



SPORT, AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF REHABILITATION

by SYLVIE ESPAGNAC

"We don't do sport to survive, but to fee/ alive"

Without any desire to indulge in crazy competition or vie with other champions, they have chosen sport as a way of expression, they being the disabled sportspeople.

Doctors have always prescribed physical exercise in the treatment of handicapped people acknowledging its important and valuable contribution. This interest has grown since the Second World War and medical disciplines like physical therapy and sports medicine have come into being. The International Federation of Sports Medicine was created in 1928. The Second World War, with so many people who were wounded, blinded or had limbs amputated, gave a spurt to medical and physiological research in physical and sports education. At Stoke Mandeville in Britain, Professor' Ludwig Guttman, "the father of sport for the paralysed and other dis-

abled" recommends sport in the treatment of paraplegics.

"Sport is an essential element in the process of physical and psychic rehabilitation, because it restores self-confidence, promotes intelligence and a spirit of competition and comradeship." In a few words he defined the three great values that sport represents to the physically disabled:

— *A curative value:* Sport is the most natural form of remedy and can give very good results combined with conventional methods of physical therapy. In his fight against himself to improve his performance, the disabled person learns to overcome his fatigue — a pre-

dominant symptom in the initial phase of physical rehabilitation.

- *A recreational and psychological value:* This value represents additional motivation for the disabled by restoring that enthusiasm for an activity of play so inherent in every human being. Sport develops self-confidence, dignity and self-discipline, a spirit of competition and comradeship — all mental attitudes that are essential to get the disabled out of his hole. In fact Guttman hoped to have the old motto “Mens sana in corpore sano” extended to “Mens sana in corpore sano et invalido”.
- *A socially reintegrating value:* perhaps the most noble reason for the disabled person’s interest in sport. Sport can help him to renew contact with the world around him and thus open the door to the other world even if such integration does not amount to absorption.

In some sports such as archery, darts, bowling, billiards, table tennis and swimming, the disabled sportsperson can compete with the non-disabled giving rise to an encounter that gradually assists better understanding.

"A MARVELLOUS SCHOOL OF LIFE"

To the disabled, it’s not the speed over a long distance that counts, but the athlete’s unconquerable spirit, the joy of participating, the courage of excelling, the generosity of sharing... Depending on the sports disciplines and the handicap, the sport is practised standing, sitting or lying. A grading system has been created for competitions. Each sportsperson must pass a muscular examination in order to determine his group, his rank and his coefficient. In order to present homogeneous series in the same discipline, a handicap coefficient is applied to each athlete, the ranking being made according to the compensated result.

In 1948, at the very moment the Olympic Games opened in London, Guttman organized the first Stoke Mandeville Games at his hospital. In 1952 they became international with the participation of 58 countries. The international committee, the International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation (ISMGF), whose current president is Mr. R. W. Jackson, decided that these Games would take place henceforward at Stoke Mandeville at the end of July each year in memory of the creation of the Hospital’s sports ground and, every four years, in the country hosting the

Olympic Games. The first Games outside Stoke Mandeville took place in Rome (ITA) in 1960 with the participation of 400 competitors from 23 countries. In November 1964, in Tokyo (JPN), the Olympic stadium welcomed 370 athletes from 23 countries, applauded and acclaimed by more than 100,000 spectators. In 1968, as Mexico City (MEX) could not receive the Games, they took place at Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv (ISR) (750 athletes from 29 countries). In 1972 it was the turn of Heidelberg (FRG) to welcome 1,000 athletes from 39 countries, from 2nd to 10th August. In 1976, Toronto (CAN) received 1,200 competitors from 40 countries, then Arnhem (HOL) in 1980 received 1,800 from 42 countries from 21st June to 6th July, and lastly New York (USA) received 2,000 from 50 countries on 28th July 1984.

Physically disabled sportsmen can also participate in continental Games:

- European Games: these have taken place since 1957 in Austria, Belgium, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Poland and Sweden.
- Pan-American Games: these took place for the first time in 1967 at Winnipeg (CAN), then at Buenos Aires (ARG) in 1969, at Kingston (JAM) in 1971, in Chile in 1973 and at Mexico (MEX) in 1975.
- Far East and South Pacific Games: the first Games took place at Oita (JPN) in June 1975.

The ideals of the Stoke Mandeville Games are summed up in the symbol of three interlaced wheels representing friendship, unity and the sporting spirit. The aims of these Games described in a message engraved in the hall of the Stoke Mandeville stadium sound as a reminder of their responsibility to all those who enter: *“The aim of the Stoke Mandeville Games is to unite all paralysed people, men and women from all corners of the world, in an international sports movement, and your spirit of true sportsmanship today will give hope and inspiration to thousands of paralysed people. A greater contribution can be made to society by paralysed people only by helping, through sport, to achieve friendship and understanding among the nations.”*

Other competitions bring together other handicapped people. The World Games for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, organized by the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf,

have taken place fifteen times since 1924, the last time in Los Angeles (USA) from 10th to 20th July 1985.

The first "Olympic Games for the Mentally Handicapped" took place at Nivelles (BEL) from 28th to 30th May 1981 and in Baton Rouge (USA) from 12th to 18th July 1983 (4,000 athletes and 1,000 trainers from 41 countries). FAVA (Franco-American Voluntary Association) each year organizes special Games in France and the 14th Games took place at Versailles in June 1983.

As far as Winter Games are concerned, the first skiing competition for one-legged skiers was held in Bavaria in 1950 under the aegis of orthopaedic surgeons Lane and Witt. The 3rd Winter Games took place in Innsbruck (AUT) from 14th to 20th January 1984. Twenty-nine athletes from ten countries took part for the first time in a competition in connection with the Olympic programme of the XIVth Winter Games at Sarajevo (YUG) in 1984 (cf. "Olympic Review" No 197, March 1984).

Sports organizations for the Deaf were formed before the First World War. In Germany the first club was founded in Berlin 1888. In a way they were the pioneers of modern sports organizations for handicapped people which gradually developed in all countries. On 16th August 1924, when the first silent international games were held in Paris from 10th to 17th August, an international committee of sports for the Deaf (CISS) was formed. In 1967, the Games acquired an international dimension and became the World Games for the Deaf. The CISS, whose motto is "Equal through Sport", has been presided over by Jerald M. Jordan since 1971.

During and after the Second World War, interest grew in the practice of sport by amputees and blind people. In 1960, an international working group on sport for handicapped people formed under the aegis of the World Veterans Federations (WVF). This was dissolved in 1964 and replaced by the International Sports Organization of the Disabled (ISOD) with membership from 16 nations, still under the patronage of the WVF. In 1967, the ISOD became independent. The first General Secretary was Charles Dunham, M.B.E. Its current President and Secretary General are Guillermo Cabezas and Hans Lindstrom.

Other organizations that exist:

— The Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA), originating from the International Cerebral Palsy Society, at present embraces 34 member organizations to which associate members and private individuals may be added. Its aim is to give a chance to all those who suffer from cerebral palsy to participate in and to like sport. World Games have taken place every four years. Seminars are organized on a grading system,

rules are in force, leaders are being trained and recreational workshops set up.

— International Blind Sports Association.

On 14th June 1984, these organizations together set up an international body, the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of World Sports Organizations for the Disabled. The role of this committee will be to develop sport for the disabled throughout the world, to promote friendship and unity among these sportspeople as well as cooperation among the international organizations, and to uphold the practice of sport without exception and without any distinction or discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, politics, etc.

Also worth mentioning is the existence of an international fund for sports for the disabled (IFSD) set up in Amsterdam (HOL) on 21st June 1983 and currently presided over by Pieter Von Vollenhonen. Its aim is to collect funds for the purpose of lending financial assistance to international sports organizations for the disabled so that they can promote their activities among these sportspeople like others.

Those athletes who are disabled sportsmen love sport first and foremost, and do so in spite of wheelchairs, artificial limbs, obstacles, the aversion and sometimes the look on other peoples' faces. Better than anyone they know the meaning of effort, struggle and discouragement, and more than all others they yearn to belong to a large community.

In 1981, when it decided that this year would be the International Year of the Disabled, the United Nations offered a chance to millions of people throughout the world to prove they were like other people with different means. Sport helps them to overcome their anxiety, fear and the complexes they experience in facing up to the world. The disabled person's love of struggle is apparent in the desire to make progress, and self-assertion comes with recognition of his handicap. Whether he is fighting himself or battling against an opponent, the disabled person learns the value of the effort expended and learns to overcome the discouragement he has to face all too often. Numerous disabled sportspersons, anonymous or famous, have managed to carve themselves a tiny slice of glory and have occasionally mounted the highest steps of the podium reaffirming the words pronounced by Pope John XXIII at the Stoke Mandeville Games in Rome in 1960: *"You are the living demonstration of the marvels of the virtue of energy. You have set a great example which we should like to point out, because it can be an example to all: You have shown what an energetic soul can manage to achieve, in spite of seemingly insuperable physical barriers."*

S. E.