

Paralympic organizations and national competitions

Malaysia has been active in the international development of disability sports. The nation played a leading role in the formation of the ASEAN Para Sports Federation and the Asian Paralympic Council, while the Malaysian Paralympic Council organized the 2006 FESPIC Games, the largest disability sports event ever held in the Asia-Pacific region. Local disability sports competitions have been conducted since 1982.



Malaysian athlete rebounding the ball in a game against China during the first Asia Paralympic Wheelchair Basketball Cup held in Malaysia, 2005.



The 100-metre wheelchair race at the Handicapped Athletics Championships in Kuala Lumpur, 1986.

International and regional organization

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the world governing body of the Paralympic Movement and organizes the Paralympic Games. It was founded in 1989 as a non-profit organization with its headquarters in Germany.

The Paralympic Games, the largest multi-disability and multi-sport competition for athletes with disabilities, are held every four years following the cycle of the Olympic Games. In 1960, the inaugural Paralympic Games were held in Rome. Since 1988, the Paralympic Games have been held in the same city that hosts the Olympic Games, approximately three weeks after the closing ceremony of the Olympics.

Athletes who take part in the Paralympic Games are classified into six disability categories: amputee, cerebral palsy, visually impaired, wheelchair, intellectually disabled and *les autres* (which comprises athletes who do not fit into the other categories).

Disability sports in the Asian region started with the formation of the Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (FESPIC) Federation in 1974. The quadrennial FESPIC Games, the largest competition for athletes with a disability in Asia and Oceania and the second largest in the world after the Paralympic Games, are held in the same year as the Asian and Commonwealth Games. Malaysia hosted the 2006 games in Kuala Lumpur (see 'International paralympic events and achievements').

In 2002, the Asian Paralympic Council was established in Busan with Dato' Zainal Abu Zarin, president of the Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC), as the founding president of the new organization. In 2006, the Asian Paralympic Council merged with the FESPIC Federation to form the Asian Paralympic Committee. Dato' Zainal was again elected president of this new body. This merger resulted in the creation of the Asian Para Games which will, beginning in 2010, replace the FESPIC Games. The biennial ASEAN Para Games are held just after the SEA Games in the same host city.

Local organization

The Malaysian Sports Council for the Disabled, a non-profit organization, was established in 1989. It was renamed the Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC) in 1996.

The MPC has seven affiliates, comprising disability organizations as well as disability sports organizations, which represent six disability categories: the visually impaired, intellectually disabled, physically disabled, hearing impaired, dwarfs and cerebral palsy.

Three sports associations for paralympians have been established in Malaysia for wheelchair tennis, lawn bowls and wheelchair basketball.

National competitions

A national multi-sport and multi-disability sports competition has been organized biennially in Malaysia since 1982. Originally called the National Sport for the Disabled, the name of the competition was changed to the Malaysian Paralympiad in 1998. From 1982 to 1996, only athletics and swimming competitions were held. The number of sports which are contested has subsequently increased; in 2006, 20 sports—judo, athletics, swimming, sitting volleyball, archery, wheelchair tennis, wheelchair basketball, lawn bowls, badminton, powerlifting, table tennis, goalball, fencing, boccia, cycling, football, shooting, tenpin bowling, sailing and chess—were included in the Malaysian Paralympiad programme. From 550 participants at the first games in 1982, the number of athletes increased to 1207 in 2006. In 1990, ASEAN countries participated in the national games and, in 2002, participation grew to include countries from the wider Asian region.

The national games have been held in various states in Malaysia. Since 1992, the event has been organized with support from the respective state governments, the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the state Athletics Amateur Associations. Since 2000, the Malaysian Paralympiad has been held in Kuala Lumpur. An important objective of the Malaysian Paralympiad is also to identify talent and increase the number of local coaches, technical officials and classifiers.

Paralympic events

The Paralympic Games programme comprises 27 events. While Paralympic athletes can be generally classified into six categories of disability—amputee, cerebral palsy, visually impaired, wheelchair, intellectually disabled and *les autres*—they are also grouped into classes based on their different levels of impairment for competitive purposes, ensuring a level playing field for all athletes taking part in a given event.

There are guidelines for athlete classification that differ from sport to sport and sometimes include physical and technical assessments of the athletes. Certified individuals, known as classifiers, are responsible for placing athletes into appropriate classes. Classification, however, is not absolute and an athlete's class is reviewed throughout his or her sporting career and changed if necessary.

Volleyball

Although there are two volleyball events for athletes with a disability—standing and sitting—only sitting volleyball is contested in the Paralympic Games. In sitting volleyball, athletes are not classified into groups; instead, they must meet minimal disability requirements. The game is played on a smaller court and, at all times, the athletes' pelvises must be touching the ground.



Shooting

The classification system in shooting allows athletes from different disability classes, but with the same abilities, to compete together. There are three classifications in shooting: SH1, SH2 and SH3. SH1 athletes do not require a shooting stand, while SH2 athletes do. Athletes classified as SH3 are visually impaired.



Powerlifting

Open to athletes with a physical disability who are divided into weight categories. Participants, however, must be declared physically fit by a physician before competing.



Football

Two versions of disability football are played. Five-a-side football is open to visually impaired athletes. Players other than the goalkeeper are blindfolded and are guided by bells in the ball. Seven-a-side football is open to athletes with cerebral palsy.



Cycling

Athletes are classified into four groups of disability—visually impaired, locomotor disabilities, cerebral palsy and handcycling athletes—as well as functional categories. Visually-impaired cyclists compete on tandem bicycles with a sighted pilot.



Goalball

Created for visually impaired athletes, goalball participants wear eye patches and shades to ensure they participate on equal terms. Bells in the ball help players track its direction.

Wheelchair tennis

Open to athletes with substantial or total loss of function in one or both legs. There is also a quad division open to athletes with disability in three or four limbs. Normal tennis rules apply although wheelchair tennis players are allowed two bounces of the ball before having to return it.



Swimming

Athletes are classified according to disability and degree of disability, for example, the degree of vision loss. Not all events are open to all classes.



Athletics

Events are open to all disability categories. Athletes are classified according to the level of their disabilities. During competitions, the visually impaired are permitted accompanying guides, who are attached to runners with either an elbow lead or a tether.



Top: Logo of the Malaysia Paralympic Council (MPC).

Above: Dato' Zainal Abu Zarin, founding and current MPC president.