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Policy on Sport for the Disabled

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It is rather disappointing that a book on sport policy in Canada should require a chapter on issues related to persons with a disability. This is not a reflection on any research that has been carried out on sport policies, but rather it highlights that legislation and policy positions established by the government that deal with 'sport for all' have failed. Over a quarter of a century ago the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of 1982 established equality rights for individuals who were considered marginal to mainstream society. Section 15(1) of the Charter states:

every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (1982, p. 3)

If this legislation were enforceable then there would be no need to highlight the policies that relate to persons with a disability because it would be an act of discrimination to have separate policies. Unfortunately the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has an additional section (15(2)) which states that:

Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of

disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that [sic] are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (1982, p. 4)

This subsection 15(2), I believe, is at the root of many of the problems that have faced marginal individuals in Canadian society. If the *Canadian Charter for Rights and Freedoms* had been a strong, enforceable document, then subsection 15(2) would not be needed. The fact that this subsection is present isolates and marginalizes individuals and communities of difference as a 'problem' that needs special measures. In other words, if the charter were robust, subsection 15(1) would be all that needed to be stated.

It is my intent in this chapter to briefly explore the evolution and continual development of policies related to sport for people with a disability. The chapter begins by focusing upon early developments in sport for the disabled.¹ Following this, the integration process and sport is critically examined in order to make sense of why elite sport has been the focus of attention, rather than sport participation. Positioning integration at the high performance end of the sport spectrum has begun to spark debates surrounding whether participation or high performance sport was most advantageous for athletes with impairments and is an issue that this chapter addresses when focusing on the culture of Canadian Paralympic sport. This provides a backdrop in which to highlight the integration of the Para-Athletics program in Athletics Canada.² Athletics Canada has been chosen as the focus of the case study for two reasons. Firstly, track and field athletics is arguably the flagship sport of both the Olympic and Paralympic Games and was one of the first sports, along with swimming to be integrated within the Canadian sport system. Secondly, it is the sport in which I have intimate, insider knowledge (cf. Howe 2008). Following the case study, the chapter concludes by exploring issues, controversies, and limitations of current sport policies in Canada as they relate to sport for the disabled.

Early Developments in Sport for the Disabled

On a very basic level, there appears to have been three stages in the development of the sport provision for the disabled. The first stage of development was designed to aid in the rehabilitation of

individuals who were seriously injured during World War II. It was felt that sport along with arts and crafts were important vehicles into a productive life (Anderson, 2003; Scruton, 1998). In the second stage, sport for the disabled was about participation, and as a result a number of international federations were established. Each of these federations had a responsibility to a constituent body of member nations and structured a sport calendar for impairment-specific groups, from grassroots to international level (Howe, 2008). These federations, namely the Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA), the International Blind Sport Association (IBSA), the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (Inas) and the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sport Association (IWAS),³ were established with the explicit intention of creating opportunities for people with disabilities and using sport as a vehicle for their empowerment. This group of impairment-specific federations is known collectively as the International Organizations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSD). It was these federations and their predecessors that helped to organize the Paralympic Games from 1960 through to 1988. These early Games, where participation was the primary mantra, were organized and run on a much smaller scale than those under the influence of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).

The establishment of the IPC in Dusseldorf on September 21, 1989, officially began what has commonly been referred to as the Paralympic Movement and was the dawn of the third stage of development of sport for the disabled. Since 1989, there has been rapid growth in the IPC that has seen it establish an extensive network of 164 national affiliates that, in some cases, replicate or replace the national governing bodies of the federations. The IOSD were still instrumental to the success of the IPC, as they introduced distinctive classification systems that were designed to create a level playing field for each impairment group. Classification in sport for the disabled continually evolves to allow for equitable and fair competition. As Sherrill suggests:

a basic goal of classification is to ensure that winning or losing an event depends on talent, training, skill, fitness, and motivation rather than unevenness among competitors on disability-related variables (e.g., spasticity, paralysis, absence of limb segments). (1999, p. 210)

These sport organizations were on the front line offering expertise, in 1989, when the IPC was established. Since many of the first officials of the IPC had previously held posts within these founding federations in the early days of the IPC, there was initially carte blanche acceptance of the IOSD classification systems. One of the legacies of this heritage is a complex classification system that many in the IPC regard as cumbersome, logistically problematic, and a potential threat to the marketability of the Paralympic Games (Steadward, 1996).

Since the establishment of the IPC, those involved with this institution have worked tirelessly to heighten the public profile of elite sports for the disabled. A year prior to the establishment of the IPC, the Paralympic Games began a pattern of following directly after the Olympic Games, adopting the same sport calendar and making use of the same venues and state-of-the-art facilities. In many respects, this helped to legitimize elite sport for the disabled. The IPC first became the international partner to the local Paralympic Games Organizing Committee in 1992 and as such has been able to strongly influence the direction and organization of all subsequent Paralympic Games. As a result, under the supervision of the IPC, there has been a move toward the normalization of sport for the disabled that has been managed in partnership with increased media coverage of flagship events (Howe, 2008).

Canada first competed in international sport for the disabled in the early 1950s in wheelchair basketball, and the nation was first represented at the third Paralympic Games in 1968 in Tel Aviv (Canadian Paralympic Committee, 2012). While the first Canadian Paralympic team was small, comprising 22 wheelchair athletes, the act of representing the nation internationally in disability sport is important insofar as this was one of the intentions of Bill C-131 *An Act to Encourage Fitness and Amateur Sport* (Macintosh, Bedeki, & Franks, 1987; Houlihan & Green, 2005).

There had been a degree of tension in Canada surrounding the use of sport as a leisure pursuit after World War II in spite of the establishment of the *National Physical Fitness Act* of 1943 (Harvey, 1988). The overriding feeling at the time was that “[s]port was something that one outgrew when adulthood was reached. It was time to move on to the more important matter of making one’s way in life” (Macintosh et al., 1987, p. 17). These attitudes towards sport would have clearly influenced the development of sport for the disabled,

which was an extension of rehabilitative medicine (Howe, 2008), and may go some way in explaining Canada's relatively late involvement within the Paralympic Games. In spite of there being no explicit mention of provision for the disabled in Bill C-131, following Harvey:

one can surmise that even for the political party in power, given the hegemony of the social democratic role of the state to equalize opportunities, the bill had to at least give the image of equality of opportunity in order to gain legitimacy. (1988, p. 324)

This statement highlights nicely the intentionality of those in power and of all policies regarding the issues of rights for the marginal within society. From the image of equality identified by Harvey (1988), it is clear to see, in the *Canadian Sport Policy* of 2002, (p. 8) where "Barriers to Access" are mentioned should have been where sport policy development ended for a time. Yet, in June 2006, the government marginalized the disabled community by releasing the *Policy on Sport for People with Disabilities* (Canadian Heritage, 2006). The development of this policy document following the publication of the *Canadian Sport Policy*, which explicitly states, in the vision for sport, "Canadians of all ages and abilities" (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 13, *emphasis added*); so the question that, perhaps, should be asked is: Why is there a need for a separate policy for the disabled? Some will argue that the current *Canadian Sport Policy* highlights inclusivity as one of its key policy principles. "Sport delivery is accessible and equitable and reflects the full breadth of interests, motivations, objectives, abilities, and the diversity of Canadian society" (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 6). This of course is welcome, and the whole tone of this important document is inclusive; however, nowhere in this document is it stated that the *Canadian Sport Policy* supersedes the *Policy on Sport for People with Disabilities*. What is clear is that if this policy is ineffective in policing the right of impaired individuals to access sport in the not too distant future there will be a 'new and improved' *Policy on Sport for People with Disabilities*.

In recent years, Sport Canada has provided core funding for the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), the organization that has governance over athletes who represent Canada in Paralympic competitions. Funding of the CPC by Sport Canada may be seen as the first step toward a fully inclusive sport system and a precursor to the integration of sport for the disabled throughout Sport Canada's

provision (Green & Houlihan, 2005; Sport Canada, 2002). Publication in 2006 of *No Accidental Champions*⁴ (Canadian Sport Centres, 2006) highlights the importance the government is placing upon the integration of high performance sport for the disabled within the Canadian sport system. Canada is not alone in developing policy that will lead to the integration of sport for the disabled into the mainstream sport as the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has been openly expressing this desire for some time (Labanowich, 1988; Steadward, 1996; Vanlandewijck & Chappel, 1996). In fact, a policy shift away from a disability-centred model of sport provision at the elite level within Canada aims to enhance the competitive opportunities as well as educate the public about [dis]ability as it relates to high performance sport (Steadward, 1996).

The adoption of *No Accidental Champions* highlights the degree to which Sport Canada considers disabled athletes a special population. In the introduction of *No Accidental Champions* the following statement attests to this:

athletes with a disability (AWADs) are first and foremost athletes, and for that reason, virtually everything in the able-bodied Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is applicable. The able-bodied LTAD and its resource paper, *Canadian Sport for Life*, should be the starting point for all athletes. *No Accidental Champions* is therefore, only concerned with additional factors that need to be considered when working with AWADs. (Canadian Sport Centres, 2006, p. 4)

This statement to the critically unaware may seem liberal and forward thinking but it still acts to segregate particular elements of the Canadian sport population. Segregation is solidified by the heading 'Not Different, But in Addition' which is absurd for the simple fact that all of human kind is different in one way or another and it is something we need to be upfront about and celebrate (cf. Silva & Howe, 2012). The fact that athletes with disabilities still need to be separated from 'able' athletes on the Canadian Sport for Life virtual platform demonstrates that acceptance of difference is far from being achieved (cf. Canadian Sport for Life, 2011).

In the following sections, I highlight issues of integration at the high performance end of the sport spectrum. The reason for this is rather simple. While mainstream sport provision can be graphically

represented in the shape of a pyramid, which is familiar to those interested in sport development and in which the LTAD is the current Sport Canada rubric, in sport for the disabled participation numbers are so low the graphic representation that is more appropriate is an obelisk. In other words, there are very few participants from which to draw high performance athletes. As such, exploring integration in the high performance is felt to be appropriate.

The Integration Process and Sport

The integration process that is being undertaken by Sport Canada is seen as important if an inclusive society is to be achieved. Broadly speaking, integration is the equal access and acceptance of all in the community. Some scholars have distanced themselves from the discussion of integration since the concept implies that the disabled population is required to change or normalize in order to join the mainstream (Oliver, 1996; Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). In other words, the concept of integration requires members of the disabled community to adopt an 'able' disposition in order to become members of the mainstream. Because of its shortcomings, Oliver dismisses integration as being heavily laden with policy rhetoric and sees the term inclusion, because of its association with politics, as more appropriate (Northway, 1997; Oliver, 1996). Inclusion means that members of the disability community have a choice in whether to fully embrace the mainstream:

Equality (defined as "the participation and inclusion of all groups") may sometimes be best achieved by differential treatment. This does mean that if oppressed groups so choose they can opt for groups-specific recognition in policy and provision, since within an inclusive approach difference would be accepted or included as a natural part of the whole. (Northway, 1997, p. 166)

Following these debates, there has been a shift within the literature on disability from the dichotomy of integration/segregation to another where inclusion/exclusion are seen as a more politically appropriate way to advocate the acceptance of the disabled. It is possible, however, to see integration as a literal intermixing that entails the culture of both groups adapting to a new cultural environment.

To this end, scholars working within sport studies have adopted a continuum of integration that is useful in the current exploration of Athletics Canada. Sørensen and Kahrs (2006), in their study of integration of sport for the disabled within the Norwegian sport system, have adopted a continuum of compliance with the aim of exploring the success of their nations inclusive sport system. Within this study, integration wherein both the athletes with disabilities and those from the mainstream adapt their cultural systems is referred to as *true* integration. Where athletes with a disability are forced to adopt the mainstream culture without any attempt at reciprocal action is seen as assimilation. Finally the least integrated model is seen as segregation where neither group is willing to transform its core cultural values in spite of being jointly managed within the sport system.

For the purpose of this chapter it is the process of successful integration which allows an inclusive society to be established that is most relevant. If society is going to become more inclusive "it is necessary for existing economic, social and political institutions to be challenged and modified. This means that disabled people [*sic*] are not simply brought into society as it currently exists but rather that society is, in some ways, required to change" (Northway, 1997, p. 165). True integration therefore has to be undertaken in order to establish an inclusive NSO.

Bearing this in mind, scholars more recently have shown that integration can be effectively understood as an outcome (van de Ven, Post, de Witte, & van den Heuvel, 2005) of an inclusive society. More specifically it is argued that "[i]ntegration occurs through a process of interaction between a person with a disability and others in society" (van de Ven et al., 2005, p. 319). In other words, it is the process of interaction between an individual with a disability who possesses his/her own attitude toward integration, strategies, and social roles and others in society who adopt certain attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities. As a result, factors that influence the success of the integration process are both personal as well as social but also include an element of support provision that will be distinct depending on the severity of the individual's disability (van de Ven et al., 2005; see also Kelly, 2001).

It is possible, for example, to see true integration as a literal intermixing that entails the culture of both groups adapting to a new cultural environment. Dijker uses the term community integration to

articulate a similar conceptualization to true integration. Community integration:

is the acquiring of age, gender, and culture-appropriate roles, statuses and activities, including in(ter)dependence in decision making, and productive behaviours performed as part of multivariate relationships with family, friends, and others in natural community settings. (Dijker, 1999, p. 41)

True integration therefore is “a multifaceted and difficult process, which although it could be defined at a policy level rhetoric, [is] much less easy to define in reality” (Cole, 2005, p. 341). The difficulty when exploring the success of integration policies is that the balance between the philosophical position and the reality (in this case a cultural sport environment) is not always clear. Simply exploring the policy landscape means that any interpretation is devoid of explicit cultural influences though all policy is a cultural artefact. This being said, the aim of integration is to allow the disabled to take a full and active role within society. The ideal would be:

[a] world in which all human beings, regardless of impairment, age, gender, social class or minority ethnic status, can co-exist as equal members of the community, secure in the knowledge that their needs will be met and that their views will be recognised, respected and valued. It will be a very different world from the one in which we now live. (Oliver & Barnes, 1998, p. 102)

Within the context of high performance sport, this aim is hard to achieve. By its very nature elite sport is selective and it is based on how well individual bodies perform against one another (DePauw, 1997) and this can lead to individuals with or without disabilities being excluded (Bowen, 2002). As Bowen suggested, “within professional sport, though, all but the super-able ‘suffer’ from ‘exclusion or segregation’” (2002, p. 71). How then, if “sport isolates individuals, but only those who are *super-able*. The rest *are* left to the realm of the minor leagues, masters leagues, local tournaments, or backyard pick-up games” (Bowen, 2002, p. 71), can we establish whether integration has actually been a success within an institution such as Athletics Canada? This understanding of sport makes it problematic to address the issue of integration without realizing

that elite sport can never be completely integrated in spite of recent attempts by the Canadian government to develop policy where integration is seen as vitally important (Canadian Heritage, 2000; Green, 2004; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Sport Canada, 2002, 2012). It is important, however, that Sport Canada achieves integration at the high performance end of the spectrum in order to send a clear message regarding the positioning of people with disabilities within Canadian society. The development in 2006 of the *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability* may be designed to promote inclusion but as we will see it may have a more marginalizing impact. In order to fully understand the success or failure of integration within Athletics Canada, it is important to explore certain elements of the culture of sport for the disabled, and it is to this issue that the discussion now turns.

Canadian Paralympic Sport Culture

To high performance athletes with a disability, the act of including the Paralympic Athletics Program within Athletics Canada has solidified their identity as elite athletes. Acceptance within the mainstream, able-bodied organization is seen as justifying the hard work and energy put into their training by rewarding them with funding from Sport Canada. However, this integration process has not occurred entirely smoothly, or completely, as the cultural environment of mainstream athletics and that of sport for the disabled are distinctive.

Within the field of sport for the disabled, key elements of this particular culture are the charitable mandate for the IOSD and the systems adopted for the organization of the sport practice, commonly referred to as classification.

A distinctive element of the disability sport culture of the Canadian affiliates of the IOSDs is their charitable foundation. These organizations were founded to 'look after' socially marginal individuals. The IOSDs were established with the explicit intention of creating opportunities for disabled people to be involved in the practice of sport using it as a vehicle for their attempted empowerment. It was the IOSDs and their predecessors that helped to organize the Paralympic Games from 1960 through to 1988 and, as a result, these games were different because there was less emphasis on high performance. This is not to say that elite athletes were not involved

but that participation was the main imperative. These early Games were organized and run on a much smaller scale than those under the influence of the IPC.

Canada has played an important role in the transformation of the Paralympics from a movement focused on opportunity and participation to one where excellence through high performance training is the sole aim. The first president of the IPC was Canadian Dr. Robert Steadward. Steadward's tenure in office (1989–2001) saw the IPC, among other initiatives, forge closer links with the Olympic Movement. Benefits include long-term financial support, access to the high quality facilities in which to hold the Paralympics, and countless other commercial benefits. An agreement between the IOC and the IPC was signed in 2001 to formalize these closer ties. In 2003, this agreement was amended to transfer "broadcasting and marketing responsibilities of the 2008, 2010, and 2012 Paralympic Games to the Organizing Committee of these Olympic and Paralympic Games" (IPC, 2003, p. 1). Agreements such as this will ease financial concerns for the IPC and allow the Olympic and Paralympic Games to be marketed as a single, high performance sport spectacle.

Closer links with the IOC highlight the serious intent of the IPC and its networks of national affiliates to transform sport for the disabled from a pastime to a high performance sport event (Howe, 2004). Athletics Canada has been relatively quick to notice the transformation in sport ethos that has occurred within sport for the disabled but integration is not an altogether simple process. The charitable foundation of the IOSDs is a stumbling block that is in the process of being overcome. However, the categorization or classification of athletes with a disability provides other concerns.

Classification is another element of the organizational structure within sport for the disabled that contributes to its distinctive culture (Howe & Jones, 2006). Classification is simply a structure for competition similar to the systems used in the sport of judo where competitors perform in distinctive weight categories. Within sport for the disabled, competitors are classified by their body's degree of function, and therefore it is important that the classification process achieves equity in the Paralympic sport practice and enables athletes to compete on a "level playing field" (Sherrill, 1999).

A complex classification system is the result of the historical development of sport for the disabled (Daly & Vanlandewijck, 1999; Steadward, 1996; Vanlandewijck & Chappell, 1996). As far as the

IOC and IPC are concerned, the current classification system used within sport for the disabled detracts from the Paralympic Games as a sport event because it confuses spectators (Smith & Thomas, 2005; Steadward, 1996). Classification is important when considering the issues of integration within mainstream sport contexts because the Paralympic athletes who receive the greatest exposure are in fact the most 'abled,' that is, the least impaired. Other athletes, who are in classes that have a small number of competitors, lack the cultural capital of those who are in larger classes and who are, as a direct result, more culturally competitive.

Integration within Athletics Canada

The move to mainstream track and field athletics within Athletics Canada was preceded by the inclusion of the sport of swimming within the same framework in 1994. In 1997, high performance wheelchair users, members of the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association, became part of Athletics Canada. The other national affiliates of the IOSD, namely, the Canadian Cerebral Palsy Sport Association, the Canadian Amputee Sports Association and the Canadian Blind Sports Association, which all continue to be funded by Sport Canada, entered into negotiation with Athletics Canada to have their elite athletes integrated. By 2002, high performance athletes who were the responsibility of these organizations were included officially within the framework of Athletics Canada, though they had become unofficial members of Athletics Canada while negotiations continued with the various disability sport organizations in the late 1990s. One of the obstacles associated with the integration of elite disabled athletes is that each IOSD has numerous classes of competitors.

The advent of a Paralympic Manager within Athletics Canada, in 1999, was facilitated in part because of Sport Canada's desire to see sports integrated across its programs. At this stage, the role and responsibility of the managers was to liaise with Sport Canada primarily regarding funding (carding) for the athletes. The Athlete Assistance Program (AAP) was designed to offset some of the costs of training, but unless the athlete is supported by family members, it does not facilitate full-time athlete status (see Chapter V). New opportunities within high performance sport for the disabled, which reward them for the hours of hard work in the gymnasium and in track and field, represent a coming of age for Paralympic sport.

The adoption of more comprehensive funding for athletes with a disability is also an important step in validating the identities of these individuals as high performance athletes.

Athletes involved within the Para-Athletics Program, however, are not a homogenous group. The desire to organize a high performance program for Paralympic athletes separately from the mainstream suggests that integration is an issue that has not been properly tackled. In the early days of sport for the disabled, divisions amongst Paralympians were often determined by the IOSD of which they were a member. The social world surrounding high performance sport for the disabled was largely demarcated by impairment, so much so that some groups were perceived to be inferior (Sherrill & Williams, 1996). Today the heterogeneity of the group is similar to what would be expected within mainstream athletics where athletes tend to be more sociable with those who engage in similar training practices. In other words, throwers tend to associate more often with other throwers and wheelchair racers tend to do the same. There is, however, a perception within the Paralympic group that some athletes gain the benefits of AAP funding and the support from Athletics Canada while not having to work as hard as others because the classification system advantages some impairment groups (Howe, 2007).

Generally speaking, those athletes with a congenital disability are socialized differently, and many athletes with acquired disabilities feel that this establishes a distinctive culture between these two groups. It is believed by those who have acquired disabilities that the congenitally disabled is not encouraged to train as hard (Howe, 2007). Whether or not this is the case, there is a degree of tension between these two groups of athletes, and this impacts upon whether government financial support is justified. In other words athlete funding should be a perk for those who train well. In essence, a funded athlete should see training as a full-time occupation, in spite of the fact that Sport Canada's AAP funding alone is not enough to sustain an individual with no family, friends or sponsors on which to rely. However, this carries an important responsibility. Receipt of the AAP funding necessarily imposes an obligation on the athlete to devote considerable time to training. In this respect, the athletes who are funded by Sport Canada's AAP and Athletics Canada can be divided by their commitment to performing at their best with all that entails and those who are simply taking the money—often winning medals—because they are in a 'soft' classification. This may be

a direct result of many of the athletes being 'products' of the IOSD disability-specific system within athletics where some classes are much less competitive than others (Howe & Jones, 2006).

Many individuals have an expectation that they will be funded, and coaches have been known to petition Athletics Canada to include athletes as part of the AAP plan. This special treatment of some athletes is likely a direct result of the charitable foundation of the IOSD, an ethos that is often in direct conflict with the goals of high performance sport. A lack of communication between the national coaches who are part of the Paralympic program and athletes might be exacerbated by the fact that Athletics Canada only 'looks after' high performance disabled athletes. While Athletics Canada maintains a degree of responsibility for grassroots development in mainstream athletics (Green & Houlihan, 2005), they have no link with potential athletes for the Paralympic program. This can make talent identification problematic, and if the Paralympic program needs to fund a certain number of athletes (or lose the funding) they will return to known athletes who may be a product of the participation model of disability sport.

The image of an athlete with a disability who does not undertake training at the level expected of a high performance athlete can have negative consequences for the organization of Paralympic programs. Structurally, the Paralympic program at Athletics Canada is included within the provision of services but it is clearly not integrated. As mentioned earlier, Athletics Canada appointed a Paralympic Program Manager whose responsibility it was to work alongside the paid head coach selecting the team of national coaches and the athletes for various international competitions. This leads to a situation where all Paralympic athletes are the responsibility of the Paralympic program's head coach and manager.

Athletics Canada is organized broadly into three event areas: endurance, speed and power, and Paralympic. In other words, an athlete with a disability who runs in the 5,000 metre is the responsibility of the Paralympic program. If the Paralympic program were fully integrated, there might be an event area for wheelchair racing, as this is different to running but not an area for Paralympics. Profiled athletes on the organization's webpage are also highlighted by their impairment group. By implication, a javelin thrower with cerebral palsy is not of the same status as his or her 'abled' equivalent. This may represent inclusion but it is a far cry from integration.

The head coach of the Paralympic program monitors the training programs the athlete develops with their personal coach. The fact that the head Paralympic coach, who may have limited experience in some elements of the sport, validates training schedules outside his/her knowledge base might be 'allowing' some athletes to be less than wholly committed to their training. This is a flaw in the current system that may be eliminated through increased funding; however, it certainly should not take away the responsibility of an athlete to action a well-designed training plan.

Following criticism of relatively poor results on the international stage, Athletics Canada underwent an 'independent' review of their Para-Athletics Program (Community Active, 2008) and as a result it has combined the role of the head coach and the Para-Athletics Program leader. This review was undertaken prior to the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games and, apart from the continuing success of superstar Chantal Petitclerc,⁵ results at the Beijing Paralympic Games were relatively poor. The report highlighted the problem associated with the recruitment of high quality athletes, which is of course a big problem but one that also directly impacts upon the 'able-bodied' program at Athletics Canada. The claims that Canada is becoming less competitive in Paralympic Athletics are not only a recruitment issue but the sign that more nations are taking sport for the disabled seriously. It does seem remarkable that the same type of review has not been undertaken in the chronically unsuccessful world of the 'able-bodied' program at Athletics Canada.

Discussion

The success of high profile athletes like Chantal Petitclerc at both the 2004 and 2008 Paralympic Games and the media attention she draws to Paralympic sport should be celebrated (cf. Howe, 2007). But while the public in Canada celebrated Petitclerc's success, there are still problems related to the integration of Paralympic athletes into mainstream Athletics. Petitclerc's triumphant season of 2004 is a good example of this disparity. After victories on both the Olympic and Paralympic stages, Petitclerc was 'honoured' at home by Athletics Canada being jointly made "Athlete of the Year." Petitclerc refused to accept the award she was to share with 100-metre hurdler Perdita Felicien, a world-class athlete and world indoor champion who fell at the start of her final at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Athletics Canada may have been acting appropriately by nominating both an abled and a disabled athlete for the award, but Petitclerc saw it as a snub. She said of the award:

to me, it's really a symptom that [Athletics Canada] can't evaluate the value of a Paralympic medal—that it's easier to win a Paralympic medal than an Olympic medal. That may have been true 15 years ago. That's not the case any more. (as cited in Wong, 2004, p. 1)

In the events in which Petitclerc competed, the depth of the field was as great as any in able-bodied athletics. At the Olympic Games and other mainstream track and field athletics events there are only ever a handful of likely winners of the top prize. The only difference is that, at the Paralympic Games, particularly in events like wheelchair racing, the winners are drawn from nations that are often the most technologically advanced. While African athletes dominate middle distance running at the Olympic Games, IAAF World Championships and Grand Prix circuit, the need for technology in wheelchair racing means that the winners are typically drawn from westernized nations. The problem according to Patrick Jarvis, former president of the Canadian Paralympic Committee and one of the few former Paralympians in a position of significant power within the Movement, is one of increased competition:

we get many supportive comments as Paralympians. But as soon as you start to incur in their [able-bodied athletes'] territory, being respected just as equal athletes and you threaten to win some of their awards, a lot are still uncomfortable with [disability]. (Christie, 2004, p. 52)

If the situation had been reversed, and Felicien had won her race while Petitclerc had not won all she contested, would the honour have gone to both athletes? Presumably not.

Athletics Canada is not the only national sport organization that has acted as if integration were an issue to which they only had to pay lip service. The Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) had publicly denounced the Organizing Committee of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games for not allowing three Canadian wheelchair athletes (Jeff Adams, Chantal Petitclerc and Diane Roy) full accreditation (Ewing,

2004). According to Adams (2004) the actions of COC were good but they simply did not realize the gravity of this snub, which flies in the face of the special agreement the IOC has with the IPC (IPC, 2003). Adams believed the COC should have made the following statement:

I'm sorry, but as Canadians, we simply cannot ask our athletes to comply with your request. It is impossible for us, because of our beliefs, because of our policies, and because of our constitution. If you'd like us to have the athletes removed from the village we'd be happy to do that, and call a press conference to explain why. (Adams, 2004, n.p.)

Whether this sort of direct action would have delivered equitable treatment is anyone's guess. However, since the COC represents a country that, in 1982, as previously mentioned, enacted the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which includes disability as a prohibited ground for discrimination, this sort of action should have been taken. It is no wonder that high performance athletes with a disability are still today having difficulty becoming integrated into mainstream sport.

In spite of being at the forefront of human rights legislation regarding discrimination on the grounds of disability, integration at all levels of sport is not happening. On November 25, 2003, the Secretary of State for Physical Activity in Sport, Paul DeVilliers, announced the creation of a working group to examine the issues related to sport and disability, which ultimately led to the release of the 2006 *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability*. As stated earlier, if Sport Canada is working as it should, why has such a policy been launched over two decades after it became unconstitutional to discriminate against people with a disability in Canada?

Let us hope that the 2012 *Canadian Sport Policy* brings Canada closer to *true integration* as there is little in the way of action that suggests the 'able' majority are going to change in order to accept athletes with a disability as equal to athletes without.

Conclusion

To the outsider, the inclusion of Paralympic athletes within the matrix of Sport Canada may be seen as a statement of a progressive nation. Nevertheless, integration within Athletics Canada has not been

complete, and as a result this shortfall heightens the social division between the abled and the disabled within high performance sport in Canada. While Athletics Canada has attempted to integrate athletes with a disability by branding them as products of their organization, these actions have done little to address the inequities within the organizations that favour the 'able' athletes. The processes of inclusion, the simple act of including the Paralympic Athletics Program within Athletics Canada has been relatively successful; however, integration, or the intermixing of persons previously segregated, has not.

The inclusion of the Para-Athletics into a mainstream organization like Athletics Canada, in some respect, creates an environment that perpetuates the differences between athletes with and without disabilities. In a sense, the organizations and people in power are catalysts for disablism. Disablism is, according to Miller, Parker, and Gillinson, (2004, p. 9), "discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others." Over the last two decades, there have been both national and international legislation passed by governments that has greatly reduced overt disablism. The elimination of overt disablism attitudes makes the lives of impaired people better, opening up opportunities for work and leisure, although some feel there is a long way to go before equity is achieved. As Deal suggested:

not all forms of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour, however, are blatant and therefore easily identifiable, as subtle forms of prejudice also exist. Therefore any attempt to tackle prejudice towards disabled people must not only focus on overtly discriminatory behaviour but also recognize subtle forms of prejudice, which can be equally damaging. (2007, p. 94)

The disablism that confronts the athletes who are part of the Para-Athletics Program is not blatant but is a subtle form of prejudice. Because of the subtle nature of disablism, it often falls under the radar established by legislation designed to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Disablism can be aversive and is therefore hard to detect, but the establishment of separate and exclusionary policies like the *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability* I am hopeful are a thing of the past but we need to be vigilant in monitoring the nature of integration practices within Canada to eliminate the potential for human rights violations.

Notes

1. It has been widely accepted within disability studies circles that a person's first approach should be adopted when addressing athletes with a disability, in other words the phrase 'person with a disability' is seen as politically correct. In this paper, I have stuck to this convention except when referring to sport as an institution. I use the term 'sport for the disabled' instead of disability sport because through my research, it is clear that sport provision for the disabled is part of what might be labeled a "disability industry" (Albrecht, 1992; Campbell & Oliver, 1996). As a result, sport for the disabled is exactly what is being discussed in this paper.
2. Athletics Canada is the national sport organization (NSO) for track and field athletics and as such receives core funding from Sport Canada.
3. This is a federation that was launched in September 2004 at the Athens Paralympic Games. It is the result of a merger of two federations, the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation (ISMWSF) and the International Organizations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSD) that have been part of the Paralympic Movement since its inception.
4. *No Accidental Champions* is the supplemental document to *Canadian Sport for Life* (also known as the Long-Term Athlete Development Model), covering sport development for athletes with a disability.
5. Chantal Petitclerc retired from high performance international competition following the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games. In October 2010, Petitclerc became a member at large of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Paralympic Committee (Petitclerc, 2010).

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