

TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE

By Sara Bennett

Canadian Kevin Frost has his sights set on the 2014 Paralympic Games in Moscow, Russia. Not only does the 43-year-old deaf-blind speed skater want the sport included in the Games for the first time, he wants to compete and win a medal. Born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1967, Frost and his family moved to Ottawa in the early 1970s where, a few short years later, he was diagnosed with a hearing impairment. Despite this, he had a paper route during his school years, and upon graduation he embarked on a 16-year career at a local grocery store. Then, in 2002, after a friend encouraged him to see an ophthalmologist because he was bumping into things, he was diagnosed with Usher Syndrome, a genetic disease that causes progressive hearing and vision loss. Today, Kevin Frost has tunnel vision and can only hear sounds at 90 decibels or higher. He lip-reads, uses 20/24-font size on his computer, and travels with a cane and guide dog.

From an early age, Kevin Frost loved sports, and even became a hockey referee at age ten. Perhaps it was only natural then that a friend with ties to speed skating would encourage him to try this new sport once his vision began to deteriorate. Frost was now without employment and a driver's licence, two things that often signify independence and self-confidence; maybe the mastery of a new skill and the rediscovery of his love for sports would restore a sense of competence and normalcy. And so it did. "I realized I still had a love and talent on the ice," said Frost in an email. "I've been competing for six years now in speed skating." Since 2004, he has won medals in competitions in Ottawa, Calgary, Lake Placid and Germany. At the Russian Paralympic Open Blind Cup in November 2009, Frost won four gold medals, and set new world records, in the 500, 1,000, 1,500 and 3,000 metre races, feats he considers his greatest accomplishments. "In Russia, the skaters have a person who follows them at all times around the oval," says Frost. "I also use an FM system for my coaches to communicate with me on the track, big orange cones to indicate when to turn (I've had many falls and disqualifications), and a large orange flag to indicate my last lap because I don't hear the bell." When I asked him about keeping his balance when he has reduced hearing and vision, Frost said it takes great core training, determination and practice. But he isn't alone. His "team" includes coaches, fitness and mental-training specialists, yoga instructors, and public relations and website experts. As he is on a fixed disability income, a variety of sponsors help with equipment costs and competition expenses. "With my support team behind me, I know my dream to be the first deaf-blind speed skater to achieve a winning medal at the Olympics will one day come true. This will also raise awareness for others with disabilities: You can reach your goals if you have the will and the heart. There is support out there. Find it, and don't be afraid to ask for, or accept it."

Kevin Frost has "officially" been delivering educational and motivational presentations in schools, businesses etc. for the past eight years. "I have done

over 200 presentations,” he says. “I travel to Mexico, and throughout the USA and Canada. I sometimes use interveners, ask someone to stand with me at the front to repeat a question, use my FM system, or lip read.” Frost also helps in practical ways. According to the website <http://kevinfrost.wordpress.com>, he helped a blind girl from Ottawa get tickets to see the Black Eyed Peas in concert, and assisted another in dealing with teasing and bullying after she emailed him for help. Frost has also delivered hearing aids, white canes and special glasses to children with hearing and/or vision impairments in Mexico. When I asked him what advice he would give others who are deaf-blind, he emailed, “My best advice to deaf-blind people is that you have great talents to be discovered. Don’t give up and keep a positive attitude. I was in your shoes at one time and hit rock bottom. I turned my life around and I am doing more things than I have ever imagined. For deaf-blind athletes, the secret is to always smile, give 110 percent, be persistent and try new sports. I had to lose lots of races and competitions before becoming one of the best. I am always learning something new every week in speed skating and rowing--another sport I love.”

What does the future hold for Kevin Frost? “My goals,” he says, “are to try to get speed skating into the Paralympics for 2014 in Russia, establish a foundation to help disabled athletes make their Olympic dreams come true, and travel the world giving talks. And since it was summertime at this article’s writing, Frost’s near future includes continued training as a rower. Although he has been rowing competitively for three years and has won medals in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Victoria and Boston, he dreams of participating in the Olympics in rowing. To that end, he’s been invited to the Canadian Paralympic Rowing Camp Trials. The father of three would also like to get into golf and curling!

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