never too late to start to try a new sport – whatever the demands.

“I have been lucky enough to have some very encouraging teammates, which has given me the confidence and belief in myself to do something I thought was beyond my capabilities,” she adds.

Article originally published on paralympics.org.nz

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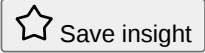
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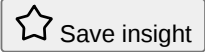
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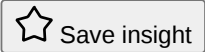
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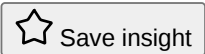


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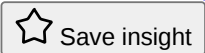
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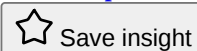
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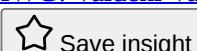
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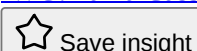
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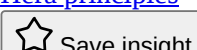
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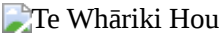
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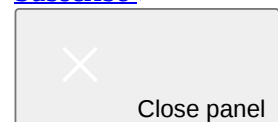
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