

SECOND EDITION

# THE PARALYMPIC GAMES EXPLAINED

Ian Brittain



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# The Paralympic Games Explained

The Paralympic Games is the second largest multi-sport festival on earth and an event which poses profound and challenging questions about the nature of sport, disability and society. *The Paralympic Games Explained* is the first complete introduction to the Paralympic phenomenon, exploring every key aspect and issue, from the history and development of the Paralympic movement to the economic and social impact of the contemporary Games.

Now in a fully revised and updated second edition, it includes new material on hosting and legacy, Vancouver 2010 to Rio 2016, sport for development, and case studies of an additional ten Paralympic nations. Drawing on a range of international examples, it discusses key issues such as:

- how societal attitudes influence disability sport
- the governance of Paralympic and elite disability sport
- the relationship between the Paralympics and the Olympics
- drugs and technology in disability sport
- classification in disability sport.

Containing useful features including review questions, study activities, web links and guides to further reading throughout, *The Paralympic Games Explained* is the most accessible and comprehensive guide to the Paralympics currently available. It is essential reading for all students with an interest in disability sport, sporting mega-events, the politics of sport, or disability in society.

**Ian Brittain** is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University, UK. He has formerly been an Executive Board member of the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation and was the Sports Coordinator for the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS) World Games in Rio de Janeiro and currently acts as Heritage Advisor to IWAS. He has attended the last four Summer Paralympic Games in Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London and was a Ceremonies Consultant for the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony. His research focuses upon sociological, historical and sports management aspects of Paralympic and disability sport.

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Ian Brittain

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# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acronyms</i>	<i>xi</i>
Introduction	1
1 The history and development of the Paralympic Games	7
2 The Olympic Movement and the Paralympic Games	23
3 The governance of Paralympic sport	37
4 Disability and the body	52
5 The broader social issues of disability within society and their impact on sports participation	68
6 Media, marketing and disability sport	86
7 Major issues within the Paralympic Movement	111
8 Diversity at the Paralympic Games	128
9 International perspectives on Paralympic participation	157
10 The Special Olympics, intellectual disability and the Paralympic Games	198
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>225</i>

# Figures

0.1	Archery, the very first competitive sport for athletes with disabilities	2
2.1	Growth in participating nations at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	29
2.2	British Paralympic team logo for Seoul incorporating the five tae-geuk logo	30
2.3	Front of Barcelona protest tee-shirt	31
2.4	Reverse of Barcelona protest tee-shirt	31
3.1	International Paralympic Committee governance structure	44
4.1	Disability and the triangle of violence	62
6.1	Hiding the disability	94
6.2	The full photograph	94
6.3	Passive athlete pose	95
6.4	A focus on the visual impairment of Turkish Goalball players at London 2012	95
6.5	Emotion and exhaustion at the end of the marathon	96
6.6	Wheelchair racers in the marathon at London 2012	97
6.7	Number of accredited media at the Paralympic Summer Games	99
6.8	Number of accredited media at the Paralympic Winter Games	99
6.9	Paralympic Mascots have become a major part of the marketing of the Paralympic Games	107
7.1	Swimming uses a functional classification system	119
8.1	A comparison of female participation rates at the Summer Olympic and Paralympic games	139
8.2	A comparison of female participation rates at the Winter Olympic and Paralympic games	140
8.3	Female participation at the Paralympic Games by Continental Association over the last twenty years	147
8.4	Asian NPC participation at the Paralympic Games over the last twenty years	148
8.5	Boccia is a Paralympic sport specifically for cerebral palsied athletes with high support needs	152

# Tables

1.1	A chronology of the early Stoke Mandeville Games (1948–1959)	11
1.2	A chronology of the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	16
5.1	Average ages of the Great Britain Paralympic track and field team at Sydney 2000	79
5.2	Average ages of the Great Britain Paralympic track and field team at London 2012	80
6.1	Photographs used from Paralympic Games	93
6.2	Largest audience by nation of the last five Paralympic Games on ParalympicSport TV	101
6.3	Summer and Winter Paralympic Games budgets since 1988	102
6.4	IPC Overall income and expenditure for 2004–2013	103
6.5	IPC Income and expenditure from marketing, sponsoring and fundraising activities for 2004–2013	103
7.1	Doping tests at recent Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games	122
7.2	Positive Summer Paralympic Games doping tests by continental association and gender since Barcelona 1992	123
7.3	Positive Winter Paralympic Games doping tests by continental association and gender since Lillehammer 1994	123
8.1	Development in the number of participating nations at the Summer Paralympic Games over the last twenty years	129
8.2	Number of athletes by continental association competing at the Summer Paralympic Games over the last twenty years	129
8.3	Distribution of the medals at the London 2012 Paralympic Games by continental association	130
8.4	Development in the number of participating nations at the Winter Paralympic Games over the last twenty-two years	131
8.5	Number of athletes by continental association competing at the Winter Paralympic Games over the last twenty-two years	131
8.6	Distribution of the medals at the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Games by continental association	132



8.7	Participation at the London 2012 Summer Paralympic Games by Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index Ranking	133
8.8	Medal success at the London 2012 Summer Paralympic Games by Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index Ranking	133
8.9	Participation at the Sochi 2014 Winter Paralympic Games by Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index Ranking	134
8.10	Medal success at the Sochi 2014 Winter Paralympic Games by Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index Ranking	135
8.11	Participation by gender at the Paralympic Games	138
8.12.	Top and bottom five sports for female participation in London 2012	142
8.13	Medal events available by sport and gender at London 2012	144
8.14	Percentage of NPCs by continental affiliation with no female participants	147
8.15	Distribution of athletes with high support needs at the London 2012 Paralympic Games	154
8.16	Distribution of athletes with high support needs by continental association at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games	154
8.17	Top and bottom five sports for AHSN participation in London	155
9.1	Participation by current IPC member nations at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	158
9.2	Distribution of the medals at all Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	159
9.3	The top ten overall medal-winning nations at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	160
9.4	Top three medal-winning nations from the African region	162
9.5	South African participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	164
9.6	South African medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	165
9.7	South African participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	165
9.8	Ugandan participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	167
9.9	Ugandan participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	167
9.10	Top three medal-winning nations from the Americas region	168
9.11	Canadian participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	171
9.12	Canadian medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	172
9.13	Canadian participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	173
9.14	Canadian medals at the Winter Paralympic Games by sport and gender	173
9.16	Brazilian medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	176
9.17	Brazilian participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	177
9.18	Top three medal-winning nations from the Asian region at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	178
9.19	Japanese participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	180

9.20	Japanese medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	181
9.21	Japanese participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	181
9.22	Japanese medals at the Winter Paralympic Games by sport and gender	182
9.23	Indian participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	184
9.24	Indian medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	184
9.25	Top three medal-winning nations from the European region at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	185
9.26	British participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	187
9.27	British medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	188
9.28	British participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	189
9.29	British medals at the Winter Paralympic Games by sport and gender	189
9.30	Andorran participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	190
9.31	Andorran participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	191
9.32	Top three medal-winning nations from the Oceania region at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games	191
9.33	New Zealand participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	193
9.34	New Zealand medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	193
9.35	New Zealand participation at the Winter Paralympic Games	194
9.36	New Zealand medals at the Winter Paralympic Games by sport and gender	194
9.37	Papua New Guinean participation at the Summer Paralympic Games	196
9.38	Papua New Guinean medals at the Summer Paralympic Games by sport and gender	196
10.1	The development of the Summer and Winter Special Olympics Games	200
10.2	Overview of intellectually disabled competitors and events at the London 2012 Paralympic Games	208
10.3	Breakdown of intellectually disabled competitors by sport and gender at the London 2012 Paralympic Games	208

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# Acronyms

AHSN	Athletes with High Support Needs
APC	Australian Paralympic Committee
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BLESMA	British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association
BOCOG	Beijing Organising Committee of the Olympic Games
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
CP-ISRA	Cerebral Palsied International Sports and Recreation Association
CISS	Comité International des Sports des Sourds
DQS	Delegation Quota System
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FEI	Fédération Equestre Internationale
FINA	Fédération Internationale de Natation
FISA	Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron
FITA	Fédération Internationale Tir à l'Arc
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federations
IBD	International Bowls for the Disabled
IBSA	International Blind Sports Association
ICC	International Co-ordinating Committee
IFDS	International Federation for Disabled Sailing
INAS-FID	International Sports Federation for People with an Intellectual Disability
INAS-FMH	International Association of Sports for Persons with a Mental Handicap
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IOSD	International Organisations for Sport for the Disabled
IPC	International Paralympic Committee
IPSF	International Paralympic Sports Federation
ISMGF	International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation
ISMWSF	International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation
ISOD	International Sports Organisation for the Disabled
IWAS	International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation
NOC	National Olympic Committee
NOSD	National Organisation for Sport for the Disabled

xii *Acronyms*

NPC	National Paralympic Committee
NWAA	National Wheelchair Athletic Association
OCOG	Organising Committee of the Olympic Games
PPP	Paralympic Preparation Program
TUE	Therapeutic Use Exemption
UCI	Union Cycliste Internationale
UKSA	UK Sports Association for People with Learning Difficulties
USOC	United States Olympic Committee
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency
WCF	World Curling Federation
WOVD	World Organisation Volleyball for the Disabled

# Introduction

Paralympic and disability sport is a seriously under researched area with a dearth of academic material, although it has to be noted that things have slowly improved since the first edition of this book came out in 2009. Disability issues impact upon all areas of life. As such, any piece of research that has been carried out in the area of non-disabled sport can also be applied to Paralympic and disability sport, with numerous extra issues to add in to the analytical mix that make the outcomes interesting, informative and useful. There is already an emerging area of research entitled Olympic studies; however, this still leaves a gaping hole in the research agenda. Despite the fact that there is now a strong working link between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) most Olympic studies courses and researchers still pay scant attention to the Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games are the jewel in the crown of the Paralympic Movement just as the Olympic Games are for the Olympic Movement and are a relatively untouched area for any researcher wishing to instigate a completely new area for study.

This lack of perceived interest in Paralympic and disability sport is, for disabled people, simply a further affirmation of their exclusion from the rest of society based upon non-disabled perceptions of their abilities, which for the most part are unfounded. The aim of this and the first edition of the book, therefore, is to provide information and data regarding the Paralympic Games that will hopefully provoke interest and further research in this fascinating area of sport. This edition of the book has attempted to not only update the original edition in terms of data from the most recent Games, but also to try and add new information, some of which attempt to respond to criticisms of the first edition in various reviews.

The Paralympic Games are a modern day sporting phenomenon that have grown from a small archery demonstration event sixty-eight years ago to become the second largest multi-sport festival on the planet after the Olympic Games. Despite this, there are still many misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding both the Paralympic Games and disability sport in general. Part of the reason for these misunderstandings and misconceptions is the aforementioned dearth of academic research and introductory texts

## 2 Introduction

regarding these Games and the issues that surround them. Given this fact the main purpose of this book is to clear up many of these misunderstandings by providing a clear and accessible text that clearly explains how the Paralympic Games have developed and the kinds of issues both their organisers and the athletes that compete in them have had to overcome to reach the stage they are at today.

### The structure of the book

The first two chapters trace the development of the Paralympic Games from their inception as an archery demonstration event at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, UK to the second largest multi-sport festival on the planet after the Olympic Games. They highlight the visionary nature of the Games founder, Sir Ludwig Guttmann, and the methods he used to gain acceptance of, and media coverage for, the early Stoke Mandeville Games. Guttmann constantly drew parallels between the Stoke Mandeville Games and the



*Figure 0.1* Archery, the very first competitive sport for athletes with disabilities

Olympics and so the development and outcomes of the relationship between the two movements and the impact this has had on the Paralympic Games in recent times are outlined. This is followed in [Chapter 3](#) by a discussion of the development of the modern day organisational structure for international disability sport and the Paralympic Games with a description of who the main organisations are and what their roles are within the Paralympic Movement.

The aim of the chapter on disability and the body is to introduce the reader to the three models of disability (medical, social and bio-social) that exist to try and explain many of the problems that disabled people face in their day-to-day lives. This will, hopefully, give the reader a better understanding of many of the issues that arise in the following chapters. The chapter will explain how the social model was developed by disability activists to help fight the dominant medicalised understanding of disability and how the medical view of disability impacts upon people's perceptions of disability and disability sport. I have also added a new section on disability, oppression and types of 'violence' used against people with disabilities to highlight the many, often subtle, ways people with disabilities are oppressed within society. It concludes by outlining the importance of language in this understanding and how the socially constructed and value-laden meanings attached to words such as 'disabled' and 'athlete' mean that when the words are put together to form 'disabled athlete' for many people there is an immediate and fundamental contradiction. This then immediately colours people's perceptions of the validity of sport for the disabled as 'real' sport.

[Chapter 5](#) explores how societal attitudes to disability and disability sport can impact upon the opportunities for people with disabilities to become involved in sport and progress to the highest levels. The perceptions of disability embedded in the medical model discourse play a major part in structuring the perceptions that people hold and the ways in which they interact in relation to people with disabilities. As a result disability often becomes the dominant feature of their social identity as perceived by those around them. As a consequence of these views, and experiences of social interaction, disability, for people with disabilities, can also become the dominant feature of their own self-perception and self-image. Therefore, because disability is seen as a negative, and connected to incapability, all of the above mentioned factors may combine to inhibit involvement in sporting activities. This chapter will highlight many of the issues, both psychological and tangible, that can flow from this and act as barriers to disabled people becoming involved in and reaching the very highest levels of their chosen sport. I conclude this chapter with a new section on the Paralympic Games and the subject of legacy, which has grown in importance immensely over the last decade.

With the growth in importance of and participation in the Paralympic Games there has been a steady increase in media coverage. However, such coverage can vary greatly from country to country and the nature of the coverage can often serve to reinforce negative stereotypes of disability and



#### 4 *Introduction*

disability sport. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) launched an internet-based television station in 2006 in order to try and overcome some of these issues and provide access in countries with no television coverage. In addition, media coverage can also impact upon the ability of the International Paralympic Committee to effectively and successfully market the Paralympic Games and Paralympic athletes. These issues will be discussed and explored further in [Chapter 6](#).

[Chapter 7](#) explores some of the key issues with the modern day Paralympic Movement. From its inception in the late 1940s the founder of the international Paralympic Movement, Ludwig Guttman, described the aims of his use of sport in the rehabilitation process of the spinally injured to be social re-integration and to change the perceptions of the non-disabled within society regarding what people with disabilities are capable of. This continued to be the underlying message of the International Paralympic Committee regarding the Paralympic Games and international disability sport for many years. These kind of aims and the language associated with it (e.g. social integration, changing perceptions, etc.) possibly led to the Paralympic Games being perceived primarily as a cultural games centred on rehabilitation and inclusion rather than one that is about sport. Cultural games have as their aim an ethos of fostering self-respect and belief amongst their participants as well as helping to solidify their social identity as a group. However, the last ten to fifteen year have seen a distinct shift in the language used and the aims set out by the International Paralympic Committee towards a purely sport based outlook. Some of the reasons and implications of this move will be discussed.

Given the varying nature and impact of physical impairments and the number of different impairment groupings that participate in the Paralympic Games a system of classification has been developed over time to try and ensure fair and equitable competition. However, this often causes confusion for spectators unfamiliar with disability sport and has been accused of devaluing disability sport due to the increased number of medals this can lead to. The reasons for this will be explored and explained, although in truth the subject of classification is worthy of a book in itself. Given space restrictions this book can do little more than introduce the basic concepts and point any interested parties in the direction of more detailed information sources.

Much has been written about the illegal use of drugs for performance enhancement purposes within non-disabled sport. Drugs cheats also occur in disability sport. However, the problem is made far more difficult in disability sport by the fact that some athletes actually need to take drugs on a regular basis for health reasons. How this is handled within disability sport will be discussed and explained.

[Chapter 7](#) will end with a discussion of a relatively new phenomenon that has nonetheless received a great deal of media attention since Beijing 2008. With the massive improvements in performance standards currently occurring in disability sport some athletes, notably Oscar Pistorius of South Africa, have

reached a standard that might allow them to qualify for the Olympic Games. However, the technology they use in terms of adapted equipment in order to enable them to compete has raised questions regarding advantages such equipment might give them over their non-disabled counterparts. This has led to the coining of such terms as ‘technological doping’ or ‘cyborg athlete’.

Chapter 8 is perhaps the most changed from the first edition. Women and athletes with high support needs are still a focus of the chapter, but I have widened the approach of the chapter to look at diversity more generally to include the impacts of which continent athletes come from and whether a nation’s ranking in the inequality adjusted human development index have a bearing upon likely participation at a summer or winter Paralympic Games, as well as the potential for medal success. Some of the issues that arise out of the debate around the cultural versus sports model debate and the impacts they have had upon the participation rates for both women and athletes with high support needs are also described and explored further.

Given the international nature of the Paralympic Games, Chapter 9 attempts to highlight the impacts of many of the issues raised in this book on a variety of nations. It does this through a series of ‘snapshots’ that describe how these issues may have impacted upon the participation and success of a particular nation at the Paralympic Games. These issues may be geographical, topographical, economic, political or cultural and may be specific to a particular country or may be relevant to other countries regionally or globally. In order to try and highlight the impact of these issues further upon the participation and medal success of the nations highlighted in the ‘snapshots’ I have also included a full historical record of each nation at both the summer and winter Paralympic Games.

The final chapter will look at an issue that has long been a cause of confusion for many people with little or no knowledge of disability sport. Many of these individuals believe that the Special Olympics and the Paralympic Games are one and the same event. This chapter will explain the difference between the two. It will then go on to discuss the participation of athletes with an intellectual disability in the Paralympic Games including why they were banned from participation following the scandal that occurred with the Spanish Intellectually Disabled Basketball team at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games and the huge ramifications this had for the Paralympic Movement as a whole prior to their readmission to the Paralympic Games at London 2012.

### **The approach of *The Paralympic Games Explained***

Disability sport in general and the Paralympic Games in particular, have grown hugely both in terms of size and political and media attention over the last twenty years. Despite this there is still a dearth of academic research or teaching regarding the subject. The aim of *The Paralympic Games Explained* is, therefore, first and foremost to provide an introductory resource that

## 6 Introduction

outlines the history, development and issues for the Paralympic Movement. *The Paralympic Games Explained* attempts to highlight the complex interactions that occur between disability, sport, the body and non-disabled society, how these interactions impact upon potential Paralympic athletes and how the Paralympic Movement and its constituent members attempt to deal with or mediate these impacts.

Each chapter contains study activities and chapter review questions in order to try and make the reader think more deeply about the issues raised. A large amount of factual information in the form of tables and graphs have been included, in addition to comparative information from the Olympic Movement where appropriate, in the hope that this might act as the starting point for further research of specific topics by the reader.

The ten chapters that make up *The Paralympic Games Explained* can all be studied in isolation, providing an introductory resource for each of the topics covered. However, given the complexity of many of the issues raised, and in order to facilitate a better overall understanding, there are a number of cross-references between the chapters.

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