

Paralympic Committee of India

Brief History of Paralympics

1. The word “Para” and “Paralympics”:

The original Greek word “Para” has divergent meanings, such as: beside or alongside; parallel; near; altered or modified etc. For the purpose of Sports here it is used as “alongside and parallel”. The word “Paralympic” is the combination of two words “Para” and “Olympic”. Its means that Paralympics are the parallel Games to the Olympics and illustrates how the two movements exist side-by-side.

2. The Concept of Para Sports:

No longer are the people with disabilities left on hillside to perish like the days of Sparta, nor do they spend their lives in beds, hospitals, or sanatoria like the era right until World War-II. A great deal has changed not only in rehabilitation science but also the social climate has improved. New frontiers in realizing optimal health, wellness, and fitness are being accomplished through research, public policy (Disability Act, 2016), advocacy, technological advances, and training and programme development. There have been changes in attitude, system, facilities, educational programmes, and school curriculum for the people with disabilities. The Governments and Non-Government organizations world over are making endless efforts in this direction. The so called “disabled people” are rather considered “differently-abled persons”. The hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Mr. Modi has given a new word “Divyang”, to coin a new meaning for it, which means “the one with a Divine Body”. In fact, it is the society, which handicaps them by depriving them from the opportunities that they require to lead their lives actively. They do not want any pity but need encouragement in their efforts to overcome the handicaps. The society should see what these people are left with and not what they have lost.

The most obvious impact of disability is the limitation one’s ability to engage in physical activity. It leads to de-conditioning and reduced capacities for daily living requirements. It ultimately results into further deterioration of activities, which is termed as “disabilitative cycle”. Bringing the disabled persons into mainstream of life requires offering them all possible opportunities, especially adapted sports, to improve their physical, mental, social and emotional capacities. In this regard Para Swimming especially permits them, irrespective of the handicap, to move quite freely without calipers, sticks, crutches, or wheelchairs. As a measure of early intervention, Aqua Therapy is a very valuable therapy which leads to immeasurable benefits.

3. Historical Review of Paralympic Games and Growth of Paralympic Family:

The Paralympic Games are the major international multi-sport event for athletes with disabilities comprising both Summer and Winter Sports. They have evolved from physical rehabilitation activity into recreational sport and then into competitive sport.

A trace of sport for athletes with an impairment can be found in last two decades of 19th Century with a sport clubs for the deaf in 1888 in Berlin. However, they were recordably introduced only after World War II and had a humble beginning when the British Government requested one Dr. Ludwig Guttmann to open a spinal injuries center at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England to assist and rehabilitate the large number of war veterans and civilians who were injured during wartime. Dr.

Ludwig Guttmann, now known as the “Father of Sports for People with Disabilities”, was a strong advocate of using sports therapy to enhance the quality of life for people who were injured or wounded during World War II. In 1945, he started some modified small area games and relays for wheelchair bound and amputee people. After working for 3 years, on 29 July 1948, to coincide with the Opening Ceremony of the London 1948 Olympic Games, Dr. Guttmann organized the first competition for wheelchair athletes which he named the Stoke Mandeville Games, a milestone in Paralympic history. They involved 16 injured servicemen and women who took part in Archery. In 1952, Dutch ex-servicemen joined the Movement and the International Stoke Mandeville Games were founded. Initially, only wheelchair athletes were invited to compete.

This led to the precursor of the modern Paralympic Games. In its beginnings, the Paralympic Movement developed through the establishment of different disability-specific sports organisations, today known as the International Organisations of Sport for the Disabled (IOSDs). In 1960, the first of these organisations, the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee (ISMGC), was constituted in Rome.

Dr. Guttmann’s dream was of a worldwide sports competition for people with disabilities to be held every four years as “the equivalent to the Olympic Games”. Twelve years later, his dream became a reality when the 9th Annual International Stoke Mandeville Games took place in Rome, Italy, a few weeks after the 1960 Olympic Games. Due to this symbolic gesture and the participation of more than 400 athletes from 23 countries for 8 Sports, these Games are honoured as the first Paralympic Games. Since then, the Paralympic Games have been held in the same years as the Olympic Games.

In 1964, International Sport Organisation for the Disabled (ISOD) was formed which offered opportunities for those athletes who could not affiliate to the International Stoke Mandeville Games, i.e. those with vision impairment, amputees, persons with cerebral palsy and paraplegics. At the start, 16 countries were affiliated to ISOD. It pushed very hard to include blind and amputee athletes into the Toronto 1976 Paralympics and later the athletes with cerebral palsy in 1980 in Arnhem. Its aim was to embrace all impairments in the future and to act as a Co-coordinating Committee. Nevertheless, other disability-orientated international organisations, such as, the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA), International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) and the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS) were founded in 1978, 1980/81 and 1986 respectively.

In 1972 the ISMGC was renamed to International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation (ISMGF) and later became the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation (ISMWSF).

The four international organisations experienced the need of co-ordinating the Games so they created the "International Co-coordinating Committee Sports for the Disabled in the World" (ICC) in 1982.

The ICC was originally composed of the four Presidents of CPISRA, IBSA, ISMGF and ISOD, the General Secretaries and one additional member (in the beginning it was the Vice-President, and later on the Technical Officer).

The International Committee of Sport for the Deaf (CISS) and International Sports Federations for Persons with an Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID) joined in 1986, but the deaf still maintained their own organisation. However, the member nations demanded more national and regional representation in the organisation.

Finally, on 22 September 1989, the International Paralympic Committee was founded as an international organisation in Dusseldorf, Germany, to act as the global governing body of the Paralympic Movement.

In 2004, ISMWSF and ISOD joined forces and later took the name International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS).

With this humble beginning, today, the Paralympic Games have become one of the prime events on the international sports calendar. In today's Paralympic Summer Games, some 5000 athletes from 160 nations participate with rapidly growing spectator appeal. The Rio Summer Paralympic Games had 22 Sports with 526 medal events and nearly 1,20,000 tickets were sold and more than 300 million people watched on television.

Apart from Summer Paralympics, Winter Paralympic Games are also held since 1976. Sweden hosted the first Winter Paralympic Games which included 12 countries. Now a days there are 5 Winter sports having about 72 events.

In 1972, the four-year cycle was modified so that the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games coincide with the Olympic Games. Later, due to an agreement between the IPC and IOC, since Seoul 1988 Summer Olympics and the Winter Games in Albertville, France in 1992, the Paralympic Games are also conducted in the same cities and venues two weeks after the Olympic Games.

In 2018, the partnership agreement was renewed through to 2032, and was signed by IOC President Thomas Bach and IPC President Andrew Parsons at the Pyeong Chang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games. The IPC President is an IOC member and the IPC is represented on several IOC Commissions.

Sir Ludwig Guttmann died in 1980, but his vision of sport for athletes with disabilities continues today. Clearly the value of sport in the lives of athletes with disabilities extends far beyond its rehabilitative benefits.

4. International Paralympic Committee (IPC):

IPC is a non-profit athlete-centered sport organization for athletes with disabilities. It is composed of an elected Governing Board, a Management Team and various Standing Committees and Councils. Its **Vision** is “to make an inclusive world through Para Sport” and **Mission** is to “lead the Paralympic Movement, oversee the delivery of the Paralympic Games and support members to enable Para Athletes to achieve sporting excellence”. The membership of the IPC is made up of representatives from 200 plus members, and since 1999 its headquarter is situated in Bonn, Germany. The IPC acts as the International Federation for 10 Para Sports and follows International Rules of concerned sport with only a few modifications.

IPC membership draws together National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), International Federations (IFs), Regional Organisations and International Organisations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSDs). The commitment and obligations of these members forms part of the IPC Handbook, the Paralympic Movement's ultimate reference document and framework.

5. Paralympic Committee of India (PCI):

In India “Physically Handicapped Sports Federation of India” was the first organization which was formed in 1992 by Mr. M. Mahadeva, an Arjuna Awardee and Paralympian, and later in 1994 registered it with the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bangalore, Karnataka as its founding

General Secretary. Later the name was changed to Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) which is now the Governing Body of Paralympic Sports in India. It is recognized by both, IPC and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Govt. of India. PCI develops and promotes Paralympic Sports with the help of National Sport Federations and State Paralympic Associations affiliated to it. The Head Office of PCI is located in Delhi while the Registered Office is in Bangalore.

Though the controlling body in India was formed in 1992, but individual Indian Para Athletes have been taking part in International Events at their own much before it. India made its Summer Paralympics debut at the Paralympic Games held at Tel Aviv, Israel in 1968.

In 1972 Summer Paralympics, held at Heidelberg, West German from August 2 to 11, Mr. Murlikant Petkar swam the 50m Free Style in a world record time of 37.331 seconds to give India her first ever Gold. India finished 24th out of the 42 participating nations.

In 1984 at New York Paralympics, Joginder Singh Bedi won Silver Medal in Men's Shot Put and followed it up with a pair of Bronze winning performances in the Discus and Javelin throws. Another Indian, Bhimrao Kesarkar, won the Silver Medal in the Javelin. India finished 37th out of the 54 participating nations.

In 2004 Summer Paralympics held at Athens, Devendra Jhajharia, won Gold Medal in Javelin Throw Rajinder Singh won Bronze Medal in Powerlifting in the 56kg category. India finished 53rd out of 136 nations.

In 2012, Mr. H. N. Girisha won the Silver Medal in men's High Jump at the Paralympic Games held in London.

In 2016 at Rio Paralympics, India sent its largest ever delegation consisting 19 competitors in 5 sports. At these games India won 2 Gold Medals, 1 Silver and 1 Bronze Medal, total 4. Devendra Jhajharia bettered his own previous World Record of 62.15m with a performance of 63.37m to win the Gold Medal. Mariyappan Thangavelu won Gold Medal in High Jump with a performance of 1.89m. Deepa Malik became India's first woman and the oldest athlete ever to win a medal at the Paralympics in the women's Shot Put with a performance of 4.61m. Varun Singh Bhati jumped a personal best of 1.86m to clinch Bronze Medal in the Men's High Jump. India finished 43rd out of the 83 nations.

The Indian Para Athletes and its Coaches have over the years accumulated several credentials and have received numerous noteworthy awards from the Govt. of India, besides innumerable awards from various State Governments including 2 Rajeev Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, 05 Padmashri Awards, 28 Arjuna Awards, 04 Dronacharya Awards and 02 Dhyanchand Awards.