

Rick Hansen SCHOOL PROGRAM



Q&A on Rick Hansen:

What did Rick do before he wheeled around the world?

Rick was born in Port Alberni, BC, Canada on August 26th, 1957, and grew up in Williams Lake, BC. In 1973, at the age of 15, while on a fishing trip with his friends, he made a decision that would change his life. They decided to hitchhike home from the trip and ended up riding in the back of a pickup truck that went out of control. Rick was thrown from the truck, breaking his back and severing his spinal cord. He couldn't feel or use his legs. The crash left him a paraplegic and he now uses a wheelchair to get around.

He may not be able to walk, but he's definitely in motion. He can still dream, and has set many new goals. After his rehabilitation, he returned home to Williams Lake, his family and high school. He was an athlete, and his high school coach taught him that that didn't end with his disability; it simply changed the nature of the sports he participated in. Soon he was competing again. He trained extremely hard for wheelchair sports winning 19 international wheelchair marathons, including four World Championships and six medals as a Paralympian. He also competed for Canada in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. He went to university, and became the first student with a physical disability to attain a degree in Physical Education from the University of British Columbia. He then set off on the ultimate marathon: an around-the-world wheelchair journey – the Man In Motion World Tour.

What was it like when you first became a paraplegic? What were your thoughts and feelings? Where did you find the strength to go on?

After my injury I was very discouraged and frustrated. I constantly compared my life before the injury and found my new reality lacking. Once I could see the possibilities and stop the comparisons, it was easier for me to face the challenge of my new situation. I have had some amazing experiences since my injury, and I wouldn't trade them for anything.

I was fortunate to have the benefit of some incredible role models. When I was young, people took the time to explain the importance of personal achievement and determination to me. I was continually challenged and inspired to make my life all that it could be, to constantly focus on the things I can do. I have first-hand experience of people making a difference in my life. One of the most important things I've learned is that we can all positively impact the lives of people around us every day.

What was the goal of the Man In Motion World Tour?

The Man In Motion World Tour was my journey around the world to make a difference. With the help of an incredible team, tremendous advisors and supporters, I wheeled the circumference of the earth: 40,072 kilometers. The tour took 2 years, 2 months and 2 days, and took us through 34 countries, on 4 continents.

During the Tour, my team and I persevered through scorching desert heat, blinding snowstorms, huge mountain ranges, sheer exhaustion and indifference from people who

didn't understand what we were doing. Achieving our goal was like a dream come true; all of the hard work and determination had paid off. The Man In Motion World Tour raised over \$26 million to support spinal cord research, rehabilitation and wheelchair sport, and heightened worldwide awareness of the potential of people with disabilities.

I also learned that there are no walls in life too great to be scaled if you set some goals, and are determined to achieve them.

What inspired you to wheel around the world; didn't it seem like an impossible dream?

I first had the vision of wheeling around the world when I was in the G.F. Strong Centre, doing rehabilitation after my spinal cord injury. At that time, I thought it would be a great adventure to take a trip around the world with me wheeling and my buddies cycling. Later, when I was back at home, I realized that one of the biggest barriers for people with disabilities was other people's attitudes and perceptions of their capabilities.

After my injury, I received assistance and goodwill from so many people. They helped me see that I had a bright future and could achieve my goals. I realized how important it is to give back to your community and work hard to make a difference in the lives of others. When I traveled around the world competing in international sporting competitions, I realized that the barriers people with disabilities faced existed everywhere. I wanted to do something about that. By this time Terry Fox, a friend of mine from wheelchair basketball, had inspired me, and the world, with his Marathon of Hope to support cancer research. Terry showed me that one person with determination can make a difference. That one person can capture the imagination and goodwill that exists out there. I realized that maybe my dream could become a reality too. I had been inspired to make a difference, and believed that I could focus my talents and passions to raise both awareness of the potential of people with disabilities and money for spinal cord injury on my around the world journey.

I have learned many things so far, and I believe that with the support and commitment from people around us, anything is possible.

What are some characteristics that you feel are important for success?

- . Courage
- . Determination
- . Integrity
- . Passion

What beliefs helped you to succeed?

I believe that anything is possible, and that when there is a barrier, either physical or emotional, I can find a way around it, or over it, or under it, but that I can overcome it. Focus on my ability, not my disability. I also believe that with determination, courage and teamwork, great things can be accomplished. We are all capable of making a difference; every person has something special to contribute, and if you have a dream, you also need to have the courage to try to make it a reality.

My life's philosophy is to make a difference in the lives of others, and I feel passionate about contributing in ways that utilize my skills and strengths to help our community. I believe my best work is yet to come.

I am constantly amazed by the generosity of Canadians, and feel very privileged to be a citizen of a country that produces such caring and compassion. This inspires me every day.

What still drives Rick to be a motivator and a teacher today?

I set out on the Man In Motion World Tour almost 25 years ago with two goals in mind: to raise awareness to the potential of people with disabilities by helping to shape a more accessible and inclusive Canada and to support research towards a cure.

Canada has greatly improved in the areas of accessibility and inclusion over the last 25 years and in many respects we can be looked upon as a model to the world. I'm proud of the progress we've made and believe there is a firm commitment from Canadians to continue working towards making Canada fully accessible and inclusive. I believe that our best work is yet to come.

What kind of sports does Rick play? What kind of sports did Rick play before he was injured?

Prior to his spinal cord injury, Rick participated in many sports, some of his favourites were: volleyball, badminton, basketball, ping pong, rugby, and his ultimate favourite hobby is fishing. His disability did not slow him down, following his injury he continued participating actively in sport including wheelchair basketball, tennis, volleyball, racquetball and marathoning. He won over 19 international marathons including 4 world championships, and he competed for Canada in the 1984 Olympic Games. Rick's favourite pastime is fishing.

What are you doing today?

I am currently President and CEO of the Rick Hansen Foundation, where I am hard at work on my biggest dream ever, which is to speed up the discovery of a cure for spinal cord injury paralysis.

I have a wonderful wife Amanda, and together we are the proud parents of three daughters.

As a long time avid fisherman, I am interested in environmental issues, and I volunteer some of my time to help create the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society, which is dedicated to conserving and restoring Fraser River sturgeon stocks. I also helped create the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund, which aims to restore salmon stocks in British Columbia.

One of the most important things I spend time on is encouraging and supporting youth through school programs, presentations to schools and community initiatives.

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What are your goals for the future? Is there anything you have yet to achieve?

My dream is a world in which people with spinal cord injury can return to full physical function. By accelerating improvements to the quality of life of people with spinal cord injury and supporting research leading to a cure, I believe this dream can come true.