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For as long as she can remember, Rosie Boyland has loved sport. Now she’s making her mark on the rugby field and the national athletics stage and hopes to be wearing the green and gold before too much longer.

The 19 year old from Shellharbour south of Wollongong is already the New South Wales women’s Under 20 champion in Paralympic shotput and has her sights set on competing at the Virtus Global Games happening in Vichy, France, in 2023.

The Global Games is the pinnacle sporting event for athletes with an intellectual disability and takes place every four years.

Rosie has both a moderate intellectual disability and autism and has been supported by the NDIS since 2018, her final year at school.

She’s also hoping to be selected for the mainstream St George Dragons women’s rugby league side within the next few years as a front rower.

“I started playing league in the Under 17s and just love it, especially the tackling,” she says.

“I haven’t been able to play much this year because of COVID but hopefully next year we’ll be back into it – playing State of Origin would be the ultimate.”

Rosie puts her sporting achievements down to the encouragement and coaching she received from her father John at an early age.

“Dad was basically the one who made my career, he’s the one who pushed me to where I am now and I’m very thankful for him,” she says. “He’s my inspiration.”

Rosie’s words are especially poignant because John is about to start kidney dialysis and is also being treated for aggressive skin cancer, meaning for the first time in his life he’s been unable to accompany Rosie to sporting events and cheer her on.

However, with support from her mother Agnes and a wide circle of friends and sporting peers Rosie has continued to train despite the challenges of 2020.

Rosie recalls her early experience of competing in shotput and discus.

“I somehow managed to win all the regional and state championships as I went through primary school, and when I was about 12 I made it to my first disability national champs in Adelaide and won a bronze medal in shotput,” she says.

Rosie’s training regime was disrupted during 2020 as she wasn’t able to attend sessions with her high-performance shotput trainer in Sydney due to lockdown restrictions, but recently she has started Saturday morning sessions with a new trainer in Wollongong.

Rosie has also trained with the Illawarra Academy of Sport (IAS) for several years and in October she was chosen for the IAS’s Athletes with a Disability (AWD) program, which offers 12-month scholarships for high-performing athletes – “it’s pretty hard to get into”, Rosie adds modestly.

When not training, Rosie is using her School Leaver Employment Supports funding from the NDIS to build her work skills at Essential Personnel from Monday to Thursday each week.

“I’ve been doing work experience since I left school at the end of 2018 and I’m really hoping to get a job in the sports industry, either at a gym or a retail outlet like Rebel Sport,” she says.

Rosie’s NDIS plan also pays for a Support Coordinator, George Kranitis from Community Connecting, to help manage her busy life.

Right now she’s beginning to think about moving out of home, so George has arranged for an NDIS-funded caseworker to come to her house every Monday afternoon to teach her independent living skills such as cooking and shopping.

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