

# Strathaven Wheelchair curler off to represent UK in Paralympic Games

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WHEELCHAIR curler Aileen Neilson was left stunned this week after she was selected to represent Great Britain at the Paralympic Winter Games.

The 38-year-old from Strathaven will be hoping she can help Team GB go one better than their previous Winter Olympics experience when, in Turin during 2006, the British team took home a silver medal after defeat on the final stone.

And Aileen is joined by three members of that team – Michael McCreadie, Angie Malone and Tom Killen – as she gets ready for her first Paralympic Winter Games. She is also joined by Jim Sellar in the five-strong team bound for Canada in March.

This week the News caught up with Aileen at Lanarkshire Ice Rink in Hamilton.

She was still in shock after being named in the squad.

Aileen told the News: “It's not sunk in yet that I'm going to the Winter Paralympics.

“It's been a dream for so long and it's all we've talked about doing since the last one finished in 2006.

“I've been at the last three World Wheelchair Curling Championships and going to the Paralympics is what I've been building towards during that time.

“This was always my main goal at the end of that four-year cycle and it's great to have achieved that.

“But I don't think until I'm actually on that plane to Vancouver and in the Olympic village that it will really sink in.

“I leave Scotland on March 3 and there is a holding camp we go into before we are allowed into the Olympic Village a week after that.

“Everyone is really looking forward to it.”

The competition will take place between March 13-20 in the Vancouver Paralympic Centre and Aileen goes in with a wealth of experience.

The Bent Primary School teacher has represented Scotland at the World Wheelchair Curling Championships for the last three years.

She picked up a bronze medal in Sweden at the 2007 tournament.

And with the British team – who compete as Scotland at the World Championships and were crowned world champions in 2004 and 2005 – having been so successful in the sport in recent years, Aileen is confident she can help Team GB to Paralympic success.

She added: “Great Britain have done very well in the past and I think our hard work and dedication will stand us in good stead for the Games. There are a lot of countries out there who have come on really well in the last few years and at last year's World Championships, Germany were fantastic and showed just how much they had improved recently.

“So there are a lot of other teams in the mix for the gold medal. But our first goal is to get to the semi-finals and from thereon in we will just see what we can do.

“If we play to our potential, though, then we are going to be in the running for a medal.”

Phil Lane, chief executive of ParalympicsGB, said of the team: “We are delighted that we can announce the wheelchair curling team that will represent Britain at the Paralympic Winter Games. We are confident they will make us proud and we hope the team will also bring home a medal for the second successive Games.”