

Pawel Zbieranowski Biography

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Biography

Pawel Zbieranowski – WWR Hall of Fame Inductee 2018 (Builder Category)

Pawel Zbieranowski stands as one of the most influential figures in the history of wheelchair rugby— for what he did on the court in the early years, and for building the foundation upon which the entire sport now stands. As a founder, visionary, and the first President of the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF), Pawel's leadership was instrumental in transforming wheelchair rugby from a niche sport into an internationally recognized Paralympic discipline.



Pawel's journey began in 1980, shortly after immigrating to Canada. Armed with a master's degree in physical education and Physiotherapy, he attended what he believed was a job interview—only to discover it was for a volunteer coaching role with the Toronto Bulldogs. Despite the lack of a paycheck, Pawel accepted, driven by his love of sport and desire to connect with others in a new country. That decision would change the future of wheelchair rugby forever.

His early work with the Bulldogs (1980–1992) ignited a deep passion for the sport and its community. He wore many hats in those years—coach, referee, organizer, and educator—while continuously working to raise the game's profile. In 1989, he organized the first annual truly International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament in Toronto with teams from Great Britain, Canada, the USA. The success of this tournament in 1989 and 1990 paved the way for wheelchair rugby to be included in the program of the 1990 Stoke Mandeville World Wheelchair Games in England with the National Teams from Canada, the U.S., and Great Britain participating.

Fueled by this momentum, Pawel played a central role in forming the **International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF)**. After years of coordination and advocacy, the IWRF was formally established on **August 6, 1993**, with Pawel elected as its **first President**. This crucial milestone opened the door for wheelchair rugby to be accepted by the **International Paralympic Committee (IPC)** as a demonstration sport in the **1996 Atlanta Paralympics**—a vision Pawel had tirelessly pursued.

Thanks to his efforts, wheelchair rugby's debut in Atlanta was a massive success. The sport's popularity exploded, and even before the Games concluded, the IPC announced its elevation to full medal status for the **2000 Sydney Paralympics**. None of this would have happened without Pawel's belief in the sport and his ability to build bridges across nations and institutions.

Biography

Over two decades, Pawel Zbieranowski contributed to the sport in nearly every imaginable role:

- **Coach of Canada's first national team (1990–1992)**
- **Chair of the International Organizing Committee (1991–1993)**
- **Referee (1981–1991)**
- **Canadian National Coordinator (1987–1994)**
- **IWRF President (1993–2002)**
- **Technical Delegate at three World Championships (1995, 1998, 2002)**
- **Committee member and delegate to ISMWSF and IPC (1993–2004)**
- **Producer of foundational training and promotional materials for WCR (1989–1998)**

His work helped build the structure of international competition and created lasting opportunities for athletes around the globe. More than just an administrator, Pawel was a teacher, mentor, and tireless advocate for inclusion and excellence in sport.

Pawel Zbieranowski's induction into the **WWR Hall of Fame (Builder Category)** recognizes his extraordinary dedication to the sport's creation, promotion, and global growth. His legacy is not marked by medals, but by the countless athletes, teams, and nations now proudly competing on the world stage—because one man believed in what wheelchair rugby could become.

Congratulations, Pawel, and thank you for building a sport and a community that continues to thrive.