

1996 ATLANTA PARALYMPIC GAMES

The first ever team of disabled Armenian Olympians will be coming to Atlanta to represent the Republic of Armenia in the 1996 Paralympic Games. 3,500 athletes from 120 countries will participate in the Paralympics, the international games for the world's best disabled athletes. The games will take place Aug. 15 - Aug. 25. The Armenian athletes will be competing in yachting and powerlifting. The yachting team will be competing on Lake Lanier Aug. 18 - Aug. 22. Powerlifting is scheduled for Aug. 20 - Aug. 24.

The Armenian yachting team is composed of four yachters, three of which are survivors of the devastating 1988 earthquake that killed more than 25,000 Armenians. 18 year old **Garoush Danielian**, born on Nov. 11, 1977 in the town of Spitak, Armenia, was trapped in the rubble of his school house for an entire day while laying on top of his friend who had been crushed to death. Garoush's right leg had to be amputated after he was taken to the Orthopedic and Traumatic Institute in Yerevan. **Stas Nazarian**, born on April 22, 1978 in Spitak, lost his left leg after a wall collapsed on him during the same earthquake, while he was going to the bakers'. **Armen Martirosian**, born on Aug. 10, 1978 in Spitak, is the sole survivor of his fourth grade. He lost 24 classmates, his right leg, and his left arm. During his recent interview, he said "I wish there were no earthquakes in this world". The fourth yachter, 17 year old **Haik Abgarian**, born on March 17, 1978 in the village of Gandza, Georgia, the fatherland of the famous Armenian poet Vahan Terian, had his foot amputated as a result of a bicycling accident when he was 12 years old. In 1996 he became a citizen of the Republic of Armenia.

All four yachters traveled to Ruthland, England in 1994, to participate in the World Disabled Sailing Championships, and their team placed 11th, out of 20 countries. Last year, they traveled to Spain, where they participated in the European Sailing Championships and qualified to compete in the 1996 Paralympics. They finished as winners of the last qualifying race. *Yacht and Yachting* magazine characterized this team as "the one with the least experience and the one with the most enthusiasm and determination".

Another Armenian Paralympian, a powerlifter, 38 year old **Gagik Gasparian**, born on July 15, 1975 in the Martuni region of Armenia, has been training in the USA for more than a year, and has won several matches against able-bodied competitors. Gagik is paralyzed from the waist down as a result of a spinal cord injury while he was serving in the Soviet Army in 1975. Since 1992 he has participated in many international powerlifting championships, in the Boston Powerlifting Championships in 1996 he placed second. On May 4, 1996, he broke a world record in the North Carolina Powerlifting Championships organized by the World Powerlifting Alliance by raising 202.5kg (445.5lbs). He will travel from North Carolina to Atlanta to compete in powerlifting, we look forward to see him compete as he is a strong favorite in a class of 160 powerlifters.

All of these Armenian Paralympic Athletes have joined the Armenian Sport Association "Pyunic" for the disabled during 1989-1990. This has helped them to rehabilitate and be self-sufficient while they have been training in summer and winter rehabilitation camps, such as in the region of Mountain Tegheris surrounding the town of Tsakhadzvor, and Lake Sevan, "the queen of Armenia".

From our community, Jeff Hohn is the envoy to the Armenian Paralympic Team. For further information, you may contact him at (770)986-6131.