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## The Newport Daily News

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"Our view" represents the opinion of the editorial board, above

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# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# For sailors, disabilities no barrier

With the fierce rivalries and the over-the-top pageantry of the XXX Summer Olympics just behind us, we can look forward to cheering for a local athlete in London's next big sporting event: the Paralympic Games.

Paul Callahan of Newport will represent the United States in sailing in the Sonar class of 24-foot boats in the games that will run Aug. 29-Sept. 9.

It will be Callahan's second trip to the Paralympic Games, designed for athletes with disabilities. The first came in 2000. He did not bring home a medal then, but has his eye on the prize this time around.

He and his teammates, Brad Johnson of Florida and Tom Brown of Maine, have been training for the past three years, competing mostly in England.

Callahan, 55, became a quadriplegic after a freak accident during his junior year at Harvard University, when he slipped on a floor, fell and broke his neck. He has no movement in his legs or hands, only his wrists.

He is quick to credit Sail to Prevail, an organization that started 30 years ago in Newport as Shake-A-Leg, for much of his success. Today, Callahan is CEO of Sail to Prevail, which among other things, runs a camp called "Confidence is Cool" for children with severe disabilities, who attend one-week programs to learn to sail.

"I wouldn't be running Sail to Prevail if I didn't think I could have a meaningful impact on these children," Callahan told The Daily News recently. "It's what drives me to compete all the way to the Paralympics. It shows the kids firsthand that they can achieve more than they ever thought they could."

Shake-A-Leg was founded by

Harry Horgan as a rehabilitation program for people with spinal cord injuries and neurological disorders. Over the years, sailing became a natural extension of the program. Two years ago, the organization, which now mainly focuses on sailing, became Sail to Prevail.

Each summer, about 1,000 people participate in its programs, the main one offered at Fort Adams State Park. Children between the ages of 7 and 17 make up about 80 percent of participants. The other 20 percent are older and include a large number of veterans, Callahan said.

The organization's mission has expanded to include many kinds of disabilities, including "children with pediatric cancer and a wide spectrum of autism," Callahan said. "We bring them together and give them goals to achieve individually, but they are together in achieving their goals."

His own experience motivates him to help the people who take part in Sail to Prevail programs.

"Being a quadriplegic and winning the U.S. trials so that I can now represent our nation in the London Paralympics has given great credibility to Sail to Prevail," he said.

We salute Shake-A-Leg and Sail to Prevail for 30 years of providing opportunities for people with disabilities, and wish one of the organization's most prominent champions the very best of luck in his quest to bring home a gold medal.