



ALUMNI PROFILE

WHO IS CHANTAL PETITCLERC?

Para-Athletics

Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games - Gold Medallist Melbourne 2006

Commonwealth Games - Flag Bearer and Gold Medallist Glasgow 2014

Commonwealth Games - Team Canada Chef de Mission

Chantal Petitclerc is a record-breaking Canadian wheelchair racer who has inspired people across the globe with her passion, dedication, and extraordinary athletic performances. She has been part of some of the most memorable moments in Commonwealth Games history, including carrying the flag at opening ceremonies and winning medals for Canada in a fully integrated Games.

In 2002, she was the first athlete with a disability to register a result for her country's team when she won a gold medal in the 800-metres at the Games in Manchester, England. That was the first year the Commonwealth Games started including fully integrated events for elite athletes with a disability, meaning any medals won by athletes with a disability counted toward their team's final medal total.

"It meant so much to me that the Commonwealth Games (Federation) decided that a performance is a performance – and it doesn't matter if you accomplish it in a wheelchair," says Petitclerc. "That was one of the best medals of my life."

Born on December 15, 1969 in Saint-Marc-des-Carières, Quebec, Petitclerc lost the use of her legs following an accident when she was 13 years old. It was her high school phys-ed teacher, Gaston Jacques, who convinced her to take up swimming to develop her strength and stamina. When she was 18, Pierre Pomerleau, a trainer at Université Laval in Quebec City, introduced her to wheelchair athletics. Petitclerc has since become the only Canadian competitor who has won medals at the Olympics, Paralympics, and the Commonwealth Games.

She says her experiences at the Commonwealth Games played a significant role in her development as a high-performance athlete. "The Commonwealth Games are more important than they receive credit for," says Petitclerc. "They are a very important step in building strong athletes – the Games really are an amazing test. The Commonwealth Games are always a great sport experience, but beyond that, they are a great human experience. It has its own special vibe and soul. Everyone will tell you that when they get there, there is this very special vibe of being part of a larger family."

At the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia, Petitclerc was chosen to lead Team Canada and carry the Canadian flag into the opening ceremonies – the first athlete with a disability to do so.

"When they announced that it would be me carrying the flag, I really wondered how the other athletes would react," says Petitclerc, adding that, at the time, it was still very new for

Paralympic sports to be fully integrated into the Games. “But so many athletes congratulated me and were so excited for me. It meant a lot,” Petitclerc says. “I thought it was a very strong decision from Canada. They were not really putting a Paralympic athlete there to carry the flag; they were putting a gold medalist and a gold contender. It was a very emotional moment for me. I had been fighting for years saying, ‘I’m not just a person in a wheelchair, I am an athlete,’ and this was proof that the message had finally gone through.”

Petitclerc has long been a strong advocate for universal access to sport. “Everyone who gets in to sport is not going to make it to a podium,” says Petitclerc. “But no matter what, they will learn values of discipline, hard work, friendship, and they will keep those values in their life long after training.”

Petitclerc was the Chef de Mission for Canada's Commonwealth Games team at the Glasgow 2014 Games.

On March 18, 2016, Chantal was named to the Senate of Canada on the advice of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 5 Paralympic Games (Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Beijing)
- 2 Commonwealth Games gold medals (2002 and 2006)
- 21 Paralympic Games medals (including 14 gold medals)
- 5 World records (100m, 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m)
- 5 Paralympic records (100m, 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m)
- 1 Olympic gold medal in the 800m (demonstration event) in the 2004 Athens Olympics

