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MANIFESTATION OF "SPIRIT IN MOTION" BY PARALYMPIC TABLE TENNIS PLAYERS

A Study of Paralympic Table Tennis Players in 2006 World Table Tennis Championships in Montreux, Switzerland

Abstract

Table Tennis is considered as a suitable sport for people of different ages and physical conditions. It has proved to be the pioneer sport in attracting people with physical and intellectual impairments as well as the hearing and vision impaired.

Table Tennis was probably played with improvised equipment in England during the last quarter of the 19th century. Since then, it has been developing and spreading all over the world, winning favor as a popular sport in over 195 countries currently as ITTF members. Table Tennis has been part of the Paralympic Program since the first Games in 1960.

The purpose of this study is to have a look at Paralympic Table Tennis from a new angle, and to try to draw the attention of ITTF towards the unique nature, conditions, and needs of Paralympic Table Tennis as an important part of World Table Tennis Family.

The researcher studied the 348 players with disabilities who participated in 2006 World Table Tennis Championships in Montreux, Switzerland.

The data was gathered from IPTTC Medical and Classification Committee about the number of players in each category and the reasons for their disabilities.

The gathered data was analyzed through descriptive statistics; the results suggested that there were 13 major categories of disabilities of which 5 were the most prominent due to the number of the players in them. These 5 categories are Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI) with % 44.54, Les Autres (LA) with %21.55, Polio with%11.49, Cerebral Palsy (CP) with%9.48 and Amputee with %10.34 of the whole population of 348 players.

With an eye to the enthusiasm, motivation, efforts, and suffering that are displayed by Paralympic table Tennis Players who play, holding the racket with a stump of the arm, with the leg, and even with the mouth, we realize that they play Table Tennis with their hearts, indeed.

This is the manifestation of "SPIRIT IN MOTION" that is definitely of significant importance to ITTF for considerations in their future planning.

Key words: *paralympic players, classification, spinal cord injuries, les autres, polio, cerebral palsy, amputee*

1. Introduction

Table Tennis is considered as a suitable sport for people of different ages and physical conditions. It has proved to be the pioneer sport in attracting people with physical and intellectual impairments as well as the hearing and vision impaired.

Table Tennis was probably played with improvised equipment in England during the last quarter of the 19th century (ITTF Website). Since then, it has been developing and spreading all over the world, winning favor as a popular sport in over 195 countries currently as ITTF members (Tepper, 2003).

Sport for athletes with a disability has existed for more than 100 years. Sports clubs for the people with hearing impairment were already in existence in 1888 in Berlin. The

world organization of sport for the people with hearing impairment -CISS- was founded in 1922 and they still organize their own world games, the Deaflympics (Olvech, 2006).

In 1944 Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, at the request of the British Government, opened a spinal injuries centre at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital. A new approach introduced sport as a paramount part of the remedial treatment and total rehabilitation of persons with a disability. Rehabilitation sport evolved rather quickly to recreational sport and the next step to competitive sport for people with disability was only a matter of some years (IPC Website, 2007).

In 1948, at the 1948 Olympic Games in London, Dr. Guttmann organized the first competition for wheelchair athletes which he named the Stoke Mandeville Games. In 1952, the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee (ISMGC) was founded (Olvech, 2006).

Table Tennis has been part of the Paralympic Program since the first Paralympic Games were held directly following the Olympic Games in 1960 in Rome, Italy (IPC Website, 2007).

The IPTTC is conformed by 163 nations through their National Paralympic Committees, 105 of those nations are actively practicing table tennis in an international level. There are around 2400 active international players in the world and they are divided in 11 classes (Olvech, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to have a look at Paralympic Table Tennis from a new angle, and to try to draw the attention of ITTF towards the unique nature, conditions, and needs of Paralympic Table Tennis as an important part of World Table Tennis Family.

2. Method

2-1. Subjects

The researcher studied the 348 players (104 females & 244 males) with disabilities who participated in 2006 World Table Tennis Championships in Montreux, Switzerland. These players (male & female) had been classified into 10 classes according to IPTTC classification system: sitting classes 1-5 for those who use wheelchair, and standing classes 6-10.

2-2. Data gathering

The data was gathered from IPTTC Medical and Classification Committee about the number of players in each category and the reasons for their disabilities.

Table 1 – Distribution of Disorders in 10 Classes of Female Players

CLASS \ DISORDER	C1&C2	C3	C4	C5	C6&C7	C8	C9	C10	TOTAL
SCI - tetra	10								10
SCI - para		20	12	8	1	1			42
Dysmelia					1				1
Polio	2	3	3	6	1	1			16
Sclorosis		1							1
Spina Bifida			1						1
Diplegia					1				1
Triparesis					1				1
CP					7	2			9
Forearm Paralysis								1	1
Amputee				1		3AK	8	2BE 1AE	15
Les Autres				1		1		4	6
									104

Table 2 – Distribution of Disorders in 10 Classes of Male Players

CLASS \ DISORDER	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	TOTAL
SCI - tetra	14	21									35
SCI - para			23	25	18	2					68
Spinal Muscular Atrophy		1									1
Scoliosis			1								1
Gun Shot – T9-10			1								1
Dysmelia											
Polio	2		3	3	4		3	6	3		24
Sclerosis											
Spina Bifida											
Diplegia											
Triparesis											
CP						8	11	4	1		24
Forearm Paralysis											
Amputee				2	5	1		4	6	3	21
Les Autres		2	2		3	13	10	10	14	15	69
											244

3. Results

The gathered data was analyzed through descriptive statistics; the results suggested that there were 15 categories of disabilities of which 5 were the most prominent due to the number of the players in them. These 5 categories are Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI) with %44.54, Les Autresⁱ (LA) with %21.55, Polioⁱⁱ with %11.49, Cerebral Palsyⁱⁱⁱ (CP) with %9.48 and Amputee^{iv} with %10.34 of the whole population of 348 players.

As tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, 348 table tennis players with many different impairments are involved in world championship levels, which reflects the outstanding and appealing characteristics of Table Tennis.

4. Discussion

Sport has been introduced as a means of treatment and rehabilitation for people with disability since it assists the medical and psychological needs of them. Sport activities

prevent the deterioration of their impairments and minimize the consequences of their immobility.

Table Tennis as a very popular sport, especially among people with disability, regarding the above-mentioned results as well as its long existence in Paralympic Movement, is capable of playing a unique role in their social and personal life.

Table Tennis should be introduced not only as an activity for recreation and championship, but also as an effective means of physical and psychological treatment and rehabilitation to the world and medical centers.

5. Conclusion

Due to the fact that a great number of people with disability including 10 Physical classes, Intellectually impaired (class 11), Vision impaired, Hearing impaired, and those with Specific Diseases are eagerly involved in Table Tennis, it has been proved that this sport has enormous capacities and potentials for attracting more and more of the people who are immobilized and deprived of social activities.

With a glance at Tables 1 and 2, we realize this pleasant fact that table tennis possesses a tremendous appeal to a great number of players with disorders in over 15 categories. There is no doubt that table tennis is highly influential not only as sport for fun, fitness, and competition, but also as a means of treatment and rehabilitation, which could further help reduce social problems affecting individuals and their families.

Hence, International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) as the leading global organization can perform a significant role by creating a link between these groups and by devising innovative strategies in the future plans. The author would like to draw the attention of ITTF to the following suggestions for the purpose of promotion of the world health and recreation:

- Introducing table tennis and its outstanding features to the world of sport and to the medical and health centers
- Expanding connections and supportive cooperation with the institutions which are concerned with sports for people with disability
- Emphasizing inclusion and integration as a principal strategy to relate players with and without disability in order to create an atmosphere of sharing, development, and social interaction among all members of Table Tennis Family

With an eye to the enthusiasm, motivation, and efforts that are displayed by Paralympic table Tennis Players who play, holding the racket with a small remaining part of the arm, with the leg, and even with the mouth, we realize that they play Table Tennis with their hearts, indeed.

This is truly the manifestation of "SPIRIT IN MOTION".

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8. Notes

- ⁱ Les Autres (LA), a French term for "others" and has been used to describe athletes with a range of conditions which result in locomotor disorders that have not fitted into the traditional classification systems of the established disability groups.
- ⁱⁱ Polio (Poliomyelitis), a condition that occurs as the result of a viral infection that affects the motor cells in the spinal cord. Severity and location of paralysis varies between individuals and depends on the number and the site of the motor cells affected by the virus.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Cerebral Palsy (CP), a disorder of movement and posture due to damage to an area, or areas, of the brain that control and coordinate muscle tone, reflexes, posture and movement.
- ^{iv} Amputee, a person who has all or part of a limb missing