

# Evan Strong Continues to Evolve with the Games

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Team Toyota athlete and Paralympic snowboarder [Evan Strong](#) dreamed of being a professional athlete since he was just a little kid. But as someone who grew up in Hawaii, Strong always thought he would chase his dreams on his skateboard, not on the snow — until a car accident changed everything.

“I never thought I would end up a professional snowboarder,” Strong says. “I didn’t snowboard before my accident, so I learned it totally as an adaptive athlete. But due to my love for board sports, it seemed like a logical addition and pretty soon I was hooked.”

Strong, who moved to Hawaii when he was 9 years old, was an avid skateboarder throughout his childhood. By 13, he earned his first skateboarding sponsorship and trained for a career in the sport throughout his teens. But just 10 days before he turned 18, Strong was injured in a motorcycle accident when he was struck by a drunk driver in a head-on collision.

The injury led to the amputation of his left leg below the knee. A natural athlete, Strong recognized how important it was for him to get back outside and start moving, both for his mental and physical health. After he was fitted for a prosthetic, organizations including the Challenged Athletes Foundation and Adaptive Action Sports helped him learn how to skateboard, bicycle and snowboard as an adaptive athlete.

“Staying active was the North Star of my recovery,” he says. “It gave me the conviction to keep working hard to get healthy again. When I was dedicated to staying active and focused on my physical therapy, I could see the physical and mental improvements.”

## **Learning to Compete**

Three years after the accident, Strong was ready to complete what he calls the trinity of board sports. The Paralympian moved to the Lake Tahoe area in 2007 to work at the NorthStar California<sup>®</sup> Resort and learn how to snowboard. His background in skateboarding and surfing helped him take to it quickly, and Adaptive Action Sports invited him to try competing at Copper Mountain<sup>®</sup> in Colorado.



Since then, Strong has dominated the podium, winning 10 world cup gold medals in para-snowboard cross and International Paralympic Committee world cup races. In 2014, he became the first man to win a gold medal in snowboarding (snowboardcross) in the sport’s debut at the Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, and in 2018, he won silver in banked slalom and came in fourth in snowboardcross in PyeongChang.

Now the snowboarder is getting ready to participate in his third consecutive Paralympic Winter Games. Strong, who trains year-round both on and off the snow, is excited to get back into competition mode after a somewhat unusual training year.

“Podiums are a great testament to the preparation and work we do while no one is watching,” he says. “The repetition of competing is the only way I can gauge how I stack up and learn what I need to adjust in order to improve.”

## **Growing the Games**

Despite the Paralympian's focus on snowboarding, Strong still competes as a skateboarder and is passionate about growing both sports for adaptive riders. Last year, he competed in his first-ever adaptive skateboarding event in the Park discipline at Dew Tour's® first-ever adaptive skateboard competition, which was also presented by Toyota.

"It's an amazing opportunity to show the world another board sport that can be accessible at a high level," he says. "I hope we get a ton of new athletes, starting with kids trying the sport for the first time and just seeing what they can do."

While there is a barrier of entry for many elite sports, Strong acknowledges it's particularly difficult for young athletes to compete in para sports, because it often requires expensive equipment. That's why the Paralympian believes in giving back to organizations like the one that introduced him to snowboarding, Adaptive Action Sports.



"It's come full circle for me, and I feel really lucky," he says. "Now I get the chance to give back through camps and clinics for kids and adults who want to try adaptive board sports. I feel lucky to be a part of such an amazing movement."

While he believes there's still a lot of work to be done, Strong has seen how much the Paralympic Games have

evolved and how much more accessible adaptive sports have become over the years.

“The field keeps getting stronger and stronger on a global level,” he says. “We’ve opened up people’s minds to what elite athletes are capable of, and I hope to see it grow even more. Since 2014, the competition has definitely elevated, and I see more riders with the Paralympic Games as their end goal.”