

# Rico Roman Is Going for a Gold Medal Three-Peat on the Sled Hockey Ice

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When Army veteran and Team Toyota Paralympian [Rico Roman](#) was first approached about joining a sled hockey team, he immediately said no. But the team kept asking, and today, Roman is headed to his third consecutive Paralympic Winter Games with two gold medals under his belt.

“At first I declined trying the sport,” Roman says. “I was thinking, ‘I’ve never played before, so why would I play after my injury?’ Boy was I wrong. I’m so glad I’m on the ice.”

Roman, who was injured by a roadside bomb while serving in Iraq in 2007, had never played ice hockey before losing his leg. A few months into his active recovery, a local group that works with wounded war veterans, Operation Comfort, persuaded him to join an all-military sled hockey team. A natural athlete, Roman took to the ice easily and spent eight months on the team before learning it was a Paralympic sport.

In 2011, Roman became one of the first war-wounded veterans named to the U.S. National Sled Hockey Team. He then went on to compete in the Paralympic Winter Games in 2014 and 2018, winning gold both times. Now, as the Team USA Sled Hockey assistant captain, Roman is hopeful his team will come home with a victory for what would be his third consecutive gold medal.

“It’s such an honor to make the team and serve my country in another way,” he says. “Going for another Games is always exciting. I really want a three-peat.”

### **Finding Himself on the Ice**

Though staying active played a big role in his physical rehabilitation, Roman didn’t jump into sled hockey right away. After his injury, he recovered for a year at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland, where the medical team managed to save his leg. But he couldn’t bend it and relied heavily on pain medication. So, when he was transferred to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, he ultimately chose to have it amputated above the knee.

As part of his rehab, Roman first got involved in handcycling before being introduced to sled hockey by Operation Comfort. Based in San Antonio, Operation Comfort helps active-duty members and veterans, as well as their families, from all service branches recover and get involved in their communities through athletics, activities and special events.



“Sled hockey brought me into this community of other disabled veterans,” he says. “Right away you get that brotherhood, that teamwork, that feeling of being part of something. I felt like I belonged somewhere again.”

The San Antonio sled hockey club, which includes veterans from all branches of service, helped the Purple Heart recipient feel normal and took focus away from his injury.

“Finding the sport really gave me an outlet,” he says. “I didn’t think about my injury when I was out on the ice — and I still don’t. I really feel just free in the moment, enjoying the sport and spending time with my teammates.”

### **Growing the Games**

Through his years competing, Roman has seen the Paralympics grow significantly. He believes that exposure is important and that the more people who can watch the Games on TV, the better.

“I love when we come home from the Games and hear people talking about how much fun they had watching us,” he says. “A lot of new people are introduced to new sports during the Games, and I think it opens people’s eyes to the level of athleticism at the Paralympics.”

Though Roman loves how the Paralympics have evolved, he jokes that the growth means he must work even harder to keep his spot on the team. During the pandemic, he trained a lot on his own, taking up cross-country

skiing to maintain his fitness — something he acknowledges is not possible for many athletes with disabilities.

“It’s not always easy to get new equipment and try new sports,” he says. “As a Paralympian, we can’t just walk in a store and buy a cross-country setup.”

Accessibility is one of the many reasons Roman is excited to have been selected as one of the nine Paralympians on the LA28 Athletes’ Commission. Comprised of 18 athletes, the Commission is designed to bring together a collection of Olympians and Paralympians to help shape the Summer Games, set to take place in Los Angeles in 2028.

“I was so honored to be asked to be a part of the Commission,” he says. “Our job is to help LA2028 plan for an amazing athlete experience and give input on the programs they are putting in place.”

In the meantime, Roman is staying focused on this year’s Games. The pressure is on for Team USA Sled Hockey as the only team to have claimed three straight gold medals in Paralympic history. But he says the close-knit team is ready for the experience on the quest for Paralympic gold number four

“There’s always pressure, but it can be a positive thing,” he says. “It keeps us hungry and focused on the goals we have. There are expectations, but we know that a lot can change in four years. I think we are better than ever ——— and we keep getting stronger.”