

Jessica Cooper Lewis - 2016 Newsletter #4
May 12 - 15, 2016. Desert Challenge Games, Tempe, Arizona.

Jessica, Isaiah, Austin, Curtis, Coach Ken and I all arrived safely after a 4 ½ hour flight from Toronto to Phoenix, Arizona. It's hot here! 104 on Thursday! Piled into the shuttle bus to the rental car company. Got our 2 mini vans and loaded all the equipment - 4 racing chairs, 2 wheel boxes, 2 wheel bags, 3 day chairs, 3 suitcases, a few backpacks and the 6 of us. Headed to the hotel, Hyatt Place, which was only about 10 minutes from the airport which is always great! The athletes changed over their wheels from the 'travel' ones to their competition ones. Ken got in line for all the registrations and getting the athletes their racing numbers. Ken and Curtis headed downtown as Curtis had to be reclassified since he had been out for the year for medical reasons. No surprise that he is still at T54! It's great to see him back in his racing chair. He's working hard to get back in top form but it takes time after being unable to train for so long. Coach Ken never lets his athletes have more than a week or so off as it takes a long time to get back to where they were.



Being out for a year will be tough but he will get there! Austin, Isaiah, Jessica and I headed to the track to be sure the chairs survived the flight! Ken and Curtis met us there and everything checked out ok with the equipment, just a few small twiks with the 'toe in/toe out' measurements. This has to do with the way the wheels move on the track. The rear wheels of the track chairs are cambered (angled) for stability. The less the camber means that there is less stability but faster in a straight line, the more camber the more stable the chair is. So for 100 metre races the wheels are better less cambered (straighter) and for longer races with corners you need more angle. Hope this makes sense. So for the athletes doing 100m and higher it's finding the right degree of camber for both straights and corners without sacrificing stability.



Ken headed back to the hotel for the coaches meeting so J, C, I, A and I headed to find Lonestar steakhouse for dinner. Unfortunately, the location listed in my GPS was closed so we found a Long Horns. Food was great - conversation a little iffy at times but with this group that is normal! The time change of 3 hours behind from Toronto caught up with all of us after dinner!



Friday morning we were all up early (3 hour time change came in handy for early mornings!) We are staying at the Hyatt Place Hotel which is the host hotel. Very nice accommodations. Lots of room which is great with the equipment. All rooms have, fridge, microwave in the room too. Had breakfast and all headed to the track for 800m races for Isaiah and Curtis had prelims in the morning. Jessica and Austin were straight finals in the evening. Temperatures were in the 80's when we left getting up over 100 by noon. Curtis and Isaiah both advanced to the final. The starter was very fast with his commands and both were caught off guard when the gun went very quickly after 'on your marks' command. They managed to still have great races. Austin had a great 800 final and managed a new PB. Jessica was up against Shirley Reilly and Kelsey Lefevour both of the USA. Kelsey is actually being assessed to possibly be reclassified from a T54 to a T53. She has exactly the same disability as Jessica - Diastematomyelia. Jessica had

a great start and the others didn't 'catch' her for about 200 meters. Shirley loves the long distances and powered past Jessica and kept the lead to the end. Jessica held off Kelsey and finished 2nd. In between races Ken, Austin, Jessica and I went to Bass Pro Store. WOW! That is one incredible store. All outdoor - fishing, hunting, boating etc. Austin and Jessica were doing some target practice! Jessica asked Ken if she could do her 800 in the vehicle at left! Needless to say he said NO!

Saturday morning: Curtis and Isaiah had their 100 and 400 prelims. Both did very well advancing to the finals which will be later tonight. In between races we were all sitting under the bleachers in the shade when a fire truck pulled up and parked next to the 6 story parking garage next door. A few minutes later the firefighters, in full gear including oxygen tanks, full face masks and ax in hand were climbing the stairs. It was a drill for them. They climbed up and down the stairs for about 45 minutes. Temperatures were close to 100!



The evening's events started off being very warm but as the sun went down it's amazing how comfortable 88 degrees can be after 110! Jessica won her 100m race and was 2nd in the 400. Her starts continue to be really good. Austin blew



away his competitors in the 100 and Isaiah got a new awesome PB in the 100 final. The 400 finals were later in the evening for Curtis, Isaiah and Jessica. Austin's classification didn't offer a 400. Jessica again was 2nd behind Shirley.

These are such amazing events. They have lots of little kids just starting out in para sport. The wheelchair racers are so little in these big racing chairs. They are all over the track not staying in their lanes but they are out there and pushing their hearts out. The little amputee runners with the tiny prosthetic flippers are wonderful. It's always so interesting to see the different prosthetics - love technology! The blind runners still amaze me - running as fast as they can guided by their guides who talk to them the whole race. If anyone ever has the chance to spectate at one of these events please go. These athletes are just like any other, they train hard, they sweat, they hurt, they are proud, they put their heart and soul into every race. An athlete is an athlete regardless of their ability.

From Jessica:

I am so excited for this 2016 racing season to get underway. During the off season you work so hard and are always anticipating what the next racing season will hold so it's definitely great to be back at it. Desert challenge was a great meet to start the season off with for me because it is a very special one as it is the one I qualified for my 200m for London in 2012. I am really motivated this season from the high of last season and that I will be representing Bermuda at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games in September to work that little bit harder and race with everything that I have. Thank you to all of you for your continued support and encouragement. You can also follow along on my blog <http://jessicalewistrack.weebly.com/>

Next stop is Nottwil, Switzerland at the end of next week for the Swiss Series. Always a great event with lots of competition and of course lots of chocolate!