



GUIDE TO REPORTING ON PARA ATHLETES

FEBRUARY 2020

DISABILITY AND IMPAIRMENT

Under the World Health Organisation definitions, the word 'disability' reflects an interaction between features of a person's body and features of society and normally infers that you are unable to do something.

When referring to a loss in body function or structure, or activity limitation, the term 'impairment' is often used when describing athletes. This shifts the focus more onto athletes' abilities and what they are able to achieve.

Long term, the aspiration is that there is no need to use either word. Those who participate in Paralympic sport are quite simply athletes. The inspirational message they send every day through their incredible sporting achievements can help bring about social change.

GENERAL RULES

When speaking, interviewing or socialising with a person or an athlete with an impairment, here are a few general rules to remember:

- Always identify the person first and then the impairment, e.g. "an athlete with an impairment or Para athlete" not a "disabled athlete". Sometimes it may not be necessary or relevant to mention the impairment, so don't feel obliged to do so. When it is relevant, just mention what the impairment is and then move on.
- Act naturally and don't monitor every word and action. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "see you later" (to a person with a visual impairment) or "I'd better run along" (to someone who uses a wheelchair).
- Avoid using emotional wording like "tragic", "afflicted", "victim", or "confined to a wheelchair". Emphasise the ability and not the limitation, ie, by saying that someone "uses a wheelchair" rather than "is confined" or "is wheelchair-bound".
- Avoid portraying people with an impairment who succeed as "extraordinary" or "inspirational". For example, overstating the achievements of Para athletes inadvertently suggests the original expectations were not high.
- Portray the person as he/she is in real life. For example, a person with an impairment might be an athlete but he/she may also be a parent, a civil engineer, a doctor, a business manager or a journalist.
- People do not want to be recipients of charity or pity. Remember that a person with an impairment isn't necessarily chronically sick or unhealthy.
- Always ask a person with an impairment if he/she would like assistance before rushing in. Your help may not be needed. However, it is quite all right to offer help. If your assistance is needed then listen or ask for instructions.

- When talking with a person who has an impairment, speak directly to that person rather than a companion or interpreter.
- Don't forget that people with an impairment may need your patience and sufficient time to act independently. Give the person extra time to speak if they are using a communication aid or have a learning impairment.
- Ask persons with an impairment to repeat themselves if you do not understand them.
- Respect the person's personal space and remember that a wheelchair is part of a person's personal space.
- When greeting a person, if you normally shake hands, then offer the same gesture, even if the person has limited use of his/her hands or wears prosthesis. The person will let you know if a certain action is appropriate or not.
- Do not assume that a person with a physical impairment also has a hearing impairment or that his/her mental capacity is diminished in any way. Speak in a normal tone and do not use language that is condescending.

APPROPRIATE WORDS AND PHRASES

Words can project images that are inaccurate and may hurt a person. In the following you can find a list of preferred terminology and appropriate wording to use when referring to athletes or people with an impairment in general.

Avoid:	Use:
<p>Disabled athlete/person Handicapped athlete/person</p> <p><i>The incorrect terms are either generalisations or derogatory and offensive.</i></p>	<p>Athlete or (where a distinction needs to be made) Para athlete or athlete(s) with an impairment Person(s)/People with an impairment Athlete/person with disabilities Athlete(s) with disabilities or disabled athlete(s)</p> <p><i>These terms refer to all athletes within the Paralympic Movement from grassroots to elite level. They are athletes first, so where possible, we should simply refer to them just as athletes. Place the athlete or person first rather than referring to his/her impairment.</i></p> <p><i>Impairment is preferred to disability. The Paralympics are all about ability, not inability. Lack of inclusion or mobility restriction are often due to external factors that can be overcome.</i></p>
<p>Athlete/Person with a vision impairment. The blind.</p>	<p>Athlete/Persons with a vision impairment / blindness and (vision impaired is also acceptable, especially to improve the flow of sentences).</p> <p>An athlete who has been classified as having a vision impairment</p>

<p>The handicapped, The disabled</p> <p>The physically handicapped</p> <p>Person with a locomotor disability</p>	<p>Persons with a physical impairment</p> <p>A person who has been classified as having a physical impairment, e.g. amputees, wheelchair users, people with cerebral palsy etc.</p>
<p>Normal athletes</p> <p>Calling able-bodied people 'normal' is derogatory to people with an impairment who are equal to their able-bodied counterparts.</p>	<p>Able-bodied athletes</p>
<p>A paraplegic, paraplegics</p>	<p>A person with paraplegia</p>
<p>A quadriplegic, quadriplegics</p>	<p>A person with quadriplegia</p>
<p>A retard / the retarded</p>	<p>A person with an intellectual impairment</p>
<p>Spastic</p>	<p>A person with cerebral palsy</p>

<p>Abnormal, subnormal, defective, deformed</p> <p>These are negative terms which imply failure to reach personal perfection</p>	<p>Specify the impairment</p>
<p>Afflicted with</p> <p>Most people with an impairment do not see themselves as afflicted</p>	<p>Say the person has... (the impairment)</p>
<p>Confined to a wheelchair</p> <p>A wheelchair provides mobility and is not confining</p>	<p>Say uses a wheelchair</p>
<p>Cripple or crippled Invalid</p> <p>These words convey a negative image of a twisted ugly body</p>	<p>Say with a physical impairment</p>
<p>Disease (when used as equal to impairment)</p> <p>Many disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and spinal injuries, are not caused by any illness or disease</p>	<p>Say impairment</p>

<p>Stumps</p> <p>This has the connotations that the person's limbs were cut off like a tree</p>	<p>Say amputation</p>
<p>Suffers from, sufferer</p> <p>People with an impairment do not necessarily suffer</p>	<p>Say is/has... (an impairment)</p>
<p>Victim</p> <p>People with an impairment are not necessarily victims and usually prefer not to be perceived as such</p>	<p>Say is/has... (an impairment)</p>

In general, it is helpful to remember that impairment is a characteristic or a situation of life but does not replace life itself. Life very often proves to be stronger than any kind of impairment.

PARALYMPIC GAMES TERMINOLOGY

Preferred term	Description/ definition	Incorrect terms	Notes / explanation why incorrect
Paralympic hopeful	An athlete who is due to take part in the Paralympic Games	Paralympian/ Paralympic Athlete	An athlete is only a Paralympian once he/she has taken

			part in a Paralympic Games
Paralympian Paralympic athlete	An athlete who has taken part in Paralympic Games.	Para Olympian Former Paralympian	A Paralympian is never a former/ex-Paralympian. If you have taken part once, you are a Paralympian "for life". If the person is no longer an athlete, then he/she is a former athlete.
Paralympic sport	General reference to any sport on the Paralympic programme. This is only used when referring to the sport's involvement in the Paralympic Games.	Para Olympic sport, disabled sport, disability sport	These terms are incorrect
Para sport or sport for athletes with an impairment	All sport for athletes with an impairment whether they feature on the Paralympic programme or not. These terms are used for all other sports events outside of the Paralympic Games.		