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SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS ASSOCIATION FOR PARAPLEGICS AND OTHER PHYSICALLY DISABLED*

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Sport vir gestremdes staan onder beheer van die Suid-Afrikaanse Sport Assosiasie vir Parapleeg en Ander Liggaamlik gestremdes. Sport soorte ingesteld word genoem, die geskiedenis van sport vir gestremdes word kortlik geskets en die prestasies van Suid-Afrikaanse sportlui op die gebied word bespreek. Kompetisie met normale sportlui vind nou ook plaas.

The advantage of sport lies in its recreational value which is a motivating force in the enjoyment of life. Recreation helps in achieving the psychological equilibrium so necessary to the disabled person in coming to terms with his physical defect. Possibly the most important aim of sport for the disabled person is to help him regain contact with the world around him. By restoring activity of mind and body, by instilling self-respect and comradeship, sport develops mental attitudes that are essential for successful social reintegration and, in particular, for useful employment.

Sport for the disabled in South Africa is governed by the National Council of the South African Sports Association for Paraplegics and Other Physically Disabled. Every Province has representation on the National Council and every Province has its own governing Regional Council. The various sports clubs have their own management committees. All those who serve on this organisation, whether in an administrative or sporting capacity, do so on a purely voluntary basis.

Competitors from the Southern Transvaal, Western Transvaal, Northern Transvaal, Orange Free State, Griqualand West, Eastern Province, Natal, Western Province, South West Africa, Rhodesia, Transkei and Ciskei take part in the annual National Championships, where they compete in the following sports: archery, field events (discus, shot-put, javelin, precision javelin, club-throwing), swimming, weight-lifting, table-tennis, basketball, notebook bowls, racing (100m, 400m, 800m and 1 500m) and wheelchair slalom. The next Championships will be held in Cape Town during the last week of March this year. In January 1977 the National Association of Blind Bowlers was accepted as an affiliated member.

In 1965 the Association registered its emblem with the Bureau of Heraldry. It depicts a springbok leaping through the wheel of a wheelchair and the badge is awarded to anyone selected to represent South Africa at an international meeting.

The father of the world-wide movement of sport for the paralysed and other disabled is Professor Sir Ludwig Guttmann, who in 1948 in England organised the first international games for paraplegics. His dynamic influence has spread world-wide and today 58 countries are affiliated to the famous brotherhood of sport whose motto is "friendship, unity and sportsmanship". Since the Stoke Mandeville Games for the Paralysed became an international sports movement in 1948, the first Springbok paraplegic team competed in 1962. It had only three competitors, two of whom returned with gold medals. This was a wonderful start and South Africa had made its mark internationally.

In addition to the Stoke Mandeville Games, International Games are held every fourth year, if possible in the host country of the Olympic Games. The first of these were held in 1960 in Rome, immediately after the Olympic Games. The competitors and escorts were housed in the Olympic village and the Games were held in the months of October and November. The second Olympiad took place in Tokyo in 1964, under similar conditions. In the five days of the Games there were over 100 000 spectators and the Tokyo Games had far-reaching effects from the point of view of social re-integration as the Japanese Government, having realised what the paralysed in their wheelchairs could do in the field of sport, set up the first factory staffed by severely disabled persons. There are now five such factories, called Sun Industries. When Mexico was unable to host the Games for the Paralysed in addition to the Olympics in 1968, it was unanimously agreed to hold the Games in Israel and when, in 1972, Munich was unable to host the Games because of inadequate facilities for wheelchairs it was the City and University of Heidelberg which became hosts to 1 000 paraplegic sportsmen and women from 45 countries. It was from these 1972 games that the small contingent of 22 Springboks returned with 18 gold, 16 silver and 14 bronze medals, as well as 11 new world records. South Africa achieved 5th place overall, amongst countries many of whom had the maximum number of competitors permitted that year (80).

In 1972, South African paraplegic sportsmen and women were the holders of no fewer than 16 world records. Many of these no longer stand, partly due to the implementation of a new system of classification of disability, partly due to the incredible achievements of disabled sportsmen in recent years. The standard at the 1976 Olympiad in Toronto was exceptionally high. Mark van der Riet, who had held the world record in the 50m freestyle event since 1972, broke that record by 0.53 sec but was only placed third in the event. Elberto Engelbrecht shot 22 points above the existing world record for the short metric round in archery but was only placed 6th. Two North American performances, in particular, were outstanding: those of American David Kiley who covered the 1 500m wheelchair race in 5 min. 15 sec. and of Canadian Arnold Bolt, a single high leg amputee, who set new world records for the high jump and long jump of 1.86m and 2.96m respectively! In a Games sadly plagued by political interference, the U.S.A. was eventually placed first, its 97 competitors having achieved a total of 155 medals. South Africa's multi-racial team of only 38 competitors did well to win 28 medals, its final position being 15th of the 38 countries who had remained to compete in the Games.

After the Canadian Games the National Council took a critical look at the set-up in South Africa and on the sports ground of Stoke Mandeville Hospital. They are held at the end of July each year in order to commemorate the holding of the first international games in 1948. The first Springbok paraplegic team competed in 1962. It had only three competitors, two of whom returned with gold medals. This was a wonderful start and South Africa had made its mark internationally.

* This article has been shortened and edited.
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The purpose of classification in sport for the disabled is to endeavour to provide fair competition according to the degree of disability. Sport for the disabled is expanding rapidly and now includes sport for the blind, for amputees and for the cerebral palsied as well as the original paraplegic sport — which is wheelchair sport for paraplegics, tetraplegics, spina bifidas and comparable poliomyelitis victims.

Classification for the blind and for amputees is fairly straightforward and is done according to set rules. On the other hand, classification for the cerebral palsied is very complex and as yet no satisfactory system of grouping the various disabilities is available, but the international committee is at present formulating a new classification which will be used at the International Games in 1979.

Classification of wheelchair athletes for paraplegic sport has been done for over thirty years and the system has gradually been changed, enlarged and improved, narrowing down the differences of disability within each class and introducing new classes where necessary. In 1963, when paraplegic sport was introduced in South Africa, the classification system was rather broad and each class comprised rather differing lesions and disabilities, so that the more severely handicapped athletes were at a considerable disadvantage. Unfortunately, each time the system of classification was revised or modified the previous set of world records was no longer valid as the old classes ceased to exist. This proved rather demoralising to the sportsmen and -women who had trained so hard to attain these records. A new system of classification was evolved in 1970 and was finally amended and revised in 1972. This form of classification was accepted by the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee in July 1974 and appears to give each athlete the most fair chance of competing on equal terms. Many athletes still complain of varying abilities within the same class but it must be remembered that all individuals, handicapped or not, are born with differences in character and temperament as well as differences in physical ability and it is not reasonable to expect a classification system or the medical examiner responsible for the classification to provide complete equality of ability.

For the purpose of international classification, in order to be accepted as a medical examiner a doctor must complete two full working sessions at the International Stoke Mandeville Games within a four-year period and must be approved by the medical subcommittee. New doctors classify athletes under the supervision of committee members. In South Africa we have a classification committee comprising five doctors, one physiotherapist and one occupational therapist. The members of the committee work in pairs to classify disabled athletes, while doubtful or borderline cases are discussed by the full committee. This committee will probably be enlarged in the future to ensure that all athletes can be classified prior to the annual South African Games so that they know in advance in which class they will be competing.

The revised classification system is based upon a neurological examination in which the strength of the residual musculature of the competitor is determined. The official statement on classification reads as follows:

Class 1A — upper cervical lesions with triceps power (grades 4 - 5), wrist extensors and