



Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

Introduction

This document provides race directors with an overview of considerations for the inclusion of Para-athletes (aka Athletes With A Disability (AWAD)) in road races sanctioned by BC Athletics, to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Since the early 1990s, Canadian sport organizations have followed a policy of inclusion for para-athletes. In the sport of Athletics, Para-Athletics caters to wheelchair athletes, amputee athletes, visually impaired athletes, and athletes with cerebral palsy.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) serves as the international federation for Para-Athletics, establishing the rules and regulations that govern the sport, and co-ordinating international competitions. And in the case of visually impaired athletes, the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) serves a similar purpose.

The competition rules specified by those organizations however, are primarily directed at high-performance competitions, exclusive to para-athletes. In addition to events organized specifically for them, para-athletes can also participate in mainstream events alongside able-bodied athletes. In athletics, these events are typically road races and marathons.

To allow for the safe participation of para-athletes, race directors should carefully review their event, and consider making adjustments where necessary. In light of this consideration, participation may be restricted to certain classes of para-athletes.

Once it has been determined that it is safe to include para-athletes, a second step is to consider whether para-athletes will compete for their own awards, in which case the categories must be defined. The IPC defines a number of para-athlete classes, but for local events classes may be combined for awards.

Overview

The term “para-athlete” is an umbrella term used to encompass all individuals with limited functionality. The term is useful when communicating generalities, however, it can over generalize/simplify and may lead to a limited understanding of the diverse sport development needs among various para-athlete groups.

There are three broad classes of para-athletes:

- **Wheelchair athletes** – This category includes all athletes who compete from a wheelchair, including athletes with spinal cord injuries, amputations, cerebral palsy, or other conditions.
- **Mobility impaired athletes** – This includes para-athletes who compete from a standing position, including athletes with cerebral palsy, amputations, achondroplasia (dwarfism), or other conditions.
- **Visually impaired athletes** – This includes blind athletes, partially-sighted athletes, and deaf-blind athletes.

As with able-bodied athletes, some para-athletes consider themselves competitive athletes, while others participate for recreational purposes. There is no clear division between competitive and recreational athletes, however, it might be expected that a competitive para-athlete will have been classified for competition purposes, and further, in the case of a wheelchair athlete, that they will use a racing wheelchair as opposed to a daily use wheelchair.

The role of classification in sport for para-athletes is to provide a structure for competition in which athletes are grouped to compete against others with a similar physical capacity. Para-athletes are grouped in classes defined by the degree of functionality present.

Classification exists in able-bodied sports as well, in the provision of separate categories of competition for men and women, for different age groups, or for different weight classes. However, while ‘able-bodied’ sport classification is typically a simple process based on a single objective criteria, classification of para-athletes is considerably more complex (see Appendix).

Special Considerations

General Guidelines

Many of the following guidelines are common sense, and should be followed regardless of whether para-athletes are participating or not.

Provide a welcoming and inclusive environment

- Include a statement in event publicity or websites etc. such as 'The [name of event or organisers] welcome entries from para-athletes.'
- Encourage para-athletes to contact you in advance to discuss their needs and the requirements to enable them to take part and, if possible, allow athletes/coaches to review the course to assess its suitability.
- Do not tell para-athletes that they are not eligible to participate without consideration of what reasonable adjustments would enable them to participate.
- Ensure any language used to describe para-athletes is sensitive and appropriate. Language is continually evolving but what really matters is that language is acceptable to the individual or group concerned. If unsure, ask the para-athlete how they would prefer to be addressed.
- Provide diagrams and/or written pre-race information for athletes who are hearing-impaired.

Access to facilities

- Undertake a review of the accessibility of facilities including car parking, toilets, changing facilities, access to buildings and other facilities for their accessibility for athletes, coaches, officials and spectators.
- Ensure there are wide parking bays available to enable para-athletes to get in/out of their car.
- Ensure registration tents and other facilities are located on an accessible surface as para-athletes may be unable to travel on mud or soft ground.
- Ensure wheelchair accessible toilets are available, open and no key collection is required to access them.
- Ensure the awards stage can be accessed. Provide a ramp if necessary.
- Provide guidance to appropriate start positions for estimated finishing times for all athletes (para-athletes and able-bodied) to ensure slower athletes are not jostled by faster athletes coming from behind. See specific guidance on race start.

Course considerations

- Ensure the course is wide enough to allow sufficient space for athletes to pass visually impaired athletes who may be attached to a guide runner, or for wheelchairs to pass each other.

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

- Try to avoid very steep climbs or descents (>20%), as wheelchair athletes may be unable to climb them or they may be dangerous on descent.
- Try to avoid sharp turns at the bottom of descents, as wheelchairs may have difficulty negotiating the turn at speed.
- Try to avoid speed bumps or ensure there are clear warning signs and details in the race packet as they may be difficult or dangerous for a para-athlete to run over.
- Try to avoid crossing roads as they may be difficult or dangerous for hearing-impaired or visually-impaired athletes. Ensure there are sufficient and competent marshals positioned appropriately to warn athletes as appropriate and post signs to warn other road users.
- Try to avoid changes in terrain such as crossing grass/mud/sand, the crossing of railroad tracks, or provide an alternative route or surface for para-athletes as they may be unable to travel over this terrain.
- Cut off times for events should be reasonable and not unfairly set to prohibit the participation of para-athletes. The cut off time may be determined by a number of factors such as the need for sufficient time to dismantle the course before dark, the number of course marshals available for the event, the reasonableness of the length of time they will be required to marshal the course in cold or bad weather, police/local authority permission for road closures, permission for length of time to use the venue, etc.

Race Start considerations

- Race starts are particularly challenging for para-athletes. Athletes are often funnelled before crossing a relatively narrow start line, causing congestion and jostling, particularly in large events. And it is more difficult for para-athletes to make the abrupt changes in stride length, direction, or pace that are necessary when surrounded by runners of different abilities early in a race. Competitive wheelchairs may be quicker than runners over most distances, but it takes some distance for them to build momentum, and hence they are slower away from the start.
- As far as possible, it is better to allow competitive para-athletes to have a few minutes start on the runners. This allows them time to spread out and makes it easier for the runners to pass without obstruction.
- How much advance start to give competitive para-athletes must take into consideration the experience of all participants (both para-athletes and able bodied), the number of participants, race distance, and course constraints (choke points, turns, hills, etc.). It may be necessary to impose a minimum performance requirement for inclusion in a competitive para-athlete start.
- Because of varying course gradients, wheelchairs do not progress as evenly paced as runners. It is worth considering this in deciding when the wheelchairs will start.

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

- Wheelchairs and runners do not see the same ideal racing lines (e.g. when turning corners) and it is important that both remain aware of this at all times. Additionally, unlike most runners, wheelchairs cannot come to an immediate stop.
- Remember, if para-athletes are starting in advance of the main field, everyone needs to be aware of this – police and course marshals; the start coordinator, starter and assistants; other race participants; timers; etc. para-athletes should be given a lead escort in the same manner as the main field.
- Para-athletes who do not start in advance of the main field should be directed to position themselves at the start where they are least likely to experience the difficulties of moving in a large, closely packed crowd. The rear of the start often minimizes such challenges.

Ambulatory athletes

In general the only acceptable footwear should be running shoes. However, those athletes with leg amputations should be permitted to use a flex foot or similar prosthetic.

Mobility impaired athletes should be permitted to use prosthesis, canes or crutches to ambulate the course.

Visually impaired athletes

Athletes with a visual impairment may need to be assisted by a guide. Guides should be provided by the visually impaired athlete and ideally should not have to pay a race entry fee and will not be considered to be participating in the race in their own right. Guides may be of either gender regardless of the restrictions of the race or the gender of the athlete. Guides should be identified in advance to you and should wear some visible or warning clothing to identify them to other runners. Often this clothing is a vest or a sign pinned to the back of their shirt, alerting other participants who are about to pass them from behind.

Guide runners may use a number of methods to help assist the visually impaired athlete. They may use an elbow lead, or a tether. And they may give verbal instruction. But the guide is not allowed to use a bicycle or any other means of motion other than running/walking.

Wheelchair athletes

Wheelchair racing falls under the governance of Para-Athletics. A wheelchair has no mechanical gears or levers. Hand-cycle racing falls under the governance of Para-Cycling. BC Athletics is able to sanction events that include wheelchair participation, but cannot sanction or provide insurance to events that include hand-cycles or motorized wheelchairs. Cycling BC is responsible for sanctioning hand-cycle events.

Wheelchair racers sometimes cause anxiety for organisers, but once you understand more about them, there is little to fear. Many of the wheelchairs tend to be very lightweight, with pneumatic tires and with the dimensions and features on the wheelchairs specified in the IPC Athletics rules. The maintenance of the chair is left to the individual and, the wearing of a helmet is compulsory in any sanctioned event. Because of the way in which a competitor sits in a chair, if a crash occurs it is the shoulder and then the head which hits the ground. Quite often the arm cannot be brought round to break the fall in time.

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

At the speeds attained by modern wheelchair athletes, racers do not grab the wheel pushrim. This would slow the chair. The most efficient technique is to wear highly padded gloves to protect the hands and stroke the rim. Contact is made at about the twelve o'clock position of the wheel, punching the rim between the thumb and first two fingers. The follow-through means that the arms will naturally fly out to the back of the rim ready to punch the rim again. Rain causes problems, due to reduced friction, and dry conditions are preferred by wheelchair racers.

Drinks stations can cause problems and because of this, wheelchair competitors are advised to carry their own refreshments. Convenient bottle designs enable pushing and drinking to be combined. The design of the gloves generally precludes grabbing cups and wetting the wheel pushrims slows the chairs, so thrown sponges are not welcome.

At the finish, ensure that the finish chute is wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, and that there is adequate run out for wheelchairs to come to a stop. A relatively flat finish is recommended.

In wheelchair races, the official finish time is the time at which the centre of the axle of the leading wheel crosses the finish line. If transponder (chip) timing is being used, the transponder should be attached to the wheelchair frame as close to the axle of the front wheel as possible.



Athletes who use a wheelchair should take responsibility for ensuring that the wheelchair is fit for its' purpose to participate in the event and for any maintenance required during the event. In general, race organisers should not be responsible for inspecting the condition of wheelchairs. Athletes who are racing have to carry their own spare tyres etc. Although they can have assistance from others for repairs, many do not bother with repairs in important races because the time lost means that effectively they are out of the race.

Athletes using a wheelchair who need to be pushed by another person should provide their own assistant. Ideally the assistant should not have to pay a race entry fee and will not be considered to be participating in the race in their own right. Assistants may be of either gender regardless of the restrictions of the race or the gender of the athlete. Assistants should be identified in advance to you and should wear some visible or warning clothing to identify them to other runners. It is recommended that pushed wheelchairs start behind the main field of runners, and would not be considered eligible for any prizing designated specifically for wheelchair racers.

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

As a guide you may expect the following times from top wheelchair athletes:

5 km: Men 12 min, Women 14 min

10 km: Men 24 min, Women 26 min

Half Marathon: Men 49 min, Women 55 min

Marathon: Men 1h.40 min, Women 2.00 hrs

However, many wheelchair competitors may take considerably longer.

Awards

Often the opportunity for para-athletes to participate alongside able-bodied runners, and receive the same finisher medal or other reward, is sufficient recognition in itself. However, events may choose to go the further step to create competitive categories and prizing specific to para-athletes.

It is not necessary for events to create categories for every IPC class. Indeed, many local participants may not have been assessed for classification. Therefore, races often only define the three broad classifications: wheelchair, visually impaired, and ambulatory, with wheelchair athletes sometimes sub-divided between Open and Quad (restricted upper limb movement) classes. The depth of prizing may be conditional on the numbers participating.

Further Information



BC Wheelchair Sports, <http://www.bcwheelchairsports.com/>
780 SW Marine Drive
Vancouver, BC V6P 5Y7
Phone: 604-333-3520
Fax: 604-333-3450
Toll Free: 1-877-737-3090
Email: info@bcwheelchairsports.com



BC Blind Sports, <http://www.bcblindsports.bc.ca/>
#330 - 5055 Joyce Street
Vancouver , B.C. V5R 6B2
Phone: 604 325-8638
Fax: 604-325-1638
Toll Free: 1-877-604-8638
Email: info@bcblindsports.bc.ca



Cerebral Palsy Sports of BC, <http://www.sportabilitybc.ca/>
6235C 136 Street
Surrey, BC
V3X 1H3
Phone: 604 599-5240
Fax: 604 599-5241
Email: sportinfo@sportabilitybc.ca



BC Deaf Sports Federation, <http://bcdeafsports.bc.ca/>
#4 – 320 Columbia Street
New Westminster, BC V3L 1A6
Send email to the BCDSF office for Video Phone number
604-526-5010 (TTY)
*Hearing people can call Telus Relay Service at 1-800-855-0511 and give
the operator BCDSF's TTY #
Fax: 604-526-5010
Email: info@bcdeafsports.bc.ca

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races



Special Olympics BC, <http://www.specialolympics.bc.ca/>

#210 - 3701 East Hastings Street

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Phone: 604-737-3078

Fax: 604-737-3080

Toll Free: 1-888-854-2276

Email: info@specialolympics.bc.ca



IPC Athletics, <http://ipc-athletics.paralympic.org/>

Appendix – IPC Rules, Regulations, and Classification

Rules and Regulations

The official IPC Athletics Rules and Regulations can be found here:

http://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/140203144307494_2014_01+ipc+athletics+rules+and+regulation+2014-2015_final+2014.pdf

Unless your event is an IPC international competition, most of the rules contained in the above document need not be strictly enforced. Officiating appropriate to the level of competition is recommended.

Types of classification

Two broad categories of classification exist:

Medical classification – Athletes are classified based on a medical assessment of their type and level of limitation. Athletes are grouped with and compete against others with the same or similar limitations.

Functional classification – Athletes are classified based on an assessment of their physical function, including muscle strength, range of motion, co-ordination, and balance. Athletes can be grouped with and compete against others with different limitations but similar physical function. In practice, many athletes are classified using a combination of these methods.

Typically an athlete is first assigned to a category of athletes, such as visually-impaired or wheelchair, based on a medical evaluation. Functional aspects are then considered in assigning a final sport class within that category.

IPC Classification Process

Details of the IPC classification process can be found here:

http://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/140203155650367_2014_01_21_ipc+athletics+classification+rules+and+regulations_final+2014.pdf

Classification is conducted by personnel trained in the specific sport classification system. Many classifiers have expertise in medicine, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, or similar fields. Classifiers who conduct classification for sanctioned national and international competitions are trained and certified by the appropriate sport governing bodies.

The classification process includes several steps, including an initial physical and medical examination and observation in and out of competition. An athlete's classification can be reviewed throughout his or her career. As there is always a level of subjectivity in the classification process, procedures exist to allow athletes who feel they have been inappropriately classified to protest these decisions.

After being classified, each athlete is assigned to a sport class. In athletics, sport classes consist of a letter and number combination. The letter, either 'T' or 'F', describes the class as for either track or field events. The first

BC Athletics Guidelines for the inclusion of Para-athletes in Road Races

number, from 1 to 5, specifies the classification group. The second number, from 1 to 8 depending on the classification group, describes the specific level within that group.

For road running purposes, the following classes are defined.

Wheelchair Classes

Athletes who are in a wheelchair due to spinal cord injury or are an amputee are in classes T51 – T54. Classes T51 and T52 have restricted movement in their upper limbs (Quad).

Classes T32 –T34 are classes for athletes in a wheelchair due to cerebral palsy.

Mobility Impaired Classes

Classes T40 – T46 cover ambulant athletes with different levels of amputations and other limitations, including les Autres (eg. dwarfism).

Classes T35 – T38 are for cerebral palsy athletes who do not use a wheelchair.

Visually Impaired Classes

Classes T11, T12 and T13 cover the different levels of visual impairment.

IBSA Classes B1, B2 and B3 are equivalent to the above IPC Classes.