

Protect Admin Officer Ben Fawcett is really good at crashing into people in wheelchairs. In fact he is so good, he won a gold medal for it at the Rio 2016 Paralympics in Brazil in September.

# GO-HARD GOLDEN WHEELMAN

Ben, 25, plays wheelchair rugby for Australia's national team, the Steelers. Invented by Canadians, this now elite-level sport attracts wheelchair-bound athletes with a taste for the extreme end of physical activity. Which is why it was originally called "Murderball". Fitness, strength, agility and tactical smarts coupled with a preparedness to leave it all on the court are the key ingredients.



PHOTO - Courtesy The Australian Paralympic Committee

## Out there

"A lot of us have had accidents from extreme sports," Ben said. "But we still have the desire to go hard, which is why we get into wheelchair rugby."

"I was snowboarding in New Zealand with some mates. On the day I got there, on my second run down Coronet Peak, I went over a jump and broke my neck."

Ben was no newbie to snowboarding. He learned the sport in Canada while on school exchange and every year since had managed to tear up at least one Australian snowfield. In his quieter moments, the then 18-year-old was in his second year as an apprentice sparky at Otis Elevators. Until everything came unstuck.

Ben is now a quadriplegic with a C5-6 spinal cord injury, and when he plays rugby he is classified as an 0.5 disability rating - an important number when deciding on the makeup of the team going onto the court.

"I was introduced to rugby as part of my rehab program in 2010, and I really enjoyed it. I played with some local sides, then was picked for the NSW state side and then the Victorian team," he said.

The Bacchus Marsh boy was named Rookie of the Year in 2012 and lined

up for the Steelers the following year in the tri-nations stoush against NZ and the USA.

## Golden day

Ben was full of praise for the Rio Paralympic Games organisers.

"We were all prepared for it not being ready, but everything went smoothly. Volunteers were really helpful and everything ran on time. The accommodation was decked out well for us; I couldn't really fault it," he said.

The Steelers beat four countries on its way to Paralympic glory, all really hard-fought but none as tight as the final. For only the second time, the Australians were pushed into overtime - where both teams are equal at game's end and three-minute quarters are added to find a winner.

This was the final gold medal event at Rio and the 12,500-seat stadium had been sold out for days. The game was living up to its hype - the two giants of the sport refusing to yield an inch. Then, in the second overtime period, Australia went ahead by a point and the Americans were stopped in their tracks: 59-58.

## Full-time, committed professional

Ben is back in training. Six days a week he is in the gym, building fitness, polishing technique, honing strategies or flat out playing. Through grants from the Australian Paralympic Committee along with some part-time work, the team is able to dedicate life full-time to the sport.

"I'm lucky that Protect gave me a start. I have been here since 2011 and I couldn't ask for a more supportive and friendly workplace. That they have given me three days off a week to train says it all," he said.

And having a gold medal hanging around his neck hasn't done his reputation any harm either. ■



“I WENT OVER A JUMP AND BROKE MY NECK.”



## Wheelchair rugby A beginner's guide

Ben says "wheelchair rugby" is a bit of a misleading name for this manic sport. Perhaps the original "Murderball" would have been better.

The game is played over four eight-minute quarters, with a two-minute break at the end of the first and third, and five minutes out at the half. There are numerous "time outs" available, not the least of which is the one minute assigned to The Mechanic, who is allowed on court to right a chair or effect running repairs to broken wheels or burst tyres. He has the skills of an F1 pit crew.

A single game can last almost two hours. If the game remains equal at its end, three-minute "overtimes" are instituted until one team gets ahead.

The object is to carry the ball over the opposing goal line to score a point. Two wheels must cross the line to have the score count. The four players on the court will do their utmost to prevent this from happening by driving into an opponent's chair. Body contact is not permitted.

To ensure fairness, an on-court team can only have a total of 8 classification points. Each player has been assigned points according to their ability, with 3.5 being the most able and 0.5, the least. The team can be made up of any combination, for example, two 3.5 pointers and two 0.5 pointers.

As a "low-pointer", Ben is rarely a ball carrier. His skills lie in blocking and screening.

The "rugby" chairs are custom-built for each player. The offensive chair is built for speed and manoeuvrability. Ben's superlight (11 kg) defensive chair is able to hook and hold opposition players. It is made from titanium and he didn't get much change out of \$10,000 when he bought it.



# HELPING ETU MEMBERS GET BACK TO WORK

The Back to Work program at Futuretech offers outplacement services to ETU members who have been made redundant or face redundancy in the near future.

Members are supported by a case manager and can access advice on training courses and transition to new industry sectors.

## Job placement services

Futuretech is offering free support to displaced electrical workers such as:

- resume and/or cover letter preparation
- interview coaching
- identification of suitable jobs
- job application assistance
- training pathway identification
- advice on new and in-demand skill needs
- industry networks
- counselling.

If electrical workers decide to change careers, a tailored vocational assessment can be undertaken to discover what future job role is suitable.

## Training services

Displaced workers may wish to remain in the electrical

industry, develop new skills or transition to a new industry.

In any case, Futuretech can offer a suite of training opportunities up to 50 per cent off (conditions apply) across Holmesglen campuses.

Some examples of training offered are:

- Registered Electrical Contracting (REC) course
- Hybrid Fibre Cable training (HFC)
- ACMA Open Registration / Structured Cabling / Optical Fibre / Co-axial
- Grid Connected PV (Design and Install)
- Grid Connected PV with Battery Storage
- Construction Wiring
- Mandatory Testing
- First Aid
- Safe Work Practices.

To view all courses on offer visit:

[www.futuretech.edu.au](http://www.futuretech.edu.au)

# CASE STUDY: JAMES

James, an A Grade Electrician, had been out of work for two months following the completion of a contract and lack of subsequent work. James met with the case manager at Futuretech and advised that he was interested in the telecommunications industry but preferred to continue work as an electrical contractor.

As James was not interested in retraining, the case manager worked with him to update his resume and cover letter. James' resume was then forwarded to contacts within the telecommunications industry. The case manager also conducted job-search activities that identified a suitable position, which James applied for. James gained employment two weeks after meeting with the case manager and was also offered a job by a telecommunications company.

James chose the electrician's job and is enjoying his new working environment.

If you are a displaced electrical worker, Pam the case manager at Futuretech can help you too. Case management services are offered through the Back to Work program, also known as 'New Horizons'. These services include:

- vocational assessment and counselling
- transferrable skills assessment
- training pathway identification
- resume preparation and assistance with job applications
- job skills training and interview coaching
- study support and funding assistance.

## For further information

Please contact Pam (Case Manager) on 9564 4705 or Helen (Administration) on 9564 4700.

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