**BIRGIT SKARSTEIN**

**Country:** Norway  
**Date of Birth:** 2/10/1989  
**Sport:** Nordic Skiing

**Sports Career**

**Paralympic Games:**  

**World Championships:**  
Nordic skiing:  
Silver and bronze at World Championships Finsterau 2017 | 2 x bronze at World Championships Prince George 2019  
**Rowing:**  

I want to work for a fair and just sport, and a Paralympic Movement developing our movement as well as society. It’s a dream being able to make sure our sport is both professional and inclusive as well as driving societal change for a more just and equal world. That’s a Paralympic dream.

**Why do you wish to run for the IPC Athletes’ Council?**

The power of Paralympic sports goes beyond the field of play. I believe sport can change the world, and that exposing our communities for Paralympic moments will make the world a better place. As an engaged individual in both sports and society, I want to utilize my role in the IPC Athletes’ Council to make a difference in the world of sports and the rest of the society.

The voice of the athletes must be strong and clear, not only on emerging issues, but also take the initiative to improve the situation for Paralympic athletes. I believe I can be such a clear voice.
What special skills, background and expertise will you bring to the IPC Athletes’ Council?

As I’ve gone through four Paralympic Games, two in winter and two in summer sports, I have gained experience, and I see great opportunities for what we can achieve together.

As a summer and a winter Paralympic athlete, I believe I have an understanding on a number of challenges seen from the athletes’ perspective. Being part of a combined Paralympic and Olympic rowing team in Norway, I have knowledge from inside the Olympic world of sports as well. I want to use this experience to bridge the understanding between the Paralympic and the Olympic world of sports.

Growing up in a winter sports nation as Norway and working in a variety of sports and activities both winter and summer I believe I can be a bridge of experience. I've worked with both abled bodied and paralympic sports and have a strong sense of community into a common ground. Together we can find the best solutions for the future in a way that honours the Paralympic Sports Movement.

I am highly motivated to use my background, resources and expertise to work for the very best of Paralympic sports for the future, and to spread the Paralympic spirit throughout the world.

How has sport impacted your life?

Sport has completely changed my life. It has proven to me what I am capable of achieving both by myself and as a part of a greater team. It's not about what I cannot do but what I can achieve with the resources I got. I believe the world of sports has a lot to give the rest of society and is a great resource of inclusion.

What is your vision for the IPC Athletes’ Council?

The IPC Athletes’ Council is the voice of athletes and plays a key role in developing and conducting our sports.

My vision for the Council is to play a leading role and forming a solid foundation for athletes regarding important issues like fair play and protection of the clean athletes, as well as making it possible for athletes from all over the world to perform to the best of their abilities, independent of which country they are from. By establishing a stronger cooperation with other athletes’ councils/committees, like the ones within the IOC, the WADA, the international federations and the national and continental committees, the common voices of the athletes could be even stronger.

There need to be more work done on securing athletes the opportunity of dual careers in a way that makes it possible to combine sports with part time work or studies that ease the transition to the professional life after the sporting career.
International cooperation to ease the way into sponsor markets for athletes is another important issue that I would like to highlight.

I believe there are more possibilities showcasing the Paralympic movement and spreading the powerful brand together with partners and sponsors. Today’s athletes are the assets of the movement, and the foundation for the future.

What is the biggest challenge you have experienced as an athlete? How did you overcome it?

My biggest challenge has been to learn how my way of sport differs from the able bodied, as well as bringing the relevant knowledge across the paralympic way. Being able to draw enough sponsors to pay for equipment and training and make what we are doing relevant and equal to other sports as well as bringing across a greater message of inclusive society.