



Curtis McGrath OAM

- ◆ 4x Paralympic Gold Medallist
- ◆ 12x World Champion
- ◆ Australian co-Captain 2024 Paralympic Team
- ◆ Invictus Games Inaugural Australian Captain
- ◆ Army Veteran
- ◆ Bestselling Author, "Blood, Sweat & Steel"
- ◆ Board Member, Paralympics Australia



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Curtis McGrath OAM

Curtis McGrath OAM is an Australian para-canoeist, former combat engineer and inspirational advocate for sport as a vehicle for connection, healing and community.

Curtis's journey began in the Australian Army, where he served as a combat engineer for six years, undertaking deployments in East Timor, Indonesia and Afghanistan. On 23 August 2012, while on patrol in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, he stepped on an improvised explosive device (IED). The blast cost him both legs (left below the knee, right at the knee), as well as serious injuries to his wrist, thigh and hearing. Remarkably, just 20 minutes after the explosion, he quipped to his mates, "you will see me in the Paralympics."

In the months that followed, Curtis embarked on an extraordinary recovery and reinvention. Within three months he was walking on prosthetic legs and soon gravitated to sport as part of his rehabilitation. He first competed in swimming at the U.S. Marine Games, winning three golds, before focusing on paracanoe. He took up paracanoe in December 2013.

Only 18 months after his injury, Curtis claimed gold at the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships in Moscow in 2014, setting a world record in the V1 (va'a) event. That victory marked the start of a meteoric rise in para-canoeing.

When paracanoe was added to the Paralympic program in 2016, Curtis transitioned to the kayak discipline. At the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, he fulfilled that early promise and made history by becoming the first Australian to win Paralympic gold in paracanoe (Men's KL2 200 m) — clocking a Paralympic record time of 42.190. He also had the honour of carrying the Australian flag at the Rio closing ceremony.

In Tokyo 2020 (held in 2021), Curtis defended his KL2 title with a time of 41.426, and added a second gold in the 200 m va'a (VL3) — becoming the first paracanoeist to win two golds in a single Games. Over his career he amassed multiple world titles — by 2024 he had won twelve world championship golds and a silver.

Curtis was named co-Captain of the Australian Paralympic Team for Paris 2024, alongside Angie Ballard. In Paris, he won gold in the Men's KL2 again (his third consecutive KL2 Paralympic gold), further cementing his place among the all-time greats. The margin in the final was 41.31 seconds, ahead of Great Britain's David Phillipson and Mykola Syniuk (Ukraine).

Alongside his athletic focus, Curtis also navigated a personally challenging period: just weeks before travelling, his newborn son Monty underwent open-heart surgery to correct a congenital heart defect.

Outside of sport, Curtis is a passionate advocate for community, rehabilitation and the power of active lifestyles. He has spoken widely on the healing capacity of sport. His memoir, *Blood Sweat & Steel*, released in November 2021, became a bestseller. He also joined the Paralympics Australia Board in 2024.

Curtis studied a degree in Aviation Management at Griffith University, where he was awarded a Sporting Full Blue. He lives on the Gold Coast, Queensland, training on the waters of Varsity Lakes. In recognition of his service and achievements, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2017 and has earned multiple "Paddler of the Year" and national sporting awards.

Curtis's remarkable path — from soldier to world-champion to Paralympic legend — underscores a consistent theme: adversity never defines us, unless we let it. He continues to be a voice for inclusion, resilience and the potential of sport to unite people and bridge divides.

Location: Gold Coast, Australia



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