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A MAN is preparing to kayak across the English Channel this month to raise money for disabled athletes.

Matt Jones, who lives in Castle Donington, only began training seriously a year ago, but will set off from Dungeness on September 30 with the aim of reaching Boulogne-sur-Mer.

The 22-nautical-mile crossing, equivalent to around 40 kilometres, is one of the most dangerous stretches of water in the world.

"Waves can get up to two metres," said Matt. "The water temperature is only just above cold water shock, there are strong tides and there's also the shipping lanes with some of the busiest traffic in the world."

"So it's definitely a huge challenge."

Matt, 36, who had only casual kayaking experience before, has been training intensely to prepare.

"I was training about 60 kilometres a week," he said.

"And this was not leisurely kayaking, this was kayaking in really difficult conditions, training in wind and battling through."

The challenge is expected to take Matt around eight hours, but poor weather or strong tides could stretch that to 12 to 16 hours.

By law he will be accompanied by a support boat with radar to monitor shipping traffic and provide safety backup.

Alongside the essentials, he plans to take personal motivation.

"I'm going to take a few pictures with me and I'm going to stick them on to the front of the kayak," said Matt. "So, I'm always looking at them to make sure I'm motivated."

His wife will be part of the support crew despite struggling with seasickness. "What is funny is she's also training just to be part of the support crew just to combat her seasickness," he said.

The crossing will raise money for Boccia England, the governing body of the Paralympic sport.

Boccia is a precision ball sport, similar to bowls, which is played by athletes with severe physical disabilities.

It is a recognised Paralympic sport and designed to be fully inclusive, giving players the chance to compete from grassroots level through to international competition.

"All money donated is directly changing people's lives," said Matt.

"Part of what Boccia England does is they go out into schools and help identify children who might be isolated who could benefit from boccia."

"It involves them in a sport they

Kayaker Matt set for Channel challenge to help disabled athletes

HE WILL FACE 2M WAVES AND ONE OF BUSIEST SHIPPING LANES TO RAISE FUNDS FOR BOCCIA PLAYERS, CLUBS

might otherwise not have access to.

"I feel like what we're doing here is really changing people's lives. It's benefiting people who might be in a difficult place and bringing them some joy and happiness."

Every £100 raised can fund access to boccia for one disabled child, and £1,000 is enough to launch a community club.

So far, Matt has raised around £2,000, including one surprise £500 donation from a stranger he met in a hotel bar.

He has also been inspired by the resilience of the boccia athletes he has met. "At the beginning I was feeling super confident," Matt said.

"Then as the size of the challenge dawned on me there was a period

where I thought I can't do this.

"I'm really out of my depth here. But the support and encouragement and just me persevering has taught me that anything is possible with the right support."

He added: "Anyone can achieve anything and it's due to the inspiration of these boccia players that hopefully this challenge will go ahead."

Paralympians have also sent messages of support, with some recording videos wishing him good luck ahead of the crossing.

One boccia athlete, Jamieson Leeson, said: "Boccia made me feel like I belonged."

"It gave me a sense of identity, knowing that I was able to compete in a sport like the rest of my family."

Matt, originally from Bridgend in South Wales, first discovered boccia while watching the Paralympics during the Covid lockdown, where he saw Great Britain's David Smith compete. He later travelled to Paris to watch the 2024 Paralympics in

person and described the athletes as "warriors" and "so resilient".

Boccia is the only Paralympic sport without an Olympic counterpart and is regarded as one of the most inclusive sports in the world.

"Where there are children out there feeling isolated and maybe don't have fulfilment or they don't have many friends... to know that Boccia England is going out and giving them the support and the access they need to be part of a community."

"That's the one thing that I would really love, to allow disabled children to make friends and to be part of a community where they aren't already. And I would also love to start a new boccia community club somewhere which I know we've raised enough money to do already."

"The idea of allowing people to make friends and be part of a community, that was inspiring to me."

Donations to support the challenge can be made through Matt's GoFundMe page:

gofundme.com/f/kayakthechannel

'ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT': Matt Jones, who will be kayaking across the Channel at the end of the month



INSPIRATION: Matt with a boccia player

More people ditching the car

MORE than 6,000 people have swapped car trips for walking, cycling and public transport over the past year, organisers of an active travel scheme say.

Between April 2024 and March this year, more than 813,000 active and sustainable journeys were recorded through the Choose How

You Move Rewards programme, delivered by BetterPoints for Leicester city and Leicestershire county councils.

The BetterPoints app uses positive incentives, challenges and local offers to encourage people to make more active and sustainable travel choices in everyday life, especially

for their daily commutes and the school run.

The programme has also benefited businesses such as University Hospitals of Leicester LEat Restaurant cafes.

Other participants have donated their BetterPoints rewards to charities including Loros hospice and

Help the Homeless Leicester.

The data showed:

■ 63 per cent of journeys replaced a single-occupancy car trip;

■ 55 per cent of respondents reported that it encouraged them to be more active;

■ This equates to 110 cars being removed completely off the road for

the year;

■ 1,325 users joined the programme during the year, 32 per cent above the annual target;

■ Engagement remained high, with a 65 per cent daily-to-monthly active user ratio.

More information about the scheme is available at:

choosehowyoumove.betterpoints.uk