

## Sport and the physically and mentally handicapped

*Some time ago, the International Review published an article describing the movement of solidarity which swept the Junior Section of the Japanese Red Cross when hundreds of disabled arrived in Tokyo, in 1964, for the International Games which had been organized for them. The competitions, which were launched more than twenty years ago, are spreading to an ever larger number of countries, and as they now cover a wide range of sports, they are in principle held in the context of the International Olympic Games. What a fine example of endurance and fortitude we are set by men and women who, although struck by bodily ills, do not submit but find fulfilment in some form of sport !*

*The Junior Red Cross of Japan played an outstanding part in ensuring the success of the Games, and we published at the time a report by Mrs. Sachiko Hashimoto, Director of the Japanese Junior Red Cross, on Red Cross activities during the Games and, in particular, on the interpretation service which she organized and which in so many cases proved extremely effective. Not only did young Red Cross volunteers help disabled competitors communicate with one another by means of a language they had learnt for that special purpose, but by rendering all manner of small services they eased the life of persons who could get about only in a wheelchair.*

*Mrs. Hashimoto wrote: "The more we saw the facts, the more were we impressed with the victory of the mind over the weaknesses of the flesh. This led us to discover the essential value of human dignity. Many of the participants, well on the way to rehabilitation, asked us not to push their wheelchairs from behind, but to walk beside them so that they might see us*

*and enjoy our conversation. 'We do not need pity' they said, 'but understanding'. Indeed, to understand is to share their joys and sorrows and also their struggle for personal dignity. This golden rule was followed by Red Cross volunteers who, when offering their services, would humbly ask: 'May I stay with you?' and 'Can I help you?' ... Thus we are immensely grateful to all those who came such long distances in their wheelchairs, and to the escorts of the competitors who opened up a new aspect of life for 155 young people of the Red Cross of Japan."*

*Other National Societies, too, are concerned with the lot of the handicapped in their own country. Among the many examples we have before us, we might mention the action of the German Red Cross of the German Democratic Republic for the rehabilitation of invalids in specialized clinics; that of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany, which at Mardorf has a centre where deficient children receive appropriate modern therapeutic treatment, and that of the Algerian Red Crescent, which runs an orthopaedic centre at Constantine. We might also mention the two "friendship cars" of the Swiss Red Cross, which so far have provided one-day trips for more than 30,000 handicapped persons of all ages.*

*Sport is of even greater significance for the well-being of the severely disabled than it is for the able-bodied, according to Professor Ludwig Guttmann, a pioneer in this field. His main principle is that sport is of immense therapeutic value to the paralysed and to other disabled persons, for it complements physiotherapy and is invaluable in restoring strength, co-ordination, speed and endurance. After thirty years' service in the cause of the disabled, Professor Guttmann, who launched the Stoke Mandeville movement, can now see the full results of his struggle and unflinching devotion.*

*We are grateful to the Nursing Times for allowing us to reproduce large excerpts from Mrs. Wendy Robinson's article<sup>1</sup> about what has been done for the mentally and physically handicapped, thanks to Professor Guttmann. (J.-G. L.)*

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... Early in 1944, after the opening of the Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, in England, Professor Sir Ludwig Guttmann,

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<sup>1</sup> London, 12 July 1973, "Sport and Recreation for the Mentally and Physically Handicapped".

a pioneer in the field of the rehabilitation of the disabled, introduced sport as part of the clinical treatment of spinal cord paraplegics. Originally it was considered to be a useful means of combating boredom in hospital for paraplegic servicemen. But it was so successful that it became evident that sport could play a paramount part in physical and psychological rehabilitation.

Today Stoke Mandeville has its own sports stadium for the paralysed and other disabled, and throughout the summer games and sports are held with competitors coming from all over the world to take part.

The first sports introduced at Stoke Mandeville for paraplegics were as a result of successful experiments. It was found that punch-ball exercise, darts and snooker could be performed satisfactorily from a wheelchair. And wheelchair polo soon became the first competitive team sport for paraplegics, followed closely by badminton and basketball. These experiments were the beginning of a systematic development of competitive sport for the paralysed, and many other events such as archery, fencing, table tennis, weight-lifting, bowling, field events and swimming were added in due course.

It was only logical, said Sir Ludwig, to start a sports movement for the paralysed following their discharge from hospital, and in July 1948 the first Stoke Mandeville Games for the paralysed were held. The idea that paraplegics in wheelchairs could become sportsmen and sportswomen in their own right has since spread to all parts of the globe. Only four years later, in 1952, the Stoke Mandeville Games became an annual international sports event, when a team of paralysed ex-servicemen from Holland came to Aylesbury to compete in them.

Year after year, the number of competitors and sports events has increased, and so far paralysed wheelchair athletes representing 56 countries have taken part in these Games. Every fourth year, whenever it is possible, they take place in the country and place where the Olympic Games are organized. In 1972, for example, the Games took place in Heidelberg, Federal Republic of Germany, where 1,000 paraplegics took part.

The success of the sports activities for the paralysed has been a great incentive and inspiration to other disabled people in encouraging them to take up sport. It seemed, therefore, worthwhile to bring together various other disabled, in particular amputees, the blind and those suffering from cerebral palsy, in multi-disabled sports contests. This led

to the foundation in 1961 of the British Sports Association for the Disabled, the headquarters being situated at Stoke Mandeville. Annual Multi-disabled Games are held there, in May for children between the ages of five and fifteen, and in September for adults.

It was because of the inadequacy of existing sports facilities for the disabled that Sir Ludwig instigated the building of a specially designed sports stadium. This ambitious project was built by the British Paraplegics Sports Society and took less than a year to complete. The sports centre, which was opened in July 1969, has been designed to be completely accessible to all kinds of disabled people, whether ambulant or in wheelchairs. There is a very large sports hall for games such as basketball, volley ball, badminton and tennis, while smaller halls are provided for fencing, table tennis, snooker and weight-lifting. In addition, there is a ten-pin bowling alley.

One of the greatest attractions is the 25-metre heated Olympic swimming pool, with continuously circulating water. Spectator stands for both the main hall and swimming pool have been included. And the dining hall enables 250 wheelchair users to eat at one sitting.

Accommodation huts have been built so that competitors and their escorts have somewhere close at hand to stay during the various sports and games. One of these has been adapted for use as an indoor bowling green during the winter months by both the disabled and the able-bodied. Sir Ludwig said that this has been such a resounding success that a six-rink indoor bowling green is at present under construction. "There is nothing else like this in the world," he said, enthusiastically, "it is unique..."

...One of the barriers to sport for the disabled, Sir Ludwig stressed, was that although there are numerous sports halls and centres throughout the United Kingdom, very few meet the needs of those in wheelchairs. Access is often difficult, if not impossible, for wheelchair users because of the presence of steps and the lack of lifts. This means that unless there are negotiable ramps the disabled have to rely on the assistance of able-bodied helpers, which immediately deprives them of their independence. As well as this, toilet facilities are, as a rule, much too small and narrow to allow negotiation of wheelchairs...

... However, there is another barrier to the physically handicapped using general sports centres, and especially swimming pools. "This is that prejudice," said Sir Ludwig, "still so deeply ingrained in society, that

sportive activities of the disabled are an embarrassment to the able-bodied." It had, therefore, been a completely new approach in this country to build a sports centre primarily for the disabled, but at the same time also opening its doors to certain sections of the able-bodied community.

Since its opening, the Stoke Mandeville Sports Stadium has proved an invaluable contribution not only to furthering sport among the disabled in the whole country, but also to providing better sports facilities for the local community generally. Above all, the stadium has broken down the barrier which has existed between the able-bodied and the disabled. It has shown that integration of both in sporting activities is not only feasible but most beneficial for both sections of the community.

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Sport can play an inestimable part in helping a severely disabled person to become socially reintegrated in the community.

Any injury or disease resulting in severe disability such as blindness, loss of limb and partial or complete paralysis, upsets to some extent the precision, economy and course of the normal movement patterns of the body. These abnormal patterns are characterized by weakness, stiffness and lack of co-ordination. The realization and sudden awareness of these unusual movements has a tremendous and shattering psychological impact on the physically disabled person.

He tends to become withdrawn and often finds social contact with his able-bodied fellowmen difficult and, sometimes, even impossible. As a result he may lose his self-confidence and personal dignity. And if he is regarded as out of the ordinary by society, he may be consumed with self-pity, become isolated and develop an anti-social attitude. All these adverse psychological reactions apply to disabled people with otherwise normal intellectual faculties.

Sporting activities which are carried out in hospital and then continued after discharge are ideal, Sir Ludwig said, in preventing the disabled from resigning themselves to their disability. Sport, in his opinion, counteracts the development of psychological tensions and anti-social attitudes.

There are some sports in which the disabled, including those in wheelchairs, are capable of competing alongside the able-bodied. For instance

in archery, darts, bowling, snooker and table tennis, the paralysed and amputees can frequently hold their own, while amputees and the blind excel at swimming.

Some outstanding sportsmen and women who have suffered injuries or disease of their neuromuscular systems have succeeded, by intensive training of compensatory techniques, to overcome their abnormal patterns of movement and regain their previous high athletic performances, including Olympic championship.

People who are disabled with congenital or acquired physical disabilities, combined with mental disorders, such as children with cerebral palsy, or those of any age who have sustained cerebral injuries resulting in partial paralysis, need special consideration. Their aptitude for sporting activities is more or less diminished and their classification in the various sports events is more difficult, requiring specialized medical and psychological assessment.

However, the beneficial effect of sport on the well-being of the mentally handicapped in promoting interest, concentration and relaxation is in no doubt. Certain psychiatric in-patients come with their nursing attendants, three times a week, from a nearby mental hospital to Stoke Mandeville Sports Stadium for swimming sessions. This has been a valuable therapeutic factor in their treatment.

For the physically handicapped, a prominent symptom in the early stages of rehabilitation, especially following fractures of limbs, amputations and paralysis, is fatigue. In contest with himself, to improve his performance, the disabled person learns to overcome this. The initial cause of the handicap, whether it is congenital malformation, disease, industrial, traffic or sports accident or war injury, is of little importance.

The great advantage of sport over formal remedial exercise lies in its recreational value, Sir Ludwig observed. This is particularly important for many of the severely handicapped who, today, are able to work. Many of them are employed in factories or offices, and sport can have a very beneficial effect in counteracting the boredom and frustration of their job...