

# Adaptive Orienteering: The Next Iteration?

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Since my introduction to Orienteering by CNYO years back in Central NY, I participated in, hosted or supported standard orienteering events, Score O, Monument O, Relay O, Street O, Snowgaine/Rogaine O, White, Yellow, Orange, etc. O, missed controls, got lost, got found, got wet, and got a turkey for Thanksgiving. It was wonderful to try such a variety of orienteering formats for us able bodied folk. Some were better than others. My wife and I still remember the battleship O in Cortland NY...we were so disappointed when the control way out of the city DID NOT SINK THE DESTROYER!!

Fast forward to 2011/12 and along comes Capital Region Nordic Alliance Inc. (CRNA), a 501(c)3 NFP Charitable Orienteering USA Club and US Paralympic Nordic Club providing year round Nordic and adaptive Nordic experiences to both the able bodied and those with a variety of disabilities in Orienteering, XC Skiing, Snowshoeing, and Biathlon. Concurrently I became involved with International Paralympic Committee Nordic in both Classification and ParaBiathlon Sport Management. This confluence spurred the transition of CRNA's four sports to be inclusive. For those with a wide array of impairments, our four Nordic sports became adaptive.

CRNA's business model is based on onsite contracting for Nordic sport instruction with a variety of social sector agencies in the capital region and beyond. It is responsible for all facets

of orienteering management. CRNA's orienteering events are integrated-the entire group....everybody. Both able bodied and those with impairments looking for controls, missing controls, finding controls. The agencies of collaboration are extremely happy with CRNA's approach to providing its Orienteering for the event is onsite, compact, manageable, not expensive as going off site and can include the entire organization as well as family and friends!

CRNA attempted Trail Orienteering but- as much as it was successful-soon realized that those with impairments had the same aspirations as their able bodied counterparts. As ability in Orienteering is not paramount to be successful...ability in the disabled yearns to be tested and stretched as it is in any Paralympic sport... go as fast as one can, think and decide running, or walking with a prosthesis, in a wheelchair, with crutches or on a skateboard due to having no legs-all while the clock is running. Regardless of impairment or disability, the entire athlete is involved and consumed to do his/her very best. CRNA soon incorporated the adaptive concept into Orienteering courses, maps and instruction/event management to reach those with a wide array of impairments/disabilities-with great success! No group is better suited for this than our nation's veterans who are afflicted with a wide range of physical and psychological disabilities due to their services in conflicts from WW II to present. None can

forget their training in what is commonly called...."Land Nav"

Land navigation has been a key skill through the ages and required for the Marine Corps and Army, while other Services included it for select personnel. This natural competitiveness in the key skill of Land Nav produced the term orienteering in the late 19th Century when competition between Nordic military garrisons began. Therefore, how can we capture the experience and competitiveness of veterans and turn it into developing a broader capability to growth adaptive Orienteering. That's where I come in.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and CRNA have partnered over the past couple years to enhance adaptive Ori-



enteering and Nordic sport opportunities for disabled Veterans and disabled Service members through the Adaptive Sports Grant, the Paralympic allowance program, outreach, and other partnership activities. Now it's time to take the relationship further. Using current programs as a catalyst, the conditions for a successful marriage between disabled veterans and Orienteering are in place and we're ready to start down the aisle.

In September, VA began asking adaptive sport organizations if they'd be interested in partnering with CRNA to develop adaptive Orienteering programs. Bolder Crest Retreat, VA, and Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center, CO, immediately responded enthusiastically their desire to develop these programs and many others are showing interest as well.

In addition, VA provides the capability to network adaptive sport training not only for both VA and Department of Defense (DOD) support for disabled veterans, but also for partners such as adaptive sports clubs, colleges and universities, Veterans Service Organizations, hospitals, state and local governments, and others. For example, VA is currently partnered with the U.S. Olympic Committee to co-



ordinate webinars in the Stress Resiliency Training System for adaptive sports organizations and DOD, while a tailored SRTS webinar is being prepared for the VA therapeutic community. VA and CRNA have discussed the possibility of adaptive Orienteering webinars that could educate these communities on the details and benefits of Orienteering.

VA and DOD also help host multi-sport adaptive sport events both directly such as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and Warrior Games, and indirectly through grants such as the Valor Games. These venues could provide opportunities to demonstrate adaptive Orienteering and train participants to expand the support infrastructure. Discussion with some of these events has begun with positive results.

Orienteering USA, CRNA, and VA also have discussed the VA's Adaptive Sports Grant (ASG) in developing adaptive Orienteering. As a National Governing Body, Orienteering USA could apply for the ASG Program under noncompetitive consideration as the national leader in Orienteering. The ASG Program is authorized

to fund event, training, program development, equipping, evaluation, and other activities related to implementation and operation of an adaptive Orienteering program.

VA-CRNA partnership is looking at other tools to assist in adaptive Orienteering, such as outreach activities. VA direct outreach programs can help expand knowledge of Orienteering, but expanded partnerships can be a force multiplier. For example, VA and the Amputee Coalition are working on a means to provide information on the full spectrum of adaptive sports programs for individuals with amputations and inclusion of adaptive Orienteering could provide awareness throughout this community.

The potential for growth of adaptive Orienteering is tremendous and the tools are arranged to make it a reality. If anyone is interested in helping, please let us know. You can contact Russ Myer at [rmyer@ny-cap.rr.com](mailto:rmyer@ny-cap.rr.com).

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