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Para-powerlifter Ben Wright is hoping third time's a charm, when the NDIS participant attempts to end a 16-year Commonwealth Games medal drought for Australia in Birmingham.

Ben, the Oceania record holder in 2 divisions and 3-time national champion, will become just the 2nd Australian to compete in Para-powerlifting at 3 Games when he takes on the Commonwealth's best.

Making his Games' debut at Glasgow 2014 the 35-year-old West Australian, who lives with Spina Bifida, followed up with a courageous 6th placing at Gold Coast 2018 following a broken back sustained in a seizure just 10 weeks out from competition.

Now fully healthy and coming off a new Oceania Record of 184kg set in South Korea last month, Ben hopes his preparation and pride in wearing the green and gold will drive him to putting Australia's Para-powerlifting program back on the map.

Ben Wright para-powerlifting - photo credit Paralympics Australia

"Every time I get to compete for Australia, it's a momentous event. It's hard to explain the feeling of wearing the green and gold… there's no other feeling like it," Ben said.

"If I can get a medal, that would be fantastic, not just for me, but for the powerlifting program. Since our medal contenders retired, we've been in development, and when not winning medals, funding goes down.

"So, to bring a medal to the program and hopefully progress funding, we could get more people along and hopefully bring more medals for the future."

Growing up in the east Perth suburb of Viveash, the journey to a 3rd Games has been a whirlwind for Ben.

Originally a wheelchair basketballer, it was in 2011, when on his first powerlifting attempt at a come and try day, Ben lifted near to a national record for his age and weight class.

"When I lifted near that national record, a coach told me I should quit basketball and become a powerlifter," Ben said.

"I started in 2012 and first competed in 2013… I pushed myself to get to my first international event and then thought it would be really cool to get to the Commonwealth Games.

"I didn't think it was on the cards, but I went to the event and outlifted (the favourite) and got my ticket to Glasgow."

Ben’s talent and dedication to training and preparation is the driving force behind his success, but his secret weapon may very well be the NDIS.

A draftsman who commutes 80kms each way daily from Mandurah to Perth, Ben said balancing his life wouldn’t be possible without NDIS support.

Ben’s NDIS-funded wheelchair is custom-made to withstand heavy weight, while other assistive technologies and home supports allow him to plan, balance, and execute his elite program and lifestyle.

“I became a participant in 2019, and I was able to get a new chair which was fantastic. Before then, I had my chair since I was 14, so it was a good 15–16-year-old chair,” Ben said.
“Most manual wheelchairs are weight rated to 120 kilos, and I weight 80-85 and lift 50kg dumbbells, so, I needed a chair that’s suitable for training.

“I worked with my occupational therapist (OT) and a manufacturer to get a hybrid chair across two models to give that extra support and withstand the weight.

“I have services to help me with heavy cleaning around the house, and things that like a cordless vacuum and an accessible clothesline to allow me to do my life admin outside of sport and work.

“If I didn’t have support and a chair suited to my needs, I wouldn’t be able to put time into training and even getting out into the work force wouldn’t be possible.”

While having 1 eye on a medal when competition gets underway in Birmingham on August 4, Ben will also be looking to the future.

“After the Commonwealth Games, I’m very much looking forward to a break, and after that, I’m hoping to lift 190kg and above at the World Championships next year,” Ben said.

“Then focus is on the Paralympics in 2024 in Paris. I’ve kept getting fitter and stronger, so It’s all about progression and seeing just how strong I can get.”

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