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A SOCIAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENT IN ISRAEL OF SPORTS FOR PERSONS WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the main developments within Israel of sports for persons with a physical disability across the 60 years of its existence. Following introductory remarks on the global development of this aspect of sports in relation to Israel's cultural context, the early leaders, who have established sports for persons with disability in Israel, are acknowledged. In the next section, the official structures governing and facilitating organised sports for participants with a disability are portrayed, leading up to an account of Israel's participation in Paralympic games. Trends in participation of male and female athletes and the medals gained between 1960 and 2004 are highlighted and discussed. This review of the Paralympic accomplishments is completed with a comprehensive description of the events related to hosting the Paralympic Games in 1968. Current trends and future directions, encompassing the need for increasing grassroots level participation sum up this article.

Introduction

On March 31st, 2007 Israel signed the United Nations Convention on Human Rights for Disabled Persons. [1] This convention includes Article 30, encompassing the provision of equal opportunities for practicing and participating in a variety of leisure activities including sports and physical activity for recreation, fitness, and education in schools. [2] This was an important milestone for summarising the 60-year period since the state's establishment with regard to sports for participants with a disability. Due to space limitations, this article will restrict its overview to participants with physical and sensory disabilities only, who typically participate in organised sports games governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), including mostly participants with spinal cord lesions due to congenital, disease or acquired disability, and those with cerebral palsy, amputations, or visual impairments. The dearth of published material regarding the state or development of sport for participants with a disability in Israel has made writing this article particularly challenging. Individual interviews of selected key informants who have been involved in Israeli sport for the disabled over long periods of time in the last sixty years were the major source of information.[3] The development of a sports movement in Israel for participants with a disability was inextricably linked to the international development of this movement, by the German-Jewish neurologist Ludwig Guttmann, who relocated to England from Germany due to the up rise of the Nationalist Party there in 1939. Therefore, a short synopsis of the development of organised sports for participants with disability is warranted here.

Guttmann began his work at Oxford University and was appointed by the British Government in September 1943 as Director of the National Spinal Injuries Unit at the

Ministry of Pensions Hospital, Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury, to take care of the numerous soldiers and civilians with sensori-motor lesions as a result of spinal injuries.[4] Guttmann brought a new philosophy to the treatment of such individuals, [5] and many of his colleagues were surprised by his enthusiasm for what they perceived as an utterly daunting task. ‘They could not understand’, commented Guttmann, ‘how I could leave Oxford University to be engulfed in the hopeless and depressing task of looking after traumatic spinal paraplegics [6]

There is little evidence prior to 1939 of organised efforts to develop sport for individuals with a disability, especially those with spinal injuries who were considered to have little hope of survival. Following the war, however, medical authorities were prompted to re-evaluate traditional methods of rehabilitation which were not satisfactorily addressing the medical and psychological needs of the large number of soldiers disabled in combat. [7] According to Mc Cann, [8] Guttmann ‘recognised the physiological and psychological values of sport in the rehabilitation of paraplegic hospital inpatients’ and so sport became a central part of his rehabilitation process. He believed that his patients could become useful members of society and complete tasks that many able-bodied persons would find difficult. As part of this programme, Guttmann initiated the paraplegic games at his hospital in Stoke Mandeville.

On Thursday, 29 July 1948, a small wheelchair archery competition was held at Stoke Mandeville, the same day as the opening of the London Olympic Games. [9] Participants were eight ex-servicemen from the Star and Garter Home in Richmond who competed against six ex-servicemen and two ex-servicewomen from Stoke Mandeville. [10] The next year this grew to include a wheelchair netball event alongside the archery

tournament. This event continued to grow until in 1952 the first international participants from the Netherlands arrived to take part. This event is accepted as the first organised international competitive sporting event for persons with disabilities, and it is the root of the Paralympic movement.

Israel followed these initiatives very closely. The first three Israeli participants in the Stoke Mandeville games arrived in 1953 [11]. They were joined in this event by teams from The Netherlands, France, Canada, Finland, as well as from spinal units from around Britain. [12] Despite this big increase in the number of international competitors Israel still managed to win one gold medal in the breaststroke swimming event, [13] and continued to succeed in subsequent competitions.

The reasons for this rather early engagement by a nation just recovering from a two-year war of independence can be attributed to (a) the many casualties of the war, and (b) the thousands of impaired children resulting from the polio epidemics in Israel during the 1950's. [14] Another possible reason was the strong links to European and American cultural scenes brought by Jewish immigrants from these countries. Examples of such influential persons who subsequently became leaders in the development of sports of persons with disability in Israel are described in detail in the following section.

Early Leaders

Gershon Huberman [15]

Huberman, a Polish Jew, immigrated to Palestine in 1937 and soon after joined the British army, where he was trained as a physiotherapist. In 1946 he completed his service and returned to settle in Palestine. In the late 1940's he attended an eighteen

month long course in physical education at the recently-established Wingate Institute. As part of this course Huberman came into contact with orthopaedic surgeons and because of his physiotherapy training they began to send him their private patients for treatment. The two major sources of sport participants with disability at that time were veterans of the Israel Defense Force (IDF), who were injured during their military service, including the War of Independence, and victims of the polio epidemics breaking out in the early 1950's. One source of professional knowledge was Ludwig Guttmann who visited Israel in 1949 and 1956 and shared his medical and rehabilitation perspective with professionals, including Huberman. Another important source was the German physical educator and sport teacher Konrad Lorenzen, who published a masterpiece of professional guidance to sports for participants with a physical disability in German.[16] He was a personal friend of Huberman and his book together with Guttmann's writings influenced Huberman's early experiences of introducing swimming, table tennis, athletics and wheelchair basketball to participants with disabilities. Huberman was affiliated with the Israeli Association for Children with Disability (ILAN), which due to its major impact on the polio vaccination campaign and establishment of the first physiotherapy school in Israel and other rehabilitation endeavours, received a piece of land especially for the practice of sport for participants with disability. This land was used for summer camps and in 1958 a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the construction of an adapted sports hall, which was officially opened on 1 September 1960, the same day as the opening ceremony of the Rome Olympic Games. It was named the 'Spewack Centre' after its principal benefactors and is better known today as the Israel Sports Centre for the Disabled (ISCD) operated by the ILAN Organisation.

In the early 1960's, with a growing knowledge and expertise in the use of adapted physical exercise, particularly for participants with neuro-muscular impairments such as spinal cord injury, polio and cerebral palsy, Huberman introduced to the programme two annual events. These particular events appear quite surprising, given that the maximum distance raced at the Stoke Mandeville or Paralympic Games was fifty metres for swimming events and about forty metres for the wheelchair dash on the track. The first was suggested after a trip by the Centre's athletes to Eilat in 1962 for a cross country march. Upon their return the participants asked if they could take part in the annual March to Jerusalem, which consisted of four days of walking, covering about 120km in four days over difficult terrain. Following some haggling with the organisers who were at first incredulous at the request, Huberman was eventually given permission for participants from the Centre to take part. They immediately began training each weekend, increasing the difficulty and distance they covered with each walk until they were ready. The march eventually became an annual event for the Centre. The same year they participated in their first March to Jerusalem (1963) the centre also entered participants in the swim across the Sea of Galilee, which could be anywhere from 3.5 to 4.5km depending upon the water levels in the lake. The successful completion of these events by athletes with a disability was one of the reasons that led to the introduction of two open one hundred metre swimming races for men in breaststroke and freestyle at the 1968 Paralympic Games in Israel.

Dr Ralph Spira

Dr Ralph Spira was born in Breslau, Germany, which incidentally was where Ludwig Guttmann went to university to study medicine, although it is unlikely they met

there, as Guttman was considerably older than Spira. However, following his own training in medicine Spira spent some time as Medical Officer at the National Spinal Training Centre at Stoke Mandeville. Apparently, he was very taken with the use of sport as a rehabilitative tool in general and with the Stoke Mandeville Games in particular. According to one of his letters, he left Stoke Mandeville in 1952 'to open and run a rehabilitation centre' in Israel at Tel Hashomer hospital in Tel Aviv. The letter, which appeared in *The Cord*, a journal for paraplegics published at Stoke Mandeville, stated that one of his first aims was to 'send a small skeleton team of paraplegics' from Israel to take part in the Stoke Mandeville Games "as soon as practicable". [17] Spira fulfilled this promise the very next year when he accompanied a small team of spinally injured IDF veterans to the Games. In time Spira took over the role of medical advisor to Israeli disability sports teams.

Spira was also a leading investigator, together with the later world-famous pediatric physiologist Oded Bar-Or, in the first attempt to scientifically quantify evidence of the impact of physical activity and sports on participants with disability, which was supported by a United States Vocational Rehabilitation Administration grant. [18] The findings of this research. [19] later won second prize at the Rehabilitation International World Congress in Dublin.

Reuven Heller[20]

Reuven Heller, was born in Haifa to an immigrant family coming from Germany. After the end of the War of Independence Heller was engaged in the rehabilitation programme of the Tel Hashomer Hospital, which attempted to follow Guttman's model. Several years later he completed a sport education course at the Wingate PE teacher's

college and joined the ISCD, where he still works today. Heller was influential in training and managing Israeli youth and sports teams throughout decades of high achievement, among them two Paralympic gold-medal teams in wheelchair basketball, in 1968 and 1976. Throughout the 1970's Heller was among the major decision-makers in the International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation.

Many other individuals need be acknowledged as facilitators of participation in sports for individuals with a disability. The swim teacher and coach Margalit Rosenfeld is one of the persons who carried out the mission right from the beginning. The late athletics coach Edna Medalia was another famous personality, encouraging many athletes to practice, and they went on to win many medal events. Obviously space limitations do not permit acknowledgement of all those who shared this commitment and who were driving forces needed to motivate young persons with a disability to participate in sports in times of limited resources.

Organisational Structure

Interestingly, the development of organisational structures in organised sports in Israel for participants with a disability was not related to the structures governing regular sport, such as 'Macabi', 'Hapoel', 'Beitar', and other clubs available for non-disabled participants. The unique knowledge and equipment necessary for training participants with a disability eventually required the establishment of separate organisations fostering unique activities mostly in specialised settings. The main driving forces of this development in Israel on a national level are listed below. Several other minor organisations have also been effective in promoting a variety of activities, mostly on a local level. Space limitations do not permit naming all of them.

Israel Defence Forces Disabled Veterans Association (IDF-DVA)

The IDF-DVA was established following Israel's War of Independence, which ended in 1949, as a non-profit organization for assisting the six thousand veteran soldiers disabled as a result of the conflict – more than 0.5 percent of the nation's population. The IDF-DVA and the veterans themselves were heavily funded by the Ministry of Defence and benefited from various financial privileges, identifying them as a unique group of the 'needy', having a much higher status and far better care and remuneration than the regular disabled individuals, due to the sacrifices they made in the name of an array of social values. [21] Apart of the financial benefits, veterans in the IDF-DVA also profited from attitudes toward them which were superior compared to attitudes toward other individuals with disability.

As a part of its social rehabilitation programme the IDF-DVA established a network of social, sport and rehabilitation centres, called 'Bet Halochem'. The veterans were provided with various programmes including sport, that gave them the opportunity to re-establish a regular routine, to maintain physical fitness in order to prevent deterioration in their health, and which encouraged them to renew social contacts that were lost due their hospitalisation and the isolation from the outside world. [22] The first of these centres was opened just prior to the 'Yom Kippur' War, another landmark event in Israel's modern history, resulting in thousands more individuals with a disability. The impact of the number of individuals accumulating after wars, and the improved financial support, was significant in terms of their options to participate in organised physical activity and sports, and on the length of their participation compared to participants with a non IDF veteran recognised disability. The first Israeli participants in the Stoke

Mandeville Games were members of the IDF-DVA, and around 70% of the participants in recent Israeli Paralympic teams also belong to this group. [23]

Israeli Association for Children with Disability-ILAN

As already reported in the section on early leaders, the ILAN organization was among the first in the world acknowledging the benefits of physical activity and sports for children and youth with disabilities. The ISCD was established in 1960, and hosted participants from both the ILAN and the IDF-DVA organizations until the latter opened their rehabilitation centres in Tel Aviv and Haifa in the 1970's. ILAN had a leading role in hosting the 1968 Paralympic games in Israel, and throughout its existence has been acknowledged as a centre of motor and social development for children and adolescents with disability. The report of Spira and Bar-Or[19] has described significant improvement, following a 12 months intervention program, in motor performance tasks such as walking on a level and inclined surface for a distance of 25 meters. They also reported improved aerobic physical performance in children with cerebral palsy (CP) one year after the beginning of a training program, compared with children who only participated in therapeutic exercise. [24] These findings [25] are of particular importance, since during the 1960's and 1970's the professional physical therapy world mostly followed the principles of Bobath therapy. [26] and largely opposed specific and non-specific resistance training, assuming that this might increase spasticity in children with CP. Only during the last decade has further evidence established the early findings of the Israeli investigators. However, their recommendations were followed by many coaches and instructors, some of whom acquired unique academic training in physical activity for

participants with a disability on a specialist course started in 1987 at the Zinman College for Physical Education and Sport Sciences at the Wingate institute. Continuous work, particularly in the aquatic domain, has further established the impact of participation in the ISCD programme on respiratory [27] and motor performance, [28] particularly in kindergarten children with a disability.

Challenge [29]

A new option of participation has been introduced to children and adults with a disability with the establishment of the Challenge organisation, devoted to recreational and outdoor activities. The establishment of Challenge as a non-profit organisation in the early 1990's has been a driving force for the development of a new array of activities almost unknown to participants with a disability in Israel. Cycling with tandem bikes for persons with visual impairment, as well as hand-cycles, together with sailing, motocross, scuba diving, skiing and many other options of performing in the outdoors have increased the limited repertoire of possibilities to excel in physical activities available to persons with a disability in Israel thus far. This organisation engendered an increase in the numbers of participants and has also been involved in training several competitive sports teams, among them the successful sailing team that won a gold medal in the Athens Paralympics in 2004.

Governmental support

Supporting agencies for disability sport are very limited in Israel. Since its inception disability sport and competitive teams from Israel have had to rely almost completely on sponsorships, donations, and the work of volunteers in order to continue operating and developing. The Athens Paralympic Games were the first Games where the

Israeli team received government funding from the Ministry of Sports and Culture to cover for the cost of sending the team. [30] Further, these athletes had to rely on sponsors' support to pay for training facilities, coaches, equipment and transportation costs. [31] The Ministry of Defence directly funds veterans as well as their sport governing body. For civilian participants with a disability the situation is more complex, and no direct support is provided for physical activity in the community or in clubs. However, several governmental agencies [32] do provide financial support across funds for specific aims: (a) The National Insurance Institute (NII) for service development for individuals with a disability, and (b) the NII Fund for Special Projects. The latter has facilitated a variety of unique projects, such as individual educational planning in physical education, an educational centre for the dissemination of information and continuous education in populations with special needs in physical education and sports, as well as a reverse-integration program for young wheelchair basketball players with and without a disability.

Israel's Participation in Paralympic Games

As related above, Israel first sent a team to the International Stoke Mandeville Games in 1953 when Dr. Spira accompanied three Israeli war veterans. The Games at Stoke Mandeville continued to grow, and although Israel continued to send a similar sized team every year the increasing number of participants from around the world and the increasing standard of competition meant that they only had limited success, taking a silver medal in 1956 and another silver medal in 1959. [33] Since 1960 Israel has regularly participated in the international summer games for persons with disability which were named Parlympics, referring to games parallel to the Olympics. Israel has

never competed in the Paralympic Winter Games, which began in 1976. However, it is one of the only twelve countries to have hosted a Summer Paralympic Games prior to Beijing 2008. Table 1 describes the participation, placing and medal account of the Israeli athletes throughout the Paralympic games compared to the participation and outcomes of other countries. Figure 1 presents the percentage of total and gold medals won by Israeli athletes throughout the Paralympic games, and Figure 2 the placing compared to the percentage of the Israeli athletes out of all participants.

Table 1: Participation data and outcomes of Israel in the Paralympics

Year	Venue	All participants	Israel participants	Participating nations	Israel place	Gold medals	Israel gold	All medals	Israel medals
1960	Rome	400	20	21	16	113	0	291	4
1964	Tokyo	375	20	21	7	144	7	419	21
1968	Tel Aviv	730	56	28	3	188	18	576	62
1972	Heidelberg	1004	43	42	8	188	9	575	28
1976	Toronto	1657	68	40	3	447	40	1172	69
1980	Arnhem	1973	55	42	12	587	13	1610	46
1984	New York/ SM*	2900	61	54	19	973	11	2767	44
1988	Seoul	3053	62	60	18	733	15	2208	45
1992	Barcelona	3004	62	83	34	490	2	1503	11
1996	Atlanta	3259	40	103	52	518	0	1577	9
2000	Sydney	3881	33	122	37	550	3	1657	6
2004	Athens	3806	24	136	32	519	4	1567	13

*Stoke Mandeville

Figure 1: Israel's athlete participation and placing in the Paralympics

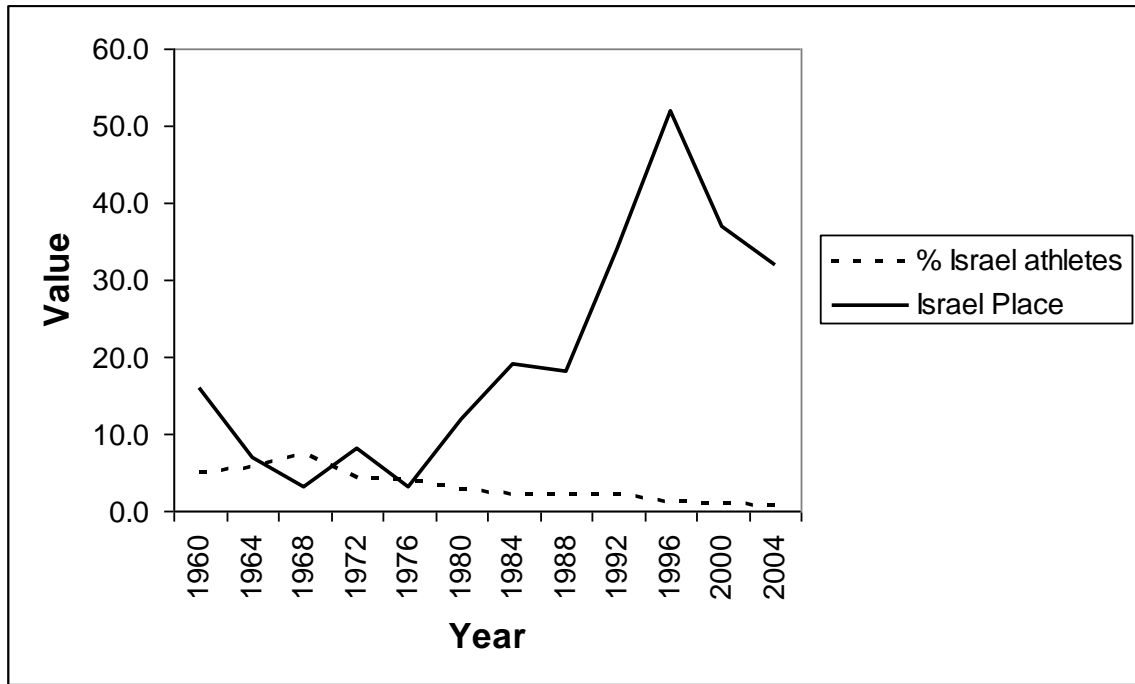
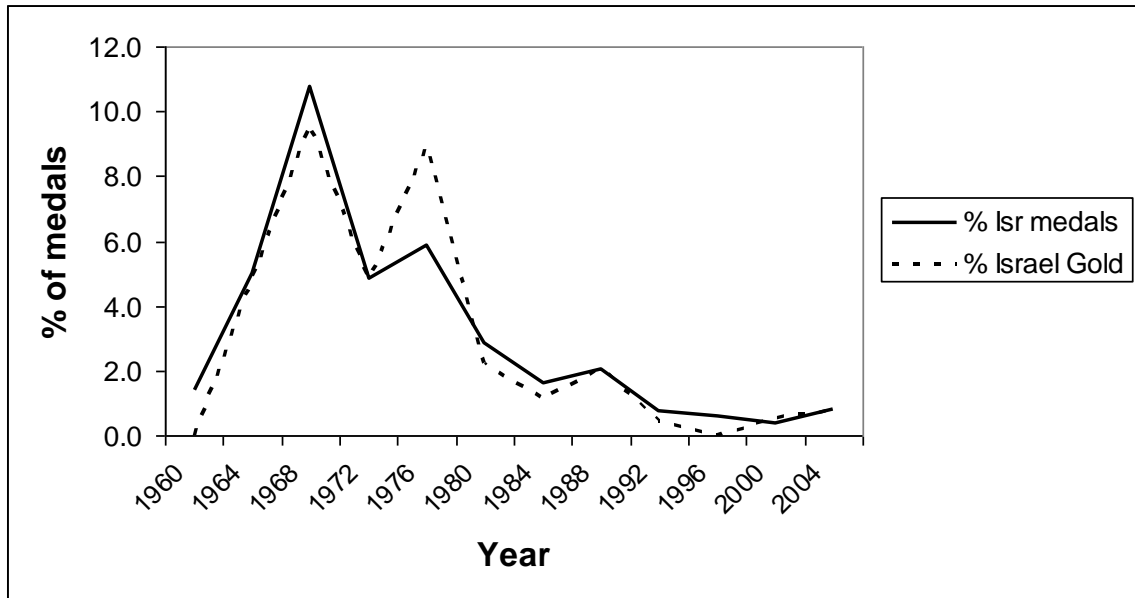


Figure 2: Israel percentage of all and gold medals won in the Paralympics

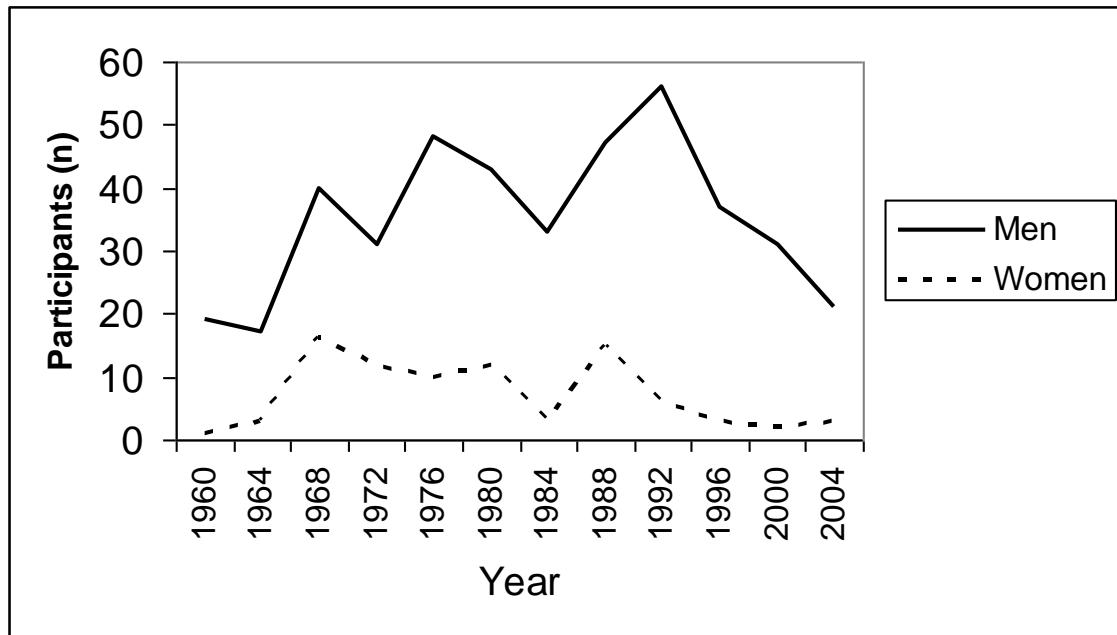


What appears in the data above is the Israeli performance in terms of final placing in the medal table, as well as the percentage of medals won out of all medals peaked in

the period from the mid 1960's to the late 1970's showing particular success in 1968 and 1976. Another observation is the consistent decline in performance since 1980 compared to the earlier decades. There are a number of reasons for this occurrence. The first is the change in the competing participants from 1976 onwards. The first four Games had been for wheelchair athletes only, but in 1976 amputees and blind and visually impaired athletes were added to the programme. In 1980 athletes with cerebral palsy, and in 1984 a group of athletes known as Les Autres, literally meaning 'the others', joined the Games. Although well known for its training of the paralysed and wheelchair sports in general, Israel was still lagging behind the central European countries with respect to sport for amputations and visual impairments. Israeli authorities did not have any specific plan, or a reaction to these major international developments. Moreover, the reliance on participants from the IDF, who had competed in many consecutive games, was not accompanied by a development programme for young participants. Therefore, as the percentage of paralysed and spinally injured participants in the Games decreased relative to the other disability groups the overall success of the Israeli team also decreased. In contrast, as the Paralympic Games have risen in number of participating countries, stature and importance, the amount of money and effort put into finding and training Paralympic athletes by countries around the world has increased markedly, raising performance standards, and tightening the competition for medals. The high numbers of participants and accompanied best achievements in 1968 and 1976, when Israel reached third placing on the medal account, can be explained in part due to the increase in number of young IDF veterans who were injured during the 1967 and 1973 wars. Also, in 1968 the position of Israel as host country greatly contributed to the degree of participation.

Another issue that stands out is the considerably low number of women who have represented Israel at the Paralympic Games relative to their male counterparts (Figure 3). The ratio of men to women has been nearly five to one over the last fifty years, and was nearly sixteen to one for the Games in Sydney 2000. Part of the reason for this may be the fact that nearly seventy percent of the Israeli Paralympic team is made up of IDF veterans, who are more likely to be male. However, in Israeli teams participating in the Olympic Games the ratio of men to women appears to be very similar: four and a half to one, which Steve Israel, writing on the Jewish Agency for Israel website, blames on the fact that women's sport in Israel 'has been both an outgrowth and an afterthought in terms of the attention that it has received and the resources and facilities that have been put at its disposal' [34]. Kahan and associates, [35] whilst carrying out a national study in Israel of participation in sports and physical activities in relation to various other factors and issues, found no significant difference in participation levels and intensity between the genders. Although this study appears to be for the general population and not just for disabled individuals, it would appear to suggest that the reasons for the low participation of women in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games is not due to a lack of participation by Israeli women in sport in general.

Figure 3: Male and female participation of Israel's athletes in the Paralympics



The Third Paralympic Summer Games in Tel Aviv, Israel.

As it appeared that Mexico City, host of the 1968 Olympic Games, would not be able to host the Paralympic Games that year, [36] both New York and Tel Aviv offered to host the Games. Tel Aviv won the competition. [37]

At the next meeting of the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee, Mr Arie Fink, President of the Israeli Stoke Mandeville Committee confirmed that the Israeli Government was 'most enthusiastic' about hosting the Games, especially as the event would coincide with both the twentieth anniversary of the State of Israel and the twentieth anniversary of the Stoke Mandeville Games. The Israeli President, Mr Zalman Shazar, had agreed to be Patron of the Games, and a budget of nearly £50,000 was allocated. [38]

The Games turned out to be a great success, attracting twenty-eight nations - seven more than at either previous Games, and a total of 730 athletes (554 men and 176

women) - nearly double the number at any of the previous Games. [39] The Games were held from 4th to 13th November 1968. All of the sports events were held in five venues [40] in or around the ISCD, which acted as the administrative headquarters for the Games. The opening ceremony for the Games occurred at the Hebrew University Stadium in Jerusalem, where nearly twenty thousand spectators witnessed the 'wheel-past' of athletes, as well as performances by a military band, a girls' choir and a group of folk dancers. Zvi Ben-Zvi, a spinal cord injured IDF veteran from the 1947-48 War of Independence, and one of the Israeli participants at the 1954 Stoke Mandeville Games, gave the oath on behalf of all the athletes to conduct themselves according to the three ideals of the Games: Friendship, Unity and Sportsmanship.[41]

Under the direction of Gershon Huberman, Chairman of the Sports Committee, the sports programme had been considerably enlarged since the 1964 programme in Tokyo. New events such as lawn bowls, women's Basketball and the 100m wheelchair race for men were introduced. [42] This was the first time bowls had appeared on the Games programme outside of Britain, as bowls clubs had apparently been afraid of the wheelchairs ruining the greens. However, the Ramat Gan Bowls Club apparently got around this by laying plywood boards across the green to allow the wheelchairs to move around the green. Considerable damage was still done to the green by the wheelchairs, but despite this Max Spitz of the Israel Bowling Association claimed that it had been a rare privilege to host the tournament, 'which had produced not only bowling and sportsmanship of the highest quality, but was an education to Israeli society as a whole'.[43]

The highlight of the Games was probably the men's wheelchair basketball final in which the host nation came up against the USA, which had won every Paralympic men's wheelchair basketball final up to that date. At previous Games the wheelchair basketball had been split into two classes – complete and incomplete lesions. However, for the 1968 Games the two groups were combined so that there was only one competition for the men. The final drew huge interest. It was due to start at 9pm, but was delayed because of disorderly crowds trying to get into the venue. The stands, built to accommodate two thousand people, were full by 5pm. Despite mounted police being drafted to control the crowds, it is estimated that by the time the game started some six thousand spectators had entered the grounds. Amongst those watching were the US Ambassador Walworth Barbour and Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, who presented the medals after the game was over. In a thrilling match Israel won a historic and hard-fought 47-37 victory. [44] Israel also went on to take victory in the women's wheelchair basketball event winning all four of their matches in a five team round robin tournament.

The 1968 Paralympic Summer Games were carefully utilised for public relations. Participants were given the opportunity to tour the 'Holy Land', with all participants and officials being taken by bus to a number of sites around Israel, including Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee [41] and the River Jordan. [45] At the Closing Ceremony, the Deputy Prime Minister Igal Alon congratulated all the participants on the contribution they had made towards world unity. [46]

Recent and Future Developments.

At the Paralympics in Beijing, 2008 a medium-sized Paralympic squad, including for the first time since Barcelona, a wheelchair basketball team, will compete, with good medal potential for some of the swimmers and sailors and a rifle shooter. To achieve this goal, the Israeli Sport Association for the Disabled (ISAD) has coordinated a multilevel promotional programme which includes the Gold athletes with good medal potential, the silver and the novice athletes. Despite the limited government funding for disability sport at either the grass roots or competitive international level, private and corporate donations have enabled financial support for many of these athletes, allowing for decent preparation toward the Games. There are some other signs that acknowledgement of sports for participants with a disability has increased. In 2001 the Israel Prize selection committee chose Barach Hagai, Head Coach at the ISCD, as the recipient of the prestigious Israel Prize in the field of sport. Having trained at the ISCD for many years, Hagai competed at five Paralympic Games starting with Tokyo 1964, winning the men's singles table tennis title four Games in a row up to 1976, and captaining the Israeli men's wheelchair basketball team to two Paralympic titles, in Tel Aviv 1968 and Arnhem 1980. [47]

Initiatives for developing future athletes include a nationwide promotional programme for young athletes with a disability in community centers, as well as a successful attempt to develop a national junior league for wheelchair basketball, based on the reverse integration principle of including participants with and without a disability, where the peers without disability comprise a normative environment utilising competitive and self-enhancement goal-setting.

Summary

Throughout Israel's sixty years of existence, the story of sports for participants with disability is one of ups and downs. The unique social-historical context of Israel living through many wars during this short period of time has apparently contributed to the economic and attitudinal gap between disabilities acquired during military service and those from other causes. This difference has had a massive impact on the make up of Israeli teams for disabled athletes. There clearly are also issues around female under-representation in sport, both for Olympic and Paralympic teams, that need to be addressed. Consistent governmental funding for identifying, confirming and further developing talents of persons with a disability in sports is another major goal that needs to be established, thus fulfilling the requirements of the UN Convention signed by Israel in 2007. A joint process of political lobbying and public relations campaigns seems to be helping in securing greater funding. However, apart from funding, a drastic improvement in recruitment of participants at the grassroots level is recommended so that the most talented prospects can later be identified for competitive sport purposes. In addition, a broad lifestyle physical activity programme should be provided, permitting all persons with a disability, including children, adolescents and adults, to benefit from the physical and psycho-social virtues of physical activity and sport.

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