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Chapter 4

Two Games and One Movement? The Paralympics and the Olympic Movement.

Peter Kell, Marilyn Kell & Nathan Price

Introduction

Every four years the Paralympic and the Olympic games combine to become the largest single sporting movement on the globe. The combination of these sporting events is characterised by a complex and often contradictory relationship. The Paralympics are intended as a parallel event to the Olympics and it is a relationship that often sees the Paralympics as nothing more than a "side show" to the Olympics. This relationship introduces questions about whether it is in the best interests of the sports people with disabilities and Paralympian athletes. There is also a concern that aspects of the Paralympics reinforce outdated notions about the abilities, status and place of sports people with disabilities in society and sport.

This paper briefly documents progressive moves in the last 50 years of the 20th Century to develop a closer relationship between the two sporting movements organising bodies and explores some of the dilemmas and contradictions that emerge from these moves. The authors argue that while the Paralympics has led to significant beneficial outcomes, not least developing a positive profile of the achievements of athletes with disabilities, the association with the Olympics has some troubling aspects. The authors question the need for a parallel event suggesting that the current dual format only perpetuates outdated stereotypes about ability and disability and reinforces a paternalism and devaluation of the achievements of Paralympians. The chapter argues that much of protocols and systems of classification in the Paralympics contradict contemporary thinking about sportsmen and women by concentrating on the notion of disability. This use of a medical model reliant on "deficit" theory as the organising logic of the Paralympic games contradicts the obsession of the Olympics with human performativity that challenges boundaries of faster, higher and stronger. The authors suggest that the success of the Olympics has been based on the imagery of the perfect athletic body. Olympic mythology and culture has been underpinned by fantasies about bodily perfection and can be traced through the work of Leni Refenstahal's *Olympia* movie in 1936 to commercial coverage of today. This Olympic obsession with the imagery of bodily perfection contradicts much of the contemporary theorisation about disabilities and reverses many advances made in rights for sports people with disabilities.

This paper briefly documents and explores a selection of issues concerning the links between the Paralympics and the Olympics and identifies the inequalities in financial support, athletic careers, media profile and status and prestige as elite athletes. The Paralympics have largely avoided the controversies and scandals associated with the excesses of the Olympic officials but the relationship has not always been in the best interests of disabled sports men and women.

The paper argues that supporters of disabled sports have three possible choices for the future in the linkages with the Olympics. They can remain locked in a co dependent relationship with the IOC, conducting parallel games, or argue for a total integration of the Paralympics into the greatest show on earth. The paper argues that another alternative is to seek to develop a different approach that is oriented to the needs of the disabled sporting community that does focus as an elite event but values participation

The Paralympic Journey: Paralleling the Olympics.

The Paralympics emerged as a direct consequence of the rampant nationalism that spawned the Olympic movement in the early 20th century. Part of the Olympic ideal articulated by Frenchman Baron Pierre de Courbertin was an affirmation of the nation state and the preparation for military conflict through the rigors of sport. More particularly it was preparation for war against Germany after the indignities of losing the Franco-Prussian war. In the wake of the cataclysmic wars of 1914-18 and 1939-1945 the dimensions of injury and trauma meant that rehabilitation and sport were linked as expressions of nationalism, sacrifice and stoicism.

The first games were attributed as being organised by Sir Ludwig Guttman in 1948 at the spinal injuries clinic at Stoke Mandevillle in England. The Institute opened in 1944, during the war, incorporated sports as part of the treatment of war casualties. The link with the Olympics was established early with the games, starting on the same day as the opening of the 1948 London Olympics. These first games attracted 16 competitors but the event repeated throughout the 1950s grew in popularity with 360 competitors from 24 countries competing in 1957(Adair & Vamplew 1998).

The progress towards the integration of what was to become the Paralympics and the Olympics really commenced at the end of the 1960 Rome Olympic games when 400 disabled athletes participated in Olympic style events in 8 disciplines. By 1988 at the Seoul games the relationship expanded to include the same venue for the Paralympics as the Olympiad. This practice has become accepted with the exception of the Soviet Union in 1980 where organisers refused to host the Paralympics and justified this lapse with the claim there were “no disabled citizens in the USSR” making the games unnecessary.

From 1960 the categories of participants expanded from exclusively wheel chair athletes in 1948 to the inclusion of vision impaired who were admitted in 1972, amputees admitted in 1976 and intellectually impaired athletes who were admitted in 1992. The categories have expanded to include recognition of Cerebal Palsy athletes and non-specific disabilities as *les autres* (the others) (Hughes 1999 p173). This expansion of eligibility has resulted in steady growth in participation so that by the Athens Paralympics in 2004 with 3,696 athletes coming from 136 countries. This growth meant that more athletes competed the Paralympics in both Sydney and Athens than participated in the 1956 Melbourne Olympic games.

The interrelationship between the two games includes the participation of athletes in both events. Most notable, Pal Szekeres, a Hungarian fencer, won a bronze medal in 1988 in Seoul. He was in a car accident in which he sustained spinal injuries. In the 2004 Athens Olympics he created history by winning a bronze medal in the individual foil (IOCa 2004).

The integration of the Paralympic and Olympic games saw the adoption of many of the rituals and symbols of the Olympic movement including the torch relay, athletes and officials oath, medal presentations, the extravagant and opening and closing ceremonies and the importance of the marathon event as part of the sporting calendar. The Summer and Winter games format has been replicated in the Paralympics as well. In the sports there has been a mix of “niche” disabled events such as wheelchair rugby and torball as well as generic events such as judo, cycling and archery adapted to the needs of disabled sportsmen and women. The Summer Paralympics in 2004 included18 sports. The Paralympic winter games emerged after the 1976 Toronto Games and includes ice sled hockey, cross country skiing Alpine skiing, the biathlon and ice sled speed skating.

While the Paralympics were the largest single sporting event behind the Olympics recognition and profile remained static until the televising of the Paralympic games at Barcelona in 1992. These games broke records for attendance, attracted over 1.5m spectators on a no charge admission basis. The figures were surpassed by the Sydney and Athens events that were characterised by large and enthusiastic paying crowds.

While the integration of the Paralympics and the Olympics has been a progressive development and has lifted the profile of disabled sports the path is not without dilemmas. These dilemmas suggest that there are still lingering questions about the wisdom of integrating Paralympic and the Olympics? Part of the dilemma is also a theoretical issue about how contemporary concepts of ability and disability are represented.

Parallelling the Olympics! Contradicting Contemporary Views about Inclusion

Initially the name "Paralympic" referred to an event for paraplegic competitors. However, with the inclusion of more disability categories, the prefix "para" has taken on its Greek meaning of "parallel", that is an event run parallel to the Olympic games. The reality of parallelism is that no matter how good the performance of a disabled athlete he/she can never compete in the Olympic games seeking special consideration, such as special equipment, support or facilities. This does not prevent disabled athletes from competing in the Olympic games. One of the more recent examples is Frank Bartolillo, a profoundly deaf athlete, who represented Australia in fencing at the 2004 Athens summer Olympic games on the same terms as all other athletes. However this is an exception and the attitude of the Olympic movement is one of compete on our terms or compete in your own games.

The Olympic ethos specifies a number of roles that relate to these questions explored in the earlier section. The sixth role in the charter of the International Olympic Committee is to "act against any form of discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement". The eleventh is "to encourage and support the efforts of sports organisations and public authorities to provide for the social and professional future of athletes" (IOC, 2005, p. 10). While these two roles might seem highly appropriate in any consideration of the future of disabled sport they are in reality meaningless in terms of the Paralympics.

This is because there is a separation at the peak level that contradicts the declared Olympic roles. The International Paralympic (IPC) is not actually a member of the Olympic organization and is a separate one that has its own vision, mission, goals and roles which has a very different mission and perceptions. So while the Olympic motto of "Swifter, Higher, Stronger" suggests pushing human physical capabilities to the absolute limit, the Paralympics motto of "Spirit in Motion" suggests vitality and excitement. While the Olympic Movement seeks to develop elite sport, logically an exclusive orientation, the Paralympic movement regards one of its roles as promoting "the concepts of health and human rights for athletes with a disability" , a much more inclusive approach (Blauwet, 2005, p. 2).

By sanctioning a parallel system the Olympic Movement has failed to include sports people with disabilities in elite international competition and institutionalised exclusion as a taken for granted phenomena that is beyond challenging. Inclusion will not be a reality until athletes, disabled or non-disabled compete at the same events in the same teams. Inherent in this is the right to equal training facilities, coaching, funding, and media coverage.

Any challenge to the status quo is and any quest for inclusion is made more difficult by the use of the category and class system that the IPC uses to codify disabled athletes. It acts to exclude rather than

include because classification follows a medical model and any classification deriving from such a model assumes that "the problems that face people with disabilities are the result of their physical and/or mental impairments and are independent of the wider socio-cultural, physical, and political environments" (Brittain, 2005, p. 430).

In contrast to an exclusionary medical model a rights based inclusive approach celebrates difference and recognises diversity and is a shift from obsessive concerns with disability around often-constructed views about what people can't do (Kell 2004). To make legitimate claims to being inclusive there needs to be real meaning behind celebrating the sports, people's participation in them and not disability. To overcome this institutional discrimination the option is for the two sporting bodies to merge and recognise what has already occurred at national and event levels. To shift from a medical model to a social and rights based model of disability a combined IOC and IPC would need to consider how the world's most elite sporting event can remove the social, cultural and political barriers that currently force the majority of disabled athletes into a parallel and lesser competition. It is however a challenge that needs have to respond to the calls for equality in money, media and profile for disabled athletes.

The Challenges of Inclusion: Money and Media.

While the relationship between the Olympics and the Paralympics has been assumed to be one that is parallel and equal, there have been periodic incidents that have challenged these assumptions. The relationship has often been typified by the sort of hitches that happened in 1996 at the Atlanta Olympics where parallel committees organising both games experienced problems in the changeover. The observations of participants illustrate some of these problems.

Atlanta was not ready for the Paralympic Games; the village was not ready and the venues were not ready, so we learned from that experience we extended the time between the games – to get enough time to keep that momentum alive for the Paralympic Athletes. This was very important and it was highlighted in Atlanta. We got off the plane in Atlanta, there were no decorations. We went to Centennial Park, which I was so looking forward to seeing. It was rubble they had knocked it down (Hughes 1999 p174).

Rather than evidence of a parallel relationship with the Olympics the crossover problems are compelling evidence of neglect of the needs of disabled athletes and the subordinated status allocated to the Paralympics as an add on to the main event. These incidents in Atlanta contributed to the eventual integration of the planning of the Paralympics and the Olympics in 2000 with the Sydney Paralympics Organising Committee (SPOC) and the Sydney Olympics Games Organising Committee (SGOC) combining to improve co ordination and working together. This should not have been difficult because

the precedent had already been established in 1994 in Lillehammer winter games where the same organising committee operated both games but the summer sports were much slower to make this change. However the dilemmas that led the hiccups in Atlanta are not simply “co-ordination problems” but a deeper manifestation of the incompatibility of organising the Olympics centred on the logic of corporate global capitalism and the need for state support and planning for Paralympics.

The Atlanta games were promoted as the “free enterprise games” and the reliance on free enterprise models as the overarching organisational philosophy for the Paralympics is inappropriate because the Paralympics lack the pulling power of the Olympics in obtaining television broadcast revenue, corporate support and individual donations that typify the Olympic “free enterprise” spirit. The promotion, participation and production of Paralympic sports are heavily dependent on underwriting by governments and state and the Atlanta example is evidence of how the market philosophy left the Paralympics vulnerable. The paucity of any illusion about a parallel status with the Olympics are exposed most starkly where financial support, television coverage and the career structures of elite athletes are concerned.

The renaissance of the modern Olympics in the late 20th century after the financial and public relations debacles of the Munich, Montreal and Moscow Olympics in the 1970-80 period was the product of the branding of the Olympics as a television event. Television rights secured the status of the Olympics with the biggest show on earth with 24 hour global coverage as well as news and highlights packages. In contrast the Paralympics have been a “poor cousin” and found it difficult to obtain the TV profile of the Olympics. At the 2000 Sydney Paralympic games the network broadcasting arrangements were not concluded until March 2000 when the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the state broadcaster, took over from the commercial host. The ABC ran a sixty-minute 5.30pm highlights package and a late news 45-minute summary as well as a broadcast of the Opening and Closing ceremonies. The reluctance of the commercial host to do a “free to air” service emphasis the difficulties the Paralympics have in securing the media spotlight. The coverage lacked the “saturation coverage” of the Olympics and resulted in the Paralympics using the internet to broadcast moving images that were not subject to the commercial copyright restrictions applied to the Olympics (Goggin & Newell 2005)

The profile of disabled sports in the wake of the Sydney Olympics receded even in the sports that are genuinely trying to pursue a policy of integration. The coverage of the Paralympics has been championed by Special broadcasting Service (SBS) and the ABC, both state owned corporations. However commercial networks committed to “free enterprise” continue to display a marked reluctance to broadcast disabled sports even when they are held concurrently with able-bodied sports. The 2004 PANPACS swimming had integrated disabled classifications in the international swimming meeting but there was virtually no disabled swimming events broadcast. In the 2005 Australian Tennis Open, a year

which broke all viewing records for the Tennis grand slam attributed to Australian Leyton Hewitt's appearance in the men's final wheelchair tennis, at the same event also had an Australian finalist David Taylor but was not telecast. Unfortunately it is these commercial networks from which the funds for sponsorships vital to the sports are directed and this marginalisation by the media does nothing to assist build the profile and opportunities for sponsorship. It is also profile building which is essential in developing athlete careers.

The integration of SPOC and SOGOC benefited the organisation of the hosting of the games Sydney 2000 but the funding of participating athletes did not enjoy as much support. Even Sydney where there was significant government funding for modified infrastructure, uncertainty was experienced in government funding with two emergency rounds of funding being required to fund a "full" Australian team. The differentiated and unequal nature of financial support and opportunities to athletes in the Olympics and those in the Paralympics clearly identifies the extent to which professionalism has eroded claims of equality across the two organizations.

While successful athletes in the Olympic games are virtual millionaires earning mega bucks as full professionals with full time managers juggling a portfolio of endorsements, media contracts, grants and performance bonuses Paralympians are mired in welfare and voluntarist structure dependent on charity and paternalism. Paralympians struggle financially to compete in elite sports and are dependent on the voluntary efforts of fund raising of sporting associations, family members and the generosity and goodwill of the community. This support is not always guaranteed with a fund concert in 1997 for the 2000 Paralympics attracting only 250 people well below the anticipated 30,000 (Hughes 1999 p172). At the time of the Barcelona Games Australian government support for Paralympians amounted to $300,000 while support for Olympians totalled $3m. The pretence of parity and discrimination between Paralympians and Olympians was starkly evident when an offer by a car manufacturer of a free car for Gold medallist was publicly withdrawn from Paralympians (Adair & Vamplew 1998 p 82).

These dilemmas experienced by many Paralympians are evident in the career of the sole Australian Paralympic athlete who has enjoyed the part of the status and financial security of Olympic champions. Wheelchair athlete Louise Sauvage is a triple Paralympian and winner of 9 Gold medals in those games. Prior to her recent retirement she is one of the few Paralympians who fulfils the requirements of a full-time athlete. Her status as a fulltime athlete is evident in a six day a week training regime that covers over 150 kilometres per week. She was named Australian sports person of the year in 2001 the only disabled sports person to win this award. Such is the esteem in which Sauvage and her achievements are held that along with Olympic champions Shane Gould, Dawn Fraser and Marlene Matthews, she has had a Sydney ferry named after her. Sauvage's success as a high profile athlete can be partly attributed to the fact that she actually participated in the "real" Olympics and her achievements were televised in

prime time. She was the winner of the 400 metre wheelchair event included in the main Olympic program as a “demonstration” sport. She was also part of the torch relay and was paired with golfer Greg Norman to take the torch across the Sydney Harbour Bridge (Goggins & Newell 2005). The success enjoyed by Sauvage illustrates well some of the contradictions about the relationship. Would Sauvage have enjoyed such a profile if she had not achieved star billing in the Olympics? And why were the medals she won not counted in the overall Olympic medal count?

Sauvage has, through her international successes been able to obtain elite sporting grants, sponsorships and sporting association support and be a full time athlete over a ten-year period. It is her icon status, international record and what is referred to asher “x factor” that has generated popularity with the media has meant that she qualified for state support and corporate sponsorship. However, she remains one of the few to achieve this status with most athletes dependent on the fund raising capacity of their sporting organizations, local communities and families.

The disadvantages concerning career opportunities is compounded when the expenses of the high tech wheelchair components and the materials for advanced prosthetics that are required for athletes is considered. Superior technology occupies an important role in developing the competitive edge and the quest to develop superior technology is one that requires considerable resources that involve advanced research and manufacturing. This feature of the Paralympic games, like the Olympic games, explains why the medal tally sees the bulk of medals being awarded to American, European nations or the 2004 leading medal winner China where generous state support is maintained by the Communist state.

However impressive the progress at the most fundamental levels progress towards integration has been patchy and has experienced some notable setbacks. While the integration process has occurred in the Commonwealth games, Goodwill games and sporting events such as the Pan-Pacific Swimming Championships (PANPACS) there are sporadic disputes and controversies that indicate that the quest for inclusion is still unfinished business and acceptance by sporting authorities is subject to ambivalence and hostility.

Acceptance of disabled athletes by the mainstream sporting Olympic establishment has not been easy with some administrators expressing discomfort at the trends towards integration. Former President of the Commonwealth Games Association, Mr Arthur Tunstall challenged the place of disabled athletes saying that it was “embarrassing to have them with able bodied athletes” triggering anxious moments in the Australian sporting community (Adair & Vamplew 1998 p83).

A more recent barometer of attitudes is the controversy over the Australian Paralympic uniforms for the 2004 Athens games where the precedent of having the same uniform as the Olympians that was

established in the Sydney games was broken. This one uniform policy in Sydney was hailed as a significant landmark by the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic organisers and the retreat from this policy was seen as a major snub to Paralympians. The controversy was also fuelled by concern that the sophisticated high fashion outfits worn by the Olympians were not evident in the less fashionable Paralympic uniforms. There was also controversy about the availability to disabled athletes of hi tech heat dispersing uniforms specially developed for the anticipated hot conditions at Athens. Uniforms highlight the global inequalities associated with involvement in the Paralympics. At the Sydney Paralympics, for example the Cambodian team did not have uniforms when they arrived and were dependent on the charity of their Sydney hosts.

The absence of media profile, career structures for athletes and the ambivalence of administrators suggest that the Paralympics is not completely a parallel organisation to the Olympic games. It suggests that while some progress has been made concerning the needs of disabled people and profiling the achievements and possibilities for them the Paralympics tend to reify notions of dependence, paternalism and marginalisation.

How might these dilemmas and contradictions be resolved towards a more inclusive and equitable sporting environment? One of the more popular sports in the Paralympic program Wheelchair Rugby might give some clues on how this situation may be dealt with.

Murder Ball: Wheelchair Rugby as a prototype in inclusion?

Some of the contradictions of the role and status of special sports emerge from wheel chair Rugby, a comparatively recent entry into the Paralympics. A demonstration sport in the 1996 Atlanta Games, wheel chair Rugby became an instant success when given full medal awarding status in the 2000 Games in Sydney. Wheelchair Rugby, often called “murder ball” has all the features that make excellent television on sport. Speed, clashes between players and wheelchair collisions all make for great spectator and television action. The Olympic venues for this sport are sell-outs and it’s a highly popular sport even amongst nations that are not recognised as Rugby nations. The sport also makes great television with a format of four quarters favouring breaks for advertising and sponsorship. In reality there is very little relevance to Rugby and it tends to look more like basketball without a basketball hoop. Indeed the game emerged as a hybrid from wheelchair basketball for players with neck injuries making shooting difficult or dangerous (MSU 2002).

Wheelchair rugby is a fast and robust sport that has some surprising features. It is a sport where man and women can play together and there is a keen interest from non-disabled people in participating. The Paralympic champions in Athens 2004 are New Zealand and their side had no less than 4 players who

were former Rugby players who have Tetroplegia as a result of Rugby scrums where they sustained their spinal injuries (IOC 2004b). The game's appeal has expanded rapidly and the organisers are optimistic that the game will move into Asia in a big way. They anticipate China, the 2008 Olympiad host, will be a major power.

Wheel chair Rugby, its popularity and the unique nature of the event suggest that it could be sustained as a stand-alone sport in any Olympic games. There is a question about why it could not be included in the Olympics given its appeal and the fact that it has worldwide coverage and could be, along with equestrian, one of the only sports with men and women competing together. Indeed the classification system employed in wheelchair Rugby acts to even any inequalities in a way that does not often happen in mainstream sports The idea might seem fanciful to "hard nosed" sports fans but it is a important to surmise if the Olympic movement is genuine about integration and equality it might consider going the next step and including some Paralympic sports in the Olympic games. Arguments that suggest the performance of the Paralympians do not match up to elite non-disabled athletes appear flimsy when for example four categories of Paralympic weightlifting have superior results to Olympic winners.

Most importantly the linkage with Rugby that is now a professional sport may provide some hints on how disabled sports people might develop professional athletic careers. In order to do this there needs to be cooperation on the part of the sporting organisations. For instance it could be possible to integrate wheel chair Rugby with mainstream rugby. If we indulge in speculation that wheelchair Rugby was integrated with Rugby Union a lot more support and profile would become available to the disabled athletes through an internationally recognised organisation. For example, they would have access to superior sponsorship, professional management, career development, trained coaches and undoubtedly more media exposure. Furthermore, there is no reason why wheel chair Rugby could not become part of the Bledisloe Cup or even the World Cup events. There could be wheel chair Rugby at half time or as a "curtain raiser" thus exposing the athletes to the crowd and possible media coverage. Wheel chair Rugby has what it takes to make a good spectator sport: violence, speed and skill. It was a sell out sport at the Paralympics. At the end of the 2000 Olympics the Australian Wheel chair Rugby Team were introduced to the crowd at the Bledisloe Cup, a Rugby competition between New Zealand and Australia thus giving them an avenue for exposure and to build profile, and the reception suggests fans are ready for such a development. It could make the next move to becoming part of one of the growing world sports.

However if this happens, sporting organisations have a larger responsibility in promoting and profiling their disabled competitors. This could possibly be done by including the athletes in regular events such as State Championships and Nationals, as is currently done by swimming but would go further to questions of opportunity.

Part of this question is about equity for disabled athletes and directly relates to opportunities for participation. Continuous and prolonged opportunities for participation are a key part of a rights based approach to sport. Rather than the fragmented paternalistic and welfare based approaches that typify disabled sports there are lessons that can be learnt from Rugby, which has emerged from an amateur background. To help combat key dilemmas associated with this area Price (2004) suggests the implementation of an orientation package for family, coaches and administrators. The education and 'buy in' of parents and coaches to such a package of special importance. Recent research in this area in Rugby Union shows that parents and family assist the athlete the most in a wide range of needs and choices as well as provide advice and assistance especially in their career development, planning, education and life-skills (Price, 2004). Athlete mentors greatly assists the athlete in many areas of their athletic career and 'off the field' life. They have much to contribute and the experience of young Rugby players shows that regardless of whether the mentor is provided from the sporting organization or an outside source, the athlete greatly benefits from the trust relationship, motivation, advice and experience of the mentor (Price 2004). Should these approaches, and the co-operation of the sporting organization be applied to Paralympic athletes, they would arguably enjoy higher participation, access to professional and trained coaches, valuable advice and support, access to athlete programs that include career counsellors and education support, a well-structured athletic career and a lift in the profile of themselves and their sport.

Unfortunately, without great change, it is largely out of the individual athletes hands and this is where the continued help of the state is crucial. To build a profile and successful career structure the disabled athlete relies on individual sporting organizations and continued interest in them in the media. This can be done by continued efforts of state sporting bodies and state run media organizations. If working for a state run organisation such as Australia Post and Qantas is good enough for Olympians why aren't Paralympians enjoying such support?

One clear way for the Paralympic movement to build profile is to ensure as many athletes as possible become involved. Participation requires a sound support structure from parents, family and friends and this profile boost is clearly dependent on all levels of government and the commitment of sporting associations to look towards community building and inclusion strategies rather than the elitism that accompanies the Olympic movement.

The Future for the Olympics and the Paralympics: Seamless Inclusion or Divorce?

While the Paralympics and the Olympics operate as parallel events the question arises about the extent to which this format actually contributes to the marginalisation of disabled sports men and women. It

prompts the suggestion that participation in a “stand-alone” global event might be a better proposition than the subordinated existence as a parallel event. Some precedent can be taken from the success of niche sporting events such as the Gay games and the Master Games. Supporters of the parallel events suggest that the Paralympics provides a profile that would not be possible with a stand-alone event. Any argument that the Paralympics need the Olympics to profile sports fails to account for the success of non-Olympic sports such as women’s netball which is one of Australia’s and New Zealand’s biggest participant sports.

Such arguments neglect the fact that disabled sports had existed as viable entities before the nation-state of Australia was founded in 1901. Inter-colonial cricket matches were conducted in Australia between the deaf as early as 1896 and it should be remembered that the Deaf International sporting movement commenced international games as far back as1924 (Adair & Vamplew 1997 p 81). The case against divorce from the Olympics is also advanced by suggestions that the Paralympics has been largely immune from the scandals of the Olympics. This argument misunderstands the way in which blatant “free enterprise” approaches to the Olympics and the resultant outcomes corrode the ethics of both movements. Already there is evidence of this with complaints of sighted guides cheating, controversy over the truth about the Spanish men basketballers’ disabled status and disputes over athlete classifications suggesting that the Olympic legacy of cheating and corruption is making an impact in the Paralympics.

There continue to be legitimation problems in being associated with a movement that glorifies the free enterprise spirit and reifies images of bodily perfection. The reliance on “free enterprise” contradicts the importance of the state structures to support the needs of the disabled where the market forces repeatedly fail them in all spheres of life. It is also counterproductive to adopt a rhetoric “the athlete and not the disability “ when the Olympic movement persists with a fetish about bodily perfection and that perpetuates unhelpful stereotypes about “normal”. The answer partly lies in developing a sporting ethos that turns its back on the glitz and glamour of the Olympics and kick the habits of the Olympic movement. Regardless of what the future of the Paralympics might be, any future sport for the disabled needs to meet the needs of all disabled people and not just an elite for recreation and competition. This is not just a simple issue of participation but a need to reclaim aspects of civil society that recognises and values diversity and difference in an inclusive way that promotes equality of opportunity.

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