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## **Judoka Gagne: Doing it for the kids**

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By Victoria Donu and IBSA

Canada's regional champion Priscilla Gagne has a laser focus as the clock ticks down to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

In January the B1 judoka retained her women's up to 52kg title at home in Montreal at the 2020 International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) Judo Americas Championships. The gold followed on from her debut bronze at the Worlds in 2018.

Having taken up judo at the age of 23, Gagne has made her way through the rankings and improved year-on-year.

Now 33, she is looking ahead at a very real shot on gold in Tokyo. But to step onto the podium, Gagne will have to go just one fight further. At the Rio 2016 Paralympics the Canadian finished fifth, losing out on bronze to Uzbekistan's Sevinch Salaeva.

"I think anyone who loses the bronze medal match would not be satisfied with their result," Gagne said. "I am grateful for the Paralympic experience because I took the learnings from it. And over the last four years I've

improved my game and grown as a person.”

Growing as a person and being a positive influence in other people’s lives is something that Gagne takes very seriously.

For her it is judo that has given her the ability to reach her potential:

“It has given me a platform to encourage others to fight back in life, to dream and to inspire others to do the same. Judo has been something that God has used to enrich my life. I have gained confidence in myself and in my faith”.

As of now, the Canadian Judoka is focusing on overcoming her disappointment from the last Paralympic games in Rio and states the important of mental preparation in the process.

Although Priscilla is striving for a better result, she also wants to be an example for future judokas and motivate them to push their limits.

“I think of the kids that might be watching the Paralympics and of the kids in the schools I visit. Those kids are a huge reason why I am working so hard. I want them to know they can dream, set goals to make it happen, and that only they can put limits on themselves”.

The competition is fierce and Gagne will face a tough group of athletes in the up to 52kg.

For her, Ukraine’s world and Paralympic champion Inna Sych (was Cherniak) and Salaeva are amongst those she considers to be her biggest opponents.

“In order to get the gold in Tokyo I can’t lose however judo is unpredictable,” Gagne said.

“Every second of each game means fighting to catch your opponent by surprise, physically force them to move a certain way, but you cannot predict what your opponent is going to do. In running track or swimming you can not interfere with your opponent, but in judo you play with their

minds, you manipulate them to move. To get the gold, a lot of focus and strategy will be required.”

Next up for Gagne ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games will be two IBSA Judo Grand Prix. The first will be in Nottingham, Great Britain, from 11-12 April, followed by Baku, Azerbaijan, from 11-12 May.