

Aussie Brave Mates selected for Prince Harry's Games

Five Queensland wounded, injured or ill Brave Mates will head to London next month after being selected in the Australian team to compete in the inaugural Invictus Games, championed by Prince Harry.

The international sporting event for wounded, injured and sick current and ex-serving Service men and women will see more than 400 competitors from 14 countries across the world compete in eight adaptive sports at London's Olympic Park from 10-14 September.

Among the Brave Mates supported by Mates4Mates to attend the event is Gold Coast's Curtis McGrath who is also Captain of the Australian team.

The 26 year old lost his legs after an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated beneath him in Afghanistan in 2012.

Sapper McGrath just competed in the World Canoeing Championships in Moscow, where he won two gold medals, and the World Va'a Sprint Championships in Rio de Janeiro. He's also training for the 2016 Rio De Janeiro Paralympics.

"To see incredibly inspiring men and women of defence forces from all over the world at the Invictus Games will be an amazing experience," Sapper McGrath said.

"It's an honour to be selected in the Australian team and an even bigger honour to be named as Captain.

"I hope I can do Australia proud and bring home some medals but I think the big winner of these games will be each and every single person who has found the drive and determination to be there.

"Prince Harry is a great champion for these games because a lot of the athletes can relate to him; he's been to war zones and seen what we've seen."

Townsville's Paul Warren who lost a leg after an IED exploded killing his mate Private Ben Ranaudo during a deployment to Afghanistan in 2009 said he's looking forward to the running and swimming events.

"I spent 10 years as a professional muay thai boxer before I lost my leg so this is an exciting opportunity to compete as an athlete again," Paul said.

"When I met Prince Harry with Curtis through Mates4Mates last year he was genuinely interested in our stories and it's cool that he's managed to put these games together for people who have fought for their flag."

Twenty-six year old Phillip Thompson, also from Townsville, will compete in the track events, powerlifting and wheelchair rugby. Phillip was medically discharged from the Army four years ago after deployments to East Timor and Afghanistan left him suffering chronic Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and hearing loss in his right ear.

Former soldier Darryl Kirkhope who lives in Brisbane will compete in all able bodied events at the Games.

The 35 year old suffers from PTSD, depression and anxiety after deployments to Afghanistan where he witnessed his mate Sergeant Brett Till die from an explosion in 2009.

“Participating in the Invictus Games will provide me with the strength and determination to have the mental fortitude to become a stronger person,” Daryl said.

“It will also help to resolve my fears and issues which I currently face day to day.

“My life is currently in a rebuilding phase and I’m so grateful for the support that Mates4Mates provides for me and my family.”

Bundaberg para-triathlete Mark Urquhart who is also on the team will head straight to London for the Games after representing Australia in the World Triathlon Championships in Canada.

Mark suffered horrific injuries as a soldier during a parachute jump with 3RAR and a further botched surgery to his abdomen has meant he can now only eat a liquid diet.

Victoria Cross recipient Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith has thrown his support behind the Games and the Australian Team by reciting the Invictus poem by English poet William Ernest Henley.

(See the video here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/bprvnn2b5ssxpj/Invictus.mp4?dl=0>)

“The word ‘Invictus’ means unconquered or undefeated and that’s exactly what these Brave Mates are,” he said.

“Their strength and determination to come from some really dark days to where they are now is nothing short of inspirational.”

Mates4Mates Chairman Peter Davies said the not-for-profit charity is honoured to support these inspirational athletes to compete in the Games.

“These soldiers turned athletes have shown remarkable bravery and are already winners in my book,” Mr Davies said.

“Challenges like the Invictus Games and other adventure activities Mates4Mates provides are incredibly important to the recovery of our injured, ill and wounded mates because it gives them a purpose.

“They’re designed to stretch them physically and mentally and give them a goal to strive for.”

More information on the Invictus Games – www.invictusgames.org

About Mates4Mates

- Mates4Mates is a not for profit charity initiated by RSL (Queensland branch) which provides support to wounded, injured or ill current and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel and their families.
- Mates4Mates is designed to complement and enhance the capability of the ADF to support their current and ex-serving personnel and their families.
- Mates4Mates is an independent, apolitical and non-religious organisation offering services like physical rehabilitation, psychological services, counselling, career coaching and adventure challenges.
- Mates4Mates harnesses the strength of an iconic Australian trait – mateship - to help them rebuild their life skills and emotional resilience.

- Mates4Mates receives no government funding and relies heavily on the generosity and support of individuals, communities and businesses to provide unshakeable support for these remarkable men and women.

Website – www.mates4mates.org

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