Cancer Advocate Patrick Dempsey Elected Honorary Captain of U.S. Olympic Team

Cycling plays a big part in the actor's annual cancer fundraising event.

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Actor Patrick Dempsey has many passions, including cycling and helping people affected by cancer. Now, it's been announced that the former Grey's Anatomy star (he played Derek "McDreamy" Shepherd) will serve as the U.S. Olympic cycling team's honorary captain and ambassador, reports USA Cycling.

According to USA Cycling, Dempsey will work to raise awareness about the sport, encourage people to ride and support the team in the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

"I have been a passionate cyclist for years now, and this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity [was] one I could not pass up," said Dempsey. "Cycling is not just a sport. It is a lifestyle, and it is important to bring awareness to the world."

Dempsey's enthusiasm for cycling plays a key role in his support for a better quality of life for people with cancer. Each year, the actor's two-day Dempsey Challenge, a run, walk and cycle event, raises money for his cancer nonprofit, Dempsey Center, which he founded in 2008.

Located in Maine, where Dempsey grew up, the center works to make life better for people trying to manage the impact of cancer through support groups, adult counseling, youth and family services, consultations, massage, reiki, acupuncture and more. The best part? It's all offered at no cost to patients and their families.

Maine is also where Dempsey's mother, Amanda, first received treatment for ovarian cancer in 1997. She died of the disease in 2014 after a 17-year battle.

Dempsey's new Olympic role will take him to Japan this summer. "I feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to play a small part in USA Cycling and look forward to encouraging the team as they prepare for the games in Tokyo," Dempsey said.

Fortunately, he'll be back in the states before this year's Dempsey Challenge, which is set to take

place September 26 and 27 and aims to raise $1.5 million. Last year, the event raked in $1.2 million. (Dempsey attends each year, and he always rides.)

Click here to check out Dempsey's sit-down with Cancer Support Community, the largest professionally led nonprofit network of cancer support worldwide. To learn more about celebrity cancer advocates, check out "Britney Spears Opens Children's Cancer Foundation Campus" and "Ex-NFL Player DeAngelo Williams Sponsors More Than 500 Mammograms."

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