



DARDA SALES

-inducted as a swimmer in 2022

“Never grow a wishbone where a backbone ought to be.” – Clementine Paddleford

Darda Sales (nee Geiger) was born on Sept 1, 1982 in London Ontario. She began her swimming career at the age of 9, at the then called Rotary Children’s Place in Sarnia, which is now known as the Pathways Health Centre for Children. What started as physiotherapy quickly turned into sport, as only a year later recreational therapist Dave Schaller encouraged Darda to try racing.

Darda’s mother, along with two other families, saw their childrens’ passion for sport and the need for opportunities in sport for young people with disabilities. They started the Sarnia Red Hots, a multi-para sport organization that originally offered swimming, track&field, and boccia.

At Darda’s first swim meet she met three older swimmers who were hoping to represent Canada at the 1992 Paralympic Games. Their enthusiasm immediately hooked Darda, and she began to set her own goals to make the Paralympic Team. Darda made her debut on the international stage as part of the 2000 Canadian Paralympic Team.

By the end of her swimming career Darda was a three-time Paralympian, attending the Sydney Games in 2000, the Athens Games in 2004, and the 2008 Games in Beijing. She twice helped Canada to the Paralympic podium, racing to a gold medal in the 4x100 medley relay in Sydney (2000) and a silver medal in Athens (2004). Darda also anchored the gold medal-winning 4x100 medley relay at the 2002 World Championships in Argentina and the 2006 Worlds in South Africa. In 2006 she also achieved her top individual performances on the international stage, winning bronze in both the 100m and 400m freestyle. Darda’s other top finishes included gold in the 100m free and 4x100m free relay, and silver in the 50m free, 400m free and 100m back at the 2007 Para Pan Am Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Darda retired from swimming in 2010 due to an injury but missed the competitive, active aspect of her life. She began to search for a new challenge. A group of friends encouraged her to come to a local pick-up game of wheelchair basketball. She fell in love with the fast-paced, strategic game and started to play with her renowned intensity and focus. Within a short period of time, Darda was playing on Team Ontario at the Women’s National Championships.

By 2014, Darda had earned a spot on the senior women’s national wheelchair basketball team. She went on to help Canada to a gold medal at the World Championships (2014), silver at the Para Pan Am Games in Toronto (2015) and a 5th place finish at the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro (2016).

Darda’s passion for sport, and specifically for swimming, continued throughout her sporting career and culminated recently as she completed her PhD researching the para swimmer development experience. She now supports athletes across our province as Swim Ontario’s Para Development Consultant.

Darda culminates her sport and life experience by sharing: “It’s not the failure that defines you, it’s how you bounce back from that failure that truly matters.”