



Maybe the future Olympic Games will show athletes with disabilities, like South African Oscar Pistorius, competing against able-bodied athletes? A new UN Convention is the starting point. Courtesy of Ossur

Sport is now recognised as A HUMAN RIGHT for people with disabilities

New UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities could help athletes with disabilities to compete in the Olympics

by Kirsten Sparre

Athletes with a disability may be a common sight at Olympic Games in the future. It is one of the opportunities offered to people with disabilities in a new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities where article 30.5 states that people with disabilities can participate in all sport on the basis of equality of opportunity.

There are 650 million people in the world with disabilities, and the new convention is the first convention on human rights to include the right to sport, explains Professor Mary A. Hums from The Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University in the US.

Hums and her colleagues have played a key role in getting sport included in the convention that is still fairly unknown in the wider world. It was passed by the UN General Assembly in December 2006 and is in the process of being ratified by enough countries to enter into force officially.

Competing with able-bodied

The article on sport in the new convention is not primarily aimed at ensuring athletes with

disabilities the right to compete against able-bodied athletes at the Olympic level but it is probably one of the issues that will help raise the profile and awareness of the convention.

There is for instance the case of the South African runner, Oscar Pistorius. Pistorius was born without the fibula in his lower legs and with other defects in his feet. He had both legs amputated below the knee when he was 11 months old but has gone on to set Paralympic world records in the 100, 200, and 400 meters.

Pistorius has defeated some able-bodied runners in his pursuit of attaining an Olympic qualifying time, touching off international debate over what constitutes disabled and able-bodied and whether his prosthetics are giving him unfair advantages.

The IAAF, athletics' governing body, ruled in January 2008 that Pistorius' prosthetic limbs give him an advantage over able-bodied opponents and therefore he cannot compete in the Olympics. Pistorius has appealed the decision to the International Court of Arbitration of Sport, and the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities may give him and others a new

lever in the struggle to be allowed to take part in the Olympics.

A string of sports rights

Article 30.5 of the convention also specifies a number of other rights to sport for people with a disability such as the right

- to be supported by the state
- to be recognised as equal to those without disabilities
- to participate at all levels and in all forms of sport – including sport with people without disabilities
- to participate in sport organised specifically for people with disabilities
- to enter and use sporting venues and facilities just like a person without a disability
- to have access to services from organisations working in the area of tourism, leisure and sporting activities

The convention also specifies that children with disabilities have the right to sport and play in and outside of school on an equal basis with other children.

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