

# *Disability Sport: An Important Component of Disability Studies Curricula*

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# *Objective*

- To address the current status of disability sport and to affirm the importance of disability studies incorporating interdisciplinary applied and theoretical research related to disability within the context of sport and sport culture

# *The Salience of Disability Sport*

- Sport is an inextricable and pervasive facet of society and culture that can and does significantly influence the lives of nearly all individuals, with and without disabilities
  - Tiger Woods, Michael Jordon
  - Olympic marketing generate over \$3.5billion in the 97-00 quadrennium
  - Nike's USA revenues for FY00 were in excess of \$4.7 billion
  - 1994 NCAA members total revenues were in excess of \$2.3billion
  - June 4-10, 2001- The top Nielsen ratings went to the NBA Finals
  - 84.2 million watched the 2000 Super Bowl

# *The Salience of Disability Sport*

- Subsequently, it is not remarkable that persons with disabilities have athletic acumen, skills, and interests, and desire to participate in a wide range of sport activities and at a range of levels
- Unfortunately, sport continues to be a realm of highly valued endeavor in which persons with disabilities continue to be subjected to widespread discrimination and marginalization
- Therefore, it is imperative that this cultural phenomenon be studied from the perspective of persons with disabilities to determine its impact, both positive and negative, upon their quality of life both individually and collectively

# *The Status of Disability Sport*

- Ideological tenets
- Organizational structures
- Technological impact
- Social impact
- Health & wellness impact
- Legal standing

# *Philosophy of Disability Sport*

- Disability sport, which is sport designed for or specifically practiced by athletes with disabilities, is represented by an ideological mosaic incorporating numerous contradictory perspectives:
  - Disability sport is a “means to an end” (medical/rehab model), and disability sport is “an end in itself”
  - Disability sport should be vertically integrated , and disability sport should be segregated
  - Disability sport should parallel preexisting analogs and use minimal modifications; disability sport should maximize participation through liberal modification of analog rules and/or through the creation of new sport activities without an analog
  - Elite programming should maximize participation, and elite programming should be competitive in the sport marketplace
  - Disability sport should duplicate participatory opportunities to maximize involvement; disability sport should complement existing participatory opportunities

# *Organizational Structure*

- Vestiges of the medical model continue today in that disability sport continues to be organized on the basis of disability etiology
  - IPC; ISOD; IBSA; CP-ISRA; ISMWSF
  - Disabled Sports, USA (amputee; Dwarf Ath. Assoc of America; Sp. Olympics; US Assoc. for Blind Ath.; US Cerebral Palsy Ath Assoc.; US Deaf Sports Fed; Wheelchair Sports, USA
- Programmatically, disability sport focuses upon elite performance models with little attention to grassroots programs
- Rather than develop a pyramidal hierarchy with a broad participatory base, disability sport has historically relied upon the use of a trapezoidal “elitist” model which fails to recognize that not all possible participants are elite, nor do they desire to be

# *Organizational Structure*

- Organizational apartheid has given way to vertical integration
  - IOC and IPC Cooperation Agreement, October 2000
  - NGB assimilation (e.g., US Tennis Association; US Swimming Association; US Soccer Federation)
  - NGB support (e.g., USA Basketball)
- Separate and unequal segregationist models continue to dominate
  - USOC passive resistance to vertical integration (definition of amateur athlete did not include Paralympians; USOC BOD and Athletes Advisory Committee consistently denied athletes with disabilities equal access to services, facilities and committees)
  - USOC is creating an autonomous US Paralympic Sports Corporation to divest itself of responsibility for athletes with disabilities

# *Technological Impact*

- Disability sport as a “means to an end” fostered rigidity in rules limiting technological development
- However, as disability sport became “sport for its own sake” rules became more flexible and substantial innovation occurred
- The athlete’s drive to improve performance led to many technological enhancements (e.g., ultralight wheelchairs and prosthetic limbs) which have improved life for many with disabilities outside the realm of sport
- The Henry Ford approach to wheelchair design invoked by E&J was retired by Quadra and Quickie
- Much of this innovation has occurred without the benefit of having being informed by research

# *Social Impact*

- Although it can be argued that disability sport participants compromise the goals of the disability rights movement by compromising on ableist norms and standards, they concurrently promote significant positive change in the bigoted perceptions of the nondisabled
- Participation in adapted sports and recreation has been identified as an effective means of positively altering stigmatizing perceptions about disability on the part of those with and without disabilities (Jackson & Davis, 1983; Lipton, 1970; Stewart, 1981; Greenwood, Dzewaltowski & French, 1990; Hedrick, 1984; Hedrick, 1986; Szyman, 1980)
- Most impressive results are associated with integrated programming
  - Road racing, tennis, skiing

# *Social Impact*

- However, disability bigotry continues to thrive in sport culture, as exemplified by:
  - USOC initiative to segregate Paralympic athletes via the USPSC
  - Nike's climbing shoe advertisement
  - Elementary and secondary educational institutions continue to offer no programming
  - Paralympic support continues to be sporadic and very limited
  - Casey Martin lawsuit against the PGA

# *Socialization to Inactive Lifestyles*

- Limited community-based adapted sports
- No secondary school programs
- Sparse and grossly deficient physical education
- Sparse post-secondary programs
- *Result*
- No interest, no aptitude, no knowledge, no skill, no opportunity = no participation in physically active sports and recreation
- Increased predisposition to secondary health complications of disability
- Insufficient data upon which to base prescriptive recommendations for exercise

# *Health & Wellness Impact*

- Inactivity and poor diet cause 300,000 deaths annually
- *Healthy People 2000* identified individuals with disabilities as persons most at risk of chronic, debilitating health problems which could be greatly ameliorated by regular physical activity, such as:
  - cardiovascular disease - hypertension - muscular contractures/weakness - HDL to LDL ratio - osteoporosis - strength & stamina - obesity- diabetes- colon cancer

# *Health & Wellness Impact*

- Regular participation in vigorous physical activity has been found to result in significantly enhanced cardiorespiratory functioning in persons with disabilities (Hoffman, 1986; Huss, 1987)
- Sedentary individuals with spinal cord injuries have been found to have significantly lower levels of high density lipoprotein than their vigorously active counterparts who participate in wheelchair athletics and their able-bodied peers (Brenes, Dearwater, Shapera, LaPorte, & Collins, 1986).
- Adapted sport participants with spinal cord injuries have been found to have fewer kidney infections and pressure sores requiring long-term hospitalizations than their sedentary peers (Stotts, 1985)
- The most significant predictor of the current level of physical activity reported by 229 UIUC alumni with physical disabilities who graduated between 1952 and 1991 was participation in adapted sports and recreation programming while enrolled at the UIUC (Hedrick & Broadbent, 1996)

# *Legal Issues*

- The Olympic and Amateur Sport Act of 1998
  - Requires that the USOC integrate “where feasible; when such designation would serve the best interest of the sport; with the approval of the affected national governing bodies”
  - USOC voting structures ensure the status quo by according the able-bodied sport NGBs and participants 71% of the vote on decisions of “where feasible, etc.”
  - Unlike 504/ADA, OASA identifies no recourse for athletes with disabilities who are subjected to discriminatory USOC actions
  - Section 504 of the Rehab Act, the ADA and IDEA have had little impact on the sport behavior of persons with disabilities

# *Benefits of Inclusion to Disability Sport*

- Programs could be greatly improved and resources validated through scholarly investigation
  - Does disability sport positively impact the attitudes of others about persons with disabilities or reinforce stereotypical beliefs? How and to what degree? What factors mitigate this relationship?
  - Does disability sport positively impact the self-concept, perceived competence, self efficacy of persons with disabilities? How? To what extent? Under what conditions?
  - To what extent is rampant socialization to hypokinetic lifestyles impacting the health and fitness status of persons with disabilities? Their employment capacity? Life quality?

# *Benefits of Inclusion to Disability Sport*

- Activism
  - Political acumen of SDS in addressing segregationist approaches and discriminatory practices by socializing agencies and agents could aid the effort to cultivate more egalitarian access and opportunity
  - An improved understanding of how their efforts coincide with the social, political, educational and economic and cultural agenda of the disability rights movement
  - An improved capacity for cross-disability cooperation and collaboration
  - A broader base of support for sport access initiatives

# *Benefits of Inclusion to Disability Studies*

- Affords a highly relevant social context within which to study the social, political, economic and cultural forces which invoke disability acceptance and discriminatory behavior
- Supports the cross-cultural analysis of disability
  - Why have athletes with disabilities been vertically integrated into able-bodied NGBs in Canada and Australia and segregated in the US?
- An ideal context for the study of the processes which underly discriminatory behavior
- An omnipresent laboratory within which interventions to diminish discrimination can be investigated and refined
- The result, better approaches for the amelioration or eradication of discrimination, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all contexts including sport culture, and an improved quality of life for persons with disabilities

# *Summation*

- Sport is not only a mirror that “reflects” our societal values and culture relative to the body, physicality, gender, etc.
- Sport is also a socially constructed realm of endeavor which can serve as an agent of change for social equality and the transformation of discriminatory cultural values
- However, those engaged in disability sport require collaboration with those engaged in disability scholarship and the disability rights movement to ensure that the disability sport movement is enlightened by scholarship and driven to activism