

Chuck Aoki

My name is Chuck Aoki and I am a native of Minneapolis. I am an athlete, an avid reader, an aspiring teacher, and finally, a person who uses a wheelchair. I use a wheelchair because I was born with a rare genetic disorder called Hereditary Sensory Autonomic Neuropathy (HSAN) Type II, which resulted in me not being able to feel below my elbows or knees. As a young kid, I was pretty much like every other kid. I played baseball, ran around with my friends, and generally seemed pretty normal. Until one day, after my mom took me to the doctor because of some swelling she found odd in my knee, they discovered I had broken my femur at age six. Not only did I break it, but I had walked on it for six weeks, since I could not feel it. This injury was a precursor to my next six years, which saw me try to walk, tear a ligament, be sidelined again, then break something else. This would continue until I was 12, when I decided along with my doctor, that I would need to use a wheelchair full time.

This would be devastating for most kids to hear, but I was lucky that since my initial injury, I had begun playing wheelchair sports at the Courage Center in Golden Valley, now known as Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute. I played wheelchair basketball there for 11 years, which I began at just seven years old. I also began the sport of wheelchair rugby there as well, which I have found my greatest successes in so far.

I have played wheelchair rugby for the United States for the last six years, including the 2012 London Paralympic Games. Representing the United States at the Paralympics is the highlight of my career so far, which was topped off by our earning of a bronze medal. We took bronze after losing the semifinal by one, 50-49 to Canada on the final play of the game, and then beat Japan 53-43 for the bronze the next day. In 2013, we went 15-1, which saw us defeat both Canada, and the world #1 ranked Australians twice and three times respectively, which saw us earn the #1 world ranking going into World Championships in August 2014, in Odense, Denmark. At World Championships, we again lost to Canada in the semifinal, this time in overtime, and had to settle for yet another bronze medal victory over Japan. I'm currently training for the 2015 ParaPan American Games in Toronto, at which we will attempt to beat Canada in order to qualify for the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games.



Off the rugby court, I have completed my bachelor's degree in secondary education, with a licensure in 5th-12th Grade Social Studies. My rugby accomplishments have also led me to becoming a member of the Hartford Paralympic Ambassador program as a sponsored athlete. As part of this program, I attend various events across the country for the Hartford and speak about my experiences as an athlete and growing up as a person with a disability. I am also an athlete mentor for a program called Classroom Champions which connects Paralympians and Olympians to classrooms across the country virtually. I produce short videos for these classrooms on topics such as goal setting, perseverance and healthy living. The classrooms then do activities related to my videos, and several live chats are conducted between the classrooms and myself. This program has allowed me to give back to students all over the U.S. as a mentor and I find it incredibly rewarding. I continue to volunteer as well with Courage Kenny, as a volunteer coach, table host at fundraisers, and at various events in whatever capacity I am needed. I'm proud to give back to an organization that has helped me to achieve so much in my life.

Wheelchair Rugby accomplishments:

- 2009: Member of 2009 USA Wheelchair Rugby team, American Zonal Championships, gold medal. U.S. National Champions, Division II.
- 2010: Member of 2010 USA Wheelchair Rugby team, World Championships, gold medal.
- 2011: Member of 2011 USA Wheelchair Rugby team, American Zonal Championships gold medal, named MVP of the Americas.
- 2011: U.S. National Champions, Division I. United States Player of the Year.
- 2012: Member of 2012 U.S. Paralympic Wheelchair Rugby Team, bronze medal.
- 2012: U.S. National Champions, Division I, MVP of nationals.
- 2013: Member of 2013 USA Wheelchair Rugby team, American Zonal Championships, gold medal.
- 2013: U.S. National Championships runner-up, MVP of nationals.
- 2014: Member of 2014 USA Wheelchair Rugby team, World Championships, bronze medal. Named best 3.0 in the world at the 2014 World Championships.