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## Relationships between international sport federations and international disability sport

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**Relationships Between  
International Sport Federations  
and  
International Disability Sport**

## **Introduction**

Sport opportunities for people with disabilities worldwide have traditionally been organized by disability rather than sport. International governing bodies for sport for people with disabilities include organizations such as the International Committee for Deaflympics (CISS) for the deaf, Special Olympics International for persons with intellectual disabilities and the International Paralympic Committee traditionally for persons with physical disabilities and since 1992 also for persons with intellectual disabilities.

The histories of CISS, SOI and IPC are unique and in many respects more dissimilar than similar. What they do have in common is the reason for their creation: to offer opportunities in a segregated setting that were not being met by the able bodied sport system.

## **Organizational Histories**

Paralympic sport began in the 1950s with a desire to re-integrate persons with disabilities into mainstream society and for over fifty years this issue has held a significant place within disability sport's growth and development. Sir Ludwig Guttmann included sport and recreation into his rehabilitation programs at the Stoke Mandeville Rehabilitation hospital precisely to encourage the inclusion of war veterans into mainstream society and it was the games that he held that became the genesis for the Paralympic Games. The International Olympic Committee has signed two agreements with IPC confirming IOC financial and organizational support for the IPC and securing and protecting the organization of the Paralympic Games (Hums, Wolff & Legg, 2003).

Special Olympics began in 1968 when Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the First International Special Olympics Games in Chicago. The concept was born in the early 1960s when Shriver started a day camp for people with mental retardation. She saw that individuals with mental retardation were far more capable in sports and physical activities than many experts thought (<http://www.2003specialolympics.com/en/default1.asp>). The IOC has recognized Special Olympics International since 1992 and provides financial support for the Swiss Special Olympics National Games (Hums, Wolff & Legg, 2003).

In the years prior to 1924, international sports for the deaf were given little importance. Indeed there were very few national federations to provide sporting competitions for them. In response to this need a deaf Frenchman, worked very hard to encourage six official national federations, then in existence, to accept the idea and to take part in the International Silent Games, a deaf version of the Olympic Games (<http://www.ciss.org/history/fullversion.html>). The IOC has recognized the International Committee for Deaflympics since 2001 and provides financial support for the Deaflympics Games (Hums, Wolff & Legg, 2003).

## **Inclusion**

A second commonality among CISS, IPC and SOI is that inclusion of their athletes into other sport arenas is a topic for discussion. A comprehensive and comparative review of what has taken place regarding the inclusion of athletes from these three organizations within the able-bodied sport system is the best of our knowledge not available. It is the purpose of this paper therefore to review current relationships and agreements between International Sport Federations and the IPC, CISS and SOI and to begin understanding what next steps may be taken to ensure that athletes with disabilities are afforded appropriate and equitable sporting opportunities. As well this assessment may lead to greater understanding of the similarities and differences between and among CISS, SOI and IPC as it relates to inclusion and thus begin to provide a road map for future

collaboration. Finally this paper will build upon the research conducted by Hums, Wolff and Legg (2003) that examined opportunities for athletes with a disability within the International Olympic Committee.

To achieve these aims, a survey with four questions was sent to 41 International Sport Federations (IF). The four questions were (1) please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnerships and or agreements between the IF and the International Paralympic Committee; (2) please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and Special Olympics International; (3) please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and the International Committee for Deaflympics and (4) please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and other international disability sport organizations. From the 41 organizations approached 25 responded to our queries.

## **Results**

**a.** Please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnerships and or agreements between the IF and the International Paralympic Committee.

Ten of the twenty-five respondents noted official partnerships and agreements with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). The most common types of relationships were sport or disability specific committees within the IPC or within the International Federation organizational structures, and the official sharing of resources such as rules and training camps. In only a few cases was funding shared between organizations.

**b.** Please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and Special Olympics International.

Five of the twenty-five organizations noted that they or their national / regional affiliates had official partnerships and / or agreements with Special Olympics International. One organization noted that they were very much interested in developing a relationship but that SOI had not reciprocated. Examples of agreements included sharing of rules and regulations and lending materials.

**c.** Please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and the International Committee for Deaflympics.

Only one of the twenty-five organizations noted an official relationship, which included an ex officio member on the International Federation Council and financial support.

**d.** Please list and briefly outline up to five major points describing the official partnership and or agreement between the IF and other international disability sport organizations.

One organization noted the creation of a council within its organizational structure to deal with all issues related to persons with disabilities. Several organizations also used this question to note that while no official agreements were in place, working relationships had resulted in several inclusive events.

## **Discussion and Next Steps**

Relationships and agreements based on the results from this survey are more pervasive among IFs and IPC. SOI has the second most number of agreements while CISS has only one. From a number of comments it would also appear that the International Federations are interested in developing relationships with disability sport organizations and are waiting for them to reciprocate. It has not been determined whether the IPC, CISS and or SOI are even interested in further developing these types of relationships and this is the next logical step in our research. If IPC, CISS and SOI are amenable they, along with able-bodied international sport federations, should begin to develop relationships leading towards inclusive efforts. We recognize however that these perspectives may not be universally agreed upon or applicable to CISS, SOI and IPC. For that reason we recommend the creation of a Commission chartered by the International Olympic Committee specifically tasked with this role and with the following mandate:

1. Identifying an agenda for inclusive endeavors.
2. Tracking inclusive relationships at the national, regional, sport specific and international levels.
3. Designing criteria for inclusion.
4. Designing models of inclusion.
5. Designing strategies for inclusion.
6. Setting standards and a framework related to inclusion.

Eventually the relationships between the IFs and CISS, SOI and IPC could be discussed based on an inclusive continuum where at one end are organizations that pay lip service to inclusion while at the other is accepted diversity (Fay, 1999). In between is tokenism, achieving a critical mass regarding inclusion, and tolerating diversity. Assessing where an organization fits on the scale would depend on actions within several areas. These include governance, media and information distribution, management, funding and sponsorship, awareness and education, events and programs, awards and recognition, philosophy and advocacy (Fay, Hums & Wolff, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

We believe that it is timely for the sporting world to examine and address the inclusion of athletes with disabilities. Gandhi observed that no culture would survive and thrive if it chose to be exclusive. Within sport we would never accept segregation by ethnicity or gender. Why then do we accept it based on disability?

## **Appendix**

### **A. Contact Information**

International Committee for Deaflympics ([www.ciss.org](http://www.ciss.org))

International Paralympic Committee ([www.paralympic.org](http://www.paralympic.org))

Special Olympics International ([www. specialolympics.com](http://www.specialolympics.com))

### **B. List of Respondents**

Fédération Equestre Internationale

Fédération Internationale de Basketball

Fédération Internationale de Natation

Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique

Fédération Internationale de Volleyball

Fédération Internationale de Football Association

Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron

International Association of Athletics Federation

International Biathlon Union

International Bowling Federation

International Curling Union

International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles

International Handball Federation

International Hockey (Field) Federation

International Ice Hockey Federation

International Sailing Federation

International Shooting Sport Federation

International Skating Union

International Ski Federation

International Tennis Federation

International Water-ski Federation

World Curling Federation

World Squash Federation

World Karate Federation

## References

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