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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 14 August 2021 – “Leslie’s Decision a no-brainer”

It’s been man flu central for the last couple of weeks. As such I have had to remain at home. I did try and go back to work somewhat prematurely but after an hour or two of hacking and snorting I was frog marched out of the office by my unimpressed staff. One bonus of the time at home was that it correlated with the Olympics. I have always found the Olympics fascinating and this time round it was even more so. From the new sports such as skate boarding and surfing to the classics such as the gymnastics, athletics, rowing and canoeing. The woman’s shotput was highly entertaining especially the USA representative, Raven Saunders, who was dressed as a Marvel comic character with her hair dyed pink and purple wearing a Joker style facemask. Watching these over achievers with the knowledge of how much training over the years had gone towards these games, can make one feel somewhat lazy. Lisa Carrington certainly had this effect, with her outstanding multiple medal winning achievements.

Lying on the couch feeling lazy, my thoughts turned to our local Northland multi-talented veteran Paralympian Cameron Leslie. He has won three gold medals in the 150m Individual Medley SM4 over the last three Paralympic Games. He’s definitely going to bring home the bacon this time around.

Or so I thought.

Then I realised that he had recently made the shock announcement of his decision, to withdraw from Tokyo. Wow! What happened? Then I read that he had made the decision because his wife was expecting their second child around time of the Paralympic Games. With the current state of international travel due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, Leslie has, understandably, put his young family first. That would have been such a hard decision to make, that I decided to hear it from the horse’s mouth. An interview was in order!.

Apparently, Cameron has been crook for the last few weeks, he had a touch of the man flu himself.

His baby girl Delilah is now 10 days new. He remembers being away for 17 days after his son Beau was born and it wasn’t fair on his wife Emma.

I asked “*How long did it take you to make this decision?*” – “I weighed up whether I could go, should go, could I go to Paris in 2024? I’m not too old yet. It would be good for my kids to have a record of what I have achieved as a disabled father. It’s hard on my 2yr old son Beau even when I goes to Auckland for a week so 3-6 weeks would be tough on the little fella. There were more negatives than positives, some things are bigger than sports right? It was the hardest, easiest decision”.

Did the pandemic play a part in this decision? – “Yes, This time around if I attended the games I would have to be away for at least 3 weeks but could possibly end up being 6 weeks with Covid quarantine restrictions.

How long had you been training for the event? – “I’ve been training since the last games, so five years”.

Will you be going to the next games? – “The Paris games are in 2024, I don’t think I will be over the hill so I will probably go.”

What do you think the coverage of these Paralympics will be like? “We will see, it would be good to see if they can match what they did in the Olympics, it has improved over the years. It’s good for both disabled people and non-disabled people to see what the Paralympians can do. “

Who should we be watching for at these games? – “Wheelblacks Rugby, 2008 was the last time they attended the games. You can’t go past the cycling track and the pool. All the New Zealand Paralympians are great, you have to be good to make the team.”

You can catch all the action as the New Zealand Paralympic Team compete at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games from the 25th of August as it unfolds each day on TVNZ DUKE (Freeview Channel 13 and Sky Channel 23). A 30 minute daily highlights show will air at 9 am on TVNZ1.

Cameron also said “Able people forget that not every disabled person wants to train for the games the same as not all enabled people want to”. Phew, I can stop feeling lazy now!

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.