



Multiple national swimming record holder, Quinton Harris, trains six days a week. He has been selected for the South African team which will compete at the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships in the US in August.

Swim champ raises funds for training

Nokuthula Ntuli

FROM a near-drowning as a young boy, Zululander Quinton Harris, 32, now holds South African disability swimming records in three categories.

Harris has been selected to join the South African team that will compete at the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships in the US in August.

"I only started swimming three years ago as a way to get fit. I really don't know what makes me special, all I do is swim," he said.

Harris's life story is remarkable. When he was two years old he came close to drowning in a pool. The accident left him with a severe reading and writing impairment.

"I've always wanted to get involved in the community in any way I could, which is why I volunteered as a lifeguard and a police reservist. Unfortunately I was shot twice during that time."

Then, Harris had a motorcross accident seven years ago which left him paralysed from the armpits down.

His friend and manager, Ryan Vermaak, described the first few months after the accident as being really tough, as most of Harris's friends disassociated themselves from him.

"My coach Claire (Swan) encouraged me to start swimming three years ago and although I still face difficulties as a swimmer with a disability I have made some great strides

as well," said Harris.

He broke a national record in the 50m breaststroke in his first competition. Last season he broke no fewer than 15 national records.

"We've had some challenging times mixed with a lot of fun. I can't swim myself, so that's another challenge on its own," said Swan, who provides Harris with encouragement and motivation and ensures he sticks to his training schedule.

"When I first started to train with him I had to get over the way he gets into the pool, just throwing himself in was quite a scary thing to watch, but how else do you do it when you have no feeling from your armpits down?"

In his spare time, Harris

helps underprivileged disabled children from Thuthukani Special School in Empangeni learn to swim.

His hard work led to his selection to join the national team being prepared to compete in the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The trip to the US is part of the build-up to Rio.

"I'm hoping to break an African record in one of the events," he said.

Vermaak and Swan told The Mercury about their fundraising efforts in partnership with the Fish Eagle Swimming Club to pay for Harris's trip.

"The whole trip is self-funded and he (Harris) can't really afford it since he's unemployed," he said.



Quinton Harris and his coach Claire Swan.