

Short Bio

Karissa Whitsell was born in Springfield , Oregon on June 15, 1981, the youngest of five children. Karissa's love for competition started at an early age when she began running local road races with her family at the age of three.

At nine, Karissa was diagnosed with macular dystrophy, a degenerative disease, which rapidly worsened. At 15 the disease forced her to give up competing on the local high school cross-country team.

A local clinic for blind cyclists, blind cyclists serve as the stoker (the back of the tandem) and a sighted person as the pilot, hooked Karissa on cycling.

Craig Griffin of Carmichael Training Systems was her first partner; Craig would then serve as head coach when Karissa joined the U.S. Paralympic cycling team with Thurston High School classmate, Matthew Veatch as pilot.

In 2000 Karissa competed with Spencer Yates in mixed tandem at the Sydney Paralympics.

After the 2000 Paralympics, mixed tandem was no longer a Paralympics sponsored event. Karissa partnered with Katie Compton in 2002 and dominated the women's blind/visually impaired category both in the U.S. and internationally in track and road competitions for four years.

Karissa is currently riding with Lana Atchley, and the two are setting their sights on the 2008 Paralympic games in Beijing .

Longer Bio

Karissa Whitsell was born in Springfield , Oregon on June 15, 1981, the youngest of five children. Karissa comes from a family that has always cherished athletic competition. She got her first taste of athletic competition when she began running local road races with her family at the age of three. She quickly developed a a love for running and competition.

Karissa was diagnosed with macular dystrophy, a degenerative disease, at the age of nine. Karissa's sight rapidly worsened from the age of nine until she was 15. She was competing with the local high school cross-country team, when her family realized they were not comfortable with her competing on the uneven surfaces of the cross-country courses.

Shortly after Karissa came upon a local clinic for blind cyclists. The blind cyclists were riding on the back of a tandem (the stoker), with a sighted pilot. Karissa immediately took to cycling and began training with Craig Griffin of Carmichael Training Systems. She soon joined the U.S. Paralympic cycling team, with Craig as head coach. She raced nationally with fellow Thurston High School student Matthew Veatch. After high school, Veatch joined the Army and shipped out to Iraq . Karissa soon found another pilot, Spencer Yates. They competed together nationally and in the 2000 Sydney Paralympics. After the Sydney Paralympics, the category Karissa and Spencer competed in, mixed tandem, was eliminated and Whitsell was left without a partner.

In 2002 Karissa began competing and training with Katie Compton. After dominating the women's blind/visually impaired category in the US and internationally in track and road competitions for four years, in 2006 Katie and Karissa parted ways. Karissa is currently training with Lana Atchley beginning with the 2007 season. Karissa is setting her sights on the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing .