

A BRIEF HISTORICAL TOUR

In 1918 in Germany, a group of war amputees started practising sports, which entertained them and made them feel better, both physically and psychologically. In Glasgow, in 1932, the “Society of One-Armed Golfers” and “Motor Club” were created; both were entities engaged in activities especially for amputees in combination with other non-disabled people. During the same period, also in Germany, Carl Diem and Wall Witz spread the idea of adapted sports to other groups relegated to the house so that they could go out and play simple sports without competition, but that helped them to relate to others.



In 1944, in Stoke Mandeville (England), Dr Guttman created the world's first centre for the rehabilitation of people with spinal cord injury, fully incorporating sports into rehabilitation treatment..

Meanwhile, the first wheelchair basketball team, the Flying Wheels, was formed in 1946 in the US. Its members were people who had suffered a traumatic war wound and wanted to show the world that, despite their significant limitations, with adequate physical and functional preparation, they were able to have a satisfactory and active life and make plays as exciting as those made by other basketball players, the “verticals,” as they were termed.

Dr Guttman had the bright idea of introducing sports in Stoke Mandeville Hospital to coincide with the date on which the Olympic Games were inaugurated in London, on 28 July 1948. This event had considerable impact, and soon, the games began to be held annually. They grew in notoriety and participation until, in 1952, they were held for the first time on an international level. Its motto, still in effect today, was:



“The goal of the Stoke Mandeville Games is to unite men and women with physical disabilities in the world in an international sports movement, in which sincere sportsmanship gives hope and enthusiasm to thousands of people with disabilities. There can be no greater contribution of people with disabilities to be able to help society, through sport, to promote friendship and mutual understanding between nations.”



In 1960, the Stoke Mandeville Games were held in Rome, coinciding with the Olympics. From that date, what are now called the “Special Olympics” have been held every four years, coinciding with the host city of the Olympics. Since then, each new edition has added new disciplines, and the number of participating countries and athletes has been increasing.

In Barcelona, we had the privilege of hosting the Paralympic Games in 1992. Everyone agrees that it was a great event, not only for what it meant for the promotion of this international movement, but also what it meant for the improvement in terms of the accessibility of the city and, above all, because it raised awareness among much of Catalan and Spanish society about discovering the potential of people with physical disabilities.

It dispelled many of the old and stereotyped prejudices and revealed many of the limitations that people suffered to achieve full integration.



People with physical disabilities became aware of their own strength as a

group, the challenge of social integration gave way to the concept of social normalization and, later, to social inclusion; a notion in which individuals no longer have to struggle to adapt to society, but it is society that has to organize itself to account for people, their diversity and their different abilities.

After Barcelona '92, the words of the great Catalan poet Martí Pol also resonated in the world of disability: “Everything needs to be done, and anything is possible.”