

Tigger bound for training at U of S

by Dan Macpherson

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For long distance runner Conrad "Tigger" Johnson, endurance is the key to his success on the track.

But now, that ability to stick with something over the long haul is starting to pay off.

In March, Tigger was interviewed by the senior coordinator of Sport Sciences, Bruce Craven, at the University of Saskatoon, and a phone call last week put his track goals a bit closer.

"They looked at Tigger's running regimen and decided they could work with him at the U of S," Tigger's mother Blanche said, adding the university department works with athletes with Olympic and Para-olympic potential.

Tigger would also be training under Scott Brinklow, long distance running coach, and he would be training with a group of long distance runners and receive intensive physiotherapy.

Once in Saskatoon he will also be joining Riversdale Track Club for more training and track meets.

News was also positive at a training camp in late April when national coaches said Tigger was ready to move up to the National Disabled Games this year, being held in St. Johns, New Brunswick August 11 and 12.

The short goal now is to start working with Brinklow and physio-

therapists as soon as possible to be prepared for the nationals.

"This has been a long time waiting," Tigger said, adding that the games in New Brunswick hold the key to his success in the Para-olympics.

The organizers of the Nationals decide which events will be held in the para-olympics.

"I'm hoping they will go for the 5,000 meter race," he said.

But before the big race, Brinklow has told Tigger he's going to be entered in whatever races possible to get prepared.

However, a minor obstacle may be sitting in Tigger's way since he pulled a muscle in his upper leg and he's not running for a while until it heals.

In the meantime, he still carries out a complete circuit of exercises to keep in condition.

His regular training includes weight training, bike riding, water running in the pool, and he runs about 10 miles a day, six days a week.

While Tigger went to the National Special Olympics back in 1990, it's taken long hours of training in all types of weather and countless pairs of running shoes to get this close to going to the Para-olympics — a goal he's held for about six years.

While the Para-Olympic Games are still several months away, he has one goal that's a little more

immediate.

With the help of the Association for Community Living, Tigger is looking for a place to stay in Saskatoon while he's training at the U of S.

"By moving to Saskatoon there are lots of possibilities," Blanche says. "He may even end up finding some employment with the phys ed department at the University."

If that happens, Tigger would be closer to his long term goal.

He says he would like to eventually either manage a pool or a gym and coach running on the side; getting a job with the university wouldn't hurt his chances.

It's been the determination to succeed that has kept Tigger running for the past years, and now with the coaching staff behind him, he's closer than ever.

"Coaches must have the same goals as you do," Tigger added.

However, it doesn't matter how many goals he had or how good he performs on the track if he can't attend the track meet.

It's going to cost a minimum of about \$1,000 for him to go to New Brunswick, so he's going to be heading into the community looking for financial support.

Blanche noted that J & E Sporting Goods has been especially supportive with track suits, shoes and other equipment for Tigger.

All the donations are deposited into a special account just for sport

expenses and not living expenses, Blanche explained, adding that people can be reassured their support is going to helping Tigger on the track.

However, a portion may have to be used to fund his dietary requirements, since he needs an intake of 5,000 calories to keep in shape.

"Social services doesn't cover that kind of intake," Blanche noted.

Tigger appreciates the support and sponsorship the community has given him in the past.

"It would be pretty tough without the support," Tigger admits. "I wouldn't be able to go (to compete) without the funding."



Conrad "Tigger" Johnson displays a pair of shoes (right) he has worn out in just a couple of months of running.