

## = Winter Paralympic Games =

The Winter Paralympic Games is an international multi @-@ sport event where athletes with physical disabilities compete . This includes athletes with mobility disabilities , amputations , blindness , and cerebral palsy . The Winter Paralympic Games are held every four years directly following the Winter Olympic Games . The Winter Paralympics are also hosted by the city that hosted the Winter Olympics . The International Paralympic Committee ( IPC ) oversees the Winter Paralympics . Medals are awarded in each event : with gold medals for first place , silver for second and bronze for third , following the tradition that the Olympic Games started in 1904 .

The Winter Paralympics began in 1976 in Örnsköldsvik , Sweden . Those Games were the first Paralympics ( Summer or Winter ) that featured athletes other than wheelchair athletes . The Games have expanded and grown to be ( along with the Summer Games ) part of the largest international sporting event after the Olympic Games . Given their expansion the need for a very specific classification system has arisen . This system has also given rise to controversy and opened the door for cheating . Winter Paralympians have also been convicted of steroid use and other forms of cheating unique to Paralympic athletes , which has tainted the integrity of the Games .

## = = History = =

The origins of the Winter Paralympics are similar to the Summer Paralympics . Injured soldiers returning from World War II sought sports as an avenue to healing . Organized by Dr. Ludwig Guttmann , sports competitions between British convalescent hospitals began in 1948 and continued until 1960 when a parallel Olympics was held in Rome after the 1960 Summer Olympics . Over 400 wheelchair athletes competed at the 1960 Paralympic Games , which became known as the first Paralympics .

Sepp Zwicknagl , a pioneer of snow sports for disabled athletes , was a double @-@ leg amputee Austrian skier who experimented skiing using prosthetics . His work helped pioneer technological advances for people with disabilities who wished to participate in winter sports . Advances were slow and it was not until 1974 that the first official world ski competition for physically impaired athletes , featuring downhill and a cross @-@ country skiing , was held . The first Winter Paralympics were held in 1976 at Örnsköldsvik , Sweden from February 21 ? 28 . Alpine and Nordic skiing for amputees and visually impaired athletes where the main events but ice sledge racing was included as a demonstration event . There were 198 participating athletes from 16 countries , and it was the first time athletes with impairments other than wheelchair athletes were permitted to compete .

Starting in 1988 the Summer Paralympics were held in the same host city as the Summer Olympic Games . This was due to an agreement reached between the International Olympic Committee ( IOC ) and the International Paralympic Committee ( IPC ) . The 1992 Winter Paralympics were the first Winter Games to use the same facilities as the Winter Olympics .

## = = Cheating = =

Athletes have cheated by over @-@ representing impairment to have a competitive advantage , and the use of performance @-@ enhancing drugs . German skier Thomas Oelsner became the first Winter Paralympian to test positive for steroids in 2002 . He had won two gold medals in the alpine events but was stripped of his medals . One concern now facing Paralympic officials is the technique of boosting blood pressure , known as autonomic dysreflexia . The increase in blood pressure can improve performance by 15 % and is most effective in the endurance sports such as cross @-@ country skiing . To increase blood pressure athletes will deliberately cause trauma to limbs below a spinal injury . This trauma can include breaking bones , strapping extremities in too tightly and using high @-@ pressured compression stockings . The injury is painless to the athlete but affects the body and impacts the athlete 's blood pressure , as can techniques like allowing the bladder to overfill .

## = = Disability categories = =

The IPC has established six disability categories applying to both the Summer and Winter Paralympics . Athletes with one of these physical disabilities are able to compete in the Paralympics though not every sport can allow for every disability category .

Amputee : Athletes with a partial or total loss of at least one limb .

Cerebral Palsy : Athletes with non @-@ progressive brain damage , for example cerebral palsy , traumatic brain injury , stroke or similar disabilities affecting muscle control , balance or coordination .

Intellectual Disability : Athletes with a significant impairment in intellectual functioning and associated limitations in adaptive behavior .

Wheelchair : Athletes with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities which require them to compete in a wheelchair .

Visually Impaired : Athletes with vision impairment ranging from partial vision , sufficient to be judged legally blind , to total blindness .

Les Autres : Athletes with a physical disability that does not fall strictly under one of the other five categories , such as dwarfism , multiple sclerosis or congenital deformities of the limbs such as that caused by thalidomide ( the name for this category is French for " the others " ) .

## = = Classifications = =

Within the six disability categories the athletes still need to be divided according to their level of impairment . The classification systems differ from sport to sport . The systems are designed to open up Paralympic sports to as many athletes as possible , who can participate in fair competitions against athletes with similar levels of ability . The closest equivalents in able @-@ bodied competitions are age classifications in junior sports , and weight divisions in wrestling , boxing , and weightlifting . Classifications vary in accordance with the different skills required to perform the sport . The biggest challenge in the classification system is how to account for the wide variety and severity of disabilities . As a result , there will always be a range of impairment within a classification . What follows is a list of the Winter Paralympic sports and a general description of how they are classified .

Alpine skiing : There are two events in alpine skiing : slalom and giant slalom . Alpine skiing accommodates athletes with the following physical limitations : spinal injury , Cerebral Palsy , amputation , Les Autres and blindness / visual impairment . There are eleven classifications , seven for standing athletes , three for sitting athletes , and three for visually impaired athletes . The divisions are defined by the degree of the athletes ' function and the need for assistive equipment ( prosthesis , ski poles , etc . ) . Snowboard Cross is technically now included in this category , though competition will take place with only limited classifications ( see below ) .

Biathlon : Biathlon is a combination of cross @-@ country skiing with target shooting . It requires physical stamina and accurate shooting . The events are open to athletes with physical disabilities and visual impairments . There are fifteen classes in which athletes will be placed depending on their level of function . Twelve divisions are for athletes with a physical impairment and three divisions are for athletes with a visual impairment . The athletes compete together and their finishing times are entered into a formula with their disability class to determine the athletes ' over all finish order . Visually impaired athletes are able to compete through the use of acoustic signals . The signal intensity varies depending upon whether or not the athlete is on target .

Cross @-@ country skiing : Cross @-@ country skiing , also known as Nordic skiing is open to athletes with Cerebral Palsy , amputations , the need for a wheelchair , visual impairment and intellectual impairment . There are fifteen classifications , three for visually impaired athletes , nine for standing athletes and three for seated athletes . The divisions are determined in a similar fashion to alpine skiing with attention given to the athletes ' level of function and need for assistive devices .

Ice Sledge Hockey : Ice sledge hockey is open only to male competitors with a physical disability in the lower part of their body . The game is played using international hockey rules with some

modifications . Athletes sit on sledges with two blades that allow the puck to go beneath the sledge . They also use two sticks , which have a spike @-@ end for pushing and a blade @-@ end for shooting . The athletes are classified into three groups : group 1 is for athletes with no sitting balance or with major impairment in both upper and lower limbs , group 2 is for athletes with some sitting balance and moderate impairment in their extremities and athletes in group 3 have good balance and mild impairment in their upper and lower limbs .

Wheelchair curling : Wheelchair curling is a coed team event for athletes with permanent lower limb disabilities that require them to use a wheelchair in their daily lives . Athletes with Cerebral Palsy or Multiple Sclerosis can also play if they use a wheelchair . Delivery of the stone can be by hand release or the use of a pole . There are no classifications in this event except the requirement that all athletes participating must have need for a wheelchair for daily mobility .

Para @-@ snowboarding : On 2 May 2012 , the International Paralympic Committee officially sanctioned " para @-@ snowboarding " ( commonly known as adaptive snowboarding ) as a medal event in the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games under Alpine Skiing . There will be men 's and women 's standing snowboard @-@ cross competitions . The IPC currently recognizes two broader sport classes , one for competitors with lower @-@ limb impairments and one for those with upper @-@ limb impairments . Visually impaired classes are not currently recognized and the sport 's debut in the 2014 Sochi Paralympics will feature events for only athletes with lower @-@ limb impairments , who will be permitted to wear a prosthesis . The events will be run in a time trial format ( one rider on course at a time ) , and results within each broad class calculated without factors that adjust raw times based on disability classification ( for example , a hypothetical athlete with a single above @-@ knee amputation will not receive any adjustment to his or her start @-@ to @-@ finish time , even though the lack of a knee and functional quadriceps in one leg can result in an impairment much greater than a hypothetical athlete with a single below @-@ knee amputation but two functional quadriceps ) . However , as the sport develops , the classes will be expanded and / or refined in the future .

= = List of Paralympic sports = =

A number of different sports have been part of the Paralympic program at one point or another . This color indicates a discontinued sport

= = Winter Games = =