

= Para @-@ swimming classification =

Para @-@ swimming classification is a function @-@ based classification system designed to allow for fair competition in disability swimming . The classes are prefixed with " S " for freestyle , butterfly and backstroke events , " SB " for breaststroke and " SM " for individual medley events . Swimmers with physical disabilities are divided into ten classes based on their degree of functional disability . Those with visual impairments are placed in three additional classes . A final class , S14 , is reserved for swimmers with intellectual disabilities .

Swimming was one of the first organised sports for people with disabilities , and was contested at the first Summer Paralympics in 1960 . Both the rules for the sport and approval of classifications were the responsibility of the Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur ( FINA ) until 1992 , when the International Paralympic Committee took over the governance of classification . As of 2012 , people with visual , physical and intellectual disabilities are eligible to compete in the sport . The classification system was originally based on medical criteria , but has since moved to one largely based on functional disability to make para @-@ swimming more competitive . The sport is currently moving towards an evidence @-@ based classification system .

= = Definition = =

Para @-@ swimming classification is based on a system in which functional criteria are assessed . Athletes who have different physical disabilities may compete in the same class so long as their functional impairments are similar . In swimming , amputations of the arms below the elbow have a significant impact on functional ability . As a result , swimming classifications differ from athletics classifications . Swimmers are divided into ten classes based on degree of functional disability : S1 , S2 , S3 , S4 , S5 , S6 , S7 , S8 , S9 and S10 . The most severely affected are in class S1 ; these swimmers are normally use wheelchairs outside of the pool . Classes are prefixed with the letter " S " for freestyle , butterfly and backstroke events , while those prefixed with " SB " are for breaststroke , and those with " SM " for individual medley events . This is because different strokes require the use of different muscle groups . In the case of the breaststroke , for example , the hand and the hip play a crucial role . Because of this , a swimmer may compete in one class for one stroke and a different class for another . It also means that swimmers with cerebral palsy , spinal cord injuries and limb deficiencies may compete against each other . For the individual medley , the class assigned is the mean average of the classes assigned for each individual stroke ( rounded to the nearest whole number with .5 rounding up ) .

There are three additional classes , S11 , S12 and S13 , for visually impaired swimmers . The lower number indicates a greater degree of impairment : class S11 swimmers are blind or nearly blind , and compete in blacked @-@ out goggles . They each have a " tapper " who uses a pole or " bonker " to warn the swimmer that they are approaching the end of the pool . The visual classifications are based on medical classification , and not on functional mobility . A final class , S14 , is for intellectually disabled swimmers . This class was dropped for the 2004 Summer Paralympics and the 2008 Summer Paralympics , but was restored for the 2012 Summer Paralympics .

The general rules for Paralympic swimming are based on those intended for able @-@ bodied competitors . The rules regarding strokes , turns and the length of time that swimmers may remain under water are similar to those for the Olympic Games . Events take place in a standard 50m pool . Swimmers may dive in or start in the water . Swimmers may not use any assistive technology while competing .

= = Governance = =

Swimming was one of the eight sports contested in the first Paralympics , the 1960 Summer Paralympics in Rome . Both the rules for the sport and for the approval of swimmers ' classifications were set by the Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur ( FINA ) . In 1992 , the International

Paralympic Committee ( IPC ) formally became the governing body for disability swimming . Four different sporting bodies , the International Blind Sports Federation ( IBSA ) , International Sports Federation of the Disabled ( ISOD ) , International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation ( ISMWSF ) and the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association ( CP @-@ ISRA ) , assisted the IPC in governing swimming at the 1992 Summer Paralympics . The IPC Classification Code and IPC Swimming govern the classification process . Classification of swimmers is performed by classifiers that are recognised by the IPC .

= = History = =

The earliest classification system for para @-@ swimming was created during the 1940s . At this time , swimmers were classified based on their medical conditions . During the late 1960s and early 1970s , the classification system was set up as a series of " handicaps " . In an effort to clearly describe disabilities and promote fairness , the number of classifications ballooned . This made organizing competitive events difficult as there were too few people in each classification ; international events for people with disabilities were said to have as many winners as competitors . At the 1988 Summer Paralympics in Seoul , the number of eligible classes was so great that 60 gold medals were awarded in one swimming event .

In 1974 , the Disabled of the German State of North Rhine - Westfalia ( BSNW ) developed a swimming classification system that stayed in use until 1982 . This system had seven classifications . There was a CP class for athletes with hemiparesis who would also compete in the same class against competitors who were single arm above the elbow amputees , had double @-@ arm dysmelia type ectromelia , had single arm paralysis or had a fixed shoulder joint . There was an intellectual disability class called Class J , and a Class H for people with severe disabilities . BSNW classification events included swimming races from 50 to 1500 metres . The system was later expanded to include nine classes before it was discontinued . The BSNW system did not gain international support , and only was used inside Germany . It was discarded because of a need to have athletes classified for international competitions .

In 1983 , classification for swimmers with cerebral palsy was governed by CP @-@ ISRA . There were five cerebral palsy classifications . Class 1 competitors could compete in the 25 metre freestyle event with flotation devices with or without flotation devices . Class 2 competitors could compete in the same events , but only against class 2 competitors . That year , 80 to 85 per cent of all competitors with cerebral palsy competed in the same classification in international competitions .

Classification for swimming relied on a points system to assess the severity of physical disability without considering athlete functionality specifically as it applied to the ability to swim a particular stroke . This caused problems because certain types of disability had a greater negative impact on swimming than others , and the point system did not directly address functional ability . To address this , in 1990 point consideration was eliminated for disability types that did not impact performance . The IPC decided to reduce the number of classifications , and to try to fix classification so that competitors could have more certainty in which classification they would compete in before attending an event . This was a major change , as previously , athletes would be classified immediately before , and even during , an event . As a result , the number of swimming classifications dropped from 31 at Seoul in 1988 to 10 at the 1992 Summer Paralympics in Barcelona .

Going into the 1992 Summer Paralympics , the International Coordinating Committee and the Technical Committee of the IPC push for a move towards a functional classification system . This came to a head at the November 1989 meeting of the Barcelona Olympics Organising Committee ( Comitè Organitzador Olímpic Barcelona - COOB ) , when a discussion started about what events and classifications should be eligible for the Games . A study by the organising committee and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia in the lead @-@ up to the meeting looked at the results of recent international competitions . It proposed a series of classes , based on the competitive results , for use in Barcelona . COOB insisted that such a system be implemented to ensure the sport at the Paralympic Games was serious and competitive , instead of recreational . The suggestions were

implemented for sports such as swimming and athletics . The Games were the first ones where swimmers of different types of disabilities competed against each other , swimmers had a guaranteed right to appeal their classification .

The move to functional classification coincided with the rise of sports science . The first detailed international swimming sport science project was conducted at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul . This was followed by a similar project at the 1992 Summer Paralympics in Barcelona . These studies provided an increasingly detailed understanding of the factors involved in high performance swimming . Henceforth sports science became the driver of both performance and classification .

Ahead of the 2000 Summer Paralympics in Sydney , changes were made in classification for the breaststroke , bringing the total number of functional classifications down from ten that had competed in Atlanta to nine . Swimmers who had been classified as SB10 at the 1996 Summer Paralympics in Atlanta opted not to compete in Sydney . Several former SB8 and SB9 swimmers moved down a class to compete , and made the finals in their classifications . The IPC 's Olympian aspiration to become an premier elite international sporting competition still fell short . In Sydney , 561 gold medals were awarded in 18 sports , compared with 300 in 28 sports at the 2000 Summer Olympics .

= = Classification process = =

During the classification process , classifiers evaluate factors including whether a swimmer 's physical limitations require him or her to start in the water , and how the swimmer enters the water in competition . A two @-@ person panel that includes at least one person with a medical background handles classification at international competitions . Classifiers are required to be familiar with the type of disability they are classifying , whether physical , visual or intellectual . Classification by national sports bodies mirrors the international classification process , conducted by nationally @-@ recognised IPC classifiers . For Australian competitors , for example , classification is managed by the national sport federation , Swimming Australia , with support from the Australian Paralympic Committee . There are three types of classification available for Australian competitors : provisional , national and international . The first is for club @-@ level competitions , the second for state and national competitions , and the third for international competitions .

Internationally , all classification is handled in English but athletes are allowed to have an interpreter present during the process . Swimmers are required to disclose any medications they regularly use , and provide detailed records of their medical history if a classifier deems them relevant . They are allowed to have someone familiar with their swimming limitations present during the process . The process includes a physical assessment , observation assessment , and a functional assessment that may include performance in the pool . Swimmers with visual impairment do not require the functional and observational components of assessment . If a swimmer intentionally misrepresents his or her disability , he or she is barred from the classification process for a minimum of two years , and is unable to compete .

If swimmers do not agree with their classifications , they can appeal through the IPC Board of Appeal on Classification , which is the body recognised by IPC Swimming . Formal processes exist for how to do this in both non @-@ competition and competition periods . Classification assessment took roughly 30 to 45 minutes at the 1996 Summer Paralympics . Classification for blind swimmers only lasted about 15 minutes .

= = Classification at the Paralympics = =

All disability types were eligible to participate at the 1992 Summer Paralympics . The IPC oversaw classification based on functional disability . General and functional classification took place in the Paralympic Village , with functional swimming classification taking place on the same dates at the Piscines Bernat Picornell . The process became a contentious issue at the Paralympics because of on @-@ the @-@ spot reclassifications that resulted in changes to the competition schedule . On @-@ the @-@ spot classification or re @-@ classification was viewed as a negative aspect of the

1996 Summer Paralympics , and the Paralympic movement overall . At the 2000 Summer Paralympics , 54 assessments were conducted , resulting in 13 class changes . There was one Paralympic New Status ( PNS ) protest and two Paralympic Permanent Status ( PPS ) protests by a national Paralympic committee , with one classification upheld and two denied . Six classification appeals were lodged for swimming at the 2000 Summer Paralympics involving four athletes , resulting in two class changes . For the 2016 Summer Paralympics in Rio , the International Paralympic Committee had a zero classification at the Games policy . This policy was put into place in 2014 , with the goal of avoiding last minute changes in classes that would negatively impact athlete training preparations . All competitors needed to be internationally classified with their classification status confirmed prior to the Games , with exceptions to this policy being dealt with on a case by case basis . In case there was a need for classification or reclassification at the Games despite best efforts otherwise , swimming classification was scheduled to take place at the Olympic Aquatics Stadium , with visually impaired swimmers getting classified from September 4 to 6 and all other swimmers being classified from September 3 to 5 . For sportspeople with physical or intellectual disabilities going through classification or reclassification in Rio , their in competition observation event is their first appearance in competition at the Games .

= = Future = =

Going forward , disability sport 's major classification body , the IPC , is working on improving classification to be more of an evidence @-@ based system , as opposed to a performance @-@ based system , so as not to punish elite athletes whose performance makes them appear in a higher class compared to competitors who train less .