

CLASSIFICATION

What is Classification?

Classification is a structure for competition. Paralympic athletes have an impairment in body structures and functions that leads to a competitive disadvantage in sport. Consequently, criteria are put in place to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes who are able-bodied. The purposes for the criteria are two-fold:

- Defining which impairment groups can compete in the various sports
- Grouping athletes in classes defined by the degree of function related to the impairment and/or specific to the tasks in the sport.

The process that is put in place to define who can compete and to group the athletes is called Classification.

Paralympic Sport is open to 10 different impairment groups:

- **Vision impairment**
- **Impaired strength**
- **Impaired range of movement**
- **Limb deficiency**
- **Leg length difference**
- **Short stature**
- **Hypertonia:** A condition marked by an abnormal increase in muscle tension and a reduced ability of a muscle to stretch. Hypertonia may result from injury, disease, or conditions that involve damage to the central nervous system. When the injury occurs in children under the age of 2, the term cerebral palsy is often used.
- **Ataxia:** Better known as clumsiness, is a neurological sign and symptom that consists of gross lack of co-ordination of muscle movements.
- **Athetosis:** Can vary from mild to severe motor dysfunction; it is generally characterized by unbalanced, involuntary movements of muscle tone and a difficulty maintaining a symmetrical posture.
- **Intellectual Impairment:** Due to the nature of these impairments, athletes have a competitive disadvantage at sport.

Fair and equal competition

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To ensure competition is fair and equal, all Paralympic sports have a system in place which ensures that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for able bodied athletes.

In the same way that many able bodied sports group athletes by age, sex or weight, Paralympic sports group athletes by the degree of activity limitation related to the impairment and/or specific to the tasks in the sport.

This process is called classification. It determines which athletes are eligible to compete in a sport and what group of athletes they should belong to for competition.

Each sport has a unique classification system which complements their sport's specific athletic skills and requirements.

When an athlete first starts competing they are assessed on a variety of skills and requirements they will need to compete in their chosen sport. This is conducted by a **classifier**, a person authorized and certified by an International Sport Federation to undertake the assessment

Due to the progressive nature of some impairment athletes are sometimes classified a number of times throughout their career.

What is a sport class?

A sport class is a category for competition, defined by the relevant International Federation. The sport class is determined by procedures that may include a physical and technical assessment of the athlete and observation in and out of competition.

For each sport in which Paralympic athletes compete, the athlete is assigned a sport class according to the relevant classification rules in the specific sport: In individual sports, typically a letter and number combination is used (eg, T42, F36, S9) in order to create a competition programme. In team sports such as Wheelchair Rugby or Wheelchair Basketball, a points system is used, whereby athletes are allocated a score (eg, 1.0, 2.0 or 3.0). A single team has a point requirement for the athletes on a team competing at any one time.

In some sports, athletes from a variety of disability groups compete together in a single event (eg, Wheelchair Basketball). In other sports, only athletes from a certain disability group can compete. For example, only athletes with visual impairment participate in Goalball.

The allocation of a sport class is a process done by Classifiers who determine the level of functional ability of each athlete. Athletes may be classified a number of times throughout their careers and changes in sport class may occur if an athlete's condition improves or deteriorates.



Sport rules have processes and procedures in place whereby an athlete can object to the allocation of his/her sport class or object to the sport class of another athlete. The resolution of this objection to sport class is a protest.

Sport rules also have processes and procedures in the case where an athlete wants to formally object to the manner in which classification procedures have been conducted. The resolution of this objection to the conduct of classification procedures is an appeal.