

Research Space

Book chapter

Inclusion and exclusion of elite athletes with disabilities

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Disability, classification and the Paralympics – inclusion and exclusion of elite athletes with disabilities

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Eligibility and classification in sport for people with disabilities in the Paralympics is one of the most debated issues, alongside doping control. The issues raised strike to very core of how we conceptualise disability and lead to the expansion or limitation of life changing opportunities for individual athletes. This chapter will introduce the reader to the concepts behind classification and the challenges of mapping the diversity of real life onto a categorical system. It will then look at who currently is, and importantly is not, included in the Paralympic movement, and finally will examine the debate around the separation or integration of the Paralympics with the Olympics.

Introduction to disability and classification

Inclusion in the Paralympic games must satisfy three important questions. Firstly, that the athlete has one of the ten impairments recognised by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), this is called primary eligibility. Second, that the eligible impairment meets the ‘minimum disability criteria’ of the sport i.e. that the impairment is sufficient to affect the performance of that specific sport. The third question relates to which class to place the athlete in, such that athletes of a similar activity limitation are grouped together to ensure that they can compete equally (IPC, 2015). The ten impairment groups the IPC recognises are adopted from the World Health Organisation (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF-WHO, 2001) and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: IPC Impairment Groups¹

Impaired muscle power	Reduced force generated by muscles or muscle groups, such as muscles of one limb or the lower half of the body,
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¹ Taken from the Explanatory Guide to Classification published by the IPC (2015).

	as caused, for example, by spinal cord injuries, spina bifida or polio
Impaired passive range of movement:	Range of movement in one or more joints is reduced permanently, for example due to arthrogryposis. Hypermobility of joints, joint instability, and acute conditions, such as arthritis, are not considered eligible impairments.
Limb deficiency:	Total or partial absence of bones or joints as a consequence of trauma (e.g. car accident), illness (e.g. bone cancer) or congenital limb deficiency (e.g. dysmelia).
Leg length difference:	Bone shortening in one leg due to congenital deficiency or trauma.
Short stature:	Reduced standing height due to abnormal dimensions of bones of upper and lower limbs or trunk, for example due to achondroplasia or growth hormone dysfunction.
Hypertonia	Abnormal increase in muscle tension and a reduced ability of a muscle to stretch, due to a neurological condition, such as cerebral palsy, brain injury or multiple sclerosis.
Ataxia:	Lack of co-ordination of muscle movements due to a neurological condition, such as cerebral palsy, brain injury or multiple sclerosis.
Athetosis	Generally characterised by unbalanced, involuntary movements and a difficulty in maintaining a symmetrical posture, due to a neurological condition, such as cerebral palsy, brain injury or multiple sclerosis.
Visual impairment	Vision is impacted by an impairment either of the eye structure, optical nerves or optical pathways, or the visual cortex.
Intellectual Impairment	A limitation in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills, which originates before the age of 18.

The minimum disability criterion is there to ensure that the impairment does have an impact on performance in that sport, and therefore is called 'sport specific'. For example, having some visual acuity problems will not impact on sprinting 100m as much as it would on playing table tennis, hence an athlete may not be eligible for IPC sanctioned 100m events, but would be eligible for IPC table tennis competitions.

Classifying athletes into the correct class so that athletes competing together are of a similar limitation and are winning due to training, skill and ability, not due to a lesser impairment, is a complex process. Classification systems have been developed for each IPC recognised sport

and are based on a functional not diagnostic approach, (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011). These classification systems are 'owned' by the International Federation (IF) which governs that sport and are required to be based on scientific evidence. However, not all sports have classes for all impairment groups. The number of classes for each impairment group will also differ between national and international competition, with the highest number of classes occurring at international world events and the Paralympic Games. Classes are given a label which depicts which sport e.g. in athletics it is usually 'T' for track or 'F' for field, and a number which denotes the impairment group and level of impairment. For example, Equestrian includes all impairment types except intellectual impairments, and classifies them into five classes, integrating physical and visual impairments. A higher number usually denotes less impairment.

Despite the governance, codes of conduct and evidence based requirements, classification remains a highly questioned area, with people's futures, medals, funding, employment, and income all being contingent on getting it right and ensuring competition is about fair play and not unfair advantage. There have been, and continues to be, numerous challenges based on conceptual inconsistencies, credibility and robustness of the classification system, negative impact of good training, allegations of cheating, misrepresentation, and unfair treatment.

Tweedy, one of the originators of the current model of IPC classification started from the position of acknowledging the need for a taxonomy which addressed some of the practical problems of a system which needs to transect nations, disability groups, medical and social models of disability, but is robust enough to be accepted globally and be future proof enough to not require constant change (Tweedy, 2002). The ICF-WHO (2001) taxonomy fits this

profile and has the added benefit of being ‘functional’ not ‘medical diagnosis’ based and was already well established. It was hoped that using this approach would bring a universality to sports classification and ensure that all sports adhere to a consistent framework and terminology. Whilst the use of the ICF as a framework to build sport classification around has been an excellent choice, it has perhaps been underused and the full potential is yet to be realised.

Multiple impairments and classification

One area of tension managed within ICF but not yet adequately dealt with in sports classifications is that of multiple morbidity. Athletes are classified on their primary impairment and if they have more than one they must choose which impairment group to compete within. For example, if an athlete has visual limitations in addition to cerebral palsy, they must choose which to be classified under and no account will be taken of their other impairment even though it may clearly impact upon their performance. For some, where co-morbidity is common, having to be categorised under only one primary impairment group results in an unrepresentative sub-group of athletes rising to the top of elite performance. A clear example of this occurs in the intellectual impairment group, where the most recent and comprehensive survey on the topic suggests that on average a person will have 11 additional health conditions, and 99% of the population will have multiple morbidities (Kinnear, Morrison, Allan, Henderson, Smiley & Cooper, 2018). This results in athletes with Down Syndrome very rarely, if ever, being able to compete at an international level in II sport, as alongside their intellectual disability caused by the genetic phenotype, comes physical issues such as short stature, low muscle tone, cardiac problem etc. which directly impact on sporting performance (Burns, 2018). The athletes that tend to rise to the elite international level for II sport are the minority of those without such common co-morbidity, resulting in an unfair playing field for athletes with the more common multi-disability profile, who are more representative of their

population. This has resulted in separate sporting organisations for athletes with Down Syndrome and allegations of discrimination against the IPC. As a way of managing this issue, the International Federation for Para-athletes with Intellectual Impairment (INAS)² has developed additional classes for those with more significant overall functional impairments and are developing a classification approach which adheres to a holistic approach to overall functioning (Gilderthorp, Burns & Jones, 2018).

Developing a robust classification system

To be eligible the impairment must be permanent, however performance in the sport might change, for example, due to a change in the impairment, improvement through treatment or rehabilitation innovations, or increased and/or more effective training. In the former two cases, a change in class could be considered reasonable, however for the latter this would be unreasonable. It would be unfair to place an athlete who has improved their performance through training, with no alteration in their original impairment in a class with those who are less impaired. Therefore, it is imperative that the classification system should not be influenced by training and tightly tied to assessing activity limitation not training (Beckman & Tweedy, 2009).

Developing a classification system that addresses training concerns as well as being built on a conceptually sound framework, and involving robust assessment methods, is a major challenge, requiring funding, research and the collaboration between athletes, IFs, athletes and event organisers (Tweedy, Beckman, & Connick, 2014). It also requires a potentially unachievable compromise between the inclusivity drive to increase parity in impairment groups and classes,

² INAS is the IPC recognised International Organisations of Sport for Disabled (IOSD) representing athletes with Intellectual Impairments.

and the pressures of ‘selling the product’ requiring shorter, faster, and more media appealing events which fuel the economic engine of the Paralympic movement (Howe & Jones, 2006).

The importance and the personal impact of disputes over classification has been well evidenced in the protests raised by some UK athletes and their families which resulted in a Select Committee Inquiry formed by the British Parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee to examine athlete classification in the context of sport governance (DCMS, 2017). Specific allegations were made about misrepresentation by athletes to manipulate their classification to gain advantage. Within these allegations the UK Sports Federations, the British Paralympic Association and the IPC were accused of poor governance. A robust defence was put up by all parties including the IPC which responded that both the IPC and the Paralympic movement as a whole had to note ‘key learning points and action’ (IPC, 2017 para. 1.1) and that:

‘In our view the Paralympic classification system is fit for purpose. We do, however, acknowledge that improvements have, can and will be made by the IPC to continually make the system more robust for all athletes.’ (para 1.2).

Following the inquiry Sport England and UK Sport published ‘A code for Sports Governance’ (2018) and the British Paralympic association reviewed its UK classification code. Simultaneously, the Board of United Kingdom Athletics (UKA) initiated a review of classification for UK Para-athletes chaired by the retired Paralympian Ms Anne Wafula-Strike. The conclusion was that:

‘There was wide consensus that the current UKA national classification system could be abused, should an athlete or support personnel be sufficiently motivated, have an understanding of the classification process and have an impairment that lends itself to

exaggeration. This issue is not exclusive to athletics but reflected across Paralympic sport. Para Athletics is a relatively 'young' sport where records are being broken frequently, sometimes by large margins. This makes it difficult to detect abuse based on performance data only. In addition, classification itself is a developing discipline. There is an ongoing need for vigilance and a regular review, check and challenge of all classification processes to ensure it continues to keep pace with the development of Paralympic sport and to mitigate the risk of exploitation.' (UKA, 2017, p4)

However, whilst acknowledging that the system could be exploited, the review also concluded *'there was no substantive evidence to suggest that this is the case'* (p4) and set out 16 recommendations to prevent abuse of the system. Interestingly the report went on to benchmark the state of UKA classification against that of World Para Athletics (WPA) and concluded that *'...the UKA system is robust and mirrors WPA's protocols for classification. Indeed, it was cited as one that is an exemplar of best practise, and one of – if not the – best in the world.'* p 7. Given the acknowledgement of a system open to abuse but the denial of this occurring and it being held up as a gold standard some would argue that perhaps the governance bar should be raised and the reliance on the spirit of 'fair play' lowered.

Internationally, prior to the Rio Games the IPC initiated a review of 80 individual cases, from 24 countries over a 12-month period. Xavier Gonzalez, the IPC's Chief Executive Officer concluded that:

'The review of the 80 plus cases revealed no instances where the IPC could reasonably allege intentional misrepresentation. In many cases, the information brought forward amounted to nothing more than allegations without substantive grounds.'

However, he went on to recognise that some remedial actions were required and that IFs needed to invest in research, classifier training and potentially a revision of some classification systems (IPC, 2016).

Events and reviews such as these serve to demonstrate that classification is still somewhat reliant on the Paralympic sporting spirit, strengthened by research, education and good governance. It is interesting to note that many of the initial classification systems were not based on published, peer reviewed research, but were an amalgam of experience, medical assessment and existing practice. Ironically, it was the research which went into the development of the II classification system, occurring before the re-inclusion of athletes with intellectual disabilities, which set a higher standard in terms of evidence-based classification. The importance of evidence-based classification has been given further emphasis by the integration into the IPC Athlete Classification Code the mandate to International Sports Federations that they must develop systems based on multidisciplinary scientific research and that athletes must be solicited to assist in the development and improvement of such systems (section 10.2.1, IPC, 2015).

All of these endeavours together with a burgeoning interest in classification research is leading to stronger classification systems and in the majority of cases provides a showcase of sophisticated research applied to real life problems resulting in advanced conceptual understanding and technical solutions. Connick, Beckman and Tweedy (2018) provide an excellent chronological narrative about how this research has evolved and a route map to further research. They point out that classification systems which are invalid, or indeed are

seen to be invalid, pose a significant threat to the Paralympic movement and that those involved have a duty to ensure that such systems are based on the best available scientific evidence.

Elite sport for all

Who is, and who is not, included in the Paralympic movement is governed by the classification system described above. However, the impairment groups currently included have evolved over time and the current accepted categories are not there by design but through historical events and by no means cover the vast range of impairment groups represented in the disability movement. For example, those with neurological impairments such as dyspraxia, mental health issues and autism are not included. The functional approach to classification (as opposed to a disease or medically based classification) typified by the ICF allows a wider inclusion of causes of impairment under an umbrella of limited functional levels, but the IPC stratification into three impairment groups (physical, visual and intellectual) ignores those who fall outside these groups and also the intersectionality between them.

Autism is a particularly good example of this issue. It is estimated that about 2% of the population of eight years olds in the US have autism and this prevalence is increasing (Baio *et al*, 2018). This is a far greater impairment population than the visually impaired, which compared to a wider age range of 5-17 year olds in the US the prevalence is estimated to be 0.8 (Institute on Disability, 2016). Or if we compare this prevalence to those with achondroplasia, estimated to be less than 0.006% in the US (Waller, *et al*, 2008). Approximately 50-60% of autistic children will also have intellectual disabilities (Baio *et al*, 2018) so may compete, and many do, under the intellectual impairment group. However, what about the 40-50% who do not qualify in this way? It could be argued that they could compete

in the Olympics and again some athletes will. However, there is enough evidence that the cognitive impact of autism can be severe and disabling, resulting in exclusion and the inability to compete on a fair playing field with those without this disability (Duquette, Carbonneau, Roul, & Crevier, 2016). In addition, the classification of having an intellectual disability, or not, is not so clear cut, as many people whilst meeting the criteria in terms of having significant impairments in adaptive behaviour do not meet the INAS accepted IQ criterion of 75 or below. However, we know from both research and the reported experiences of people with autism that competing in mainstream sports can be very difficult and adaptations sometimes need to be made (Webster, 2016). Research evidence is also increasing that from a very early developmental age differences in gait and fine motor control can be detected, which may become exaggerated in later life (Rinehart & Jest, 2016). Hence, the combination of cognitive and physical differences leads to a consistent range of characteristics termed autism and a significant impairment group currently not catered for within the Paralympics.

Protests about this occur usually from an athlete or family members, but until INAS expanded its remit to include all athletes with autism (those with and without intellectual disabilities) in 2016 there has been no international sports federation attempting to cater for these athletes' needs. The scheduling of the summer Paralympics is currently saturated, and the competition schedule for qualifying events dense, with pressures to include more sports, wider classes, more events, all of which have an economic costs attached. It is not envisaged, given the economic and logistic concerns of the IPC, that they will be looking to expand their inclusion criteria and such developments remain outside the Paralympics and devolved from its economic and profile advantages.

Another disability group which is absent from the Paralympics, for very different reasons, merits discussion, is Deaf athletes. Nowhere are the issues of the social construction of disability, identity and inclusion/exclusion as clearly played out as in relation to the participation of Deaf athletes. This starts with the use of the words 'Deaf' or 'deaf' (Foster, Fitzgerald, & Stride, 2018). Ammons and Eikman (2011) define this distinction:

“Deaf” with a capital D is used to signify deaf people who are primarily sign language users, members of the Deaf community, and share Deaf culture and common experiences. By the same token, the authors and others use ‘deaf’ to indicate the general population of deaf people (people who have hearing loss). This distinction between a sociocultural understanding of Deaf people and a medicalized understanding of the condition of deafness is crucial for any analysis of what it means to be Deaf.’ (p1149).

Central to this distinction is identity, culture and communication which has led to the Deaf community wishing to establish, and maintain, a sporting independence from both the IOC and the IPC and found their own Deaflympics. The application of the category 'disability sport' is contested by the Deaf sporting community, who do not see themselves as having a disability, but being stigmatised and marginalised through a largely invisible difference. This places them in an interesting position between the IOC and the IPC and has led to complex and at times troubled relationships between the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD), which governs elite Deaf sport, and the IOC and IPC.

Jerald Jordan (a previous ICSD president) described the position well:

“The Deaf athlete views the disabled athlete as being a hearing person first and disabled second.....If Deaf athletes were to compete in the Paralympic Games, then numerous sign language interpreters would be necessary to bridge this communication

barrier, otherwise the Deaf athletes would be completely separated from all disabled athletes. The very purpose of the Games – to bring athletes together – would be lost.....As a group Deaf people do not fit into either the able-bodied or disabled categories.Our limits are not physical; rather, they are outside of us, in the social realm of communication. Among hearing people, whether able-bodied or disabled, we are almost always excluded, invisible and unserved. Among ourselves however, we have no limits.” Jordan, 1991

The first Deaflympics was established in 1924 in Paris and has carried on every four years since then, with a break for World War II. It was the second largest international games to be founded after the Olympics and before the Paralympics. The Deaflympics now include 27 different sports and hold the games every four years, usually attracting over 3,000 athletes from over 70 nations. As well as the most common Olympic sports, interestingly the Deaflympics also includes chess. The IOC granted official recognition of the use of name Deaflympics in 2001. A major principle behind the games is that they are entirely organised by the ISDC of whom all the committee members are Deaf. The ISDC holds the same ideals and principles of Olympism and the Deaflympics explicitly sets out to promote these values.

Debates have continued about assimilation into either the Olympics or the Paralympics. In terms of the Olympics, as well as the mutual recognition of events, Deaf athletes commonly compete in both. However, personal accounts depict the ‘specialness’ of competing in the Deaflympics and Deaf world championships in terms of the rich experience of being able to fully communicate, the universality of sign language, and the sense of ‘family’ and ‘belonging’ (Ammons & Eickman, 2011; Foster, 2018). In terms of the Paralympics, there is the major

obstacle of positioning Deaf sport as part of the community of ‘disability sports’. Inclusion also contradicts the classification code as the impairment usually has little impact upon performance, other than in some sports to make technical adjustments to make auditory cues visual, e.g. starting gun includes a starting light. Indeed, some have pointed to the advantages hearing loss can bring to sport in terms of heightened senses in other modalities, termed ‘Deaf gain’ (Foster, 2018). To include Deaf athletes in the Paralympic programme, as constrained as it is, would result in a decrease of athlete participation from other impairment groups and to compensate for this a possible reduction in the range of sports included. Such dynamics work against existing para-athletes lobbying for greater inclusion by expanding impairment groups. The cost of sign language interpreters would also be prohibitive and the ISCD is critical of the IOC in terms of the representativeness of impairments within the IOC executive committee. Hence, whilst the Paralympics may have attractions in terms of sponsorship, profile and national funding, the disadvantages are numerous and significant.

A compromise was reached with the IPC and ISCD signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2004 to agree collaboration and reach a mutual understanding and promotion of each organisation’s roles, responsibilities and ambitions. However, the debate continues to rage and requests for continued and closer dialogue between the ISCD and the IPC endure (Harrison, 2016; Palmer, 2013).

To be distinct, inclusive or integrated

Further debate has raged over whether the Paralympics should be integrated or merged with the Olympics or the order reversed such that the Paralympics would come before the Olympics. The reasons for these suggestions range from the ideological to the practical, with the

ideological spanning the continuum from inclusionist to separatist positions, but the majority of the practical issues falling at the separatist position. To unpack this debate, we first have to consider what is meant by the terms inclusion and integration.

A full inclusive position would be to have events for athletes with disabilities fully embedded in the schedule for non-disabled athletes. This is the case with the Commonwealth Games where an agreement was signed between the IPC and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) in 2007 to build on previous exhibition events and the later integration of Para-athletes into National teams in the 2002 Manchester games. The aims of the agreement are to promote the growth of sporting opportunities for Paralympic athletes and to position the IPC as overseeing this co-ordination. In terms of full inclusion for the Commonwealth Games this means no separate tickets or events for para-sports and all medals contributing to the national tally. However, not all sports are included and at a minimum the programme must include Aquatics, Athletics, Lawn Bowls and Powerlifting. Successive games are stretching these boundaries and the 2018 Gold Coast Games included seven para-sports (adding track cycling, table tennis and triathlon) with an increase of 45% more para-athletes and 73% more medals in para-events compared to Glasgow in 2014 (CGF, 2018).

The current situation with the Olympic and Paralympic Games is more that of integration, with a growing closeness, integration in some aspects but, maintaining a clear distinction in the delivery of the Games. Misener and Molloy (2018) provide a detailed analysis of this relationship, plotting the collaboration from bid to delivery. Before 2000, the Games were hosted separately with distinct organising Committees (OCs), but in 2000 a contract was signed between the IOC and the IPC agreeing that the Paralympics may take place after the Olympics,

in the same city, using the same facilities and venues. Also it was agreed that the IPC President to be a co-opted member of the IOC and that a funding stream should be established from the IOC to IPC. This contract has been further expanded over the years and the revenue to the IPC significantly increased. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is now in place extending this agreement until 2032 (IOC 2016). As Misener and Molloy (2018) point out, this effectively integrates the bidding, planning and organisation of the Games, but that there remains a commitment to the Games retaining 'distinct identities' and that the IOC and IPC maintain sole responsibility for each event. Whilst this is enshrined in the contract and the Paralympic Handbook Misener and Molloy (2018) highlight the use of the word 'may' in reference to the current arrangement, suggesting a 'get out clause' should the context shift, as it very nearly did with Rio 2016. They conclude that whilst the OCs are working towards a more integrated model of delivery there is still much work to be done in terms of the balance of focus between the Games and question if currently the Olympics are gaining more than the Paralympics, and indeed if the Paralympics would ultimately suffer from further integration.

David Legg has also contributed much to this debate and has charted the delicate history of the evolving Paralympic movement and IPC in parallel to the established Olympic movement and IOC. (Legg, 2018; Legg, Fay, Wolff & Hums, 2014). He also tackles the contentious issue of disabled athletes competing in the Olympic games, which, whilst it only so far includes a small number of athletes, does raise questions about the distinctiveness of the two movements. In response to these complex questions Legg points to a concern that the participation of disabled athletes within the Olympics would devalue the Paralympic Games. He suggests such inclusion would 'denude the Paralympics of some of their most prestigious events', and that the Paralympics would become a less prestigious event for those with more severe disabilities (Legg, 2018). It also might be argued that should this movement occur those remaining in the

Paralympics would just include those athletes for whom prosthetics cannot compensate for their impairment. The rise of the 'cyber athlete', augmented by advanced technology, suggests the IOC/IPC will increasingly be required to manage a situation where the performance of disabled athletes outstrips that of the non-disabled.

Whilst the inclusion of some disabled athletes within the Olympics might be beneficial for a small minority it may not be beneficial for the majority of para-athletes. As it stands now, this issue tends to be managed on a case by case basis, but when it does become an issue it is one which attracts wide media attention and raises these complex questions repeatedly. In his analysis Legg (2018) points to the statement made by Elizabeth Dendy, an athlete representative with cerebral palsy, who suggests we must be careful 'not to reinforce the message that the one percent of the elite disabled athletes, who were often the most visible, represented the entire sport movement' (Dendy, 1993, p359 cited by Legg, 2018 p161).

Where the debate now goes will be interesting, and as Legg points out National and International laws and treaties such as the UN Convention on Human Rights for Persons with a Disability (UN, 2006) may have an influence on this direction. Contributing to this is the success of Paralympic media to provide a different representation of disability related to empowerment. This has raised questions amongst the general populous about why are the Olympics and Paralympics separate and is this a human rights and inclusion issue? Whilst not being privy to the much more granular and nuanced debates of the actual delivery of the Games, the general public do position this as a rights issue and are more likely to move to an inclusive perspective. Possibly as a way of avoiding the conflict one can see why the former

IPC President Sir Phillip Craven may have shifted his previously oppositional position to adopting the ‘possibility’ stance focussed on in the press prior to London in 2012.

‘The Paralympics and Olympic Games could merge, says the president of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Sir Philip Craven said things are developing all the time and nothing is "set in stone"’. (BBC, 2012)

This statement provoked some backlash from athletes concerned about the diminution of the Paralympics and it is notable that no subsequent public statements have been made and the new IPC President, Andrew Parsons remains, publically silent on the issue so far.

Whatever the ideological positions, the practical and logistical implications are extremely challenging. To allow complete integration the size of the whole event would increase dramatically. An athlete village which accommodated 11,000 athletes would now need to accommodate 15,000 athletes with a concomitant increase in officials, coaches and other support staff. The transport infra-structure, always a challenging aspect of event delivery, would need to manage a third extra travellers. The event programme would potentially need to be expanded to five weeks, which could result in ‘audience fatigue’ and major conflicts about media coverage and timetabling, with those in the Paralympic movement arguing they would be the losers (Heilpern, 2016). In the highly competitive broadcasting space would the Paralympians get as much coverage as they do now? These are just some of the issues and questions raised by a fully integrated Games, all of which serve to suggest no foreseeable change in the near future and this position has been largely supported by the Paralympic athletes themselves (e.g. Tanni Grey-Thompson, BBC, 2012).

One direction of change which is less often articulated is in the opposite direction, to make the Paralympics more separate. Legg (2018) points out the economic possibilities of this suggesting that cities unable to accommodate both Games could bid for the Paralympics and gain from what he terms the economic advantages of 'Handicapitalism' (p167). This is premised on the belief that hosting the Paralympics without the Olympics would indeed be of economic benefit. Given the economic legacy of both Games which has had winners and loser in the past this seems a risky strategy. The final permutation to be considered is whether to foreground the Paralympics before the Olympics. Whilst arguments could be presented about 'Disability First' as a way of increasing coverage and representation, the most compelling argument for remaining the same, presented by the IPC Head of Communications and echoed by other stakeholders, is that *'The Olympics is the best test event for the Paralympics.'* (Springer, 2016). The increasing media and audience impact of the Paralympics would also suggest that a good trajectory is set and so questions the sense of making such a substantial change (Legg & Dottori, 2017).

Conclusion

The Paralympics have come a long way in its relatively short history. It has had a global impact on the representation of people with disability in sport and has forced change in those cities which have hosted the Games and other large Paralympic sanctioned events. The legacy and generalisation of such gains are disputed and can be criticised for not being sustained or being impactful enough (Brittain, 2018). However, without the Paralympics it is hard to envisage the changes which have occurred happening. The very existence of the Paralympics serves a function at so many levels; from the life changing experience it offers individuals to the unique natural research opportunities it provides us to understand the impact of impairment. With any

large movement spanning ideological, scientific, economic, humanitarian and socio-political domains, it is going to attract controversy and challenge. Because of the very nature of these tensions, it provides an exceptional and unparalleled opportunity for the application of principles which will undoubtedly advance the position of people with disabilities. May the debates continue.

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