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# THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I AM COMING TO INDIA: CURTIS McGRATH



Curtis with the students of Stella Maris College

Praveen Tyagarajan



Curtis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The para-athlete was in Chennai a few days ago as part of the Development 4 All — Disability Inclusive Development Campaign, to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. “This is the first time I am coming to India, but really a short visit. I have been brought here by the Australian High Commission as part of a campaign to help people with disabilities,” he says. His short trip to India included visits to New Delhi and Chennai, during which he met members from Paralympic Committee of India, Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBFI) and different NGOs. “With both the paralympic committee and the WBFI, I discussed the possibilities of Indian athletes coming to Australia to attend coaching clinics and vice versa, and also about sharing resources like equipment, facilities, etc. I also met students of Stella Maris College in Chennai. I interacted with the students; told them about my story and also heard from a young woman on how she overcame her physical disabilities,” he elabo-

rates. He even got to catch up with Indian Paralympian Deepa Malik. “She was talking about her plans of moving into coaching and life after the sport. Unfortunately, in the next Paralympics in Tokyo, Deepa’s event isn’t there,” he says.

According to him, the state of Paralympic sports is similar in both India and Australia, “except for the fact that India is a little behind in terms of number of medals at the Paralympics,” he says and adds, “But in the both the countries it’s developing quite well. It is commendable that In-

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dia won four medals in the last Paralympics, the highest ever haul by the country in its history.” So, what more needs to be done in India? “In Australia, the funding for both, able-bodied and Paralympians, is quite similar. Though not equal, it’s almost the same. Also, sponsorships are easier for Paralympians there. That’s not enough for the para-athletes to live on, but that at least takes care of the expenses for the system. I think that’s one thing Indian government can consider and do the needful. Paralympians achieve so much with the very little resources they have. So, that needs to be recognised,” says Curtis.

Though it’s only a few days in India, he’s head over heels in love with Indian food and even knows some of the dishes by name. “In Australia, we’ve Indian restaurants in every corner of the street. I like chicken saagwala, beef vindaloo and naan. Especially naan dipped in Indian curry is just yum,” he says with a smile. So, any places in India on his bucket list? “Yeah, I definitely want to visit Taj Mahal. But not this time. I found a lot of difference between New Delhi and Chennai in terms of weather, landscape, architecture, etc. So, I am sure that every place in India has something new to offer,” Curtis signs off.