



For Immediate Release

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Bridgestone Partners with Eight Team USA Paralympians on the Road to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024

- **U.S. Paralympians Aaron Pike, Blake Leeper, Chuck Aoki, Dani Aravich, Daniel Romanchuk, Justin Phongsavanh, Scout Bassett, and Susannah Scaroni are joining Team Bridgestone as athlete ambassadors.**
- **The roster of elite athletes will support Bridgestone brand initiatives that reflect the company's belief that equitable access to sports and athletic equipment for people of all abilities is *What Really Matters*.**
- **Bridgestone is leveraging its tire and rubber expertise to help enhance the performance of adaptive equipment used by its athlete ambassadors.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (October 9, 2023) – [Bridgestone Americas](#) (Bridgestone) today announced it is partnering with eight Paralympic athletes from the United States to serve as Team Bridgestone athlete ambassadors on the road to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024.

Joining the global Team Bridgestone athlete ambassador roster are:

- **Aaron Pike** (Para Athletics, Para Cross-Country Skiing, and Para Biathlon);
- **Blake Leeper** (Para Athletics);
- **Chuck Aoki** (Wheelchair Rugby);
- **Dani Aravich** (Para Athletics, Para Cross-Country Skiing, and Para Biathlon);
- **Daniel Romanchuk** (Para Athletics);
- **Justin Phongsavanh** (Para Athletics);
- **Scout Bassett** (Para Athletics); and
- **Susannah Scaroni** (Para Athletics).

The decorated group has combined to win 10 medals over the past three Paralympic Games, and each is a passionate advocate for adaptive sports and the Paralympic Movement. Together they will work with Bridgestone to support brand initiatives that promote inclusivity and equity in sport, as well as collaborate on innovation activities related to adaptive sports equipment.

“Each of these incredible athletes understands what it takes to reach the biggest stage in sports, and they’ve also experienced the community and confidence that

comes with simply having a chance to compete,” said Sara Correa, chief marketing officer, Bridgestone Americas. “Bridgestone is incredibly proud to support their continued pursuit of performance at the highest level, as well as partner with them to help increase equitable access to sports and athletic equipment. No matter your team, background or ability, what really matters is that we help create the opportunity for all people to chase their dreams and enable them to perform at their best.”

Team Bridgestone athlete ambassadors are selected based on their alignment with the company's core values, their personal stories and passions, community involvement, and opportunities to collaborate on equipment innovation. The group will participate in activities related to Bridgestone's *What Really Matters* brand platform, which is designed to highlight purpose-driven actions that are making positive and lasting impacts for future generations.

Supporting Adaptive Athletics

Bridgestone's support for adaptive athletics is part of its commitment to helping promote diversity and create more inclusive communities. These efforts include work with Challenged Athletes Foundation, Adaptive Sports Ohio, and Amputee Blade Runners to provide volunteer support and funding for local adaptive sports programming, equipment, and individual athlete grants related to training, travel, and more.

Exploring Opportunities to Enhance Equipment

As part of its commitment to innovation and mobility, Bridgestone has also been applying its tire and rubber expertise to help advance the performance of adaptive equipment used by some of its athlete ambassadors. Aaron Pike, in particular, has collaborated with teams at the Bridgestone Americas Technology Center in Akron, Ohio, to test tire rubber applications for gloves and wheelchair hand rims. Additional exploration is underway to examine applications for high-performing tire rubber on prosthetic running blades, spike plates, and gloves in various sports.

These eight U.S. Paralympians join a global roster of Team Bridgestone athlete ambassadors that includes more than 45 Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls from nine countries. You can view the full Team Bridgestone athlete ambassador roster [here](#).

Meet Team Bridgestone

Aaron Pike (Para Athletics, Marathon, Para Cross-Country Skiing, Para Biathlon) is a Minnesota-born athlete who started his wheelchair racing career in 2007 at the University of Illinois. Pike has been to six Paralympic Games and competes in both summer and winter events. Pike has competed in four World Para Nordic Skiing

Championships and won three gold medals at the 2023 event. He has also competed in a host of prestigious marathons around the world, collecting top fives finishes in New York, Boston, and London and winning the 2022 Capetown Marathon in South Africa.

Blake Leeper (Para Athletics) was born without legs from a congenital birth defect and used prosthetics from an early age, but he did not start racing until 2010 at the age of 21. He quickly caught the eye of Team USA performance coaches and moved to the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California, where his path to the Paralympics gained speed. Leeper won silver and bronze at the London 2012 Paralympic Games and claimed six World Championships medals between 2011 and 2013. Leeper transitioned his training with a focus on qualifying to compete against able-bodied competitors in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, but his pursuit was ultimately denied by various sport governing bodies. Refocusing after this setback, Leeper returned to the world scene to win silver at the 2023 World Championships and now has clear eyes set on Paris 2024. Outside of sport, Leeper works with Wiggle Your Toes, a non-profit whose mission is to empower those who have lost a limb to move forward, take action and get back to the life they want.

Chuck Aoki (Wheelchair Rugby) was born with hereditary sensory autonomic neuropathy (HSAN), which inhibits feeling in his hands and feet. He gravitated to sports at an early age, starting with wheelchair basketball at age six before transitioning to wheelchair rugby in high school. Now one of the most respected leaders of Team USA Wheelchair Rugby, Aoki has two silver medals and one bronze from his appearances at London 2012, Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. He was also selected as a flagbearer for Team USA at the opening ceremony for Tokyo 2020. Outside of sports, Aoki is involved with the University of Michigan Adaptive Sports and Fitness (ASF) department, helping to connect individuals with disabilities and medical providers to adaptive sports.

Dani Aravich (Para Athletics, Para Cross-Country Skiing, Para Biathlon) is a Boise, Idaho, native whose explored a range of summer and winter sports in her athletic career. Born without her left hand and forearm, she played a variety of sports as a child before being introduced to cross country running in high school. Aravich competed collegiately in cross country and track at Butler University before adding skiing to her post-graduate training. She set a focus on becoming a dual-sport Paralympic qualifier and achieved that goal by representing Team USA in Para Athletics at Tokyo 2020 and in Para Cross-Country and Para Biathlon events at Beijing 2022. Aravich collected her first Para Cross-Country World Championships medal as a member of Team USA's winning mixed sprint relay team in 2023, and has since dedicated her training solely on winter sports. She also serves as an adaptive model, motivational speaker, and ambassador for the Challenged Athletes Foundation, which Bridgestone also supports. Dani balances her time in sport professionally, working on disability consulting and equity in women's sports.

Daniel Romanchuk (Track and Field, Marathon) is one of the most accomplished men's wheelchair marathoners in the sport. A two-time winner of the New York City Marathon, he has also won the Boston, London, and Chicago marathons. Romanchuk captured his first Paralympic marathon medal with a bronze at Tokyo 2020 to pair with the gold medal he won on the track in the 400m. Born with spina bifida, Romanchuk tried a variety of sports with the Bennett Blazers Physically Challenged Sports Program in Baltimore. He eventually began to focus on wheelchair racing and advanced his training through the University of Illinois Wheelchair Track Program. Romanchuk is passionate about encouraging the upcoming generation of Paralympic athletes to pursue and maintain excellence and integrity in the sport. While his athletic career is far from the finish line, he also aspires to have a future career in engineering.

Justin Phongsavanh (Para Athletics - Javelin) competed in sports through high school, but in 2015 was a victim of a random act of violence that resulted in a spinal cord injury. He was connected with Challenged Athletes Foundation in 2017, soon receiving a grant for a throwing chair and a subsequent equipment grant for a javelin. Within a year he had earned his place on the national team, and he won gold in his international debut at the 2019 Parapan American Games. Phongsavanh's rise continued despite the pandemic, as he set a javelin throw world record at the U.S. Paralympic Team Trials for Track and Field and followed it with a bronze medal at Tokyo 2020. In addition to his aspirations in sport, Phongsavanh is passionate about helping the next generation of athletes through mentorship with Challenged Athletes Foundation. His mother also works for Bridgestone at the company's Firestone Ag plant in Des Moines, Iowa, making his partnership with Bridgestone a family affair.

Scout Bassett (Para Athletics) has stared down adversity since childhood. After losing her right leg in a chemical fire and spending the first several years of her life in an orphanage in Nanjing, China, Bassett was adopted by an American family in Harbor Springs, Michigan, and used sport as a means to connect with others in her new surroundings. A training grant from Challenged Athletes Foundation put her on a path of success that has included seven U.S. national titles, six global medals (ParaPan American, World Championships, and Para Triathlon World Championships), and an appearance at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. Bassett is a passionate advocate for adaptive athletes and continues to find ways to help increase access and equity for others. Her big plans on the road to Paris 2024 include publishing a book about her inspiring story and launching the Scout Bassett Fund to help support female athletes with disabilities.

Susannah Scaroni (Track and Field, Marathon) is currently one of the dominant forces in women's wheelchair racing. In 2022 alone she won the New York City Marathon for the first time while setting a course record, and also added victories at the Boston Marathon, Chicago Marathon, Peachtree Road Race 10K, Grandma's

Marathon and NYC Half Marathon. Scaroni's incredible run extended momentum she built on the track at Tokyo 2020 where she captured gold in the 5000m and bronze in the 800m. Outside of racing, the three-time World Championships medalist and three-time Paralympian has a master's degree in nutritional science and focuses on specific nutrition and hydration needs of athletes with disabilities. She is also an ambassador for the New York Road Runners' Run for the Future Program.

To learn more about Bridgestone, visit [BridgestoneAmericas.com](https://www.BridgestoneAmericas.com).

About Bridgestone Americas, Inc.:

Bridgestone Americas, Inc. is the U.S.-based subsidiary of Bridgestone Corporation, a global leader in tires and rubber, building on its expertise to provide solutions for safe and sustainable mobility. Headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., Bridgestone Americas employs more than 49,000 people across its global operations. Bridgestone offers a diverse product portfolio of premium tires and advanced solutions backed by innovative technologies, improving the way people around the world move, live, work and play.

About Bridgestone Corporation's Worldwide Olympic and Paralympic Partnerships:

Bridgestone proudly became a Worldwide Olympic Partner in 2014 and a Worldwide Paralympic Partner in 2018. Bridgestone is dedicated to delivering products, services and solutions that improve the way people move, live, work and play, and its commitment to the Olympic Movement and Paralympic Movement continues a history of sport and innovation dating back more than 100 years. As a worldwide partner, Bridgestone has marketing rights that include its full range of tires, tire services and selected automotive vehicle services, self-propelled bicycles, seismic isolations bearings, and a variety of building and industrial products.

About Team Bridgestone:

All Bridgestone activities related to its Worldwide Olympic and Paralympic Partnerships are designed to empower people of all backgrounds and abilities to persevere through adversity and perform at their best, no matter what. In support of these efforts, the company is currently partnering with more than 45 inspiring Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls from nine countries and over 20 sports to serve as Team Bridgestone brand ambassadors on the Road to Paris 2024.

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