



Kennedy Krieger helps Physically Challenged Athletes maintain fitness through adaptive training

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By **Deborah Green**, Baltimore Fitness Trends Examiner



Daniel Romanchuk, age 12 now, of Mt. Airy, Maryland, participating in wheelchair track using a racing wheelchair. (Photo Courtesy of Kennedy Krieger)

[Gerry Herman](#) had an athlete that he began training back in the 1980's that missed 50 days of school and after training with him for a year, the

athlete had no absences the next school year.

"Her whole body improved, she improved. She ended up becoming a world-class athlete. That kind of shows you how fitness can improve your overall life," [Gerry Herman](#) says, the

[director of Physically Challenged Sports and Recreation program at Kennedy Krieger Institute](#) in Baltimore.

Gerry along with his wife, Gwena Herman, has trained athletes at the [Kennedy Krieger Institute](#) for many years and has noticed how fitness plays a key component in the lives of their athletes.

[Kennedy Krieger Institute's Physically Challenged Sports and Recreation Program](#) (PCSRP) provides physically challenged children an outlet to maintain physical fitness and nutritional diet through sports.

In the United States, almost one in five people have a disability and approximately 37.7 million suffer from an activity limitation, according to the [National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research](#).

In 2008, the [Maryland General Assembly](#) passed a [Fitness and Athletics Equity for Students with Disabilities Act](#), which requires Maryland schools to give students with disability an opportunity to compete in interscholastic athletics. [Unified Sports](#) is an opportunity to get able bodies and disabled of all different types

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together on a team. Through this measure unified sports programs has been established to allow schools to design and train coaches to accommodate athletes.

"That's kind of a parallel program to the actual athletic program. So you'll find athletes that will be able to and have enough skill to compete with the regular team, so it's kind of best of both worlds," Herman said.



Louis Schaab, age 14 now, of Laurel Maryland, pictured at a sled hockey camp.(Photo Courtesy of Kennedy Krieger Institute).

Training:

[PCSRP](#) believes in a multisport approach and developing athletes with a base in range of motion, flexibility, and strength for sport specific stresses. For instance, athletes competing in sports like [sled hockey](#) and [wheelchair basketball](#) would stress a pulling motion or a pushing motion.

"Particularly with the wheelchair athlete or ambulatory athletes that use any type of assisted devices, that develop and focus on the anterior, whether their trying to develop it or not because they are putting so much stress on the anterior portions of their body, so we have training systems to over emphasize the posterior muscle groups to try and get them in better posture and better fitness and balanced," Herman said.

Gerry says, that the most common drills that athletes competing in basketball do is three maximum pushes with an abrupt stop. "You do that forward and backward and that simulates the stress of the game and also, tries to prepare the joints and the muscles."

Adaptive training is crucial for physically challenged athletes as they try to stay ahead of their able bodied competitors. For most of the athletes in the program they usually train three days a week, which means their behind.

"If you train Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday, you're still four days behind. Take four days multiply it by four years and that's how far behind you are with able bodied peers in terms of practice," Herman said.

One the ways the program compensates for reduced training time is using the [Burn Machine](#), an asymmetrical barbell designed with rotating grips to improve muscular and cardio endurance. The program received this equipment through a grant from the [Baltimore Ravens](#), in which, athletes can train independently at home.

"You can do a set of curls and then you rotate it and you can do cardiovascular for 30 seconds."

This device is perfect for wheelchair athletes because it helps strengthen their wrists.



Burn Machine, a asymmetrical barbell system that has 360 degrees rotating grips. (Photo by Deborah Green/Examiner.com).

Gerry Herman's Vision:

In Gerry Herman's mind lurks a picturesque view of the programs athletes training not once, twice or <http://www.examiner.com/fitness-trends-in-baltimore/kennedy-krieger-helps-physically-c...> 11/14/2010

three times a week-but every day.

“One of the dreams of my career someday is to have an opportunity to coach people like they would be coached on a high school level, were they get to practice every day as a team and developed both their cardiovascular and their sports skills.”

Looking beyond a child’s disability and allowing that child to improve its health and self-esteem through sports is a great objective that he plans to continue to instill in coaches, parents and most of all, the physically challenged.

“Ideally you can provide the motivation for them to do it and that’s why high school sports is a great avenue, even if it’s their just getting in a chair everyday and taking a couple of laps its better than watching TV during that time period. As the kids get integrated into high school sports; whether, it’s swimming or track and field or tennis, they’re doing something, so that’s improving their overall fitness level,” Herman said.



Cliff McCormick, age 18 now, of Baltimore, Maryland, participating in track with the support of a walker. (Photo Courtesy of Kennedy Krieger Institute).

Gerry Herman has coached over 100 athletes locally and nationally from ages 2-21 –years old. The program offers several sports programs, including, sled and floor hockey, wheelchair basketball, football, track and field and a host of other sports.

For Information Contact: (410) 923-7844

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