



## **My Story So Far.....**

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Many building blocks have fallen into place to enable me to be in the position of Captain of the Australian Men's Wheelchair Basketball team heading for Beijing in 2008.

Looking back I realise that the skills I have now were developed from very early days. I was born in Wagin, a small town in the Great Southern area of Western Australia and grew up on the family wheat and sheep farm. Country life was all about being active and outdoors. You had the opportunity to play every sport and often played with and against much older competitors because of the limited numbers. As young children we had responsibilities on the farm and could all drive cars and ride motor bikes long before we went to secondary school.

At 12 I left home to attend Aquinas College in Perth as a boarding student. A whole new world opened before me and life changed in a big way. Boarding school taught me many of the skills I still use today. Being a boys' school and a member of the Independent Schools Association we experienced sport at a high level. This level of competition was new to me and the values of team sport and representing your school became part of me. For the first time I benefited from professional coaching and represented the school in tennis, swimming, football and athletics.

Leaving school just after my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday I again faced decisions and great changes in my life. I had begun work with Boat Torque, a Perth ferry company that had the major travel contracts for the Perth to Rottnest route and this led to me enrolling at the Maritime TAFE to study marine engineering. At the same time I fulfilled a childhood dream and began to play Colts football for Claremont. All my life I had been a one-eyed supporter of Claremont and Carlton. I soon found that all my schoolboy lessons were about to be put to the test and that huge effort was expected with little or no room for under achieving or poor performance. Training was now at an even higher level and I learnt what it is to be a sportsman.

The Rottnest Ferries was to be a summer job so that I had enough money to get through the football season without working full-time but soon my love of the ocean and football were to be tested. Due to the summer and winter aspect, the two went

hand in hand but football demanded more. On the other hand I could see there also was an exciting life to be had with a career in the marine world.

In December 1992 my choice was made for me with an accident on the boats which resulted in me losing my lower right leg below the knee. Life was put on hold for the 12 days I was in hospital. After this life was a ride I will never forget or want to change. A life in football was gone but the boats and other sports were still an option

Three months of rehabilitation were to follow; learning how to walk again gave me a real sense of reality. My new focus in life was to get back to work as soon as possible and I took up swimming as a sport to keep me fit. Swimming to keep physically fit and works for the mental edge. Little did I know swimming would open up yet another world!

Due to my competitiveness I entered a few swimming events at the West Australian State Swimming Championships where I was spotted by a Board member of Wheelchair Sports. After a meeting where they explained the concept of Wheelchair Basketball along with the other benefits of belonging to this organisation, I began to play in the local competition of wheelchair basketball. At this stage I had no concept of where this could and would lead me.

At the same time I was still working on the boats and had just finished my first skippers' ticket, my Master Class Five. This was very important as it proved to me and to the world at large that I had triumphed over the disability and could still pursue a career in the marine industry. This was a massive sense of achievement. Once again I had to choose between lucrative jobs on the boats in North of Western Australia or take a punt on Wheelchair Basketball and a chance to represent my country at a Paralympics.

Basketball won due to my new outlook on life and the belief that you only live once. After a few years playing in Perth and finishing bottom of the ladder each year I decided to move to Melbourne to play under Sandy Blythe and the Dandenong Rangers. Wanting to learn more I took up a scholarship with the University of Texas in Arlington on a full sports scholarship to play wheelchair basketball. After one year in the programme and some amazing experiences in the States I returned to a winning team with Dandenong and a place in the Australian team for the Sydney Paralympics.

I had made up my mind that after Sydney I would return to the boats but again my life in basketball took another turn. Work Cover in Melbourne employed me as a public speaker to educate people in all aspects of life from the corporate CEO to budding young apprentices. Work Cover enabled me to continue playing basketball and train at the highest level needed to perform on the world stage.

I also started to work with Sports Challenge a Western Australia initiative that used elite sports people to mentor children with low self esteem. This was done through the medium of basketball and the program was being introduced to other States. To

help motivate other young people with difficulties was a perfect way to give a little back to all who had helped me. It also helped to round out my leadership skills and taught me a lot about who I was as a person and how I could lead people with common goals to achieve what they wanted to achieve.

Basketball continued and what was meant to be a year in Italy to play basketball as part of a holiday turned into 6 years of the most competitive sport I have could ever imagine. Taking me all parts of the globe and experiencing life at a rapid pace. Using Italy as a base I have played in the North for Cantu on the shores of Lake Como, in the Capital Roma and now in the sleepy south of Taranto where basketball is regarded higher than soccer. Italy has a true professional league where players earn a full living from playing basketball. Playing full time in Europe has honed my skills to play against the best in the world on the international scene. During those six years I have played basketball in America, Italy, United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, Cyprus, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and Australia.

One of the biggest highlights of my life, other than the Paralympics, was the setting up of two mini basketball teams for children under 18 with disabilities in Cantu and Roma. Both teams now play in a regular mini basketball league in Italy and are ranked in the top three on a national level. Being coach of Roma when they played Cantu will be a day I will never forget.

The Athens Paralympics was a fantastic experience. Winning a silver medal was the icing on the cake and allowed me to tick off another box in dreams and goals I set both before and after my accident. To reach the final and know you are amongst the best players in the world is a special feeling. However losing the final kept the fire burning and I wanted to finish basketball with a world gold medal.

After Athens the stage was set for me to retire but with a young Australian team and a desire to be a member of the best team in the world kept me going. I was also nominated as captain. As players we remained united to go one better than Athens and win gold at the World Gold Cup in Amsterdam in 2006. Now after finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> at that event with an even younger team than we thought we have our sights firmly set on gold at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic games.

Being captain of the Australian team is an honour. The only thing missing from my checklist that would complete the story will be to lead the Oz Rollers to gold in 2008 at Beijing

#Brad Ness and the Oz Rollers went on to win not only the 2008 Beijing Paralympics but also the World Cup in 2010.

## Career Highlights

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- 2011:** Coppa Italia Champions  
Italian Super Cup Champions
- 2010:** World Champions
- 2009:** Awarded O.A.M Medal
- 2008:** Gold Beijing Paralympics (Team Australia)  
Australian Team Captain  
Australian Champions NWBL – Perth Wheelcats  
Champions Italian 1<sup>st</sup> Division Serie A1  
Champions Coppa Italia  
Leading Points Scorer Coppa Italia
- 2007:** World Club Champions Perth Wheelcats  
Australian Champions NWBL – Perth Wheelcats  
Perth Wheelcats – Captain  
Dream Team Taranto – Captain
- 2006:** Wheelchair Sports Western Australia Sport Star of the Year  
Australian Champions NWBL – Perth Wheelcats  
Perth Wheelcats - Captain  
Most Valuable Player - NWBL Australian League  
All Star Five NWBL Australian League  
Inaugural Sandy Blythe Medal - Most Valuable International Player 2005/06  
World Gold Cup 3<sup>rd</sup> – Oz Rollers (Team Australia)  
Australian Team Captain – Oz Rollers  
Most Valuable Player for Dream Team Taranto Coppa Italia
- 2005:** Australian Team Captain – Oz Rollers  
Kitakyusha Champions Cup 1<sup>st</sup> – Oz Rollers  
IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships 1<sup>st</sup> – Oz Rollers  
All Star Five IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships  
Coppa Italia 1<sup>st</sup> – Santa Lucia Rome
- 2004:** Athens Paralympics Silver Medal – Oz Rollers  
Most Valuable Player for Oz Rollers Athens Paralympics  
IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships 1<sup>st</sup> – Oz Rollers  
All Star Five IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships
- 2003:** Wheelchair Sports Western Australia, Sports Star Of The Year

- 2002:** World Gold Cup 4<sup>th</sup> - Oz Rollers  
Australia NWBL Champions – Perth Wheelcats
- 2001:** Australia NWBL All Star Five  
Most Valuable Player Perth Wheelcats  
IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships 1<sup>st</sup> – Oz Rollers  
All Star Five IWBF Asia Oceania Qualifying Championships
- 2000:** Sydney Paralympics 5<sup>th</sup> – Oz Rollers  
Australia NWBL Champions – Dandenong Rangers  
NCAA USA College Finals 2<sup>nd</sup> – University of Arlington Texas
- 1999:** Australia NWBL 2<sup>nd</sup> – Dandenong Rangers