

Huffin' and Puffin, Martin is dedicated to helping James

MARTIN Gribble understands the sacrifice needed for brotherly love.

On Sunday, November 1, exactly one year from the date his brother James was left a quadriplegic, Martin will embark on the Puffin Paddle, a journey driven by the unconditional love of one brother for another.

The paddle will be a solo act, with Martin attempting to kayak the 2200km length of the Murray in an active effort to raise funds for the treatment of his brother James.

"Being brothers, we used to always play sport together, whether it was tennis or rugby," Martin said.

"Although it has been difficult seeing James struggling to do the most basic things, such as putting his shirt on in the morning, I marvel at his optimism and determination to succeed."

Last November, while James was in Zambia waiting to go fishing, he fainted in the extreme heat of the African summer, falling backwards onto hard sand.

The result of this fleeting illness was catastrophic, with James' C4 and C5 vertebrae broken and spinal cord severely bruised.

He was left with voluntary movement only from the shoulders up. Spending five weeks in Johannesburg under intensive care, James was finally flown back to Sydney, where his family and therapists, both at his Hunters Hill home and at Coorabel, in the Royal Rehabilitation Centre in Ryde, tirelessly continue to pour hours every day into his muscle and movement rehabilitation.

The Puffin Magic Foundation was set up as a tax-deductible foundation in January this year, funding the services and equipment necessary for James' rehabilitation.

The Puffin means a lot to James.

who first encountered the bizarre bird in Ireland in 2004. Since then, a toy Puffin has traversed the world with him, joining in adventures like scouting zebras in Zambia and playing it cool on a Berlin dance floor.

The Puffin Magic Foundation hosts events from cake sales to marathons, raising money for costly therapy and medication.

Martin's kayak paddle down the Murray River, aptly named the Puffin Paddle, will last from November 1 til December 12.

"It will be an intense physical test, a journey that will make me better appreciate the kinds of challenges my brother faces every day," he said.

"His rehabilitation is as intense as that of a professional athlete, and this is a way I can celebrate and respect my brother's achievements."

Although progress has been slow, with doctors claiming James would never be able to ride a bike again, he has defied the odds, with gradual steps to independent movement.

Martin's kayak project is a direct attempt to see James return to his able, active self.

Sponsors such as the Canoe Warehouse in Artarmon have, literally, come on board, providing Martin with his kayak.

"My aim is to help provide James with world-leading rehabilitation, giving him the best chance of making a full recovery so he can achieve his ultimate goal of walking once again," Martin said.

To be a part of this journey, to donate or support the Puffin Magic Foundation, go to puffinmagic.org.au/index or contact Martin Gribble on 0433 886 048.

- by work experience student

Robert Kennard



Picture: BRAD HUNTER