



Mississauga's Chelsea Clark died on Aug. 2 after a battle with neuroblastoma, a rare form of cancer. She won two gold medals and set a world record in the T34 100-metre wheelchair sprint for athletes with cerebral palsy. File photo

Paralympian was best known for her spirit

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Whatever Chelsea Clark set her mind to, she achieved it.

Case in point, the 2004 Paralympics in Greece, where the Mississauga track star won two gold medals in the T34 100 and 200-metre wheelchair sprints for athletes with cerebral palsy, setting a world record time in the 100m.

On Aug. 2, Clark died from cancer at the age of 31, and Canada lost one of its great Paralympic athletes.

"Whenever she made up her mind that she wanted to do something, she did it," said Clark's mother, Lynn.

"It didn't matter what it was, whether it was walking or talking. When she was first born, the doctors said it was likely she wouldn't do either. She decided if she really liked something, she would do it."

Clark won her Paralympic medals only a few years after taking up wheelchair track with Mississauga-based Cruisers Sports for the Physically Disabled.

"They found this old chair that was like a green army camouflage, but they thought it was long enough for her because she was so tall," Lynn recalled. "The first time she went around the track, she came back with a huge smile on her face. She always liked things that were fast."

Clark was born in Ottawa, moved to Meadowvale when she was aged 4 and then to Burlington seven years ago.

She was an accomplished athlete by the time she started track, having already participated in equestrian, baseball, gymnastics, synchronized swimming and sledge hockey.

She rode horses for almost 25 years and was approached by the Canadian Paralympic Committee about the possibility of joining its dressage team before the 2008 Paralympics, but didn't end up joining.

The Mississauga Sports Council presented her with the female athlete of the year and disabled athlete of the year for 2004, making her the first athlete to receive both honours in a calendar year.

She was also named disabled athlete of the year in 2005 after winning four gold medals at the Cerebral Palsy World Championships to conclude her track and field career.

Clark was Canada's nominee for the International Paralympic Committee's Best Games Debut award.

A celebration of her life will be held on Aug. 30 at the Brant Hills Presbyterian Church (2138 Brant St.), in Burlington at 1 p.m.