

# **Athlete with disability represents HSU in international contest**

August 27, 2019

Student athlete Tanner Wright—who was born with an underdeveloped left arm—not only represented Hardin-Simmons University, but also the United States in the Parapan American Games in Lima, Peru, on Aug. 24.

Wright placed second in the long jump competition, and he qualified in the preliminaries for the 100-meter race on Aug. 27.

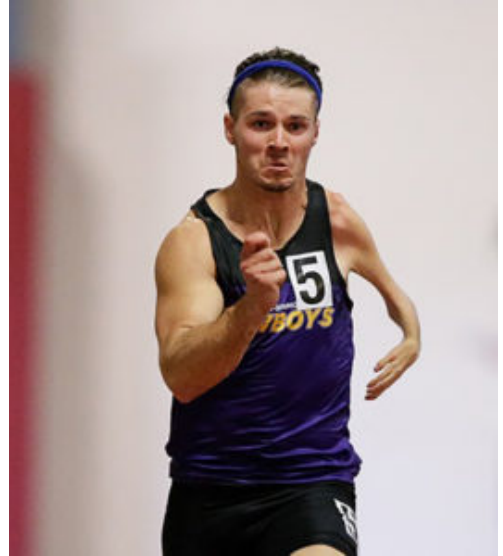
The Parapan American Games is an international sporting event for athletes with physical disabilities. It takes place every four years immediately following the Pan American Games.

The first Paralympic Games were held in November 1999 in Mexico City with 1,000 athletes competing between four sports. The 2019 Parapan American Games includes 1,850 athletes competing in 17 sports.

## **Questioning God**

Growing up, Wright struggled with his faith. He asked God why he was born with a disability—arthrogryposis, normally a congenital joint contracture in two or more areas of the body. Wright is the only recorded case in medical history of arthrogryposis in one arm.

As he continued to grow in his understanding both of his faith and his disability, his perspective changed.



Tanner Wright competed at the East Texas Invitational in Commerce where he placed fourth overall, setting a new men's outdoor long jump record. (Photo courtesy of HSU)

"I realized after a while that it was just who I am, and it's my opportunity to be someone others can look up to," Wright said. "I want to show other kids with disabilities that they can go out and play sports, too."

Wright's interest in running began when he was a high school student playing football. When he noticed most of his teammates were involved in track to become faster on the football field, he joined the track team, too. As a kicker, he expected to increase his kicking distance.

About two years ago, he injured his hip. The recovery process took a year, and Wright struggled with depression as he learned to cope with a new routine that did not include as much physical activity as before. Due to his lack of exercise, he began losing muscle and gaining weight.

While recovering from his hip injury, Wright turned to God for help. After praying for motivation with his recovery, he realized God was telling him to take a step back and relax.

“I realized that it just wasn’t going to be my year, and I just needed to take some time for myself to relax and stay healthy,” Wright said.

## Sharing his faith



Student athlete Tanner Wright—who was born with an underdeveloped left arm— not only represented Hardin-Simmons University, but also the United States in the Parapan American Games in Lima, Peru, on Aug. 24. (HSU Photo)

Wright explained he had never expected to join Team USA in the Parapan American Games. He and his coach discussed the opportunity as a joke a

few times during practice. However, they soon realized Wright's running times at the Nationals in 2017 were fast enough for him to qualify.

Being able to compete in the Parapan American Games gave Wright a chance to go into the world and spread the gospel, he noted.

"I definitely see it as a chance to teach others about my faith," he said. "My teammates believe the same thing I do—that it's because of God that we're so athletic in the first place. So, yeah, I do think it's a great opportunity to share the word" of God.

After the Parapan American Games, Wright's next goal is to compete in the Paralympic Games in Tokyo 2020.

His training now is more focused on track events rather than on lifting weights.

"I have to be careful these days," he said. "It's so easy to get injured that I'm just trying to maintain what I have by staying healthy."

With a training schedule that keeps him in the gym five to six times per week, Wright does not have much free time. However, when possible, he enjoys playing video games with his brother, learning to cook, and showing his Abilene friends what his hometown of Fort Worth is like.

As a former patient at Scottish Rite Hospital, Wright volunteers as a counselor working with mentally and physically disabled children. In time, he would like to become an orthotist.

As far as everyday living goes, Wright's condition does not hold him back.

"I love answering this question," he explained. "I tend to forget I even have a disability. I do life the only way I know how. I just do it. I've never had to live life any differently."