Deaflympics and the Paralympics: eradicating misconceptions

Donalda Ammons[a] and Jordan Eickman[b]

[a]*International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (former President) and Gallaudet University (Professor Emerita), Washington D.C, USA;* [b]*California State University, Northridge, California, USA*

This article adds to the limited literature about the world of Deaf sport. It argues that deafness is not viewed within the Deaf community as a disability, and highlights the importance of Deaf culture and the shared meaning of being Deaf. The article then goes on to look at the debates around the Deaflympics, and the important role that this independent competition can play for Deaf athletes. The article addresses the problems that arise when it is argued that Deaf athletes, and thus the Deaflympics and national Deaf sport organizations, should be assimilated into the Paralympic Games under the umbrella of disability sport. This position has severely affected many national Deaf sports organizations and their ability to develop and fund their Deaflympics athletes. The history of the relationships between the Deaflympics and the Paralympics, and the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf and the International Paralympic Committee are also discussed.

Being Deaf, Deaf culture and the Deaflympics

The words Deaf and deaf have important and different meanings for the Deaf community, but the subtle distinction between the two is often not understood by society at large. 'Deaf' with a capital D is used to signify 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).[1] 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.

Deaf people see themselves as part of a linguistic and oppressed, cultural minority with its own culture, who often face prejudice, stigma and discrimination like other minority groups, even though deafness often appears to be invisible. Sport functions as an important social and psychological institution for identity and valorizations and that is why the independence of the Deaflympics is important for Deaf people in many different countries. Unlike in the so-called disability sports, the very specific cultural, community and identity issues at play here are a key component that motivates Deaf athletes' desire to maintain their own international sport events where their needs and aspirations can be met.

This article addresses the widely held position that Deaf athletes (and thus the Deaflympics and national Deaf sport organizations) should be assimilated into the Paralympic Games under the umbrella of disability sport. We argue that this demonstrates a profound misunderstanding as to what it means to be Deaf.[2] This misconception has severely affected many national Deaf sports organizations and their ability to develop and

fund their Deaflympics athletes. In order to understand how this situation arose, the history of the relationships between the Deaflympics and the Paralympic Games, and the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) must also be examined.[3]

Being deaf is not a disability: Deaf culture, sport and communication in signed languages

Deaf people have always found a way to find each other and share their commonality and, in particular, their need for visual communication through sign language. The first free school for deaf children was established in Paris in the 1760s.[4] Deaf people began congregating in more formal situations, primarily for social and cultural reasons. Most Deaf people were (and still are) born into hearing families. They have experienced difficulties with communication and especially the misunderstanding of how deafness affects the ability to participate in society. This, in turn, has led to negative stereotypical attitudes towards Deaf people. When the first Deaflympics occurred, 'society viewed deaf people as intellectually inferior and linguistically impoverished beings'.[5] In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the global battle for Deaf human rights, as it has become clear that Deaf people have reduced access to education, government services and what equates to equal citizenship, based on their deafness alone. A significant reason for this, it has been found, is the lack of recognition of sign language and the associated translation services that are needed to allow Deaf people access to large sections of society.[6] These problems can also be seen in the context of Deaf sport.

Jerald Jordan, CISS President [CISS was renamed as the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD)] from 1971 to 1995, argues that the central aspect for Deaf athletes is not sport, but that they are Deaf, and that being Deaf is the most important aspect of their identity: 'Deaf people do not consider themselves disabled, particularly in physical ability. Rather, we consider ourselves to be part of a cultural and linguistic minority'.[7]

He goes on to explain the importance of communication to Deaf people in the context of sports. The fact that Deaf people use sign language to communicate is a central aspect to their identity and Deaf culture. Mixing hearing and deaf people at sports events changes the event's very nature:

> *The Deaf athlete views the disabled athlete as being a hearing person first and disabled second* (italics added). When athletes congregate at the Paralympics, or when hearing and Deaf people congregate at any event, the hearing people, regardless of physical limitations, are able to communicate freely with each other as long as they have a common language. The Deaf athlete, however, is always excluded from the group. On the other hand, at the Deaf Games, or any other event at which Deaf people meet, Deaf athletes can usually communicate other Deaf athletes, regardless of which country they may be representing. In the Deaf Games, athletes are able to compete and interact with others freely and without sign language interpreters, except where hearing officials are involved. 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. It has been the oft-repeated experience of the Deaf community that our unique needs are lost when we are lumped into either category. 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.[8]

In other words, a Deaf person in a setting full of non-signing hearing people would not have the same access to communication, conversations and information, and the same opportunity to socialize, make friends and have cultural exchanges through direct communication (in the Deaf person's case, via a signed language) as a hearing person in the same setting would. Likewise, a non-signing hearing person in a setting full of signing Deaf people would lack the same opportunities.

For Deaf people, information must be presented visually and communication must take place using a visual language, in contrast to hearing people for whom information and communication usually take place through a spoken language modality. For many in the Deaf community this has become a human rights issue, arguing that Deaf people have the equal right to information and communication opportunities as hearing people do.

In the past, many deaf children were placed in residential schools for deaf children, which impacted on their sport experience as well, and the deaf school experience was particularly important for them. Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan explain:

> Sports are one of the powerful bonding forces in the DEAF-WORLD. The love of individual and team sports is nurtured in the residential schools and whetted by rivalry among schools. Sports rapidly become a vehicle of acculturation for the Deaf child, a shared experience, a source of Deaf pride, and an avenue for understanding customs and values in the DEAF-WORLD ... However, sports frequently play a particularly important role in the lives of minorities, for they open a path to achievement and distinction where many others are closed by prejudice. In the DEAF-WORLD, moreover, athletics provide a level playing field when it comes to language ... Some Deaf people attend athletic tournaments to play, of course, but they and many more are there for another reason: to be with other members of the DEAF-WORLD (frequently impossible during the work day) and to see old friends who have become separated after graduation or marriage or a move to a new job.[9]

American Sign Language (ASL) for Americans is a national language so Deaf people are able to meet and communicate as a language minority group at sport events. Lane et al. elaborate further:

> Athletics in Deaf culture also serve linguistic and political functions. ASL is a *truly national language*, in part because of the co-mingling of Deaf people in the residential schools, in the clubs and in regional and national athletics. And athletic programs provide an opportunity for Deaf managers, so often disempowered in the larger society, to further their leadership abilities, to show what they can do, and to broker a certain amount of power in the DEAF-WORLD ... The DEAF-WORLD sees itself as a language minority, not a disability group ... With athletics organized formally in Deaf schools and clubs and at local, regional, national and international levels, and given the role of athletics in social life, leadership training, and cultural bonding, Deaf sports are clearly a major institution in the DEAF-WORLD.[10]

It is important to understand that signed languages are different from spoken languages. For example, ASL is different from English, and not just 'English conveyed through signs' or 'a manual code for English'. Signed languages are not based on sounds. For example, 'ASL signs have five [parameters, or components] — handshape, movement, location, orientation and non-manual signals (facial expression)'.[11]

Sign language is not universal. Signed languages differ from each other and furthermore have dialects, 'complex rules of grammar', large vocabularies, and can be used for 'everyday conversation, intellectual discourse, rhetoric, wit and poetry'.[12] Also, it is possible that in different countries where the spoken and written language, for the layman's purposes, are virtually identical (i.e. English in the UK and the USA), the signed languages in each country are very different from each other (British Sign Language and ASL). Lane *et al.* explain when Deaf people from different countries congregate, 'a contact

language known as *International Sign*' is used, 'allowing speakers of mutually unintelligible signed languages to communicate'.[13]

Deaf sports history

Organized Deaf sport began in the late nineteenth century. Through the emergence of Deaf societies, church groups, reading clubs and so forth, Deaf sport clubs sprouted. The Ohio School for the Deaf had baseball and rugby teams circa 1870. The earliest known and established adult Deaf sport club is the Glasgow Deaf and Dumb Football Club (Scotland), set up by 1872. The six earliest adult Deaf sport clubs were found in Britain. Thus they developed pretty much in parallel to sports clubs for the hearing. By 1915, other clubs had appeared, mostly in Western Europe and Australia. In Europe, due to geographical proximity, local sporting clubs began to play 'friendlies' across national borders. A Scotland–England football match at Glasgow on March 28, 1891 is the earliest known full Deaf international match in any sport between two nations, a mere 19 years after the first Scotland–England match among the hearing teams. Germany's Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband, dating from 1910, is the oldest national Deaf sport association.[14]

The Deaflympics, launched in 1924, are the second oldest international multisport event in the world, after the Olympic Games (1896), and are under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Eugène Rubens Alcais, the deaf French Deaf Sports Federation secretary-general visualized the idea 'of staging an international Deaf sporting event that would promote the growth of deaf sport federations all over Europe' and was ably assisted by Antoine Dresse, a young deaf Belgian, in making this a reality.[15]

The first Deaflympics were in Paris in 1924 (148 athletes from nine countries) and the first ever sports event for any group of people with disabilities. At the conclusion of the initial Paris Games, Deaf sporting leaders met at a nearby café and established an international governing body for Deaf sports named Comité International des Sports Silencieux (CISS or International Committee of Silent Sports).[16]

Subsequent summer Games were held every four years with a suspension during World War II. The first winter Deaflympics were held in Austria in 1949 with 33 athletes from five countries. The 2005 summer Deaflympics held in Melbourne experienced then-record participation with 3488 athletes/team officials from 74 countries, 21 international media groups, over five million hits to the Deaflympics website, and an over AU$19 million estimated economic benefit to the City of Melbourne.[17]

The IOC granted official recognition for the 'Deaflympics' appellation in 2001. Japan and the USA became the first non-European countries to affiliate with ICSD, and the USA was the first non-European country to confirm participation in the Deaflympics for the 1935 Games. Among relative newcomers (since 1977) enjoying the benefits of this worldwide network of sports and social inclusion are such geographically disparate countries as Mongolia, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Estonia, Uruguay, Iceland and Swaziland. As of May 2010, ICSD has 104 member nations geographically distributed amongst four regional confederations as follows: Africa (20 members), Asia Pacific (30), Europe (42), Pan America (8).[18]

Organization of the Deaflympics

The Deaflympics are distinguished from other IOC-sanctioned Games by the fact that they are organized and managed exclusively by the ICSD Executive Committee who are all Deaf. Oftentimes the local organizing committee includes hearing people in various managerial positions and they work collaboratively with deaf people. Only Deaf people are eligible to

serve on the ICSD Executive Committee. ICSD currently limits Deaflympics eligibility to athletes who are both 'Deaf, defined as a hearing loss of at least 55 dB per tone average in the better ear (three-tone frequency average at 500, 1000 and 2000 Hertz, ISO 1969 Standard)' and 'members of an affiliated National Deaf Sports Federation and citizens of that country'.[19] This limitation was established in 1979 by the 25th ICSD Congress.[20] Eickman describes the history behind how ICSD developed eligibility rules based on hearing limits and notes how simulating being deaf and doping were analogous in the eyes of the then-ICSD Executive Committee, as 'an example of how Deaf people protect Deaf culture and Deaf identity.'[21]

The Deaflympics are typically organized by a national deaf sports federation, through an organizing committee, that also seeks financial support, to ensure the Deaflympics are held at an elite level. Sometimes, governments partner with the national deaf sports federation, playing a significant part in the Deaflympics' operation. International, national and local sport organizations are enlisted to assist with sport event operations, thus creating the need for a high level of sign/spoken language interpreting to facilitate communication between deaf athletes/officials and hearing sport/government officials. Also visual presentation of information, through using video screens, captioning and information boards, during the Deaflympics is crucial for both athletes and spectators.[22]

ICSD objectives and structure

ICSD's objectives include serving as Deaf sports' international representative organization, developing and promoting sports training and competition in the Deaf international sporting community, developing new training programmes and expanding existing opportunities for Deaf sport participation at international standards, promoting Deaf sport's organization and development in developing countries, liaising with the IOC and General Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF), in pursuance of ICSD objectives, and with the various international sports federations, in providing continued guidance and resources for Deaf athletes and Deaf sports programmes.

The ICSD Executive Committee is unique because it is run only by Deaf members. Members come from all parts of the world and communicate in different sign languages. Therefore, meetings are conducted in international signs. ICSD Congresses of all Full Members, each represented by three delegates, convene every two years, within the week preceding the Deaflympics. Voting delegates at ICSD Congresses must be able to understand and use international signs.[23] However, due to funding and support constraints, some full members are not able to send Congress delegates and rely on attending regional meetings.

Olympism in the Deaflympics

ICSD shares the same goals and beliefs as the IOC, such as a need for athletes to compete with each other and a need for a group of people with a commonality, in this case Deaf people, to come together and share their experiences. The Deaflympics actively promote the old ideal of the Olympics – brotherhood through sports and upholding to the ideals of Olympism. 'And it was also Coubertin who originated the idea that while the Olympics can instil national pride, the cooperation the world's nations may promote peace and prevent conflict'.[24]

> Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.[25]

Juan Antonio Samaranch, former IOC president, describes his first-hand observation of how the Deaflympics reflect Olympism:

> My first dealings with the CISS came when I attended the 1981 Deaf World Games in Cologne, Germany. I was inspired by the special sense of camaraderie amongst the athletes, officials and spectators, united together in a sea of moving hands. It did not matter that those people were deaf; I could easily see that these Games held a special meaning and purpose for all those involved, just like the Olympic Games. Unity through sport, differences put aside, the final push of a runner towards the finish line and a gold medal – it was all there in Cologne.[26]

Sport continues to be a bonding force in the local and global Deaf community. The value of coming together for a celebration of Deaf sport, where culture and language are not barriers, was clearly demonstrated at the 2009 Deaflympics where the biggest ever contingency of countries and athletes/team officials attended. The Deaflympics *do* play a large part in Deaf culture and the Deaf community, but this does not detract from the Deaflympics as an elite Olympic-level sports event. It is perhaps for this reason that some have pushed for inclusion in the Paralympic games. However, Baker and Cokely describe how ASL, in a signed modality, draws Deaf people in the USA together and its powerful impact on maintaining Deaf culture and community, which is something that would be lost if pulled under the Paralympic umbrella.[27] It is not hard to imagine or witness that other sign languages do the same thing for Deaf people all over the world.[28] Also, Stewart's *Deaf Sport: The Impact of Sports within the Deaf Community* describes the connection between Deaf sport and ASL, and it is obvious from elsewhere in this work that the Deaflympics fall under this scope of Deaf sport. His profiles of various Deaf sport leaders further affirm these points.[29] Deaf sport, however, is not the only context under which Deaf people gather, others occur under political, academic, and other special interest group banners such as the WFD, Deaf Academics and Deaf History International.[30] And so one must ask why it is that sport is so important.

Breivik, Haualand, and Solvang[31] describe the significance of Terence Parkin's (Deaf South African Olympic silver medallist) comments about his participation in the Deaflympics in their discussion of 'The Olympic Ideal and the deaf community', which appears to reflect their connection of Olympism with Parkin's Deaflympics experience:

> Terrence Parkin, made a statement, when coming from him, elegantly united the Olympic ideal of *citius – fortius – altius* and the outspoken joy of meeting and making friends with deaf people from all over the world ... Terrence Parkin made a metaphoric relation between the athletic achievements and the sense of being at home among ones' equals that many overtly expressed. Parkin officially announced that he had chosen to attend the Deaf World Games rather than a world cup swimming contest elsewhere, because being in Rome was like *being with his family*. Being a world-class swimmer, he broke several DWG-records during the Rome DWG, and his statement of being with here with his 'family' was visibly acclaimed and appreciated. Being both an outstanding athlete and a 'true' deaf person (by announcing his membership in the Deaf family in fluent international signs), he personalized not only the vibrant sense of *communitas* (Turner 1974) of the Deaf community that could be sensed through the games. In addition, he also used a symbolic language with parallels to the Olympic Truce, which underlines *the spirit of brotherhood* that shall be prevailing among groups and individuals all over the world during the period of the Olympic Games[32]. By using the family metaphor, both Parkin and the IOC make a moral statement ... Parkin did thus not only say that he felt like he was a part of the worldwide deaf family, he also stated that he was *like* them. So when he at the same time made outstanding Olympic achievements, the entire deaf world (his *family* or *equals*) was metaphorically lifted to higher levels, too.[33]

Gerhard Sperling's (a German/East Germany race walking athlete) comparative comments about competing at the Olympic Games and the Deaflympics, make it apparent that communication at the Deaflympics is also significant:

> At the Olympics I experienced the beauty of color of many nation's flags, TV cameras, flashing lights, huge street and stadium turnouts, spectators' screams and their hand and facial expressions while I competed as a lone deaf walker, and at the World Games I was always the happiest man because I could freely converse and socialize with any foreign deaf athlete.[34]

Mike Cavanaugh, a former US Deaf men's team handball coach, has directly participated in four Deaflympics, eight Olympic Games and two Paralympic Games. His insights, as a hearing person able to communicate in ASL, in comparing the 1988 Olympic Games and the 1989 Deaflympics, are especially informative offering the perspective of an outsider–insider:

> I experienced the exact same thrill in participating in the Opening Ceremonies of the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul as I did in the Opening Ceremonies of the 1989 World Games for the Deaf (WGD) in Christchurch. I also observed that there was a remarkable level of genuine friendship displayed amongst the athletes at the WGD and I attributed that to the universality of sign language and the athletes from different nations being able to readily communicate with one another. The common bond of brotherhood and sisterhood through sport was pure and uplifting. This experience had a powerful and lasting impact on me and I am left with the impression that the deaf share a special experience through their deafness.[35]

We believe Cavanaugh's reference 'to the universality of sign language' includes his observation of the shared features of signed languages that allow Deaf athletes to communicate across language barriers by using International Sign, as we ourselves have experienced the same thing at the Deaflympics. Cavanuagh also appears to state that this ability of Deaf athletes to communicate with each other leads to building the bond he describes and sharing the experience of being Deaf.

> It was obvious to me that before, during and after competition there was a greater enjoyment of just being in one another's company for the athletes in the WGD. Everyone wanted to win but there was seemingly greater respect for one another amongst the athletes which for me only enriched the level of competition. All athletes make sacrifices to compete in the Olympic Games and the WGD. I think however WGD athletes make greater sacrifices, personally and professionally to compete and perhaps that is why they enjoy the moment and the competitive experience perhaps to a greater degree.[36]

The testimonies of Parkin, Sperling and Cavanaugh, two Deaf and one hearing participant in the Deaflympics, offer more support of how the Deaflympics reflect Olympism, specifically in how the direct communication, sign language-using environment provides a platform for the aforementioned IOC-described 'joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles' that Deaflympics athletes and fans can impart to each other.[37]

ICSD–Paralympic Games relationship: self-governance and opportunities for athletes

Although the ICSD and the IPC have collaborated over the years, ICSD questioned the merit of a move towards the incorporation of the Deaflympics into the Paralympic Games. In the 1990s, some national Deaf sport governing bodies felt that hosting the Deaflympics were becoming increasingly more expensive, as was the cost of participating in them. Government and public money was not easy to obtain and the idea of joining with the IPC might not only reduce these costs, but take advantage of the high public profile the Paralympic Games enjoyed.[38] Some also felt that this might increase opportunities for athletes who were currently struggling with the increased expenses. The IOC was also keen for this partnership. In 1991, Jordan wrote:

> As president of the CISS, I am constantly asked why deaf people have a separate international sports program. I am also asked why deaf people do not simply participate in games for the disabled. My first response is to say that *Deaf athletes are not disabled in any way when playing various sports*; in fact, fair competition can be achieved only with other deaf people, with whom communication comes easily. But being deaf in a hearing world means much more than simply having separate sports, teams, games and other social activities . . . Deaf athletes are neither fish nor fowl. On the one hand, they are medically disabled, which leads to the tendency of the hearing population to classify them with other disabled athletes. On the other hand, as far as sports are concerned, they are able-bodied. No adaptations to the rules of sports need be made. No new sport needs to be conceived to make participation of deaf persons possible. What deaf athletes do need is an environment that will meet their physical needs as well as their social needs. Where competition with able-bodied, hearing athletes provides ample opportunities to hone athletic skills, it often fails to satisfy basic social needs, like communication and getting to know fellow players on intimate terms.[39]

In recognition of the unique communication requirements of Deaf athletes, the prohibitive costs to the IPC of providing sign language interpreters, and the inability for the Paralympic Games to accommodate the growing numbers of Deaf competitors, the ICSD felt that they had no other recourse but to withdraw its membership with the IPC. Members of the ICSD Congress could not support eliminating the number of sporting events that would be offered for Deaf athletes if they were to compete at each Paralympic Games. The IPC made it clear that they could not afford to be the umbrella organization for the existing Deaf Games without a serious reduction in the number of events and given the number of sign language interpreters that would be required. Each of these factors merits discussion in further detail here.[40]

Currently, 19 summer and 5 winter disciplines are currently contested at the Deaflympics.[41] Similarly, there are 22 summer and 5 winter Paralympic Games sports.[42] Jordan explains that: 'in Deaf sport there is only one classification – deaf. No modification to any sport occurs, other than minor technical adjustments to make auditory cues visible'.[43] Jordan goes on to explain that, 'By comparison, in the Paralympic Games many events are adapted. Because of the great range of physical qualities, athletes competing in the Paralympic Games have had to be classified according to ability. This classification system is complex and intended to create a level playing field for the athletes' and he gives a few examples of the various numbers of classifications for the different types of Paralympic athletes.[44]

Thus, if Deaf athletes were incorporated into the Paralympic Games, instead of 19 summer disciplines, only three to five sports for Deaf athletes would be part of the Paralympic Games programme, and Jordan makes a similar point in his analysis of the Deaflympics and the Paralympics. For many this is a sacrifice not worth making. Table 1 provides a comparative listing of the sports/disciplines offered in each summer competition.[45]

Also, to ensure equal communication access between Deaf athletes and hearing Paralympic Games officials and athletes, qualified signed/spoken language interpreters fluent in the appropriate languages are required. For example, an interpreter fluent in Swedish Sign Language and spoken Swedish would be needed to facilitate communication between a Deaf Swedish athlete and hearing Swedish Paralympic Games officials and athletes. Approximately 3000 such interpreters, at a total cost of approximately US$3,000,000, would be needed to cover the demand. The IPC is not able or willing to fund this interpreting service.

Additionally, the ICSD organization had been (and continues to be) a role model for the national and local Deaf sporting organizations around the world. Since 1924, the ICSD has been organized and administered *by* Deaf people, experiencing self-governance and self-regulation. Without an equitable merger of the ICSD and the IPC, the outcome of any agreement with the IPC would result in ICSD and their Games being organized and

Table 1. Sport events in the Deaflympics and the 2008 Paralympic Games

Deaflympics	Paralympic Games
Athletics	Archery
Badminton	Athletics
Basketball	Boccia
Beach Volleyball	Cycling
Bowling	Equestrian
Cycling Road	Football 5-a-side
Football	Football 7-a-side
Judo	Goalball
Karate	Judo
Mountain Bike	Power lifting
Orienteering	Rowing
Shooting	Sailing
Swimming	Shooting
Table Tennis	Swimming
Taekwondo	Table Tennis
Tennis	Volleyball (Sitting)
Volleyball	Wheelchair Basketball
Wrestling Freestyle	Wheelchair Fencing
Wrestling Greco-Roman	Wheelchair Rugby
	Wheelchair Tennis

administered *for* Deaf people. This is an important concept for any organization which is self-governed – the organization *by* its constituents as opposed to being managed *by* an outside group on their behalf. Because of the ICSD's philosophy of leadership *by* Deaf people, this also became the model for local and national Deaf sports organizations, enabling Deaf people from all over the world to enjoy empowerment and self-governance in the arena of Deaf sports. The IOC has respected this decision and has continued to provide recognition and support. This is a model that could, and perhaps should, be expanded within the IPC, rather than pushed aside. Currently the IPC is neither self-governed nor self-regulated by those it represents. For many in the Deaf community this is an insurmountable problem that looks like a step back from the long-fought battle for self-determination by those who are socially marginalized.

A compromise of sorts has been reached, but its viability remains to be seen. In November 2004, officials from the ICSD and the IPC signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in the hope of creating a collaborative landscape in international competition and a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities as separate organizations. There was further understanding that Deaf athletes with additional disabilities would be able to participate in various IPC events, and conversely, multidisabled Paralympic athletes with at least 55 dB hearing loss in the better ear could compete in the Deaflympics and Deaf World Championships. The agreement was developed with the intention that it would provide the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) with better awareness and understanding of the ICSD and the IPC as two separate organizations that manage their own quadrennial event, the Deaflympics and Paralympic Games, respectively. Other stipulations of the MOU include to: mutually recognize and respect the autonomy of their organizations, as well as cooperate 'in informing ... sports authorities of the international structures of both organizations and addressing the conflicts that may arise at national level between the affiliated organizations'.[46]

Confusion and misconceptions at the NOC/NPC level: a struggle for retaining autonomy

The aforementioned factors have made it very difficult for NOCs and NPCs to understand the unique situation of and provide equal financial, logistical and other support to the Deaflympics and Deaf athletes. There are also several additional important factors adding to the confusion; first, the accord between the IPC and the IOC to make the Paralympic Games part of the Olympic bidding package.[47] Second, the recent IOC restructuring (the splitting of the IOC Sports department into two separate departments—Sports and Games) which transferred responsibility of the Olympics and Paralympic Games to the Games department, while leaving the Deaflympics (classed as a Recognized Federation) behind within the Sports department has led to a marginalization of this competition. Third, the regular turnover of NPC officials means that there needs to be an ongoing education of NPC officials about Deaf sport, Deaf people, signed languages and Deaflympics-related issues. The learning curve that these officials must undergo means that there are constantly periods of miscommunication between the NPC and the ICSD.

These factors have combined to make a 'perfect storm' of disability organizations stating that they speak for and represent Deaf sport and national governments taking actions that negatively impact national Deaf sport organizations. Given this comprehensive history and the positive interactions with IOC and IPC, there continue to be serious problems in educating disabled sports leaders and organizations throughout the world to the unique situation of the Deaf athlete.

Ammons illustrates five actions taken by disability sport organizations or national governments undermining Deaf sport autonomy. This includes disability sport organizations declaring control over Deaf sports on the continental level in Africa, in Botswana and the United Arab Emirates, the French government restructuring its sports program which ultimately led to the dissolution of the Federation Sportive des Sourds de France, an ICSD charter member, and mandated that the deaf sports operate under the Federation Francaise Handisport, and the British government took funding away from the 2009 British Deaflympics team due to the British government's desire to focus instead on British athletes for the 2008 and 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.[48] In a further development, French athletes could not participate in ICSD competition for some months, while negotiations were underway to re-establish a Deaf-led French Deaf sports representative entity. During the first attempt at negotiating a resolution, ICSD met stiff resistance from Federation Francaise Handisport.[49] This conflict encompasses the whole point of this section in a nutshell – hearing sport leaders failing to respect and support Deaf self-autonomy in running Deaf sports affairs. This is serious disenfranchisement and disempowering, and even more appalling in light of the key role Eugène Rubens Alcais, a deaf Frenchman, had in the Deaflympics' formation. In the most recent development, the French athletes have now resumed participation given the fact ICSD yielded to external pressure to re-admit France as a member in good standing.

These decisions illustrate the seriousness of the consequences of this lack of Deaflympics and Deaf sport awareness, and the need for continual, clear, strong messages from the IOC regarding the Deaflympics' autonomy and their sanction by the IOC. The actions taken by disability sport organizations and national governments suggest a tremendous lack of respect and support for Deaf sport and the Deaflympics, and the absence of a true understanding of the Deaflympics and their benefit to and meaning for Deaf athletes and the Deaf community, and thus the tremendous positive benefits of supporting the Deaflympic movement and their Deaf athletes.

National governments and National Olympic Committees: funding challenges and the potential end of the Deafympics?

In order to redress the balance of power in favour of the Deaf sports organizations work needs to be done at the national level. Ammons gives a succinct explanation of the roots of the problems and further examples.[50] The problems outlined above, along with many other problems we face, arise because there is no clear distinction in many governments and NOCs regarding disabled sports. To take it one step further, these problems exist because *there is no clear recognition of ICSD/Deaflympics as a separate, equal and independent body within the IOC family*.[51]

In other words, Ammons explains that as ICSD's scope encompasses all Deaf sports worldwide rather than solely the Deaflympics, there is no current 'International Deaflympic Committee' (IDC) existing that solely focuses on Deaflympics organization. This creates great difficulty and work for national Deaf sport federations in educating their national governments and/or NOCs about ICSD and the Deaflympics and that these national Deaf sport federations are actually responsible for their nation's Deaflympics participation.

This leads to either of two outcomes usually occurring. The first is the non-recognition of ICSD plus an assertion for Deaf sport to be under IPC governance. If more countries go down this road, Deaf sport will most likely disappear. The second is much more favourable for the Deaf community – establishment of a national Deaflympic committee that also supports and promotes Deaf athletics within that nation. When the IOC restricts the use of the name Deaflympics, it has been found that governments do not give equal recognition or funding for their Deaf sports federations. Other impacts include a decline in the number of Deaf athletes participating in the Deaflympics, primarily because of limited funds from their national governments which has led to the cancellation of some events due to insufficient number of athletes and/or teams.

Also, for both the 2005 Summer Deaflympics (Melbourne, Australia) and the 2011 Winter Deaflympics (High Tatras, Slovakia), the national government was anticipating working with a national Deaflympic committee. When this was not the case, a serious crisis appeared regarding either government or NOC support for the Deaflympics in question. For Australia, a resolution was found only after an IOC member stepped in, resulting in 'the use of the name of Deaflympics in Australia'. For Slovakia, the 'government was appalled to learn that there was no national Deaflympic committee in Slovakia and that IOC would not allow it'. A Slovak governmental ultimatum and deliberations resulted in a Slovak Deaflympic Committee being formed, which averted the Slovak Paralympic Committee's running of the 2011 Deaflympics.[52]

An interesting development took place in May 2010 when ICSD's Executive Board cancelled the 2011 Winter Deaflympics, with the apparent reasons being both funding and organization falling short of expectations.[53] Subsequently around September 2010, ICSD had a change of heart with a decision to reinstate the Winter Deaflympics in Slovakia after receiving strong and re-newed commitment from Jan Mokos, the Mayor of High Tatras. With much regret and sadness, the Games never materialized due to lack of necessary funds to fulfill the obligations.

Ammons reminds that:

> The CISS/ICSD has no control of the use of the term Deaflympics by national governments or NOCs. In adhering to the IOC'S basic universal principles for good governance, and adhering to the advice of President Rogge, given in August 2006, who told us that we could not interfere in each country's affairs, it would be inappropriate to do so.[54]

However, ICSD has seen a huge difference in support and funding for Deaflympic athletes between countries where a national Deaflympic committee has been established and countries where no national Deaflympic committee exists and a Deaf sport federation exists under a different name or where the national Paralympic organization runs Deaf sports. For ICSD and national Deaf sport federations, having ownership of the word 'Deaflympics' can and does make all the difference.

Conclusion

n recognition of the unique communication requirements of Deaf athletes, it is clearly evident that the Paralympic Games could not afford to include Deaf athletes, given the number of sign language interpreters that will be required, or offer a competition programme for Deaf athletes that is identical in scope and breadth to what the Deaflympics already offer.

It is not only the enjoyment of playing sport, but the importance of the social connection, central to how Deaf communities thrive and survive in today's world that makes the Deaflympics so important. In Stewart, Ammons is quoted:

> An important part of all international competition is the opportunity to meet and develop friendships with people all over the world. Deaf athletes are not so much rivals fiercely competing for a prize, as they are friends competing alongside and against one another . . . no matter what sign language we use or what country we are from, the urge to socialize with one another will always be there because we are Deaf first and athletes second.[55]

This quote again highlights the importance for Deaf people of communicating in a signed language modality with other Deaf people and how Deaf sport is a platform for this environment.

There is work being done to correct some of the mis-steps that have been made. The ICSD has introduced policies and programmes to eradicate misconceptions about the Deaflympics and Paralympic Games by initiating Deaf Sports Reform (creating an IDC, re-focusing the ICSD on non-Deaflympics competitions, and forming a ICSD Youth committee) in 2008 which will lead to clearer distinctions between different aspects of elite Deaf sport.[56] In recent years, the ICSD administration under immediate past president Ammons spent much time and energy advocating ICSD, the Deaflympics, and Deaf sport to the IOC and IPC, and educating and dealing with various NOCs and NPCs regarding national Deaf sport organizations.

The IOC and IPC have responded positively to these efforts. In January 2009, IOC President Jacques Rogge gave his support to the Deaf Sport Reform changes.[57] Since November 2004, the ICSD and IPC have agreed to allow eligible athletes to participate in each other's Games.

Now it is time for the NOCs and NPCs to step up and fully support their Deaf athletes by recognizing the Deaflympics as an Olympic and Paralympic Games-level event, as the IOC and IPC already do, fully funding their Deaflympic teams and Deaf sport programmes (including elite, developmental, and grassroots programmes), respecting IDC/ICSD's authority over Deaf sports, working with IDC/ICSD/ICSD Youth to allow each Deaf athlete the opportunity to reach his fullest potential, both as a Deaf person and Deaf athlete, and raising awareness of Deaf athletes, signed languages, Deaf sport, and opportunities that Deaf sport offers through mainstream media channels, at training centres, and within the Deaf community throughout their geographic domain.

With a clear understanding of the unique issues involved with the Deaflympics and Paralympic Games, all who enjoy and support sport can and will work together in a positive way to eradicate misconceptions about the Deaflympics and Deaf athletes.