

Vail area doctor selected for Tokyo Paralympics

Dr. Joel Dekanich combines chiropractic knowledge with sports medicine and nursing

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As a dual-credentialed chiropractor and nurse practitioner, Dr. Joel Dekanich has found himself uniquely qualified to help athletes who face challenges aside from the typical breaks and bruises.

Dekanich has been quite busy as a result.

The Vail-area local was on the medical staff at the Paralympics in Rio and the World Para Athletics Championships in London in recent years; in recent weeks, he wrapped up duties as the medical director for with the International Dance Festival in Vail; and in recent days, Dekanich has been packing for Tokyo, where he will once again serve on the sports medicine staff for the United States Paralympic track and field team.

The Tokyo Paralympic Games take place Aug. 24 to Sept. 5 and will feature 539 events across 22 sports hosted at 21 venues. The U.S. para track and field team is comprised of about 60 athletes; Dekanich is one of four medical personnel picked to travel with the team.

Dekanich said he will enjoy and is honored by the assignment, as working with para athletes necessitates a range of biomechanical awareness that isn't always required in working with able-bodied athletes.

"There are different compensations in the body to deal with different impediments," he said. "Yet, at the same time, psychology is psychology."

Also, "I really like everyone on the team," he said.

A GOOD DOCTOR

Dekanich's clinic, Vail Integrative Medical Group, has helped pros and Joes near and far from its three locations in Eagle County.

Among the more special artifacts of Dekanich and the clinic's success is something less glittery than the Olympic and Paralympic souvenirs. A simple framed picture of the Battle Mountain High School cross-country team from 2017 speaks volumes.

Naomi Harding, of Edwards, moved away from her on-snow dreams at Vail Ski and Snowboard Academy, which she attended as a freshman and sophomore, to transfer Battle Mountain and join the cross country-team in 2017.

Harding describes the move as the best decision she could have



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Dr. Joel Dekanich is a diplomat of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians and a board-certified family nurse practitioner. Dekanich was one of four doctors selected to represent the U.S. para track and field team at the Tokyo Paralympics.

made, citing many positives in addition to the cross-country success that came from the experience. Among the benefits was her time spent working with Dekanich, who had been treating a lot of the runners on the Battle Mountain team.

"He put me out of pain," Harding said of Dekanich. "I was very grateful for him."

Harding, who was a junior at the time, said many of the athletes on the team wanted to recognize the important role Dekanich had in their success that season. They presented him with the framed picture as a memento.

"We wanted to thank him for keeping us healthy that year, because it clearly paid off for us," Harding said.

The team finished third in the nation that year.

AND THOROUGH

The following season for Battle Mountain cross-country — Harding's senior year — contained a lot of high-pressure, big expectation competitions, and Harding continued to work with Dekanich to seek an advantage. One of her legs is slightly longer than the other, and in addition to orthotics in her shoes, the regular attention Harding received from Dekanich

helped her work through the issue. It was a crucial season as Harding was under the watchful eye of NCAA Division-I college coaches.

"He was able to do this hip manipulation, which helped with my alignment," Harding said of Dekanich. "He was always very good at explaining what he was doing and why."

Harding went on to make the track and cross-country team at the University of North Carolina. As a Tar Heel, she began seeing the team's own specialist, and Dekanich consulted with that team's sports medicine professional to explain what had been working for Harding, which she appreciated.

"I think he's been using a lot of the same techniques as Joel," Harding said of the team doctor's work on her in North Carolina.

Harding said while Dekanich is always thorough and trustworthy in his approach — as exemplified by his care in consulting with her new specialist — in first seeing him she was also comforted by the fact that there were other high-level athletes benefiting from his services.

Olympian Val Constien, who recently finished 12th in the women's 3000 meter steeplechase



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Dr. Joel Dekanich at the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016. Dekanich has again been selected as a medical professional for the Paralympics and will represent the U.S. and the Vail area in Tokyo starting Aug. 24.

at the Tokyo 2020 Games, is a longtime patient of Dekanich's, and Val Constien's sister, Elizabeth Constien, was on the Battle Mountain cross-country team with Harding in 2017 when they finished third in the nation.

"There's so many great doctors in Vail; I think it's a testament to how many great athletes emerge from

the Vail Valley," Harding said.

Dekanich says the area's many great athletes are what keeps him practicing in Vail.

"I love practicing here because it's a very active area, and people take their recreation seriously," he said. "It's one of the best places in the country, if not the world, to practice in."