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Conflict, Perseverance, and Legacy: A Historical Analysis of the 1976 Torontolympiad

With modest beginnings in 1952 at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England, the International Stoke Mandeville Games were the first international sporting spectacle for paralyzed persons. In 1960, the games first coincided with the modern Olympic Games when they were held in Rome a week after the Olympics, and then again in Tokyo, 1964. The 1968 games were held in Israel instead of Mexico City, the host of the Olympic Games, as it was not deemed viable for that country to host them. Due to lacking accommodations at the Olympic Park in Munich, the 1972 games were held in Heidelberg, Germany. Although touted as the games for disabled individuals, not all classifications of disabled individuals were allowed to compete. The German games in 1972 played host to demonstrations by blind and amputee athletes. However, it was not until 1976 that the Olympiad for the Physically Disabled included events for the blind, paralyzed, and amputee athletes.

This paper is aimed at establishing the significance of the 1976 Torontolympiad in the historical development of the disabled sport system within Canada and the World. Very little research has been conducted regarding disabled sport at a historical and organizational level. In order to redress this state of affairs, this paper engenders an understanding of a time in history of disabled sport in Canada, and highlights the political influences that came to shape the current disabled sport system of today. The majority of this work relies on primary source material located in national, provincial, and municipal archives, minutes of meetings of the Organizing Committee, and interviews with key agents who held influential roles during the time under investigation. Newspaper articles from the Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, Sun, and the Etobicoke Gazette were also analyzed to aid the author in understanding the climate surrounding the games.
