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Meet the parathlete dedicated to realizing inclusive mobility for everyone

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Meet the parathlete dedicated to realizing inclusive mobility for everyone

The Only Progress is Human Act for Inclusive Mobility explores how everyone can achieve their goals regardless of physical ability or limitations



Melissa Russell

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Kazuhiko Kanno is on a mission to improve mobility access for all by sharing his remarkable journey to becoming a medal winning parathlete.

A passion for sports has always driven Kanno. As a child in Japan, he dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player. But in high school, he began to experience difficulty with some skills and experienced a loss of confidence (called the Yips), which excluded him from his school team's regular lineup.

In search of a new passion, he discovered surfing, but that was also cruelly cut short when, at age 22, an accident damaged his cervical vertebrae, leaving him without the use of his arms and legs. The injury was devastating for Kanno,

"Before my accident, I was a surfer," he said. "I used to think being unable to use my arms and legs were the same as losing my freedom. But my disability opened up a whole new world of possibilities."

Finding a passion for rugby

One day, while shopping at a local store, he was approached by a national wheelchair rugby player, and that chance meeting led him to try the sport for himself. The experience was liberating.

"Until I started playing this sport, I took for granted I would be assisted and supported," he said. "However, on a wheelchair rugby court, if you are tackled and knocked down by an opponent, no one will help you."

Kanno learned when on the court, his wheelchair was no impediment. He discovered the sense of accomplishment he worried would be denied due to his injury. One thing led to another, and he quickly began winning medals with Japan's national team. "The cheers in the stadium brought a new perspective into my life," he said.

In 2020, Kanno retired from wheelchair rugby to pursue paracycling, adapted for cyclists with various disabilities. Building on his love of sports, Kanno wanted to help others and began searching for ways to share his experiences.

Kanno was introduced to Dassault Systèmes through a recruitment program for athletes in Japan to help elite athlete career transitions by finding companies to partner with to achieve their goals.

He joined Dassault Systèmes in 2017 as an ambassador, helping to improve awareness of mobility challenges for the disabled by sharing his accomplishments. His goals include using innovative technology to design cost-effective handcycles to enable many more paracycling riders to participate in the sport

The Only Progress is Human

Kanno is now on the verge of something quite exciting. Partnering with [Guinness World Records](#) this fall, he will travel to Paris to attempt a handcycling world record to highlight the challenges of inclusive mobility as part of [The Only Progress is Human Inclusive Mobility Act](#).

Dassault Systèmes has always believed in putting people at the heart of innovation. The Only Progress is Human spotlights the major challenges facing humanity and those working toward solutions. Through software and digital solutions, including the [3DEXPERIENCE platform](#), the company empowers innovators to create products and services that improve people's and their communities' lives.

"Through my athletic pursuits, I'm able to raise awareness about accessibility and mobility. With Dassault Systèmes' support, I am ready to push myself further than ever before," he said.

"We are all supporting Kanno in his goal," said Laurence Barthes, executive vice president, chief people and information officer, Dassault Systèmes. "Breaking this record will be a personal achievement, but also a collective one."

Kanno has a fantastic support network in place, including his family and co-workers. He is being mentored by the famous French cycling champion Laurent Jalabert, a cycling champion of the 1990s, consultant and commentator on the Tour de France for France and

other cycling events. During the world record attempt, Jalabert will ride ahead of Kanno on the route to guide him and set a pace.

After the world record attempt on October 3, Kanno will lead the Mobility Night Ride through the streets of Paris on October 4, inviting the public to ride along with him by bike, scooter, rollerblades, etc.

Helping disabled athletes enhance performance

Kanno is also working on a research project with the National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Disabilities in Japan to gain insight into how disabled athletes perform in their wheelchairs. One of his projects focuses on creating precise measurements of a rider's movement to simulate tests to improve bicycle designs. He describes the work as "revolutionary" for athletes and people with mobility disabilities of all kinds.

"It is very time-consuming and difficult for us wheelchair users to move from our wheelchairs to a competition wheelchair," Kanno said. "This project has the potential to allow people to find their best settings within a computer and may allow them to do so with the least amount of time, effort and performance. I believe that this is a great opportunity to have an impact on mobility and activity, not only for people with disabilities but also for sports that use equipment, rehabilitation of the elderly and so on."

Celebrate Kanno's achievements

Dassault Systèmes is proud to have Kanno as an ambassador for the Only Progress is Human Act for Inclusive Mobility, spotlighting the efforts to improve accessibility and mobility. His dedication and relentless pursuit of challenges as he pushes the boundaries of athletic achievement, are an inspiration to all.

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“Dassault Systèmes believes that my success means the collective success of our team and provides an opportunity to instill our company's purpose and values in each and every one of our employees. We both embark on

and voices in each and every one of our employees. We don't embark on new challenges believing that if we challenge the status quo, we can imagine new horizons."

Kazuhiko Kanno

"Accessibility is human first and then technological. And thanks to Dassault Systèmes virtual twins, we can make accessibility even more human, even more attainable," said Victoire de Margerie, vice president of corporate equity, marketing and communication, Dassault Systèmes.

Discover More

Redefining the limits of Mobility: Kazuhiko Kanno's story – Ep. 1



 **Melissa Russell**

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Melissa Russell is an award-winning journalist and editor living in the Boston area. She has written for many news outlets as well as for websites, trade publications and other platforms.

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