

Activity
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Value: Empowerment and social support in sport
Activity: Meeting an athlete with a disability



GENERAL GOAL

Students become aware of athletes/persons with a disability and encompass a newly found respect of their athletic and personal achievements.

SPECIFIC GOALS

- To experience personal contact with an athlete with a disability.
- To hear what it is like to live with a disability.
- To gain appreciation for the fact that disability does not equate to limitation or inability.
- To learn about sport related matters (eg, rules, adaptations, skills, training, equipment, etc) in the sport of the guest athlete.
- To gain respect for the sporting abilities and achievements of the guest athlete.
- To gain exposure to the successes and failures in the sporting career of the guest athlete.

ENVIRONMENT

Classroom activity (adaptations are possible).

SUGGESTED EQUIPMENT

Special equipment related to the sport of the athlete (perhaps provided by the athlete as a demonstration).

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE ACTIVITY

Session leader, assistants and athletes (if available).

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Prior to this activity, the session leader should prepare the students. Students should draft questions to pose to the athletes. Detailed information about preparing for this activity can be found on the Athlete Interview Information Sheet (provided on the PSD DVD).

STARTING THE ACTIVITY

The session leader introduces the guest athlete(s) and moderates the activity.



RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

The athlete introduces him/herself and explains their own personal story and experiences through sport and in daily life. Afterwards the students are given the opportunity to ask prepared and spontaneous questions. The session leader should act as the moderator between the students and athlete(s) and lead the discussion to ensure the intended subject areas are met.

Possible topics to discuss could be:

- a) Sport: rules, classification, special equipment, adaptations, training, sport injuries, competition, travelling, sport achievements.
- b) Environmental barriers affecting daily life for a person with a disability: how to make transfers from a wheelchair to a regular chair (demonstrations), support, activities for daily living (ADL), hygiene, difficulties, disadvantages, opportunities, travelling, barriers, social attitudes, etc.
- c) Empowerment: Sport as a motivation for a healthy lifestyle.

The session leader should intervene when one topic is focused on too long. Students should leave this activity having a realistic image of what it is to live with and take part in sports while having a disability.

GUIDELINES FOR ADAPTATION TO YOUNGER PARTICIPANTS

- Be very concrete; use simple, clear language.

GUIDELINES FOR ADAPTATION TO OLDER PARTICIPANTS

- Do not underestimate the students' ability for empathy and understanding. Create an open atmosphere for students to ask a variety of questions.
- Collect stories or video material of different Paralympic athletes to discuss and compare.

REFLECTION

The session leader will ask specific questions in order to create a complete summary of what was previously discussed.

Sample questions

- What did you consider interesting? What will you remember?
- How can sport help persons with a disability?
- What does it mean to be an elite athlete with a disability?
- What does it take to become an elite athlete or athlete with a disability?
- Is society encouraging persons with a disability to get involved in sport? How could this be improved?

The session leader should try to cover the whole range of impressions the students experienced throughout the activity.

every paralympian has an incredible story to tell...

Erin Popovich (USA, Swimming):

Erin Popovich, one of the most accomplished US Paralympians, has captured more medals in the past two Paralympic Games than any other US swimmer. Erin was born with achondroplasia, a genetic disorder in which affected individuals have arms and legs that are very short, while the torso is more nearly normal size and is classified at the Paralympic Games in the 'Les Autres' sport class. She started Swimming at the age of 12 and just six months later she was competing in her first international competition. At the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games she was the most decorated athlete with three gold and three silver medals, setting four world records and in 2004, she took a gold medal in every event she competed in (five individual, two relay) at the ATHENS 2004 Paralympic Games. Erin is currently pursuing a degree in health and science with a concentration in sports medicine at Colorado State University, while training for the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games.

Henry Wanyoike (Kenya, Athletics):

At the age of 21, Henry, who was a promising runner on the Kenyan national team, lost 95% of his sight over night, when a stroke damaged his optic nerves. He learned to become self-sufficient again and was able to return to Athletics. His willpower and desire to be a champion led him, only one year later, to qualify for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. Dragging his guide who was sick with malaria, he won the gold medal in the 5,000m, guided by the shouts of the crowds. He followed that performance with gold medals in the 5,000m and 10,000m at the ATHENS 2004 Paralympic Games. Henry is involved in numerous charity projects in Kenya and throughout the world and also runs his own organization, the Henry Wanyoike Foundation, which raises money to provide people in Kenya with cataract operations.

Gerd Schönfelder (Germany, Alpine Skiing):

Gerd was a professional ski racer before a train accident took his right arm in 1989. He had his Paralympic debut at the Tignes-Albertville 1992 Winter Paralympics and has since competed at five Winter Paralympic Games. Over that time he has won sixteen Paralympic medals, including 12 gold medals. That makes him the most decorated male athlete in Paralympic Alpine Skiing. For his many achievements, he has received Germany's highest sporting award, the Silbernes Lorbeerblatt, three times. Also note that Gerd skis without poles and reaches speeds of over 100km/hour!



paralympians

Oscar Pistorius (South Africa, Athletics):

Oscar Pistorius was born without a fibular bone in both his legs. He was only 11 months old when his legs were amputated below the knee. Following an accident in early 1994 while playing Rugby, Oscar took up Athletics and only a few months later he took the gold and set a new world record in the men's T43 (double below the knee amputee) 200m event at the ATHENS 2004 Paralympic Games, instantly making him one of the biggest stars in Paralympic Athletics. He runs on two prostheses, while most double leg amputees use a wheelchair to compete and is nicknamed "The fastest man on no legs"! At the 2006 IPC Athletics World Championships, he beat his own world record in both the 200m and 400m T44 events and is currently the Senior South African Champion for able-bodied athletes. On top of his Athletics training, Oscar enjoys Water Polo, Rugby, Tennis, Cricket, Soccer and Wrestling and is also involved in a number of charities. He says: "When people ask me what it's like having artificial legs I reply, 'I don't know. What's it like having real legs?' To all intents and purposes, I was born like this and it's all I know".

Javier Ochoa (Spain, Cycling):

In 2001, Javier Ochoa suffered a head injury during a training accident which led to traumatic brain injury and also killed his twin brother and teammate in the Tour de France. Javier achieved his earlier sporting glory as an able-bodied cyclist. In 1996, he was National Amateur Champion and in 2000 became a professional rider with the Kelme Team in Costa Blanca and finished 13th over all in the 2000 Tour de France and won the 10th stage. After spending nine weeks in a coma, Javier got back on his bike and competed again at the ATHENS 2004 Paralympic Games, where he took the gold medal in the men's CP3/4 Road Race/Time Trial and a silver medal in the men's CP3/4 Individual Pursuit.

Esther Vergeer (The Netherlands, Wheelchair Tennis)

From the age of six, Esther had problems with her spinal cord. During an operation she lost the ability to walk due to a lesion of her spinal cord (L3). During her rehabilitation, Esther began to play Wheelchair Basketball and Wheelchair Tennis. Esther actually played for the Dutch women's Wheelchair Basketball team before she decided to focus on Wheelchair Tennis. Esther started competing in Wheelchair Tennis internationally in 1996. By 1998 she was already ranked number two in the world and in 1999 took the number one spot. Esther then won gold in the women's singles and doubles at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games and again at the ATHENS 2004 Paralympic Games. She has also held the number one position consistently from 2000 to 2006. On top of her Tennis career, Esther is studying Management, Economics and Law in the Netherlands.

LINKS

Website: www.paralympic.org
PSD Manual: Section Two, Chapter 4



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