

SMEENK READY TO CHASE DOWN SUCCESS

WHEELCHAIR RACER
RANKED SECOND
IN 100M

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When Austin Smeenk crossed the line in 15.19 seconds earlier this year, it was a significant accomplishment for the Halton-area athlete.

After almost two years without an official competition, he had done more than set a personal best and lowered his Canadian record in the T34 wheelchair 100-metre event. Smeenk had recorded the second-best time in the world this year.

At just 24, Smeenk is a veteran racer and holder of three Canadian records. He qualified for his first Paralympics at 15. Smeenk was still competing in a borrowed race chair and he and his coach at the time made the difficult decision to skip the Paralympics, believing it would be better for his development.

The following year, he demonstrated his promise,



Mike Cowley photo

Austin Smeenk will compete in his second Paralympics, with a strong chance at a medal in the 100m.



Paralympics (sixth in the T34 100m, eighth in the 800m).

At the last world championships, he had three top-fives, including a fourth in the 800m, which he will also race at the Paralympics. But so far, the podium at a major championship has remained just out of his reach.

Now Smeenk heads to Tokyo having recorded a time that would have put him on the podium in 2016.



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AUSTIN SMEENK

turning in four top-10 finishes at the world championships.

Smeenk, who was born with spastic paraplegia—a hereditary disease that causes progressive stiffness and contraction in the lower limbs—has continued to rise in the world rankings since then. He had top-eight finishes in both his events at the 2016

HAWTIN SHOOTING FOR GOLD

NATIONAL
BASKETBALL TEAM
VETERAN HOPES TO
PUT CANADA BACK
ATOP PODIUM

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Canada once dominated wheelchair basketball, winning three straight Paralympic gold medals between 1992 and 2000.

Melanie Hawtin hopes to return Canada to its place atop the podium.

Hawtin is one of five players returning from the team that finished fifth in Rio in 2016. A national team veteran, Hawtin rarely played basketball until 2012. Burlington Vipers coach Chris Chandler tried to get her to play. But Hawtin had her sights set on making the Paralympics in track.

She'd been racing since she was five years old and qualified for the national championships at 10. She was racking up medals and accolades on her way to national titles in the 100-metre, 400-metre and 1,500-metre races and representing Canada at the world junior championships.

But months before the 2012 Paralympics, Hawtin was told she would need



Wheelchair Basketball Canada photo

Melanie Hawtin competes against Great Britain at the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation World Championships in Germany.



surgery. Her recovery prevented her from training in her race wheelchair because of the need to lean forward.

Wanting to remain active and able to sit more upright in a basketball chair, she took Chandler up on his offer. Within two years, Hawtin made the national team and helped Canada

win a gold medal at the world championships. A year later, she earned a silver medal at the ParaPan-Am Games in Toronto.

An injury kept Hawtin out of the 2019 ParaPan-Am Games in Peru, where Canada upset the United States, the reigning Paralympic champions, to take the gold. Now Hawtin and the Canadian team head to Tokyo, looking for a repeat performance.



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