



It's The Real Deal

Paralympic Schools Program



People with Disabilities

INCLUSION and EQUITY

Do you have a classmate who uses a wheelchair? Do you have a friend who is blind? If you do, then **you may know a future Paralympian.**

These days, athletes with disabilities have a greater number of opportunities to take part in sports than ever before. Athletes with disabilities often belong to the same organizations and participate in the same events as their able-bodied teammates and classmates. This is called inclusion. **Inclusion is the practice of including all people. It means considering the wide spectrum of needs, interests and abilities of everyone in your community and providing opportunities for all to participate.**



The outcome of the move to inclusion is equity. Equity is a right that all people have. In physical activity and sport competition equity is about fairness and accessibility. **This means that regardless of sex, race, religion, or level of ability; all people should have equal access and be given the chance to participate in all sports and recreational activities.**

“An inclusive physical education environment is one which provides the opportunity for students of all abilities and interests to participate in physical education. Inclusive physical education recognizes the inherent value of each student; the right to take risks and make mistakes; the need for independence and self-determination; and the right to choice.” (Source: *Maximizing Opportunities for Students with a Disability – An introduction*, Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability, 1994).

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THE ROLE OF SPORT

Sport has the unique ability to bring people together from all over the world, to compete and celebrate their similarities and differences. “According to the Olympic Charter, established by Pierre de Coubertin, the goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.” (Source: *Olympic.org*, July 2003)

The general philosophy of the Paralympic Games is to follow the rules of the Olympic sports as much as possible. This philosophy is already implied in the name of the event. The term “Paralympic” is taken from the word “Olympic” and the prefix “Para”, a Greek word that means “close to”. **The Paralympic Games is an elite sports event in terms of both the organisation and the actual competition.** (Source: *Athens2004.com*, July 2003) In this, it shares in spirit of the Olympic movement that dates back to ancient Greece.



The Paralympics are a dynamic expression of the capabilities of people with disabilities. Sport has been a great way of building the visibility and profile of persons with disabilities. **Sports allow people to see that people with disabilities possess amazing skills and are capable of great athletic performances.** In fact, many Paralympic athletes compete at the same level as their able-bodied counterparts. Society needs to provide people with disabilities with many opportunities in the sport world, from local recreational sporting activities to elite international competition.

The Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) works to increase the opportunities for athletes with a disability within a sport system that recognizes the value and contribution of all competitors. The Paralympics provides people with disabilities a chance to display their ability and compete with their peers on a fair basis.

What is the difference between the Paralympics and the Special Olympics?

The Special Olympics and Paralympics are two separate organizations. Special Olympics is unique in providing sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Paralympics provides sports opportunities for elite athletes with physical disability. The Special Olympics World Summer Games takes place the year before the Olympic Games, while the Paralympic Games are conducted immediately following the Olympics. (Source: *Scholastic.com*, July 2003)

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SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

“The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the international representative organisation of elite sports for athletes with disabilities. The IPC organises, supervises and co-ordinates the Paralympic Games and other multi-disability competitions.” (Source: *International Paralympic Committee*, July 2003) **In order to compete on equal terms, Paralympic athletes are placed into different classes.** Specialized medical and technical personnel, called classifiers, evaluate the athletes with various tests based on the athletes' ability to perform skills required by the sport. In that way, it is guaranteed that the **athletes competing within a class have equal or similar abilities and the determining factor for their success is skill and training, rather than the level of disability.** (Source: *Athens2010.com*, July 2003)

People with the following disabilities are eligible to compete at the Paralympic Games and their class in each sport is determined by their functional ability to perform movements associated with that sport.

1. ATHLETES WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Amputee Athletes

An amputation refers to a missing limb or part of an arm or leg. Not all amputees are alike. Some athletes were born without a limb or parts of limbs. Others have lost limbs or parts of limbs through illnesses like cancer or diabetes, or as a result of an accident. Amputations can affect an individual's balance and ability to move. Some athletes wear prosthesis. **A prosthesis is an artificial device that replaces the missing body part and helps improve its movement.** Athletes with amputations compete in a number of sports including Cycling, Cross Country Skiing, Alpine Skiing and Athletics.



Athletes with Spinal Cord Injuries



Spinal cord or back injuries may result in paralysis, which affects movement of the lower body and all or part of the trunk muscles. The degree of a disability from a spinal cord injury depends on where the injury has happened along the spinal cord. In general, the higher the injury on the spine, the less function there is afterward because more muscles are affected. **People with spinal cord injuries who are paraplegics have limited or no function of the lower body, but have use of their arms allowing them to participate in sports such as Wheelchair Rugby and Sledge Hockey.** Quadriplegia affects both arm and leg movement.

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Athletes with Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy is a condition that damages the areas of the brain that control movement and body posture. This damage can occur before, during and after birth due to a delay in oxygen getting to the brain. **The disability may have no visible signs, or it may cause lack of control of facial and limb movements and speech difficulties.** Athletes who experience mild symptoms of CP compete in sports such as seven-a-side soccer, while those athletes with more severe symptoms compete in Boccia and other sports.



Les Autres

This impairment classification encompasses individuals with Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Polio, and Spina Bifida. It also includes a number of other disabilities that do not fall into any of the more specific classifications.

- ▶ **Multiple Sclerosis:** a chronic, unpredictable condition that affects the brain or spinal cord or both, causing muscular weakness, loss of coordination, and speech and visual problems.
- ▶ **Muscular Dystrophy:** a progressive genetic condition characterized by progressive muscular weakness and shrinking of the muscle fibers. Paralysis is the inability to move a part of the body. Some people with Muscular Dystrophy may experience paralysis because of the gradual weakening of arm, shoulder and leg muscles.
- ▶ **Poliomyelitis (Polio):** a viral infection of the motor cells in the spinal cord that leads to deformation, muscular paralysis or weakening of the muscles. The severity of the infection determines the extent of the damage and paralysis.
- ▶ **Spina Bifida:** a developmental buckling of the spine in which one or more of the vertebrae fail to completely close during early development. Vertebrae are the series of bones that make up your spine. This leaves an opening in the spine that leads to nerve damage. This affects muscle function and sensation to varying degrees.

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2. ATHLETES WITH Visual Impairments (Blind)

With Visual Impairments, an athlete may have partial sight or may be completely blind. Some persons can distinguish only the difference between light and dark. Others see a mist, as if a thick white curtain were always in front of their eyes. Some see the world around the edges of a dark area in the centre of their eyes, never seeing a whole shape, but only its top, bottom or sides. For others, everything is blocked off but a tiny speck of light. Some see nothing at all. **Athletes with a visual impairment can participate in a variety of sports, including Goalball, Alpine Skiing, Cross Country Skiing, Biathlon and Cycling.**



3. Athletes with an Intellectual Disability



Athens 2004 Paralympic Games.

There are many types of intellectual disabilities. Some people are born with an intellectual disability while other people have an intellectual disability that is caused by an accident or a condition. Persons may be socially mature or act younger than they are; they may be gifted in their abilities or be lagging behind their peers; have low self-esteem or have great confidence; have good verbal skills or use a special device to communicate. Down Syndrome is the most common genetic problem that causes an intellectual disability. These individuals have 47 chromosomes, rather than 46. This genetic difference causes varying degrees of developmental delays. **Athletes with an intellectual disability participated in a number of demonstration sports during the**

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FACT SHEET

In 2001, approximately 3.6 million Canadians or 12.4% of the population living in households reported having a disability. This number is expected to increase to 7 million by 2020.

Of the 3.6 million

- 305,750 OR 8% are between 5 - 24 years of age.
- 626,610 OR 17% are between 24 – 44 years of age.
- 217,000 are between 5 – 24 years of age AND have a mobility* or visual disability (Paralympic Sports' primary target market for athletes)
- 205,238 are between 25 - 44 years of age AND have a mobility* or visual disability (Paralympic Sports' secondary target market for athletes)
- 53% female, 47% male

** a mobility disability includes; spinal cord, cerebral palsy and amputee*

NOTE: Some 3.2 million adults reported having mobility pain but reluctantly did not associate it with any limitation. Therefore the data was not used.

Statistics source: Statistics Canada: 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS)

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