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*Michael Cottingham and Renan Petersen-Wagner*

“Marketing” can be considered one of the catchwords of contemporary society, embedded as it is, in every-day language. Ellis N et al. (2011) argue that the term has a number of connotations, meaning different things in different situations. Marketing can be used in contexts of companies, individual athletes, or sports; nevertheless, when referring to marketing in an academic setting the conceptualisation must be clear. As defined by O’Reilly et al. (2013), sport marketing is the application of marketing in the sport industry, but first, marketing must be defined in its broadest sense.

There are two common approaches to the definition of marketing (representing, in some respects, contrasting discourses). The first of these addresses the marketing mix that shapes not only our understanding of marketing, but also our practice of marketing, based on a process akin to the preparation of a perfect recipe (Ellis N et al., 2011). Successful marketing relies on effectively mixing the different ingredients, represented by Kotler’s (2000) proposed 4Ps (place, promotion, price, product) (see Grönroos, 1994). In this sense, this first approach makes the company the focal point by looking at how it can mix its different areas of action in order to attract customers. The other common approach is customer sovereignty. In contrast to the former, this views the stakeholders and especially the consumers, as the focal point, rather than the company. In this sense, companies become celestial bodies gravitating around consumers who dictate what and how they want to be served. These approaches are naturally at odds, one assuming the company as the centre of the system and the other assuming the consumer as the centre.

What is proposed in this chapter and exemplified through a discussion of the British Paralympic Association case is that a third avenue can be found where those paradoxical discourses can be reconciled. Companies and consumers are neither centre nor periphery of any system of

marketing, but rather part of an interdependent relationship. The chapter will follow with a discussion of the evolution of marketing thought following the definitions provided by the American Marketing Association (AMA), consider the emergence of relationship marketing within marketing practices, and introduce how sport marketing, and disability sport marketing in particular, have similarly evolved and continue to develop. Then, the Paralympic Games in general will be discussed in terms of financing and sponsorship, followed by the specific analysis of marketing tactics of the British Paralympic Association in order to serve as basis for the proposition of a third hegemonic discourse within marketing practices. The chapter sets out to enhance our understanding of marketing practices as a theory, in the context of disability and specifically Paralympic sport, and how this is applied from the perspective of a relevant executive.

### **History of Marketing Thought**

The early definitions of contemporary marketing influenced how practitioners marketed and also how academics theorised marketing concepts. One of the first definitions of marketing provided by the American Marketing Association in 1935 was “the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers” (AMA, 2008). Under the 1935 definition, marketers were individuals within businesses who planned the logistics in order to widely distribute products and goods to markets.

In 1985, the AMA defined marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, price, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives” (AMA, 2008). This updated definition emphasised the micro-managerial functions of marketing within businesses and defined those functions. Furthermore, it incorporated planning and execution of different marketing activities: conception, price, promotion and distribution, activities similar to Kotler’s 4Ps (see Kotler, 2000) or to the aforementioned marketing mix (see Ellis N et al., 2011). Secondly, this definition introduced the goals of marketing: the satisfaction of individual and organisational objectives. However, by

indicating just two entities of the market, namely, individuals (the consumers) and organisations (the businesses), other stakeholders – such as the civil society, governments, regulators, etc. - were side-lined from the AMA annotation until 2004 when the term was redefined as “an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and stakeholders” (AMA, 2008). Another noteworthy aspect of this new definition is the substitution the terms services and goods for value. It was not until the 2008 definition by the American Marketing Association - which read as "activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2008) - that marketing was given an ever increasing role in promoting societal values.

### **Sport Marketing**

Broadly defined, the tasks that are most relevant to sport marketers are attracting spectators and developing corporate investment and partnerships. The most common goal related to spectators is to assist them with the transition from casual spectators to highly invested fans (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Numerous strategies are used to increase investment and attract spectators, including providing consumers with ideal motivations (Trail & James, 2001); points of attachment such as relationships to teams, sports, nations, or specific players; providing sport parity or dynastic models (Crooker & Fenn, 2007); and service quality of an event (Byon, Zang, & Baker, 2013). These strategies are designed to motivate spectators, and while they can be generally explained, unique contexts and considerations such as the sport presented require tailored planning to attract and meet the needs of spectators (Armstrong, 2002; Greenhalgh, Simmons, Hambrick, & Greenwell, 2011).

If marketing represents relationship to consumers, sponsorship is the relationship to corporations. Sponsorship, more than solely partnering with large scale events, is focused on congruency between the values of a sport, event, team, or individual athlete, and a sponsor

(McDaniel, 1999). Sponsorship and corporate investment have a symbiotic relationship with spectatorship. In short, sponsorship increases the available investment used to attract and better serve spectators, and greater spectatorship undoubtedly entices corporate sponsorship. While sport sponsorship is an effective strategy at almost any time, it can be most effective when spectators are personally invested in the sport (Mioch & Lambrecht, 2006). Specifically, consumers are likely to support a product or organisation if they believe the organisation advances causes the consumers value. Poor performance and bad publicity can be offset or ignored if the organisation is perceived as investing in good causes.

Perhaps, because of this knowledge, a strategy of corporate social responsibility developed. In addition to granting access to the spectators and sports fans, corporate social responsibility provides a greater perspective on the corporate view of an organisation. Corporations are seen as more invested, and these relationships improve brand standing (Walker & Kent, 2009). In addition to direct marketing, and expanding product exposure, sponsorship enables companies to improve brand standing, especially if spectators personally value the event. As will be explored later, disability sport provides an investment opportunity by way of corporate social responsibility. While financially beneficial, this view is potentially problematic, as it may feed into the trope that disability sport is more of a charity donation than a competitive athletic entertainment.

### **Marketing Disability and Disability Sport: an Overview**

Having established the foundational meaning of marketing as well as the importance of the relationships between companies and all stakeholders, the same principles may be applied to understand the industry of sports marketing and, in particular, the newer, less common niche of *disability* sports marketing. As with all marketing, sports and disability sports marketing strive to deliver a product of value to customers and maintain beneficial relationships with stakeholders, just as in the context of sport, where the product is sport events, teams, or other goods involving consumption of the sport (tickets to watch events, sporting memorabilia, fan gear, etc.), the

customers are fans and spectators, and some of the main stakeholders include athletes and sponsors, among others (Byon, Cottingham, & Carroll, 2010).

However, because disability sport has been so infrequently and problematically marketed, some context-specific information will be provided in this text. Disability is rarely seen as part of a marketing strategy and, as a whole, is seldom included in media coverage. People with disabilities are often ignored, perhaps because disability is not viewed as attractive, or because disability reminds people without disabilities about the potential for loss of function or cognition (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2005). As discussed in detail by French and Le Clair in chapter six of this Handbook, when disability *is* covered in the media, it is often presented in either a paternalistic way or central to the image, story, or context (Riley, 2005). This problematic depiction has led academics and social activists, such as the late Stella Young, to refer to the common promotion of disability in public contexts as “inspiration porn” (Young, 2014). Young contended that disability is used to make people without disabilities feel guilty, and that they perceive individuals with disabilities as having to overcome unimaginable difficulties to perform even the simplest of tasks. Yet this view implies a sense pity or an assumption that the person with disability must have an extremely difficult life, to the point that individuals with disabilities often feel offended by being impulsively made into the object of another person’s inspiration. When they do perform and do so beyond expectations, they are inherently seen as inspirational, having overcome barriers associated with their disabilities. This perception creates unique challenges for disability sport promoters who must contend with stereotypes of disability, promoting the truly outstanding athletic feats of the athletes without exploiting their story or otherwise further perpetuating negative perceptions of disdain or inspiration borne of pity and low expectations so prevalent in society. Alluding to the 2004 marketing definition, the company not only has the challenge, but the ethical responsibility of creating value for customers and fostering customer relationships in a way that benefits all stake holders and the society at large, including the athletes, the practitioners, the disability community, the sponsors, and by extension, the greater public,

whose perception of disability can be greatly swayed by the narrow media portrayal of it (AMA 2004).

Take for example elite athletes with mobility impairments. They recognise that their visible disabilities already affect how they are perceived by the public (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009), as both athletic but also as a mechanism for inspiration. Now local coverage of disability sport only exacerbates the problem and further skews public perceptions: an anecdotal review of media such as TV broadcasts, newspapers, and online outlets shows a proclivity to focus more on the athletes' personal stories rather than their athletic accomplishments, as these sources often fail to even report scores, rankings, or times that athletes completed events. Consequently, the public tends to focus less on the extraordinary athletic capabilities of the athletes, but rather on their disabilities and how they cope with them day to day. As discussed by French and Le Clair, athletes can find it frustrating to be identified by their disabilities and not fully recognised for athleticism, an all too common phenomenon that invalidates or at least minimises the impact of any praise they receive.

Yet, despite media's lack of attention to athletic achievements, athletes with disabilities have actually debated whether or not their personal stories should be used when promoting disability sport as sources of inspiration, one of the motivating factors that attracts consumers. The results of at least one study indicate division. Some individuals believe that disability sport should avoid the term "inspiration" and focus more on traditional sport promotion tactics; however, others believe that using an inspirational narrative is necessary to promote disability sport (Cottingham, Gearity, Goldsmith, Kim, & Walker, 2015). An alternative study found when disability sport managers at national and international organisations were asked about methods for promoting disability sport, some called for a full focus on athleticism and a disengagement with disability, but others saw a benefit in sharing athlete injury stories (Cottingham, Gearity, & Byon, 2013).

Given these contradictory viewpoints, some professionals responsible for promoting disability sport simply do not feel adequately equipped to make the best decisions to market the

product (Cottingham, Blais, Gearity Bogle, & Zapalac, 2015). Studies assert that professionals in fields such as sport management are seldom even exposed to disability sport in their training and professional development, and therefore ill-prepared and unknowledgeable when it comes to marketing (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014; Shapiro, Pitts, Hums, & Calloway, 2012). The implication is that most individuals engaged in the promotion of disability sport are not learning about disability on the job nor are they receiving relevant training.

Alternatively, sport promoters might have practical exposure to disability sport, but lack training in sport management-specific programming. Until recently, disability sport marketers have had little to no empirical data to work with that provide guidance on disability sport promotion. Anecdotal evidence, trial and error, and a hunch were the realistic current strategies for determining how to garner sponsorship, attract spectatorship, and increase community support (Cottingham et al. 2015).

### *Consumer Behaviour*

On the subject of support and spectatorship, customers, or consumers are another integral part of the marketing relationship, now that disability sport business activities have been reviewed. Consumer behaviour of non-disabled and disability sport will presently be addressed to provide some insight into what motivates them to attend events, or buy into the product the company is promoting. First, non-disabled sport spectatorship research has noted that spectators are primarily motivated by factors such as drama of close games, physical skill of the athletes, escape from day-to-day activities, and social interaction with others (Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). In addition to motivation, spectators are often driven to consume sport by their points of attachment. These are represented by factors such as desire to support a team, a sport, specific athletes, or a city (Robinson, M. J., Trail, G. T., & Kwon; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003). These incentives constitute the framework explication for why people consume sport. Research on *disability* sport consumers shows that they are driven by the same motives as



non-disabled sport, but they are additionally motivated by unique factors such as attachment and interest in the disability community, inspiration, and a desire to watch athletes overcome (Cottingham, Carroll, et al., 2014; Cottingham, Chatfield, Gearity, Allen, & Hall, 2012; Cottingham, Phillips, Hall, Gearity, & Carroll, 2014). None of these factors have been observed motives in non-disabled contexts. While there may be a presumption that most or all individuals in attendance have some relationship to disability (a friend or family member or themselves having a disability), data collected from large-scale international disability sport events indicated that this is simply not the case. Rather, a significant proportion of spectators have no direct relationship to disability (Cottingham et al., 2012; de Haan, Faull, & Kohe, 2014; Evaggelinou, C., & Grekinis, 1998).

### **Marketing the Paralympic Games: an Overview**

This is an interesting point and one that affects all stakeholders in the marketing of one of the prime events of disability sport: the Paralympic Games. Businesses can cater to a more diverse clientele, as can potential sponsors, and a wider array of customers can find greater value in the product without being directly related to disability. The Paralympic Games provide an exemplar case because it faces the typical challenges of disability sport marketing, but still has a wide reach and the capacity to make a significant impact. In that respect, the Games are directly influenced by sport promoters with little knowledge of disability sport and sport-management specific programming. Especially at the grassroots level and given the poor local communication networks and presentation of disability sport, the Games must continually find ways to stimulate interest and educate the wider public to promote engagement. Yet consistently new ticket sales records are broken, broadcasting is expanded, overall event quality is improved, and more corporate sponsors and partners join the Paralympic Movement.

While our empirical data is limited, it is important to examine the available information pertaining to the spectators of the Paralympic Games. The following statistics are based on the

London Games: spectators were primarily from the UK (14% were international), male, between the ages of 24-45, and most were spectating with family and friends (Ekmekci, Berber, Zaharia, & Turco, 2013). Their spectatorship contributed to stimulating the economy. Even those from the UK had typically travelled and spent 1-2 nights in the area, while those who had travelled internationally spent an average of 6.5 nights (Ekmekci, et al., 2013). Additionally, 2.7 million spectators attended events, and ticket sales were over \$70 million (CBS News 2012).

Spectatorship and sport consumption was mixed during the Rio games. Specifically, attendance at the height of the Rio Paralympics was greater than at the Rio Olympics (Steinberg, 2016). However, many tickets for the Paralympics were not purchased on the open market by consumers; instead, many philanthropists donated the tickets for youth to view the games (Indian Express Website 2016).

In addition to the spectatorship detailed above, broadcast coverage has increased spectator access to the games with publicly funded media outlets. The UK is currently leading the way with coverage, but private media outlets such as NBC, while having been criticised alongside other US networks for poor coverage of the 2012 Games committed themselves to enhancing the level of coverage at future Games (IPC Website 2014). A review of the promotional efforts provided by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) shows a commitment to both promoting the inspirational aspects of disability whilst also aggressively highlighting world records, gold medal winners, and stories of national pride. Fortunately, greater outlet and coverage of disability sport has assisted in developing a more appropriate representation of disability sport as an athletic endeavour. It is clear that a sophisticated and complex presentation of disability sport is utilised by the IPC to engage fans on their terms. As disability sport practitioners identified, sharing stories and engaging inspirational narratives might attract spectators, but only a presentation of athletes and their accomplishments can turn them into fans (Cottingham, Gearity, & Byon, 2013). In short, the difference between spectators and fans is investment in the game and its outcome, not simply the stories of the athletes. If fans are to be made who have a genuine attachment, they must be focused

on the outcome on the field, with a rooting interest, a willingness to boo and be disappointed in performance, and a feeling of vicarious achievement, which is incomparable with paternalism.

While social media is not the primary focus of this chapter, its role in a marketing context is worth briefly noting. Although broadcasting coverage of disability sport has increased, it is still limited, and the presentations are not always in line with the images athletes would like to portray. Because of this, Paralympic athletes have taken promotional efforts into their own hands. Rather than permitting the media to define elite disability sport, many athletes manage their public social media pages to control how disability is presented and marketed (Pate, Hardin, & Ruibley, 2014). While empirical research is lacking on the social media efforts of practitioners, a cursory review of websites from international governing bodies, national governing bodies, and disability sport advocacy groups would seem to mirror the efforts of individual athletes. Specifically, they are working to promote Paralympic and elite disability sport on terms that present the sport favourably and portray participants as athletes rather than as inspirational stories. Further discussion of social media and representations of disability through the Paralympic Games, forms part of French and Le Clair's chapter (5).

### *Disability Sport Sponsorship and the Paralympic Games*

If the fans are the customers and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the company in this marketing relationship, then the IPC must be aware of the need to not only maintain and attract new customers, but sponsors as well, some of their most important stakeholders when it comes to financial support. Sponsors are individuals, organisations, or commonly companies providing funds or other provisions in support of a team or event such as the Paralympic Games. When a company is involved, it seeks to positively impact its brand and image when considering sponsorships. Additionally, a company's portfolio is often developed to meet key needs, gain access to constituents, or present itself as a player in large-scale sport promotions (Pitts & Stotlar, 1996).

In the last few decades, sponsorship selection has improved and become more sophisticated. (Giannoulakis, Stotlar, & Chatziefstathiou, 2008). Unlike smaller scale disability sporting events where charity seems to be a motivational factor for at least some sponsors (Cottingham et al., 2013), sponsors of the Paralympic Games categorise their commitments as investments. In order to understand these motivations, Kabitsis, Harahousou, and Kostaris (2002) interviewed 15 executives who represented companies sponsoring the Sydney 2000 Games. Their reasons for investment were to gain access to the community hosting the event, to compliment Olympic sponsorships (extending their coverage another 30 days), and to reaffirm their partnerships with Team Australia programmes. In addition, an investment in the Paralympic Games provided sponsors access to corporate speakers, which gave the sponsors an extended relationship. Other motivations included sponsoring an “inspirational event,” a motive previously affirmed as driving some spectators. Lastly branding and corporate image should be considered. Corporations are often disliked, and are perceived as being disinterested in people (Walker, 2010). Some companies utilised this particular opportunity to invest in a feel-good cause in order to address image issues relating to being perceived as indifferent. Furthermore, if a company’s actions are associated with contributing to a cause that a spectator values, the spectator is more likely to purchase that product (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010).

Research shows that sponsors are gaining significant returns on investing in the Paralympic Games. By Seoul, sponsors were receiving an improved corporate image, and attending spectators expressed a desire to invest in the sponsors in the future (Nam & Lee, 2013). These benefits seem to extend beyond those who are present at the Games. If individuals know that a corporation sponsors the Paralympic Games, they are more likely to purchase products from them because they had both familiarity and positive associations with the Games (Park, Yoh, Choi, & Olson, 2011). In short, an investment in the Paralympic Games provides a greater likelihood in brand standing and the potential for a positive return on investment.

Further proof of the power of investment in the Paralympic Games is the movement that has been seen to protect the Games against ambush marketing tactics (Ellis, Gauthier, & Seguin, 2011). Ambush marketing is a systematic effort of non-sponsoring organisations to confuse consumers on the identity of the true sponsor. Often organisations will invest less money in the hopes to gain notoriety around a large-scale sporting event. If corporations are willing to engage in ambush marketing around the Paralympic Games, it is safe to assume that corporations see substantial value in the event. In brief, investment in the Paralympic Games seems to be prudent. There is return on investment, the corporations recognise the benefits of the brand, and there is competition to have access to the Paralympic brand.

Of the 12.5 million Euros generated by the IPC in 2014, half came from ticket sales, broadcasting, marketing efforts, strategic and corporate partnerships, and related efforts (“International Paralympic Committee Annual Report,” 2014).

Marketing revenue also includes sponsorship and fundraising events, and at fifty percent of IPC’s revenue, this is the most sizable portion of the Paralympic revenue generation. In addition, other IPC sport events yield about twenty percent of the revenue with grants producing another twelve percent. Membership fees and related expenses make up a smaller portion of the budget. In short, the current financial model is sustainable, and as the Paralympic brand grows, it provides an effective model to increase revenue, relying more on corporate investment.

### **BPA Case Study**

Jane Jones was until 2015 the director of marketing and communications for British Paralympic Association (BPA) and has been involved in various capacities since 1990. Accordingly, she has observed Paralympic marketing for over 25 years. She noted a number of themes which augment, clarify, or redirect findings previously identified in the literature. The reader is invited to review the excerpts from this interview<sup>1</sup> and consider how they echo, elaborate on, or refute findings previously presented in this chapter. While a single case study, her comments present the challenges

and opportunities of marketing disability sport and draw out points previously identified through the literature. The following section reviews her experiences in marketing Paralympic sport.

### *Initial sponsor investment*

Jones noted that sponsorship was initially not as sophisticated nor evident as sponsorship in the 1990s. Funding was often seen as a charitable action rather than an investment. Jones described the sponsorship that was received:

Smith Kline Beecham, Bird's Eye Walls, Rank/Odeon Cinemas, Birkhoff Associates and Seeker's International... But the point I make there is I think although that's quite an impressive, long list was any of it actually true sponsorship? Probably not, it was they had rights of association, they had I'm sure; a sponsorship contract was drawn up and rights to use the logo and things. But actually, as we know, sports sponsorship to be nowadays it wasn't, it was corporate social responsibility, it was charitable donations, it was philanthropy, really, helping a charity, a charitable organisation.

Additional support was simply in kind donations, products (such as fencing materials), and flight arrangements, rather than direct financial investment.

### *Education of sponsors*

Many potential large sponsors have little to no experience with the Paralympic Games. As corporate sponsorship became more of an investment and less of a charitable affair, Jones and her staff took sponsors and potential sponsors to the Beijing Paralympic Games to educate them; this was a non-traditional move. However, Jones noted that many sponsors travel to non-disabled sporting events in order to observe sponsorship investment. Jones explained, "You know, if you're Coca-Cola you want to know where are the vending machines going to go and that kind of thing." Nonetheless, the BPA motivation for taking sponsors was quite different, and Jones elaborated:

They came out to the Paralympics, and we said we're not doing any of that [product observation], we're just taking you to see the sport and to meet some of the athletes and the people involved.... I think the people who haven't seen the Paralympics they expect it to be not a great sporting spectacle. They expect to feel sympathy for the people that they're watching but actually, they don't.... They go and see it and its amazing, thrilling, gripping,

exciting sport. They don't feel sympathy at all for the competitors and the athletes they feel respect, absolute respect for these people who are sportsmen and women...and the brilliant thing about Beijing was, of course, the stadiums were full.

This well-planned approach helped the view of sponsorship of the Paralympic Games evolve from charity to investment in elite athletics. Further efforts were taken to educate potential sponsors, such as moving away from feel good stories to presentations of athletic empowerment. Jones described:

We did an ad, which we called Superheroes. And the idea was, again, that we shot these athletes looking incredible, like they would be in an Adidas or a Nike commercial. You know beautifully shot, beautifully lit, looking really muscle-y, and showing off their physique. We wanted to show that human side too... So we showed that to the partners and they could see that actually this didn't have to be something that was all, you know, violins in the background and making you feel terribly sad... So we did that, we took these sponsors out and they definitely did feel differently about it. They came back and started to persuade their colleagues, persuade their senior people within their business.

#### *The compromise of how the Paralympic Games is presented*

When Jones was asked about the presentation of inspirational backstories, she noted she used to be highly frustrated with this method as the focus should be on the results of athletes. However, she followed up with a recognition that the storyline and the nature of a disability is probably an acceptable marketing tool as long as it is not the end presentation. Jones elaborated:

And I think I probably softened my view a little bit, as we got towards London 'cause I was thinking, do you know what, if there's a door marked Paralympic and they have to go through it by finding out whether it was a car accident or whether it was – let them get into the room. I know that they'll leave that room that says Paralympic being absolutely blown away by the quality of the sport.... You know the fact that Great Britain won 120 medals in London that the nation sat up, took notice, watched, and they weren't doing it because they were feeling pity for the athletes they were doing it because it was brilliant sport. And it was sport that they've not seen before in quite a few cases.

#### *Brand of the Paralympics*

Perhaps most interesting was Jones's take on the current position on the brand of the Paralympics, which provides substantive opportunity and fits a marketing niche but also notes the existing barriers. Jones contends that because elite athleticism is often coupled with a sense of ostentatiousness and extravagance and because athletes at times make poor choices that reflect on

sponsors, sponsoring sports can be profitable, but they can also be a landmine for corporate sponsors. In contrast, the Paralympics are perceived differently, which allows them to be considered a safer investment. Simultaneously, this means that the games have not fully 'arrived.'

Jones explained:

I think it's moved on now, and the fact that companies in the social media age can be criticised for who they support they have to be much more conscious of that. And so you've seen examples of where sponsors have started to push back against sports organisations or indeed, individuals when they felt that that association is going to be damaging to them. ...I think in the Paralympic perspective, as I say, we are in a fortunate position in that we are a long way from anybody being openly critical of the Paralympics. I sometimes joke and say my job will be done when the wheelchair basketball team has a shocking game and castigated on the back pages of the press in the same way that the England football team are. And then we will be truly equal.

*Exposure sells the sport and shifts perceptions (and sells the sport more)*

It should be noted that Jones is clearly invested in addressing perceptions and making Paralympic sport more relatable. In order to accomplish these goals, she engages in breaking down perceived barriers associated with disability. In turn, she works to present images that are similar to spectators' previous experiences when viewing sport. This process makes disability sport more digestible. Jones explained:

I think one of the critical things that happened in London, was Jody Cundy having an absolute meltdown<sup>2</sup>. I thought that was, you know, with hindsight that was a fantastic symbol to the rest of the world to say do you know what, this really matters to these guys. He's put four years of his life on the line training for this, and you can see how much this means.

Jones continued:

So all of those things I think are fantastic symbols and when you're marketing something that people don't really know about, they look for things that they recognise. So that was a really good example for all the journalists that were covering the Paralympic sport that bloody hell they take this really seriously....And so the point I'm trying to make here is that we still need to market the Paralympic per se. We haven't got the hard core, the volume, of hard core sports fans that want to know what Ellie Simmonds time was last weekend, where she's ranked in the world. We're still very much in the territory of oh; it's a fantastic thing, Paralympic. I love it. I love watching it. Yes, I'll watch that but I wouldn't be interested in watching it if it wasn't in a very good stadium somewhere and if I was the only person sitting there. It's that whole package that has to do with scale and spectacle.



Finally, Jones addressed the belief that the future of marketing the Games is presenting athleticism.

In summation, she offered the following:

So yes, we have a massive marketing job still to do. I think we know how to do it now. I think we understand that it's not about athlete back-stories per se, it's about sporting endeavour and trying to get people to see the sport, experience the sport. How you present it making them, I mean you look at the Channel 4 Super Humans film and how fantastic that was and what a phenomenal job that did in terms of saying do you know what, the best in my view is still to come. Look at them, they look phenomenal sportsmen and women, and that attitude that that film showed was tremendous.

### **Overview and concluding thoughts**

As outlined in this chapter, marketing Paralympic sport is a uniquely challenging and engaging process. The promoters of the sport utilise traditional marketing strategies but must address stereotypes, limited awareness, and insufficient resources. Societal perceptions of disability cause additional difficulties, as these preconceived notions are often transposed onto athletes with disabilities. Finding the balance of how to promote athletes with disabilities has been a recurring theme and a consideration for practitioners as far back as the 1980s (Cottingham, Carroll, Lee, Shapiro, & Pitts, 2016), and it will likely be a challenge for years to come.

Strategies exist to address these considerations when marketing Paralympic sport, and promoters are finding success. To attract spectators, marketers are first spotlighting personal stories, and in order to sustain interest, they are transitioning the attention to athleticism. These efforts, which directly address perception and focus on athlete ability, are also used on sponsors and company executives, as evidenced by the statements from Jane Jones, and supported by academic research (Cottingham et al., 2013), which noted that executives struggle to find the balance between inspirational stories and athletic accomplishments. Furthermore, this method creates a more inclusive model for marketing Paralympic sport and is more relatable to other forms of sport promotion. Efforts to educate and attract spectators must and will continue, utilising traditional marketing strategies such as nationalism (Robinson et al., 2004) along with motivations unique to

this setting such as education about disability, disability cultural education, and perhaps even disability inspiration (Cottingham, Phillips et al., 2014).

Practitioners consider and project the next movement of Paralympic sport marketing. While significant progress has been made in terms of television coverage with Britain's Channel 4 providing over 150 hours of coverage during the London Games (International Paralympic Committee, 2012), coverage in large nations such as the United States, China, and India was underwhelming. Worldwide, coverage of the Rio Games increased, but the Games gained exposure in measured paces rather than in leaps. Furthermore, countries such as India had no coverage of the Rio Games (dna India website 2016). Cries of Paralympic fatigue (Sweney, 2012) cannot be ignored and should be addressed. Marketers must convince broadcasters and corporate sponsors that the Paralympic Games are of the same athletic acumen but with a unique consideration that will attract new spectators and reinvigorate those watching the Olympic Games. In short, efforts must be made to ensure progress is aggressive rather than incremental.

In the end, potential sponsors will have to be informed that this is not a charitable effort but instead a financial investment. As noted by Jones, the brand of the Paralympic Games is strong and safe; in a time of disappointing athletes and poor choices, Paralympic investment is comparably risk free. Furthermore, a strong return on investment should motivate investors (Nam & Lee, 2013). This notion was tested in Rio, which saw a movement to charitable ticket provision but also strong attendance of the games. The most recent games showed that the Paralympic movement is solid and viable but perhaps not promoted as the athletic pinnacle it truly is. Future marketers will undoubtedly work to solidify the Games as an athletic accomplishment rather than simply as an educational opportunity.

## **Notes**

1. This interview was undertaken by Dr Ian Brittain and Dr Renan Petersen Wagner from Coventry University, UK at the offices of the British Paralympic Association on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015.
2. The world-record holder in the 1km time trial C4 class and six-years unbeaten, Cundy was marked as 'did not finish', by the judges following an argument over what Cundy felt was a faulty start gate that caused his back wheel to spin as he started his ride causing him to stop after 5 min.

The judges' decision caused him to have a highly public meltdown in front of the cameras and spectators. (Daily Telegraph Website 2012)

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