

Paraclimbing, Accessibility, & The Southeast Paraclimbing Comp

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With more eyes on climbing than ever before, climbing competitions are one area of the indoor climbing industry that has exploded in popularity over the last few years.

From recreational gym competitions, sanctioned youth and collegiate climbing circuits, and elite national and international level events, there's a climbing competition for everyone. Or is there?

Paraclimbing provides access for people with physical disabilities to compete against peers. However, paraclimbers only have one competition sanctioned by [USA Climbing \(USAC\)](#) each year - USA Paraclimbing Nationals. This competition moves all over the country, which can make it difficult and expensive to travel to. There are a handful of gyms offering paraclimbing categories at their recreational competitions, but there are very few dedicated competitions for adaptive athletes to dip the toe of their climbing shoes into the competition waters.

This is a big part of the reason that Catalyst Sports started the [Southeast Paraclimbing Competition](#) in 2022. Back for its third year in a row, the 2024 competition will be held on Saturday, December 7th, at Central Rock Gym in Kennesaw, GA.

The competition serves many purposes. **First and foremost, it brings paraclimbers and the entire adaptive climbing community together to share tips and tricks**, like which prosthetic climbing foot or Bluetooth headset (used by visually impaired climbers to get instruction from their sight guides) is the best.

While the competition can be fierce at times, most seasoned athletes can be found sharing beta with a newer climber in between attempts. It also gives those newer paraclimbers a chance to try their hand at competing on a smaller stage.

Eric Gray is the Executive Director of [Catalyst Sports](#), a non-profit in the southeast dedicated to expanding access & community in adaptive sports.

Eric explains, “Stepping into competition on the big stage (Paraclimbing National Championships) **can be extremely intimidating, especially if it's your first time competing. We wanted to create a high-quality comp with a low barrier to entry, where beginners can work through first-time mistakes and seasoned climbers can practice on world-class routes.** The pressure is low but the stoke is high!”

The Southeast Paraclimbing Competition (SPC) is designed to prepare those climbers who want to make it in the big leagues for the national championships and beyond. The main competition is a modified redpoint format, meaning climbers have a set amount of time and attempts to climb the highest they can on three different routes.

In the evening, climbers who want an extra challenge can choose to compete in the optional finals round, where they try to onsight a route in one attempt, with only six minutes to observe it beforehand.

Climbers will compete in one of six categories, depending on the type of disability they have: neurological/physical disability, upper extremity amputee/limb difference, lower extremity amputee/limb difference, visual impairment, seated, or youth.

At national and international paraclimbing competitions, athletes must go through an extensive and often invasive classification process to determine their competition category. At the SPC, climbers will self-classify, taking out the stress of obtaining medical paperwork and arriving early to go through an interview with classifiers.

In addition, this year’s competition will offer a men’s, women’s, and non-binary division for each category.

A huge piece of the puzzle when putting on a paraclimbing competition is the host gym. Paraclimbing competitions are on top rope, so a bouldering-only facility won’t cut it.

[Central Rock Gym Kennesaw](#) was an obvious choice for this year’s competition because they are already supportive of adaptive climbing in the Atlanta area. Catalyst Sports [holds a weekly adaptive climbing program](#) at CRG. They also provide discounted rates for [VetsClimb, a climbing program for disabled veterans](#).

While a supportive host gym is critical, most setters don’t know the ins and outs of routesetting

for adaptive climbers, much less for a paraclimbing competition. Thankfully, one of the most experienced paraclimbing routesetters in the country lives and works in the Southeast.

Aaron Davis is the Head Setter at BloCHaven in Greenville, SC, a USAC L4 National Chief Routesetter/Instructor and IFSC Paraclimbing Routesetter. He has been setting for USAC Paraclimbing National events since 2019. Aaron is the lead instructor for the Paraclimbing Routesetting Clinic, held Tuesday, December 3rd - Saturday, December 7th at CRG Kennesaw.

He will be teaching alongside Nohl Haeckel, the Director of Setting at Flowstone Climbing in Redlands, CA, a USAC L5 National Chief Routesetter/Instructor and IFSC Paraclimbing Routesetter. During this clinic, participants learn to set for paraclimbing competitions and for recreational adaptive climbers in their home gyms. They get in-depth instruction and 1:1 feedback from Aaron and Nohl, as they set routes for the climbing competition. Then, they get to watch paraclimbers climb their routes.

The benefits of combining the setting clinic with the competition are two-fold. First, it ensures high-quality routes for the competitors, without extra stress on the host gym's setting team. Second, **it improves the knowledge of the setters and their experience setting for adaptive climbers in the overall climbing community.** These routesetters can go back to their home gyms with newfound knowledge and confidence to make adaptive climbers feel that they belong. They will also be better equipped to set routes for new paraclimbing competitions that will inevitably begin to increase across the country.

Putting on a climbing competition is a huge endeavor, and it would not be possible without partners. [The Dralla Foundation has stepped up](#) as the presenting sponsor for the SPC for the next three years, ensuring that this competition will continue through 2026.

[Walltopia is the platinum sponsor for this year's competition](#) and built the amazing walls at CRG Kennesaw. [Prosthetic & Orthotic Associates of Tennessee](#) has returned as a silver sponsor and continues to be a resource for the adaptive climbing community in the area.

Additionally, more than 30 volunteers will give their time and energy to make this day an amazing experience for every competitor, from first timers to world cup medalists!

Get Involved

- If you're interested in learning more about the Southeast Paraclimbing Competition, or signing up as a climber or volunteer, **check out the Catalyst Sports website.**
- Learn more about and register **for the Paraclimbing Routesetting Clinic here**
- You can reach out to Emily Moscoe, the Adaptive Climbing Director for Catalyst Sports, with any questions about either event at emily@catalystsports.org.



PREVENTING COACH BURNOUT IN INDOOR GYMS

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SHARING SPACES IN INDOOR CLIMBING GYMS



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