

Road to London 2012 COUNTDOWN

Paralympic team announced

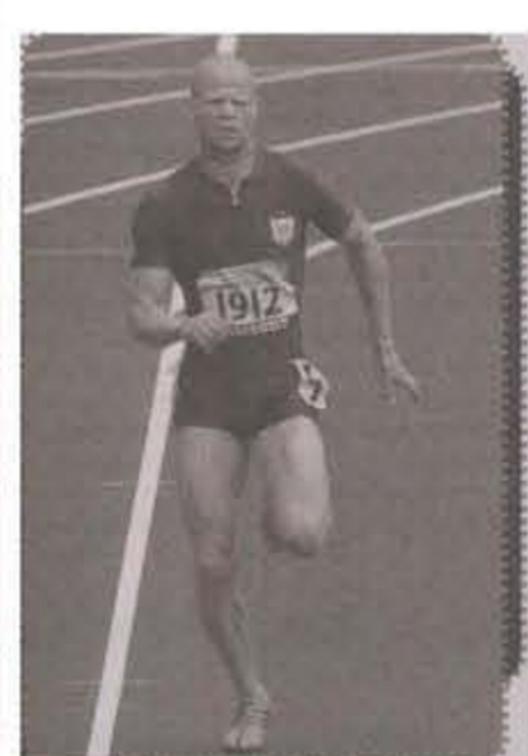
Oscar Pistorius and Natalie du Toit will spearhead Team South Africa at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

The 62-strong team team has been announced at Olympic House in Johannesburg to much fanfare and celebration. The team numbers are only slightly down on the 66 athletes that travelled to Beijing, China, which hosted the Paralympic Games in 2008.

The squad will be spread over seven different codes. These are: athletics, cycling, equestrian, rowing, swimming, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis, with athletics having the strongest representation with 25 athletes.

In Beijing Du Toit won five gold medals while Pistorius took gold in his three track events.

Swimming will have 10 competitors while the wheelchair basketball team is made up of 12 athletes. Next highest quota are the six cycling competitors. Also included in the team are visually impaired athletes Hilton Langenhoven and Ilse Hayes. Both based in Stellenbosch, Langenhoven won three golds in Beijing while Hayes took gold and silver.



Speaking at the Team Announcement a proud SASCOG CEO, Mr Tubby Reddy said he had no doubts that the selected team would return triumphant. "Although qualifying standards are high, our Paralympians have a global reputation for excellence and I know they will once again do us proud. They've fought long and hard to get into this team and we shall see the rewards at these Paralympics."



Introducing the team, SASCOC President Mr Gideon Sam said it was only right that the Paralympians got their deserved share of publicity. "At our last press conference we shared our team for the Olympic Games in London and now it's the turn of the Paralympic athletes to get their share of the limelight.

"In the past we have sometimes come in for criticism about the performance of our Olympic teams but when it comes to

Paralympic teams our men and women have done us proud time and time again. Let me remind you that the first South Africans to represent their country at the Paralympics numbered just nine, way back at the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics and they set the benchmark by bringing back eight gold medals.

"Down the years our para-athletes have continued to bring glory to the country. At the last Paralympics in Beijing we sent a team of 66 and between them they brought back 30 medals, 21 of which were gold. This is the high standard of excellence that we have come to expect from our Paralympians.

"Sadly we don't have a huge Paralympic sporting culture in this country. These are the stars who quietly go about doing their job of preparing for competitions at the very highest level. For something like three years and 11 months you'll hear just about nothing and then suddenly a month before the Olympics the country starts waking up and says: 'Hey it's the Paralympics, who is going!?'

"But having said that, we thankfully have, in the shape of Oscar and Natalie, two global superstars who manage to keep the Paralympic flame burning throughout the Paralympic cycles and our other Paralympians



must make sure that they feed off this publicity and go on to carve their own niche in the sporting world.

"I also have to thank all our Paralympic sponsors. We are blessed to have some extremely loyal Paralympic sponsors and they have always been there in times of hardship, stood rock-solid behind our Paralympians and in turn been rewarded by the medals these amazing young men and women have brought back to South Africa."

The London Paralympics gets underway on 29 August and ends on 9 September.