



# SPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS FACTOR IN RESHAPING THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTING SOCIETY

## Abstract

*Limited research has been done on the history and impact of sport for people with disabilities in South Africa, yet disabled athletes like Oscar Pistorius, Natalie du Toit, Ernst van Dyk, Hilton Langenhoven, Zanele Situ, Lucas Sithole and many others have become internationally renowned sporting icons. They have contributed to making disability sport trendy and contributed to uniting a sports mad society and helping it enjoy, understand and appreciate disability sport on par with other sporting codes. Since 1994, disability sport has grown faster than many of the able-bodied sporting codes in South Africa and, in some cases, even surpassing it in popularity. The South African Minister of Sport and Recreation, Fikile Mbalula's decision to amend policy and to give Olympic and Paralympic medalists the same compensation after the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games clearly illustrates the rise to prominence of disability sport in this country. Statistics have shown that more television viewers supported South African Paralympic events than during the Olympic Games itself. During the apartheid era, disability sport had to endure the same abuse and social problems as other, able-bodied sporting codes in South Africa. However, after 1994 it seems that disability sport and disability athletes adapted to the fast changing sporting issues within the democratisation of both politics and sport in South Africa with more ease.*

**Keywords:** Sport; sport for people with disabilities; politics and sport; Stoke Mandeville Games; Paralympic Games.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Sport; sport vir persone met gestremdhede; politiek en sport; Stoke Mandeville Spele; Paralimpiese Spele.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In studying the contribution of disability sport to the nation building process in post-1994 South Africa, it becomes apparent that disability sport has not yet fully received the recognition it deserves.

The history of apartheid in South Africa is a well debated, documented and by now, a thoroughly

researched issue. Equally well documented, is the interaction between politics and sport during the apartheid era. The same can, however, not be said about disability sport in South Africa. Very little information is available about what it was like to be disabled in South Africa prior to the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> Information on disability sport during this period is therefore even more limited. Even though disability sport has progressed to share centre stage on equal terms with all other able-bodied sporting codes in the democratic South Africa<sup>2</sup>, it remained relatively desolate in terms of sport historical research.

This article serves as a pilot to further probe the history of disability sport in South Africa, especially – but not limited to – the twenty years of democracy since 1994. During this period, many sporting achievements, individual athletic milestones and administrative contributions aided to developing an integrated South African society. Unfortunately, all of these accomplishments are not well documented or publicly acknowledged. This is mainly because they were not regarded by all as part of the bigger, “normal” sporting codes that were regarded as a vehicle to unite all South Africans after 1994.

## 2. DISABILITY SPORT DURING THE APARTHEID ERA

Not unlike the abled-bodied sporting codes in South Africa, disability sport also felt the brunt of apartheid and separate development before 1994. Ironically, however, there is a notable comparison in the classifications of people under apartheid and the international classification of people with physical impairment.

During the apartheid era, the way people were classified in South Africa determined their “rights” to which they were entitled.<sup>3</sup> According to Brittain, these rights of citizens were traditionally assigned according to physique, with physical differences used to divide the powerful from the powerless. This classification was done purely based on race and skin colour. Throughout the world, the same form of classification based on physical differences has been used to discriminate against people with a variety of impairments in order to define, and often control their lives. Therefore, Brittain argued that people with disabilities, and the organisations that support them, had a stronger understanding of discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

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1 IS Brittain, “South Africa, apartheid and the Paralympic Games”, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 14(9), 2011, p. 1168.

2 Between 1960 and 2016 Team South Africa won 297 medals at the Paralympic Games, while South Africa could only master 86 medals while participating at Olympic Games between 1904 and 2016. International Paralympic Movement, “IPC Historical Results Archive, Paralympic Summer Games”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 31 March 2017.

3 Brittain, p. 1165.

4 IS Brittain, *Perspectives of elite athletes with disabilities: Problems and possibilities* (PhD, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, 2002), p. 24.

Based on this argument, disabled non-white South Africans were subject to double discrimination based on race, as well as impairment. This, according to Brittain, was one possible reason why the organisers of international disability sporting events were so adamant that South African teams be included in competitions.<sup>5</sup> Having been ostracized by the rest of society, participation in sport may well have been one of the few opportunities South Africans with disabilities, and non-whites in particular, had to show that they were capable of achieving greatness.

## 2.1 The establishment of a governing body for disability sport in South Africa

The South African Paraplegic Games Association originated through an initiative of the Rotary Club of Orange Grove in Johannesburg. The formation meeting in 1962 took place at the Old Edwardian Club, a multiracial club in Johannesburg. Just prior to this meeting, the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee (ISMGC) met at Stoke Mandeville, Britain, in July 1962. At this meeting, the ISMGC President, Dr Ludwig Guttmann, announced that South Africa was well on the way to establishing a Paraplegic Sports Association and a Spinal Unit in Cape Town. As a result, South Africa was invited to participate in the 1962 International Stoke Mandeville Games.<sup>6</sup>

Dr Guttmann (later Sir Ludwig) was a neurologist, celebrated in disability sport circles for introducing a new regimen of treatment and rehabilitation of people with spinal cord injuries at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital during the Second World War. Sport played an important role in this treatment and rehabilitation. This led to Guttmann establishing a world sports movement for the disabled, which, through the vision and ideals of the Stoke Mandeville Games, eventually culminated in the Paralympic Games.<sup>7</sup>

In line with National Party sports policy, mixed sport was prohibited at the Old Edwardian club. Thus, the South African Paraplegic Games Association had to ensure national games were held in alternate years for different race groups.<sup>8</sup> The South African Paraplegic Games Association initially only catered for persons with spinal cord injuries. After the 1976 Paralympic Games, held in Toronto, Canada, the Association changed its name to the South African Sports Association for Physically Disabled (SASAPD), accommodating sports for people

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5 Brittain, "South Africa, apartheid and the Paralympic Games", p. 1166.

6 GJ Coetzee, *Betrokkenheid van Suid-Afrika by die Internasionale Stoke Mandeville-Spele (1962-1985)* (MA, Stellenbosch University, 1989), p. 14.

7 J Scruton, *Stoke Mandeville: Road to the Paralympics* (Aylesbury: Peterhouse Press, 1998), p. xiv.

8 South African Sports Association for Physically Disabled, "Our History, South African Sports Association for Physically Disabled", <[http://sasapd.org.za/?page\\_id=209](http://sasapd.org.za/?page_id=209)>, accessed 23 January 2016.

with visual impairment, amputees, cerebral palsied and *Les Autres* (French for “the others”. This category is for athletes whose disability does not fit under the other categories).<sup>9</sup> As pointed out by the Executive Officer of SASAPD, Menzo Barrish, the Association was based on non-discrimination, but it was still subject to the apartheid policy, which continually enforced separate sports development. This led to the Association sending alternate teams of white and non-white participants to the Stoke Mandeville Games, rotating on an annual basis.

The first non-white team represented South Africa in 1965, and this “rotation” practice continued until 1975.<sup>10</sup> The run-up to the 1976 Toronto Paralympics was indicative of the first possible opposition from the Canadian government towards the participation of South Africa at the 1976 Games because of the National Party’s apartheid policy. South Africa was duly notified that they would not be invited to the Toronto Games. However, both the ISMGC and the International Sports Organisation for the Disabled (ISOD), of which the Disabled Sports in South Africa was a full member in good standing, were against this decision and took steps to solve the problem. The 1976 Games was held under the aegis of the ISMGC and ISOD, and, after a meeting with the organising committee in May 1975, Disabled Sports in South Africa was informed that a South African team would be welcome, provided they had integrated trials and sent an integrated team to Canada (Greig 2005:61).<sup>11</sup> This might have had an impact on South Africa deciding to send their first ever racially integrated team to the 1975 Stoke Mandeville Games – the team comprised of around thirty athletes, including nine black athletes.<sup>12</sup>

The team that represented South Africa at the 1976 Toronto Paralympic Games was also the first-ever integrated team at a Paralympics and, “a breakthrough in apartheid in sport”.<sup>13</sup> The political influence of apartheid was, however, starting to catch up with disability sport. Eight teams withdrew before or during the 1976 Games on instruction of their respective governments in opposition to the participation of South Africa.<sup>14</sup> These were Kenya, Sudan and Yugoslavia, who withdrew before the Games, and Cuba, Jamaica, Hungary,

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9 *Ibid.*

10 Coetzee, p. 45.

11 DA Greig, *South African apartheid and the 1976 Toronto Olympiad: A historical analysis of influential actions and events affecting the 5th Paralympic Games* (MA, University of Windsor, Ontario, 2005), p. 22.

12 GJ Coetzee and FJG van der Merwe, “South Africa’s participation in the international Stoke Mandeville Games”, *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation* 13(1), 1990, p. 83.

13 Coetzee, p. 53; also see Scruton, p. 322.

14 L Guttman, *Textbook of sport for the disabled* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1976), p. 233.

India and Poland who turned up in Toronto, but withdrew prior to the start of the Games or, in the case of Poland, competed for several days and then withdrew.<sup>15</sup>

South Africa continued to participate at the Stoke Mandeville Games with integrated teams between 1977 and 1979. In South Africa, this challenged the National Party sports policy of separate development and, internationally, it resulted in a number of nations that were opposed to apartheid boycotting the Games. After a breakdown in communication with the Russian organising committee, the 1980 Paralympic Games was moved to the Netherlands. Under pressure from the Dutch government, the Games organisers decided not to send an invitation to South Africa.<sup>16</sup> The same fate confronted South Africa ahead of the 1984 Paralympic Games in America. Although the South African team continued to participate at Stoke Mandeville from 1981 to 1983, there was no invitation to the 1984 Paralympics. This was a clear indication that the political situation in South Africa was rapidly starting to isolate sport in the country, and disability sport was not spared this misfortune.

## 2.2 The rise of disability politics

During an international table tennis event at Stoke Mandeville in 1979, Maggie Jones, a double Paralympic medal winner, handed out flyers highlighting the poor healthcare facilities of disabled black people in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> She was banned from all ISMGC events for life for doing this. This led to the first protest at the International Stoke Mandeville Games by a group called Disabled People against Apartheid. They continued their protests every year that the Games were held at Stoke Mandeville. From 1981 to 1985, the protest action intensified and demonstrations were held regularly outside the stadium.<sup>18</sup> This protest action continued and intensified until South Africa's eventual expulsion from the Games in 1985.

As pressure from across the world mounted on the South African government, a state of emergency was declared in 1985 to give the government the power to deal with increasing resistance against apartheid, both locally and abroad. At the same time, the number of countries boycotting the Stoke Mandeville Games increased steadily. It reached a climax in 1985 when the British Paraplegic Sports Society, as host of the Stoke Mandeville Games, was forced to discuss the impact of the boycotts with the International Stoke

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15 Brittain, "South Africa, apartheid and the Paralympic Games", p. 1171.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 1172.

17 Scruton, p. 188.

18 In 1982 a new group, Disabled People against Apartheid, was formed with support from all the main organisations representing disabled people in Britain. South Africa was eventually expelled from the Stoke Mandeville Games in 1985. British Anti-Apartheid Movement Archive (AAM), Sport collection, picture 8112, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 1985.

Mandeville Games Federation (ISMGF). This resulted in an executive vote on 29 July 1985 against accepting future South African entries for the Stoke Mandeville Games.<sup>19</sup> It was, however, evident that the South African Sports Association for the Disabled went the extra mile to ensure that all athletes with disabilities, irrespective of race, were given the opportunity to compete internationally.

The ISMGF and ISOD and, in particular, its leader, Ludwig Guttman, were very strong allies of the SASAPD. Initially disability sport in South Africa appeared to have operated under the political radar, according to Brittain, “possibly because of its perceived lack of importance”.<sup>20</sup> As the international resistance against apartheid intensified, so too did the pressure on disability sporting structures to cut ties with South Africa. This was aided by the death of Dr Guttman in 1980, as he strongly supported the cause of South Africa’s participation in international disability sport throughout his illustrious career in disability sport.

### 3. POLITICAL CHANGE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

At the end of the eighties it was clear that, with three successive Olympic boycotts against South Africa, the boycott weapon in general had done sport far more harm than good. The use of sport as weapon in the struggle was, however, both legitimate and ironic. It was apartheid in South Africa that brought politics into sport through its racial discrimination between sports people of different race.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, apartheid finally came to an end in South Africa. Towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa entered a new political era. The dismantling of apartheid, the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other organisations banned under the apartheid regime, gave birth to the Nelson Mandela era, accompanied by ideas such as the “rainbow nation” and Mandela’s influences, popularly dubbed the “Madiba magic”.

It would be rather difficult to find an example of a more divided society than that of South Africa in 1994, at the time when the first democratic elections marked the transition from apartheid to democracy.<sup>22</sup> It was thus clear that a very strong nation-building process was needed, based on citizen education to enable all South Africans to unite under a new dispensation. According to Farquharson and Marjoribanks, nation building transpires not only through the

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19 Brittain, “South Africa, apartheid and the Paralympic Games”, p. 1177.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 1178.

21 P Martin, “South African sport: Apartheid’s Achilles heel?”, *The World Today* 40(6), June 1984, p. 234.

22 P Enslin, “Citizenship education in post-apartheid South Africa”, *Cambridge Journal of Education* 33(1), 2003, p. 74.

creation of formal institutions, but also through struggles in cultural and symbolic contexts.<sup>23</sup> Politically, the trust between decade long enemies was not yet strong enough to ensure that the concept of the “rainbow nation” would survive beyond infancy. This is where sport bridged these differences.

### **3.1 Sport as vehicle towards stability in post-apartheid South Africa**

Many of its former competitors welcomed South Africa’s return to international sport in the early 1990s.<sup>24</sup> The South African “nation playing itself into oneness”<sup>25</sup> was initiated publicly by President Nelson Mandela at the 1995 Rugby World Cup final when he urged all South Africans to support “our children” in the national team, and he appeared at the game wearing a Springbok jersey and cap.<sup>26</sup> The South African National soccer team, Bafana Bafana, won the African Cup of Nations the following year and, on the back of the 1995 Rugby World Cup victory, this carried South African sport forward in unity. At this stage, disability sport also started ascending to play its role in reshaping the South African society.

### **3.2 Disability sport in the new South Africa**

Towards the end of the 1990s, disability was still seen as the Cinderella of the historically disadvantaged groups targeted by affirmative action in South Africa.<sup>27</sup> People with disabilities experienced substantial difficulties in obtaining employment, which, in turn, had significant repercussions on their psychological, social and economic wellbeing. This made the achievement of disability sport in South Africa during the post-apartheid era even more significant.

The important role of people with disabilities in nation building were frequently emphasised by the iconic first democratic president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. During the opening of the first annual South African Junior Wheelchair Sports Camp in 1994, Mandela said, “disabled children are equally entitled to an exciting and brilliant future”.<sup>28</sup> Almost two decades later, Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula still echoed phrases Mandela used regarding disability

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23 K Farquharson and T Marjoribanks, “Transforming the Springboks: Re-imagining the South African nation through sport”, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 29(1), 2003, p. 29.

24 Nauright, p. 24.

25 CM Anderson *et al.*, “One country, one sport, endless knowledge: The anthropological study of sports in South Africa”, *Anthropologica* 46, 2004, p. 52.

26 D Booth, “Mandela and Amabokoboko: The political and linguistic nationalisation of South Africa”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34(3), p. 470.

27 M Schneider and M I Nkoli, “Affirmative action and disability in South Africa”, *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 77, 2011, p. 90.

28 Nelson Mandela during the opening of the first Annual South African Junior Wheelchair Sports Camp, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4 December 1994.



sport and nation building, "I urge everyone to look at individuals with [...] disabilities in a different light. If given a chance, these individuals can make a mark in whatever discipline they are guided through. If guided well, they will excel in whatever they attempt to do."<sup>29</sup> It was remarks like these by Nelson Mandela which aided in nurturing disability sport into a key role player in the reformation of the post-apartheid South African society.

### 3.3 Management structure of disability sport in post-apartheid South Africa

In 1994, the National Paralympic Committee of South Africa (NAPCOSA) was formed as a direct result of a request from the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the then National Department of Sport and Recreation (SRSA). The request entailed that the IPC wanted to work with a single disability sports structure in each country. As a result, the three affiliates of NAPCOSA – the South African Sports Association for Physically Disabled (SASAPD), the South African Deaf Sports Federation, and the South African Sports Association for Severely Mentally Handicapped – converted into the South African Sports Association for Intellectually Impaired.<sup>30</sup>

This structure operated until 2001, when Disability Sport South Africa (DISSA), a Section 21 company, comprising of the same three affiliates that formed NAPCOSA seven years earlier, was formed. All the functions of NAPCOSA were merged under the the High Performance programme of DISSA. At this stage, DISSA was involved in seven different disability groups – amputees, cerebral palsied, spinal cord injuries, deaf, intellectually disabled, visually impaired and *Les Autres*. The physically and intellectually disabled, as well as deaf athletes were affiliated to DISSA. The Sport for Intellectually Disabled South Africa organisation was in the process of uniting and would become part of DISSA.<sup>31</sup>

In 2005, the formation of the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) ensured that the three affiliates of DISSA became members of SASCOC in their own right. SASCOC gave recognition to the National Paralympic Committee (NPC), which was responsible for the delivery of Team South Africa to all multi-sport coded events, including the Paralympic Games, the Commonwealth Games, All Africa Games, the Zone VI Games and the Deaflympics. Having taken over the high performance functions of DISSA, SASCOC was now responsible for the delivery of

29 Minister of Sport and Recreation South Africa, Fikile Mbalula, on the Paralympic Team South Africa official send off to the 2012 London Paralympic Games, 20 August 2012.

30 South African Sports Association for Physically Disabled, "Our History", <[http://sasapd.org.za/?page\\_id=209](http://sasapd.org.za/?page_id=209)>, accessed 23 July 2015.

31 DISSA: Sport for people with disabilities presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, Cape Town, 10 June 2013, p. 6.



athletes to Paralympic qualifying events such as World Championships. SASAPD maintained its responsibility of providing for mass sport participation, developmental levels to all disabled athletes and assisting high performance athletes to represent SA at the highest level. By 2005, SASAPD catered for 16 different sporting codes throughout the country, which included five disability groups – spinal cord injuries, amputees, cerebral palsied, visually impaired and blind, and *Les Autres*.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4. ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY SOUTH AFRICAN DISABILITY SPORT IN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

As stated, this publication serves as a pilot focusing on various aspects of the history of disability sport in South Africa. It would be unfair to single out individual athletes, coaches, and administrators who excelled in disability sport in post-apartheid South Africa at this stage. Individual performances will be analysed in depth at a later stage, since the achievements of disability sport as a collective towards uniting the South African society after 1994 is a current priority. It would, however, be impossible to appraise the collective achievements of disability sport in South Africa without mentioning certain individuals. This should not however create the impression that these athletes were the only ones who contributed to the success of disability sport in the country.

##### **4.1 Twenty years of Paralympic glory, 1992 to 2012: A catalyst to uniting the South African society**

The Paralympic Games has developed into the second largest sporting event in the world. In terms of size, significance and complexity it compares only to the Olympic Games.<sup>33</sup> The word “Paralympic” originates from the Greek preposition “para”, which means beside or alongside, and the word “Olympic”. This adds up to the fact that the Paralympic Games are parallel to the Olympics Games and explains how these two movements exist and grow side-by-side.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that disability sport would play an important role in post-apartheid South African sport was already evident at the 1992 Paralympic Games in Barcelona. A very small team of ten athletes (nine male and one female) represented South Africa at the Games<sup>35</sup> and returned home with four gold medals, one silver medal and three bronze medals, finishing 27th overall on the

32 Interview: C Rademeyer – H Veitch, Bloemfontein, 14 August 2015.

33 A Pappous *et al.*, “From Sydney to Beijing: The evolution of the photographic coverage of Paralympics Games in five European countries”, *Sport in Society* 14(3), 2011, p. 345.

34 International Paralympic Committee Archive, Adenauerallee 212-214, Bonn, Documentation on the History of the Paralympic Movement, “The Paralympic Games”.

35 I Brittain, *The Paralympic Games explained* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Routledge, 2016), p. 162.

medal table.<sup>36</sup> The size of the team, the smallest since 1968, and the smallest post-apartheid South African team ever to participate at the Paralympics, can be attributed to the fact that sport in the country had been in isolation for many years. As athletes, coaches, and administrators in general, the team was not completely prepared for international participation. Notwithstanding this, the fact that a team of eleven athletes brought back eight medals, of which 50% were gold, was a great achievement. Unfortunately, these results were overshadowed by two overpowering factors – the misconception regarding South Africa’s real sporting strength after decades in isolation, as well as the wide-ranging euphoria of being back in international sport, being able to compete at both the Olympic- and Paralympic Games and being part of the “normal sporting world” again.

Twenty-two years on, the performance of the South African team at the 1992 Paralympics remains remarkable, even more so if compared with the success rate of Team South Africa at the Barcelona Olympic Games the same year. More than 90 athletes represented South Africa on its return to the Olympic Games, but could only manage two medals, both of which were silver.

At the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics, Team South Africa broke five world and two Paralympic records. The team consisted of 40 athletes (29 men and 11 women) and competed in five different sporting codes. Team South Africa won 28 medals at the Atlanta Paralympics: ten gold (in athletics, bowls and swimming), eight silver (athletics, bowls and swimming) and ten bronze (in athletics, bowls, shooting and swimming).<sup>37</sup>

At the next Paralympic Games in Sydney in 2000, Team South Africa broke eight world records. The team, which comprised of 66 athletes (50 men and 16 women), brought home 38 medals: 13 gold (in athletics and swimming), 12 silver (athletics and swimming) and 13 bronze (in athletics, cycling, powerlifting and swimming). The number of sporting codes Team South Africa participated in at the 2000-Paralympics increased to nine<sup>38</sup>, and while the percentage of female team members stayed the same as in 1996 (28%), there was a dramatic increase in black athletes in the team (from 11% in 1996 to 28% in 2000).<sup>39</sup>

In 2004, 51 athletes (31 men and 20 women)<sup>40</sup> represented South Africa at the Paralympic Games in Athens. The team’s medal count dropped to 35 (15 gold, 13 silver and seven bronze).<sup>41</sup> Four years later, at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, the 61 member South African team consisted of 40 male

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36 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

37 DISSA: Sport for people with disabilities presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, Cape Town, 28 August 2001, p. 5.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 International Paralympic Committee Archive (IPC), Adenauerallee 212-214, Bonn, Documentation on the History of the Paralympic Movement, “The Paralympic Games”.

41 International Paralympic Movement, “IPC Historical Results Archive, Paralympic Summer Games”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015. Also

and 21 female athletes. The number of medals won by Team South Africa again declined from the previous Paralympics, totaling 30 medals (21 gold, three silver and six bronze).<sup>42</sup> A positive aspect of the 2008 Paralympics is the fact that the 21 gold medals were the most ever gold medals won by South Africa at any of the Paralympic Games since re-admission. “Beijing was the first step in disability awareness”, Natalie du Toit said after the Games. “Before Beijing the kids (with disabilities) were hidden from the rest of the community, because they were shy of them, but the Beijing Olympics really brought that out.”<sup>43</sup>

The London Paralympics of 2012 saw Team South Africa, comprising of 62 members (44 men and 18 women), win 29 medals (eight gold, 12 silver, and nine bronze medals). In total, South Africa has thus won 168 medals at the Paralympic Games since 1992 (71 gold, 49 silver and 48 bronze medals).<sup>44</sup> To put this in perspective, it needs to be compared with the achievements of the South African Olympic team over the same period. From 1992 to 2012, Team South Africa achieved 25 medals at the respective Olympic Games. This included seven gold, 11 silver and seven bronze medals.<sup>45</sup> It would, however, be very difficult to draw a straight comparison between the medal performances at the Olympics and the Paralympics. At the 2012 Paralympic Games for example, there were approximately 4 200 athletes competing for just over 500 medals, while at the 2012 Olympics, there were around 10 500 athletes competing for only 300 medals.<sup>46</sup>

According to Brittain, the emphasis on the Paralympic Games is important, since the impact of the Paralympics and disability sport on the lives of people with disabilities, and the perceptions of non-disabled society regarding people with disabilities has been enormous. Unfortunately, examples of disability sport and Paralympic heritage are almost invisible against the background of the wider area of international sport heritage in general.<sup>47</sup> In South Africa however, Paralympic heritage developed hand in hand with that of Olympic heritage. Sport

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see International Paralympic Movement, “South Africa National Paralympic Committee of South Africa”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015.

42 International Paralympic Movement, “IPC Historical Results Archive, Paralympic Summer Games”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015.

43 Du Toit describes London as world leader in Paralympic Movement, 8 August 2013, International Paralympic Movement, “Du Toit describes London as world leader in Paralympic Movement”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/news/du-toit-describes-london-world-leader-paralympic-movement>>, accessed 15 October 2015.

44 International Paralympic Movement, “IPC Historical Results Archive, Paralympic Summer Games”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015.

45 International Paralympic Movement, “South Africa National Paralympic Committee of South Africa”, <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015.

46 SASCOC President Gideon Sam, SASCOC Press Conference, SASCOC House, Johannesburg, 9 July 2012.

47 IS Brittain *et al.*, “The marginalisation of Paralympic heritage”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19(2), 2013, p. 171.

in general is regarded as an imperative social and cultural practice within society. Based on this, many reasons can be given as to why Paralympic heritage might be considered worthy of inclusion into the sports heritage principle.

The Paralympic Games and disability sport as a collective have rarely been considered in this context, although it has played a significant role in changing attitudes towards people with disabilities in a non-disabled society. It has also helped in rebuilding the lives and identities of many individuals who have been disabled as a result of an accident, disease or sport injury.<sup>48</sup> Since re-admission into international sport in 1992, the South African sporting public was spoilt for choice. Yet the Paralympic Games fast became one of most watched, discussed, and loved events on the sporting calendar.

## 4.2 Celebrating Paralympic success after the London Games

In his official “send-off” speech to the Paralympic Team South Africa in August 2012, the Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula said, “The disability sport has grown tremendously over the years and become a strategic part of human life and public consciousness. The whole country must begin to give our athletes with disabilities the honour and integrity. We should give them the respect they deserve through structured support and in kind.”<sup>49</sup>

Before the 2012 Olympic- and Paralympic Games, SASCOC introduced a financial incentive award structure for medal winners in the two South African teams. Able-bodied athletes at the Olympics received R400 000 for a gold medal, R200 000 for silver and R80 000 for bronze, with their coaches also receiving financial rewards. Medal winners at the Paralympic Games were to receive R100 000 for a gold medal, R75 000 for silver, and R40 000 for bronze, while their coaches would not go unnoticed as they too would receive big payouts.<sup>50</sup> On their return from London after the Paralympics, Mbalula kept his word in treating the Paralympic Team South Africa with honour and integrity. Based on the performance of Team South Africa at the Paralympic Games, Mbalula stepped in and described the SASCOC decision of unequal remuneration as discriminatory. He announced a decision to upgrade the monetary incentives of Paralympian medal winners to equal that of their Olympic counterparts. The resulting financial

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48 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

49 Minister of Sport and Recreation South Africa, Fikile Mbalula, on the Paralympic Team South Africa official send off to the 2012 London Paralympic Games, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

50 The South African, “SA athletes will earn R400 000 for each Olympic gold medal”, <<http://www.thesouthafrican.com/sa-athletes-will-earn-r400000-for-each-olympic-gold-medal/>>, assessed 26 July 2015.

deficit, which ended up bring almost five and a half million rand would, according to the Minister, be funded by the National Lottery Board.<sup>51</sup>

Although the (re)action of Mbalula emphasised the general public's feelings towards the Paralympic team in South Africa, elsewhere in the world disability sport was not receiving the same accolades. In America, for example, where the NBC owned the broadcasting rights to the 2012 Paralympics, no live coverage of the Games took place. Instead, NBC only broadcast four one-hour segments of the London Paralympics in total.<sup>52</sup> In comparison to this, NBC devoted hundreds of hours of coverage to the 2012 Olympic Games.

At the time of the London Paralympics, Alexis Schafer of the IPC explained that there was still a long way to go when it came to the marketing and promotion of the Paralympics.<sup>53</sup> However, the attitude of the South African government (read Minister Mbalula's intervention) did go a long way to improve the Paralympic legacy worldwide. Although the gesture Mbalula initiated was financially costly, it was expansive in uniting South Africans in their celebration of the Paralympic success.

In the aftermath of the London Paralympic, the British hosts shared the South African sentiments on public maturity regarding disability sport. "I think people are going to look back at this Paralympic Games and for the first time really, truly believe that Paralympic sport is not just inspirational, it's hardcore sport", Oscar Pistorius was quoted with regard to the 2012 Paralympics.<sup>54</sup> London 2012 Chief Sebastian Coe echoed this shortly after the closing ceremony, when he said, "I really genuinely do think that we have had a seismic effect on shifting public attitudes towards disability sport."<sup>55</sup> The 2,7 million tickets that were sold, packed venues and the vocal crowd indicated that the 2012 Games had created a global platform for elite disabled sport and helped change perceptions of people with disabilities.

### 4.3 Other notable achievements

Apart from the Paralympic Games, there were many other international competitions and championships at which South African disability athletes excelled. Since the start of the new millennium, Team South Africa have been breaking world and championship records and winning medals at the Deaflympic

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51 M Etheridge, "SASCOC will honour medal incentives", *Towards London 2012* (SASCOC publication), September 2012, p. 1.

52 JR Pate and T Mirabito, "Finding their spot: Exploring TV commercial content during NBC Sports Network's broadcast of the 2012 London Paralympic Games". Paper presented at the annual meeting for the Global Sport Business Association Conference, Bahamas, 6–9 February 2015.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *The Independent*, 10 September 2012, p. 11.

55 *Ibid.*

Games. As early as 2001, Team South Africa displayed its talents, dominating in athletics and swimming.<sup>56</sup> At the IPC World Championships, Team South Africa continuously won many medals in various sporting codes, including athletics, cycling, powerlifting, swimming, basketball and table tennis.<sup>57</sup> Since 1994, Team South Africa also had successes in, among others:

- the All-Africa Games (sometimes also called the African Games or the Pan African Games);
- the Commonwealth Games;
- the Winter Paralympics;
- Zone VI Games; and
- individual disability sports including bowls, equestrian, football, golf, rugby, table tennis, tennis and many others.

#### 4.3.1 Laureus World Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Award

Ernst van Dyk, South Africa's champion wheelchair racer became the first South African to receive a Laureus World Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Award in 2006.<sup>58</sup> Apart from winning various Paralympic medals, including gold, Van Dyk also won the Paris Marathon and was a five-times Cape Argus Hand Cycling Race Champion. In 2014, van Dyk continued to write sporting history and, in April of that year, he became the first athlete to win the Boston Marathon ten times.<sup>59</sup>

In 2010, Natalie du Toit became the second South African to receive the Laureus World Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Award. In evaluating white women as role models in post-apartheid South Africa, John Nauright mentions Natalie du Toit's name with that of Penny Heyns, Marianne Kriel and Irene van Dyk.<sup>60</sup> Nauright refers to these women as having had "tremendous international successes", instead of referring to du Toit as "disabled".

In the following year, Oscar Pistorius became the third South African to win this award. Pistorius won three gold medals and one silver medal at the IPC Athletics World Championships in 2011. He was the first athlete with a disability

56 DISSA: Sport for people with disabilities presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, Cape Town, 28 August 2001, p. 6.

57 Republic of South Africa Government: Minutes of the Sport and Recreation Portfolio Committee meeting, Cape Town, 10 June 2003.

58 Anon., "Van Dyk wins 2006 Laureus Award", *The Paralympian (Official Magazine of the International Paralympic Committee)* 3, August 2006, p. 12.

59 *The Boston Globe*, 21 April 2014, p. 12.

60 J Nauright, "African women and sport: the state of play", *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, and Politics* (Special Issue: Women's sport and gender in sub-Saharan Africa) 17(4), 2014, p. 565.

to win a medal at an able-bodied Athletics World Championships<sup>61</sup>, and made history by becoming the first double-amputee to compete at the Olympic Games. Although anything said about Pistorius after the 14 February 2013 tragedy might be clouded to a certain extent, his contribution to disability sport and sport, both in South Africa and internationally, speaks for itself.

The intension was not to list or highlight the achievements of Van Dyk, Du Toit and Pistorius, as that is worthy of a discussion on its own, but rather to indicate the importance of them all winning the prestigious Laureus World Sportsman of the Year with a Disability Award.

### **4.3.2 Lucas Sithole**

In September 2013 Lucas Sithole became the first African to win an American Open tennis title. Sithole beat world number one, David Wagner, in the men's Quad final in New York to win the title. As a twelve year old, Sithole lost both his legs and part of his right arm in a train accident.<sup>62</sup> "Lucas is fortunate that people in South Africa have already recognised athletes with a disability, probably much stronger than other countries", Holger Losch, coach of the South African wheelchair tennis star said after the final.<sup>63</sup>

Losch's comment highlighted the fact that the sports-mad South African public took to supporting disability sport in a way unparalleled in the rest of the world. The script for Sithole's victory at Flushing Meadow fitted in perfectly with the rise to prominence of disability sport in South Africa, and the triple amputee was soon regarded as the new crown prince of disability sport in South Africa.

### **4.3.3 Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award**

The Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award was named after the South Korean, Dr Whang Youn Dai, who dedicated her life to the development of Paralympic sport in South Korea and around the world. At the 1988 Paralympic Games in Seoul, South Korea, the IPC honoured her contribution to the Games by establishing the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award (formerly the Whang Youn Dai Overcome Prize). Since 1988, the IPC Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award was presented at every Paralympic Games to one male and one female

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61 Anon., "Best in the World", *The Paralympian (Official magazine of the Paralympic Movement)* 1, April 2012, p. 42.

62 Cable News Network (CNN), "No legs and one arm but Lucas Sithole is a rolling inspiration", <<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/05/sport/tennis/lucas-sithole-wheelchair-tennis-south-africa/>>, accessed 20 June 2015.

63 *City Press*, 19 September 2013, p. 8.



athlete who best demonstrated the spirit of the Games by inspiring and exciting the world.<sup>64</sup>

Only two South Africans have had the honour of receiving the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award. At the 2000 Sydney Paralympics, Zanele Situ broke the Javelin world record (F52- F54 class), and became the first black female to win a Paralympic gold medal for South Africa.<sup>65</sup> Residing in a rural area in the Eastern Cape, with few resources, Situ coached herself. After losing her mother in early 2003, she returned to training and successfully defended her Javelin gold medal at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens. During the Athens Paralympics, she was awarded the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award.<sup>66</sup>

In August 2008, Natalie du Toit became the first amputee in over a century to compete in the Olympic Games. At the Olympics, she competed in the 10-kilometre open water race, finishing sixteenth. Du Toit made history again in Beijing when she became the only person in history to carry her country's flag at the Olympics and Paralympics.<sup>67</sup> At the 2008 Paralympics, which followed on the Olympics, Du Toit won gold medals in all five events she entered. During the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, 24 different countries nominated athletes for the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award. Natalie du Toit was eventually given the honour of receiving this award for best epitomising the spirit of the Games and inspiring the world.

## 5. CHALLENGES FACING DISABILITY SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Although disability sport continues to play a prominent role in a post-apartheid society, disability in general still faces many challenges. In South Africa, the majority of people with disabilities have been excluded from the mainstream of society and prevented from accessing fundamental social, political and economic rights.<sup>68</sup>

For disability athletes, the main challenge encountered throughout was the accessibility of the majority of sporting facilities, accessible transport, disabled

64 Anon., Finalists for Whang Youn Dai Award Chosen in International Paralympic Movement Media Centre Archive, 18 March 2010.

65 International Paralympic Movement, "IPC Historical Results Archive, Paralympic Summer Games", <<https://www.paralympic.org/results/historical>>, accessed 25 July 2015.

66 Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award, "Summer 2004 Athens", <<http://www.whangprize.org/pages/winners2004s.htm>>, accessed 26 July 2015.

67 T Yuankai, "Determination in motion. South African swimmer triumphs in Olympics and Paralympics", *Beijing Review* 39, September 2008, p. 1.

68 Robert Masambo, National Chairperson, Disabled People of South Africa. Minutes of the meeting of the Public Service and Administration, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (Disabled People South Africa briefing on education, employment and accessibility challenges), Cape Town, 6 March 2013.

parking and the precise equipment needed for the different sporting disciplines.<sup>69</sup> These needs were emphasised on a continuous basis by administrators and coaches alike. Achievements by high performance athletes in disability sport assisted in fast tracking the solving of many of these problems, but in rural areas it remains a problem.

At school level one of the main challenges highlighted by DISSA shortly after the turn of the century was the issue of incorporating learners with disabilities into the mainstream of the education system. Furthermore, the struggle to get Physical Education re-introduced into the in the core school curriculum, and the training of educators and medical personnel to deal with children with disabilities is continuously regarded as problematic.<sup>70</sup> Other challenges, which DISSA identified in 2003 and which are still not completely solved a decade later, include sufficient funding for development, administration, and the lack of sufficient competition opportunities locally – especially in remote rural areas.<sup>71</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

In drawing attention to the role played by disability sport in reshaping the South African society after 1994, this article concentrated mostly on the impact of the Paralympic Games. The example of the Paralympics was used because it can be compared in parallel with the Olympic Games. It must be strongly emphasised, however, that the Paralympics is not the only successful component of disability sport in the country. The impact and legacy of disability sport on the rainbow nation expands far beyond the boundaries of the Paralympics, but due to practical restrictions, this article could not cover disability sport in its entirety. Disentanglement of the other layers of disability sport's impact on South African society would be the next logical step in the process.

Both disability sport and able-bodied sport suffered the consequences of apartheid before 1994. Disability sport was in a more fortunate position as the Stoke Mandeville Games provided an opportunity which able-bodied sport never had. Unfortunately, this ended during the mid-eighties when apartheid politics also caught up with disability sport. The demise of apartheid led to democracy in South Africa and after 1994, far-reaching changes for the “rainbow nation” also reached the sporting arena. Initially able-bodied sporting codes set the trend in getting South Africa back into the international sporting arena. Soon, however, the successes of the Rugby World Cup (1995) and African Cup of Nations (1996) was imitated in disability sporting codes. While internal issues, such as

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69 DISSA: Presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, Cape Town, 10 June 2003, p. 15.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

71 *Ibid.*

affirmative action in team selection, competition with international clubs to keep key star players and other internal sports politics partially restricted able-bodied sport, disability sport kept on growing.

South African disability sport, sharing the same unjust past of apartheid with able-bodied sport, had other, far more challenging issues to deal with at the same time. The way in which disability sport raised to prominence in post-apartheid South Africa is indicative of the character formed through a long history of confronting challenges. Many sporting heroes rose to prominence through this journey – determined athletes, administrators and coaches who excelled at disability sport and helped reshape a sport-mad country that was once greatly divided.