



## Achieving Goals

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by Christina Mills

This month I managed to catch up with retired 1996 Paralympic athlete Eric Nitzel from San Diego California. Eric has been a long time track and road racing athlete in his community for many years and when I finally caught up to him this is what he had to say.

Q: How old were you when you first began your track and road racing athletic career?

A: I first began my track career when I was thirteen years old and shortly after that was when I began to get involved in road racing.

Q: What inspired you to get involved in just track and road racing?

A: I chose to get involved with the whole racing thing because I enjoyed the adrenaline of racing and really like the speed of the whole sport.

Q: What track and road racing teams have you trained with?

A: First I started with the San Diego Road Runners team, but then got involved with other team during the same time. I was on Team Shadow, Team Fortress, Team Cannodiale. I also trained by myself daily.

Q: How often were you training before you made it to the Paralympics vs. When you actually made the Paralympic team?

A: When I first began doing the sport I started training 10 - 15 miles a day five to six days a week, but after I knew I made it onto the Paralympic team I started training 20 - 25 miles six days a week.

Q: When you first began sports did you have a goal in mind of what you wanted to do as a disabled athlete?

A: I had two goals, my first goal was short-term one that was to win each and every road race I competed in. Long- term I knew I eventually wanted to make the Paralympic team



Q: What has been your highest achievement as an athlete with spina bifida?

A: I would have to say winning third place in the Boston Marathon would have to be one of my highest achievements besides making it to the Paralympics because of the level of competition that is involved in that race.

Q: At the 1996 Paralympics, what events did you compete in?

A: I was in the one, two, four, and eight hundred meter races. I was also in a couple relays with some friends of mine that had also made the Paralympic team.

Q: I know that while you were racing you were sponsored by wheelchair manufacturing company, Quickie, how did that happen for you?

A: After racing for a couple of years and getting to know the sport, I got to know many people and by that point it was word of mouth that got my name out to the public. Soon enough I was getting phone calls from Quickie.

Q: If you could do it all over again what would you do differently, if anything?

A: I would train much harder for starters and would have pushed a lot more miles.

Q: Final question, What advice would you give to an aspiring disabled athlete that is looking into being as successful as yourself?

A: If you want to be an athlete the first piece of advice I'd give is to be dedicated do whatever sport it is you do. Secondly, stay focused on what you plan to get accomplished and make sure you treat your body well with what you eat and what other activities you choose to get yourself involved in. Stay true to yourself.