

THEY HAVE MY BACK

by Andre Scott

I had a great time and solid results at the 2007 Para Pan Am Games this past August in Rio. As any medalist will tell you it takes more than good serves, a fancy backhand, and a strong fight to succeed—you need a solid team behind you. I want to take this time to thank those that had my back in August and continue to now as I try to qualify for the Paralympics in Beijing.

My preparation for Rio started when I qualified as a USOC Paralympic National Team member in December. This status provided me with additional funding for training/tournaments as well as quarterly stipends, health insurance, and coaching support. My responsibilities as a National Team member require me to have updated USADA forms at all time, keep my training up, and to continue to do everything I can to qualify for Beijing (which will be based on my world ranking in January).

I have been extremely fortunate to be part of the best college program in the country—Texas Wesleyan University. Through the support and guidance of Jasna Reed and Keith Evans, I have had access to the best training facilities available and seven-days-a-week access if needed. Keith has been my day-to-day coach and he has helped me improve my game in all areas. As an Olympian, Keith knows what it takes to compete internationally, and his coaching is great.

The USOC made a very wise move a number of years ago when they asked Sean O'Neill to bring his experience and passion to disabled table tennis. Sean's assignment was to take our team to the next level and he hit the ground running. He started by helping the players create personal training schedules, and he works with us at tournaments both domestically and abroad.

Sean gives a lot of personal assistance. He monitors my daily on-line journal and has been known to send me SMS messages at tournaments between matches (to remind me of what to focus on next). One other tool that Sean has provided the team with is extensive video coverage of matches—he has taped, converted, and uploaded to the Google Video servers, so now any of us can watch any of our matches over the last five years from any internet connection around the world.

In addition to stressing the physical needs, Sean really enjoys the mental side of table tennis. He encourages contingency planning and mental rehearsal which teaches us to respond to, but not to react to, situations. These skills have allowed me to stay calm while fighting through many tough opponents and matches. I am making much better choices these days due to this. I will say that I have met many people that want to win as badly as Sean does, but very few that are willing to prepare to win as he does.

Some say you are only as good as your equipment and I've got my back covered there also. STIGA is my official equipment supplier (through Table Tennis Pioneers at ping-pong.com). I have found STIGA Magna rubber to be the best for my game with great spin, speed, and control. STIGA and TTP have also outfitted our team over the past five years and we really looked nice in Rio thanks to their support. NIKE is the official clothing supplier for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Teams; Nike provided all the table tennis players with an extra pair of indoor court shoes.

The staff that we had in Rio been exemplary. Starting at team processing in Washington, D.C., they were dedicated to helping. Special thanks to medical trainer, Craig Elder and team leader Larry Rose. Working behind the scenes, our staff is seldom noticed—but they always there to lend support and guidance. My teammates in Rio were awesome and all came to play their best. The fact that we all left with silver or gold medals proves this. Let me close by thanking my teammates—I go to the table knowing that they have my back; that they are behind me and working hard for my success.

