

York St John University



Watson, Nick J. and Parker, Andrew
(2014) Editorial (Special Issue : Sports,
religion, and disability). *Journal of Disability & Religion*, 18
(1). pp. 1-7.

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorksjs.ac.uk/id/eprint/836/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228967.2014.869152>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorksjs.ac.uk

Citation: Watson, N.J. and Parker, A. (2014) Editorial, *Journal of Religion and Disability* (Special Edition: Sports, Religion and Disability), 18(1): 1-4. See: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15228967.2014.869152#.UxXyqlRFDcs>

EDITORIAL

The wheelchair basketball proved less noisy and disruptive than might have been expected: the three-a-side match, contested under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, impressed the congregation in its skill and grace, and proved to be a highlight of the first-ever Paralympic service on Sunday (17 August). Organised in conjunction with the British Paralympic Association and the English Federation of Disability Sport, "Courage and Faith: The opening service for the London 1012 Paralympic Games", was not part of the official programme, but was billed as an "act of worship", "part of the Christian response to the Games.

(Boulding, 2012, p. 3)

We feel sure that Sir Ludwig Guttmann CBE, FRS (1899-1980), the German neurosurgeon who founded the *Stoke Mandeville Games* in 1948 in England, which was the platform for the Paralympic movement (1960-) and Michael Ramsey (1904-1988), the incumbent Archbishop of Canterbury at that time, could not have possibly anticipated a 'Paralympic Service' (including a practical sporting demonstration) in one of England's most iconic places of worship. This event was just one example of the ways in which the modern-day Church (mainly through the temporary multi-denominational organisation, *More Than Gold*) and the Olympic Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Initiative, engaged with the London 2012

Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Church of England (2012) released a prayer for the Paralympics that was composed by the Liturgical Commission and which was published online. A Baptist-led charity, *The Haiti Hospital Appeal*, in partnership with the Haitian Paralympic Committee, collaborated to send a Paralympic team to London 2012 to “... help counter the “harrowing” stigma of disability in Haiti”, which is something that was acutely heightened by the many disabling injuries received by citizens following the Haitian earthquake in 2010 (Hobson, 2011, p.1). Ahmed Kelly, an orphan loved and raised by the Sisters of the Catholic organisation, *Missionaries of Charity* in Baghdad, Iraq, was able to compete in a swimming event at the London Paralympics (Greaves, 2012). These Paralympic stories (amongst many others), were reported in well-known religious media outlets, such as *The Church Times*, *The Catholic Herald*, and *The Baptist Times*, which reflects the growing interest in the area of ‘disability’ amongst the Christian community (and amongst theologians) more broadly (e.g., Brock & Swinton, 2012; Reynolds, 2008; Yong, 2007).

With regard to academic research on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, there have been a significant number of Special Editions published for social science journals that have focussed on the Paralympics and disability sport. Examples are: (i) *Qualitative Research, in Sport Exercise and Health* (Smith, 2012), and (ii) the *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* (Jobling, 2012). However, a review of any number of these publications highlights that they are, without exception, devoid of reference to the spiritual and religious dimensions of the Paralympics Games and/or disability sport. There is also a significant body of social science literature that has addressed the Paralympics (Schantz & Gilbert, 2012; Legg & Gilbert, 2011; Brittain, 2010; Bailey, 2008; Gilbert & Schantz, 2009; Howe, 2008), the Special Olympics (e.g., Coreen *et al.*, 2012; Harada *et al.*, 2011; Gillespie, 2009; Siperstein, Kersh & Bardon, 2007; Farrell *et al.*, 2004), disability sport (e.g., Le Clair, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2012; Winnick, 2011; Jespersen, and McNamee,

2009 ; Thomas & Smith, 2009; De Pauw & Gavron, 1995), individual disability sports (Juetten & Berger, 2008; Berger, 2009), and issues of disability in leisure settings (e.g., Cushman & Gidlow, 2012; Horne & Howe, 2009). While this corpus of work is invaluable for understanding the social, cultural, political and historical aspects of disability, in and around sport and leisure locales, the absence of debate surrounding spirituality and religion within this literature would appear to be something of an oversight.

Further to reading and corresponding with theologians that have examined issues of disability, we have identified very few reflections on the connections between sport, religion and disability save for those emanating from such sources as: papal addresses (see John Paul II, 2000, 1985), theological essays on the Special Olympics and Paralympics (Watson, 2013a, 2012; Watson & Parker, 2012; Brock, 2012), sections of a recent doctoral thesis and book chapter that addressed the Special Olympics (Shafer, 2012: 189-196; Yong, 2007:114-15), academic conference presentations concerning the theology of disability sport (Swinton, 2012; Watson, 2013b, 2011a,b; Watts, 2007) and empirical research and writing on women, disability and Islam (Limoochi, 2012; Gaad, 2011, 2006).

Hence, having established that neither, social scientists or theologians had ‘bridged the disciplinary gap’ between religion, disability and sport/leisure, we felt the need to begin a conversation on this topic. To this end, the essays and empirical studies found herein, address a wide-range of critical questions surrounding sport/leisure, disability and health. The scope and remit of these contributions goes well beyond the London 2012 Paralympics, yet this has been the historical and cultural context against which we developed this project. In line with the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006, article 30), we hope that the range of essays on offer may encourage the community of scholars and practitioners in this particular field, to reflect upon how opportunities for persons with disabilities to engage in sport and leisure activities might be further developed; opportunities,

which we argue, have the potential to offer physical, emotional *and* spiritual benefits. With these issues in mind, the three broad aims of this project are to provide:

- (i) Original empirical research and scholarship on the spiritual and religious aspects of physical and intellectual disability sport and leisure. It is hoped that this developing corpus of work will be published in journals from a variety of disciplines, for example disability studies, sports studies, sport sociology, theology and religious studies, thus facilitating the broad dissemination of knowledge and thus change in general practice, legislation and pedagogy.
- (ii) Practical recommendations for those working with the disabled in sport and leisure contexts (for example, the Special Olympics, Paralympics, Community Disability Sport, L'Arche communities) and Sports Ministry organisations who, to date, have been somewhat reluctant to engage in disability sport (Watson and Parker, 2014). It is hoped that these discussions will help those involved in the administration and leadership of disability sport and leisure to grasp how the relationship between sport and disability can be viewed from a spiritual and religious perspective. And, in turn, how such a standpoint has the potential to impact current secular understandings of disabled sport participation, models of coaching, and 'relating' to those with disabilities.
- (iii) A critique of what Thomas Reynolds (2008), calls the 'cult of normalcy' in modern culture that marginalizes the disabled, and which is often characterized by the perfect 'muscular' athletic body and personal status gained primarily through accomplishment in the professionalized 'win-at-all-costs' culture of elite sport.

In summary, this project is both ‘exploratory’ and interdisciplinary, and in this sense, we hope that scholars and practitioners alike will find it to be a useful stimulus and ‘starting point’ for thinking critically about the rich and fascinating interconnections between sport and leisure, disability and religion.

Co-Guest Editors

Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker

September 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the Editorial staff that have been involved in this project, in particular, Ms Brechtje Reinders, Professor Hans Reinders, Mr Sean Beppler and Stephen Thompson, for encouraging us and for their flexibility and promptness in answering our many questions. Our sincere thanks also go to Mr Bill Gaventa and to Professors John Swinton and Amos Yong, for guiding us to key resources and individuals in the process of developing the proposal and essays for this collection. In turn, we greatly appreciate the time, effort and expertise of each of our contributors who have provided a wealth of original and fascinating material to ponder. The first-named co-editor (Nick J. Watson), would also like to express his gratitude to Emeritus Bishop David Smith and Dr Graeme Watts for initiating the idea of academic investigations into ‘theology and disability sport’, and to Phil Montanjees, the community director of L’Arche Liverpool, UK, for allowing access to the community; another ‘door’ that led to this project.

REFERENCES

Bailey, S. (2008). *Athlete First: A History of the Paralympic Movement*, Chichester. UK:

John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Berger, R.J. (2009). *Hoop Dreams on Wheels: Disability and the Competitive Athlete*. New

York: Routledge.

Boulding, R. (2012). Paralympic Skills on Show in St Paul's. *Church Times*, 31 August, 3.

Brittain, I. (2010). *The Paralympic Games Explained*. London: Routledge.

Brock, B. (2012). Discipline, Sport and the Religion of Winners: Paul on Running to Win the Prize. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 25(1), 4-19.

Brock, B. & Swinton, J. (2012). *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Church of England (2012). *A Prayer for the Paralympics*. Retrieved August 7, 2013, from

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2012/08/a-prayer-for-the-paralympic-games.aspx>

Coreen M. Harada, G.N., Siperstein, R.C., Parker & Lenox, D. (2012). Promoting Social

Inclusion for People with Intellectual Disabilities through Sport: Special Olympics International, Global Sport Initiatives and Strategies. In Le Clair, J.M. (ed.), *Disability in the Global Sport Arena: A Sporting Chance* (pp. 63-80), London: Routledge.

Cushman, G. & Gidlow, B. (2012). Special Issue: Leisure, Health and Disability. *World*

Leisure Journal, 3, 197-303.

Davis, R.W. (2010). *Teaching Disability Sport: A Guide for Physical Educators*. Champaign,

IL, USA: Human Kinetics.

DePauw, K.P. & Gavron, S.J. (1995). *Disability and Sport*. Champaign, IL, USA: Human Kinetics.

Farrell, R.J., Crocker, P.R.E., McDonough, M.H. & Sedgwick, W.A. (2004). The Driving Force: Motivation in Special Olympics. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 21, 153-166.

Gaad, E. (2011). A Case Study on the United Arab Emirates: Women, Disability and Sport.

In T. Benn, T., G, Pfister, G., & H, Jawad. (eds.) (2010) *Muslim Women and Sport* (pp. 211-221), London, UK: Routledge.

Gaad, E. (2006). The Social and Educational Impacts of the First National Down's Syndrome

Support Group in the UAE. *Journal for Research in Special Educational Needs*, 3(September), 134-142.

Gilbert, K. and Shantz, O. (2009). *The Paralympic Games: Empowerment or Sideshow?* UK:

Meyer and Meyer Sport.

Gillespie, M. (2009). Participation Patterns in an Urban Special Olympics. *British Journal of*

Learning Disabilities, 37(1), 21-27.

Greaves, M. (2012). Paralympian Raised by Sisters in Iraq. *The Catholic Herald*, August 17,

1.

Hobson, P. (2011) Haiti 2010 to London 2012. *The Baptist Times* (No. 8391), August 5, 1.

Harada, C.M., Siperstein, G.N., Parker, R.C. & Lenox, D. (2011). Promoting Social Inclusion

- for People with Intellectual Disabilities through Sport: Special Olympics International, Global Sport Initiatives and Strategies. *Sport in Society*, 14 (9), 1131-1148.
- Horne, J. & Howe, P.D. (2009). Special Issue: Leisure and Disabilities. *Leisure Studies*, 28(4), 371-504.
- Howe, D. (2008). *The Cultural Politics of the Paralympic Movement: Through an Anthropological Lens*. London: Routledge.
- Howe, P.D. & Parker, A. (2012). Celebrating Imperfection: Sport, Disability and Celebrity Culture. *Celebrity Studies*, 3(3), 270-282.
- Jespersen, E. & McNamee, M.J. (2009). *Ethics, Dis/Ability and Sports*. London: Routledge.
- Jobling, A. (2012). Special Issue: The Paralympic Games. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*. 59(3), 225-336.
- Juette, M. & Berger, R.J. (2008). *Wheelchair Warrior: Gangs, Disability and Basketball*. PA, USA: Temple University Press.
- John Paul II (2000) Address of the Holy Father to the Italian Silent Sports Federation, May 15, in Müller, N. and Schäfer, C. (2010) *The Pastoral Messages (Homilies, Angelus Messages, Speeches, Letters) of Pope John Paul II that refer to Sport: 1978-2005* (Introduction by Monsignore Carlo Mazza), Compiled by Norbert Müller and Cornelius Schäfer with the help of the Vatican Office of Church and Sport, of the Pontifical Council of the Laity.
- John Paul II (1985) Address of Pope John Paul II to the Participants in the European Blind

Championship, Castel Gandolfo, September 14, in Müller, N. and Schäfer, C. (2010) *The Pastoral Messages (Homilies, Angelus Messages, Speeches, Letters) of Pope John Paul II that refer to Sport: 1978-2005* (Introduction by Monsignore Carlo Mazza), Compiled by Norbert Müller and Cornelius Schäfer with the help of the Vatican Office of Church and Sport, of the Pontifical Council of the Laity.

Le Clair, J.M. (2012) (ed.). *Disability in the Global Sport Arena: A Sporting Chance*.

London: Routledge

Legg, D. & Gilbert, K. (2011). *Paralympic Legacies*. Champaign, IL, USA: Common Ground Publishing.

Limoochi, S. (2012). Islamic Women and Disability in the Paralympic Movement:

Expectations, barriers and Strategies for Inclusion, in Le Clair, J.M. (ed.) *Disability in the Global Sport Arena: A Sporting Chance* (pp. 232-241). London: Routledge.

O' Keefe, C. (2006). Leisure at L'Arche: Communities of Faith of Persons of Developmental Disabilities. In G. Van Andel., P. Heintzman and Visker, T. (Eds.) (2006), *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society* (Revised ed.) (pp. 116-124). Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press.

Reynolds, T.E. (2008). *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Brazos Press, Div. baker Publishing Group.

Shantz, O. & Gilbert, K. (2012). *Heroes to Zeroes? The Media Perceptions of Paralympic Sport*. Champaign, IL, USA: Common Ground Publishing.

Shafer, M.R. (2012). *A Christian Theology of Sport and the Ethics of Doping*. PhD. Thesis,

University of Durham, UK. Retrieved 3 May, 2013, from

http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6398/1/A_Christian_Theology_of_Sport_and_the_Ethics_of_Doping1.pdf

Siperstein, G.N., Kersh, J., & Bardon, J.N. (2007) A New Generation of Research in

Intellectual Disabilities: Charting the Course (Report), *A Special Olympics Working Conference*, Miami, FL, December 6-7, 2007. Retrieved 3 May, 2013, from <http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/healthy-athletes/2007%20Research%20Agenda%20Miami.pdf>

Smith, B. (2012). Special Edition: Paralympics and Disability Sport. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 2, 173-295.

Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. (2012) Disability, Sport, and Physical Activity. A Critical Review. In N. Watson, C. Thomas, and A. Roulstone (Eds), *Routledge Companion to Disability Studies* (pp. 336-347). London: Routledge.

Special Olympics (2005), *Changing Attitudes Changing the World: Media's Portrayal of People with Intellectual Disabilities*. Retrieved 7 August, 2013, from http://www.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/LandingPage/WhatWeDo/Research_Studies_Description_Pages/Policy_paper_media_portrayal.pdf

Swinton, J. (2012) Spirit in Motion: Disability Theology and the Soul of the Olympics (Keynote Lecture). *Everybody Has a Place: Paralympic / Disability Sport Theology*, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, London, 2 July.

Thomas, N., & Smith, A. (2009). *Disability Sport and Society: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

UN (2006). Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport. Retrieved 3 May,

2013, from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

Watson, N.J. (2013a). Special Olympians as a 'Prophetic Sign' to the Modern Sporting

Babel, In N.J. Watson and A. Parker. (eds.) *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 167-206). London: Routledge.

Watson, N.J. (2013b). Theology and Disability Sport: An Emerging Idea, Invited

Presentation, International Seminar on Religion and Sport: Past, Present and Future (Convener, Dr Afe Adogame), The Dept. of Religious Studies and the *Centre for the Study of World Christianity*, University of Edinburgh, UK, March 27.

Watson, N.J. (2012) Sport, Disability and the Olympics: An Exploration of the Status and

Prophetic Role of the Special Olympic Movement in Light of the London 2012

Olympic and Paralympic Games. *The Bible in Transmission*, Spring, 14-16. Retrieved 4 September, 2012, from

http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/bible_in_transmission/files/2012_spring/BiT_Spring_2012_Watson.pdf

Watson, N.J. (2011a). Special Olympians as a 'Prophetic Sign' to the Modern Sporting

Babel, Paper Presented at the *Society for the Study of Christian Ethics Annual Conference, Christian Ethics in Sport*. University of Cambridge, Westcott House, UK, 2-4 September.

Watson, N.J. (2011b). A Case Study of the Role of Sport in the Life of a Father and his Son

who has Profound Disabilities, Paper Presented at the *Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies Annual Conference*. College of the Ozarks, Branson, MISS, USA, June 9-12.

Watson, N.J., & Parker, A. (2014). *Sport and the Christian Religion: A Systematic Review of Literature*. Newcastle Upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Watson, N.J. & Parker, A. (2012). Christianity, Disability and Sport: A Case Study of the Role of Long-Distance Running in the Life of a Father and a Son who is Congenitally Blind and has Profound Intellectual Disabilities. *Practical Theology*, (5)2, 191-210.

Watts, G. (2007) Athletes with a Disability – Mixed Messages from the Bible, *Paper Presented at the Inaugural International Conference on Sport and Spirituality*, Hosted by the *Centre for the Study of Sport and Spirituality* (2003-2009), York St John University, York, England, UK, 28 – 31 August.

Winnick, J.P. (2011). *Adapted Physical Education and Sport* (5th ed.). Champaign, IL, USA: Human Kinetics.

Yong, A. (2007). *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco, USA: Baylor University Press.

