

# UTA MAGAZINE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON ■ winter 2005



## Circle of friends

Freshmen live and learn in KC Hall



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ON THE COVER  
Members of the  
Leadership  
Commonwealth  
freshman interest group  
huddle outside Kalpana  
Chawla Hall.

LENSCAPE  
Editor Mark Permenter  
captured this wintry  
campus scene on  
Valentine's Day 2004.

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# UTA MAGAZINE

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by Mark Permenter



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## Olympic feats

Wheelchair basketball athletes get royal treatment after Paralympic performances

The smile across David Eng's face was as bright as the gold medal hanging around his neck. And he was determined to show them both off as he visited with University President James D. Spaniolo last fall.

He offered the hardware to Spaniolo, but the president declined. "I need to earn one of these before I can do that," Spaniolo said.

Eng surely earned his. A kinesiology sophomore and forward on UTA's wheelchair basketball team, he won the gold medal with Team Canada at the 2004 Paralympic Summer Games. Eng, who is from Montreal, joined two UTA teammates in Athens, playing on the same Olympic court where NBA superstars had been just weeks earlier. Seniors Jason Nelms and Michael Paye represented Team USA.

"This was a lifetime dream for me," Paye said. "You just start visualizing yourself wearing the uniform and working hard for your team and your country."

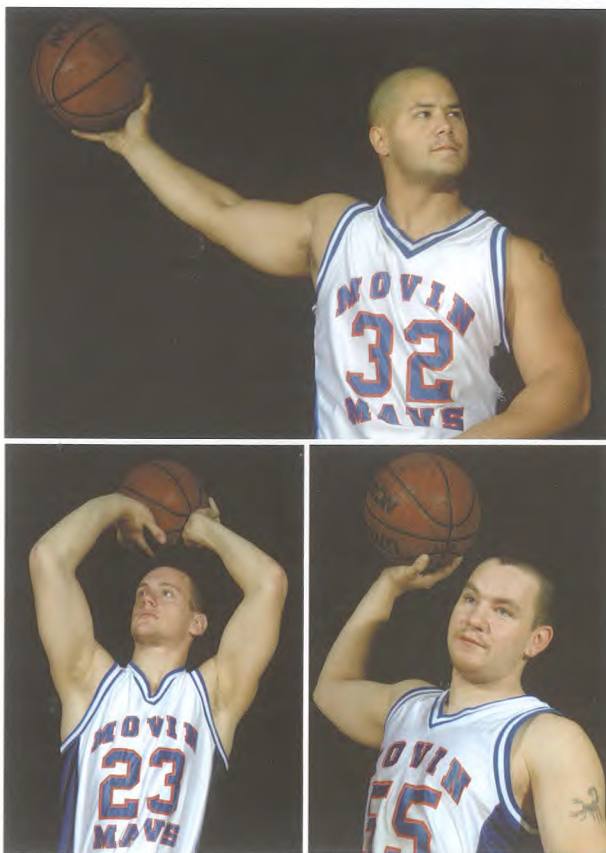
Eng, Nelms and Paye continued a two-decade tradition. UTA students or alumni have competed—and won medals—in every Paralympic Games since 1984. All three hope to return in 2008, when the games will be in Beijing.

Spaniolo hosted the athletes in a private reception in Davis Hall, but he wasn't the only president on their agenda. In mid-October, Paye joined U.S. Olympians and Paralympians at the White House (Nelms skipped the trip to catch up on backlogged schoolwork). And Eng, the only French-Canadian ever to win a gold medal, met Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin in late September.

Between Labor Day and Halloween, the three athletes were in several nations on two continents, in and out of classes, competing with and against the world's best athletes, on the medal podium, stuck in Greece, visiting world leaders and back on the UTA campus.

"It was an incredible experience ... absolutely unbelievable," Paye said. "Going up on the [Acropolis] and looking out over the city of Athens was incredible."

The defending-champion United States finished one victory short of the medal-qualifying round after a loss to



Paralympic basketball players, clockwise from top, David Eng, Jason Nelms and Michael Paye.

### IN THE GAMES

UTA students or alumni have represented their home nations in every Paralympic Summer Games since 1984. (Athletes represented the United States unless otherwise noted.)

#### 1984

Randy Snow, *track*  
Jim Hayes, *track*  
Chris Cooper, *basketball*

#### 1988

Gabriel Diaz DeLeon, *field*  
Monique Jannette, *track*  
Abu Yilla, *track*

#### 1992

Mary Ridgway, *Team Leader*  
Randy Snow, *tennis*  
Gabriel Diaz DeLeon, *field*

#### 1996

Steven Welch, *tennis*  
Randy Snow, *basketball*  
Gabriel Diaz DeLeon, *field*  
Rusty Belknap, *sitting volleyball*

#### 2000

Steven Welch, *tennis*  
Willie Hernandez, *basketball*  
Paul Schulte, *basketball*  
Enoch Ablorh, *basketball (SWE)*  
Cesar Olivas, *basketball (MEX)*  
Brad Ness, *basketball (AUS)*  
Campbell Message, *basketball (AUS)*

#### 2004

Jason Nelms, *basketball*  
Michael Paye, *basketball*  
David Eng, *basketball (CAN)*  
Brad Ness, *basketball (AUS)*  
Jon Rydberg, *tennis*  
Steven Welch, *tennis*  
Gabriel Diaz DeLeon, *field*  
Lori Daniels, *sitting volleyball*

SWE-Sweden; MEX-Mexico; AUS-Australia; CAN-Canada

Great Britain and wound up in seventh place. Nelms said he was disappointed with the outcome but honored to have been in Athens. Canada defeated Australia, featuring UTA alumnus Brad Ness, in the championship game. Four other UTA alumni also participated in tennis, field and sitting volleyball.

Eng was a first-time member of Team Canada, and Paye was new to Team USA (and also its second-youngest player at age 21). Nelms, a smooth-shooting point guard, is a three-year veteran who has earned medals in the 2002 Gold Cup and the 2003 Paralympics Qualifier, though this was his first Paralympics.

Movin' Mavs coach Jim Hayes said the students' Olympic success was a result of their dedication. Nelms, Paye and Eng regularly spent five hours a day in the gym, working out and shooting more than 1,000 shots. Seems getting home proved something of a chore, too: Team USA was delayed several days by mechanical problems on its chartered flight, while Team Canada was busy with sponsorship obligations and media requests.

Despite varying degrees of success in Athens, the three are proud of each other. But Eng joked that reuniting with Paye and Nelms, who didn't win medals, has been intimidating. "Being between these two guys sometimes is scary," he said.

They laugh in good fun because they're now teammates again. The Movin' Mavs' season began in October. They go for their seventh national championship in March at Texas Hall, and UTA will be the only team with three Olympians on its roster.

"It doesn't guarantee we'll win, but it's a big advantage," Hayes said. "We've still got a lot of work to do because other teams are no slouches. ... If we keep working as hard as we have been, there's no question it will happen."

Win or lose in March, Hayes said his players have already achieved much.

"I'm very proud of them. I hope that UTA is proud of their accomplishments also," he said. "All three of them are not just athletes, they are champions." ■

— Danny Woodward