



Thunder in the Valley games 'smooth' in second year

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Sixty-eight athletes -- a 17 percent increase over a year ago -- are showing their prowess during the second annual Thunder in the Valley Paralympic Games at Saginaw Valley State University.

"Everything's running completely smooth," said Program Director Jeff Coupie, taking a break in the shade of a tree between events.

[Use this link](#) to see more Thunder in the Valley photos.

Meanwhile, Justin Jackson was preparing for the 5-kilometer handcycling event.

The 25-year-old Hemlock resident won eight gold medals last year in wheelchair racing, competing in the 25-meter to 5-kilometer events.

"It's better this year," Jackson said, "because they've spread the events over three days."

Last year's games took place all in one day; Jackson said he couldn't even get out of bed the day after all his events. This year, he prepared with plenty of fruit and carbohydrates in the days leading up to the race.

Jackson suffered a spinal cord injury in a car crash three years ago. He learned to play wheelchair basketball during therapy at Mary Free Bed, a rehabilitation hospital in Grand Rapids.

"I play tennis all summer," Jackson said. He is hoping to recruit a basketball team to compete within the state.

The closing ceremonies are at noon Sunday.

Thunder in the Valley's farthest U.S. athlete traveled by bus from Fort Worth, Texas, but this year marks the first international competitor in Lohane Magarao, a 20-year-old from Brazil, Coupie said.

Magarao came to Michigan to be fitted for a prosthetic leg supplied by Michigan Orthopedic Service in Saginaw.

She ended up competing in the swimming competition Friday and did quite well, said Munger resident Art Hope, 52, vice president of the paralympic games and Michigan Sports Unlimited, a Saginaw-based adaptive athlete organization. Magarao is the only woman amputee at the games.

Hope said a competitor from the Wounded Warrior project for wounded service members took part, although the individual wasn't immediately available for comment.

Proceeds from the games help Michigan Sports Unlimited, whose mission, Coupie said, is to educate, instruct and provide access to recreational activities for individuals with disabilities.

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