

# **The Paralympic movement in Qatar**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The role sport could play in relation to social re-integration and changing the perceptions of people with disabilities was recognized by the founder of the Paralympic sport movement. Since the inception of this movement in the late 1940s, to the formation of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in 1989, until today, the aspiration to use para-sport to create a more inclusive society for people with an impairment remains strong.

The Qatar Ministry of Youth and Sports underscores the importance of sport, amongst other factors, to promote social inclusion and cohesion, and it is something which is further highlighted in Qatar's 2030 vision. The Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC) is responsible for managing the athletes to compete at the Paralympic Games and other international competitions as well as for providing opportunities for all those with disabilities to participate in sport. While the first official Paralympic Games took place in 1960, Qatar made its debut at the 1996 Atlanta Games. There have been very few Qatari athletes competing at the Paralympics.

Interestingly, after the hosting of the 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships in Doha, two athletes medalled at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. This Championships was held in the Middle East for the first time since its inception in 1994. While there is a large body of knowledge focusing on major sport event legacies, especially concerning the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games and para-sport events generally have received less attention. This seems to be no different in Qatar. This case study aims to take stock of the Paralympic movement in Qatar and evaluate

the legacy of the 2015 IPC World Athletic Championships. This case study draws on primary and secondary data to provide context to the Paralympic movement in Qatar.

**Keywords:** Qatar Paralympic Committee, para-sports, 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships, legacy

## INTRODUCTION

Disability sport is considered as sport created for, and/or specifically practiced by, athletes with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> While the history of disability sport can be traced back to the late 1800s, Sir Ludwig Guttman is considered to be the father of the Paralympic movement.<sup>2</sup> Guttman, a neurologist, introduced the use of sport to rehabilitate patients with spinal cord injuries in Stoke Mandeville hospital in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

- His work led to the Stoke Mandeville Games which started out as a competition between British spinal units in 1948
- By 1952 these Games had attracted international participation and by 1960 they took place in Rome in the same venues as the Olympic Games until the early 1990s<sup>4</sup>
- It was only in 1989 that the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was founded as a collective voice for advocacy for the Paralympic movement
- In 2008 the relationship between the International Olympic Committee and the IPC strengthened with the adoption of the “one city, one bid” model for the hosting of both the Olympic and Paralympic Games by the same organising committee<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blauwet, Cheri, and Stuart Willick. 2012. “The Paralympic Movement: Using Sports to Promote Health, Disability Rights, and Social Integration for Athletes with Disabilities.” *American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 4: 851-856.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Brittain, Ian. 2018. “Key Points in the History and Development of the Paralympic Games.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Paralympic Studies*, edited by Ian Brittain and Aaron Beacom, 125-149. London, UK: MacMillan.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

- Up until that point cities had done so due to the precedent set at the 1988 Seoul Games
- The Paralympic Games have grown in recent years, with Rio 2016 seeing the most para-athletes participating:
  - Over 4000 (2,657 men and 1,671 women) from 159 countries took part<sup>6</sup>
  - A record 1,687 women athletes also participated, which was more than double the number who competed at the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta.

While Qatar had its first representation at the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1984, it only made its debut at Paralympic Games 12 years later in Atlanta – where one para-athlete participated in powerlifting. The first big achievements for the QPC were its first medal (bronze) in the Assen 2006 World Para Athletics Championships by Nasser Al Sahoti in javelin and, a year earlier, a bronze medal by Ali Al Mass in discus in the Rio de Janeiro 2005 World Wheelchair Games. Additionally, at the Kuala Lumpur 2006 Para Games, Team Qatar won one gold and one bronze medal.

There have been very few Qatari athletes competing at the Paralympics (not more than three para-athletes per edition and no women prior to 2016). However, it is important to note that after Doha hosted the 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships, two athletes (one female and one male) medalled at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games (shot put). Whereas there is a growing body of knowledge regarding major sport event

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<sup>6</sup> IPC. n.d. “Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.” <https://www.paralympic.org/rio-2016>

legacies, particularly concerning the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games and para-sport events generally have received less attention.<sup>7</sup> Given that this seems to be no different in Qatar, this case study aims to provide an overview of the Paralympic movement in Qatar and evaluate the legacy of the 2015 IPC World Athletic Championships.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to gain an understanding of the Paralympic movement in Qatar and the legacy of the 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships, primary research was conducted. This included semi-structured interviews with key personnel (technical expert and head coach) at the Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC, the national Paralympic Committee of Qatar), as well as a focus group with an administrator (technical expert) and three para-athletes. The interviews and focus group were conducted in August 2020. All ethical considerations were taken into account and participants provided their informed consent to take part in this study. The interview/focus group team comprised of a bilingual team member who was able to assist with translation and also transcribed the focus group. The transcription data was analysed and key themes were identified. This was supported by secondary data and a documentary analysis of reports provided by QPC administrators. The reports were used to provide an overview of the QPC as presented next.

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<sup>7</sup> Brittain, Ian. 2018. "Legacy of Sporting Mega Events for People with Disabilities." In *Legacies and Mega Events: Fact or Fairytale?*, edited by Ian Brittain, Jason Bocarro, Terri Byers and Kamilla Swart, 99-115. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

## **The Paralympic Committee of Qatar**

The Qatari Sports Club for the Disabled was established on December 17, 1993 according to the decision of the General Authority for Youth and Sports.<sup>8</sup> The Qatar Disabled Sports Club is regarded as the Disabled Youth Forum in Doha, and it is an educational and sports facility that contributes to integrating the disabled into society through sporting activities. Furthermore, it provides them with opportunities to satisfy their hobbies, to hone their skills and to become part of the global family of sport for the disabled.<sup>9</sup>

The Qatar Sports Federation for People with Special Needs was formed on July 27, 2001 according to the decision of the President of the National Olympic Committee in order to help the integration of the disabled in society through sporting activities and their local and international participation.<sup>10</sup> On March 19, 2008, the name of the Qatar Special Needs Sports Federation was changed to the QPC, pursuant to the decision of the Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee.<sup>11</sup>

The QPC is responsible for the selection, preparation and management of the Qatari team of para-athletes to compete at the Paralympic Games and other international Paralympic sport competitions.<sup>12</sup> The QPC is not only committed to enabling Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence, but also to developing sport opportunities for all people with a disability in Qatar - from the beginner to the elite level. Furthermore, the QPC endeavours to encourage the spirit of the Paralympic

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<sup>8</sup> QPC. n.d.a. "Qatar Foundation for Rehabilitation of Special Needs." Unpublished Report.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> QPC. n.d.b. "Qatar Paralympic Committee." Unpublished Report.

<sup>12</sup> QPC. n.d. "Qatar Paralympic Committee." <https://m.facebook.com/NPCQatar/about>

movement and its values, which include courage, determination, inspiration and equality.<sup>13</sup> The objectives of the QPC are as follows:

- Spreading sports for people with special needs of all kinds and encouraging their practice and development in the State of Qatar
- Providing every young person with a disability the opportunity to participate in sports and recreational activities that are compatible with his/her physical capabilities
- Preparing people with special needs to be mentally, socially and physically sound through sport within the limits of international laws and regulations.<sup>14</sup>

The organisational chart of the QPC is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: QPC Organisational Chart  
Source: Adapted from QPC, n.d.a

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> QPC. n.d.b. "Qatar Paralympic Committee." Unpublished Report



Table 1 presents the sports currently offered by the QPC, as well as those that it is targeting to include. Boccia and goalball are two Paralympic sports that do not have Olympic counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Boccia was introduced at the 1984 Paralympic Games in New York and Boccia International Sports Federation is the governing body.<sup>16</sup> Boccia involved throwing or rolling coloured balls as close as possible to a white target ball, also known as the “jack”.<sup>17</sup> The winning player, pair or team is the one who has thrown or rolled the most balls near the jack.

<b>Current sports</b>	<b>Targeted sports</b>
Athletics (all disabilities)	Equestrian (all disabilities)
Boccia (cerebral palsy)	Archery (mobility impairment)
Goalball (visual impairment)	Swimming (all disabilities)
Chair basketball (mobility impairment)	Judo (visual impairment)
Football (intellectual disability and hearing impairment)	
Table tennis (intellectual disability and mobility impairment)	

Table 1: QPC current and targeted sports  
*Source: Adapted from QPC, n.d.b*

The sport of goalball is governed by the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) and is played exclusively by athletes who are blind or vision impaired.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>15</sup> IPC. n.d.a. Paralympic sports: Boccia. <https://www.paralympic.org/boccia/about>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> IPC. n.d.b. Paralympic sports: Goalball. <https://www.paralympic.org/goalball>

game was created in 1946 to assist with the rehabilitation of veterans who had lost their sight during the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> It was introduced to the Paralympic sport programme for the first time at Toronto 1976, with the women's event added at the 1984 Paralympic Games in New York.<sup>20</sup> The sport is played by three players at a time, with a team comprising six players in total, who have to stay on their hands and knees to throw a ball past the opponents and into their net to score points.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 2: QPC Goalball team  
Source: QPC

In terms of the operational environmental, QPC has conducted the following SWOT analysis as presented in Table 2.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of the Federation headquarters and the availability of modern sports equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social shame and parents' lack of awareness of the importance and role of sport</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> IPC. n.d.c. Paralympic sports: Goalball. <https://www.paralympic.org/goalball/about>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competency of technical and administrative personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The association plays the role of clubs in the process of attracting and training players</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Olympic Committee's unlimited interest in sports for people with special needs</li> <li>The strong character of the Board of Directors</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lack of specialised sports clubs or special needs sports branches within the sports clubs</li> </ul>

Table 2: QPC SWOT analysis  
Source: Adapted from QPC, n.d.a

QPC have identified the following priorities in order to advance the Paralympic movement in Qatar.<sup>22</sup>

**Sport and entertainment facilities:**

- Furnishing the rest of the QPC headquarters as a hotel prepared for camps and tournaments
- Preparing and providing equipment for all sports practiced in the Federation
- Work to create and provide comfort and natural relaxation
- Building a multi-disciplinary gymnasium for women's sports
- Providing an athletics track for the Federation

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<sup>22</sup> QPC. n.d.a. "Qatar Foundation for Rehabilitation of Special Needs."

- Establishing a games and entertainment hall in line with the players' requirements
- Providing transportation prepared for mobility impairment
- Providing special devices such as sports chairs and artificial limbs to help the player achieve their best performance.

#### **Media promotion and publicity:**

- Preparing brochures and informational publications
- Enhancing QPC's website
- Intensification of sports days throughout the year
- Introducing the federation to governmental, independent and private schools and centres for people with disabilities
- Holding showcase matches inside commercial complexes.

#### **Sport education, awareness and cultural change:**

- Conducting study days on sports for people with special needs
- Programming sports classes at the level of specialized schools and integration schools
- Activating participation in the Olympic school programme
- Establishing joint visits between Committee players and sports club players
- Organizing cultural and entertainment forums and programmes for children and their parents.

#### **Developing the journey of athletes:**

- Providing qualified administrative, technical and medical staff
- Providing all capabilities and reasons for preparation in the best circumstances

- Intensification of important international participation
- Work to put distinguished players in the custody of QPC in order to increase the volume of training and enable them to rest as required
- Involving a group of players in training programmes in management and training in order to benefit from their experiences to develop the Federation.

### **Sport management:**

- Improving and developing working conditions for the technical department.
- Contracting with the Players Affairs Supervisor
- Contracting with a private secretary for the technical administration
- Adoption of an internal regulation that organises the functioning of the sports administration
- Contracting with a supervisor for sports facilities
- Establishing a committee to manage girls' sports.

### **Hosting international events:**

Hosting sporting events was limited to organising tournaments and meetings at the Gulf level until the year 2015, when QPC, in cooperation with the Olympic Committee, organised the IPC World Athletic Championships. QPC seeks to launch an annual open international athletics championship approved by the IPC, in which a group of champions participate. QPC also seeks to host meetings of regional and international federations, as well as the General Assembly of the IPC.

### **Key findings of case study research**

#### *Profile of athletes and administrators*

Two male para-athletes, one female and the QPC Technical Expert participated in the focus group. The para-athletes ages ranged from 27 to 35 years. All of them participate in athletics. Para-athletes 1 (male) and 2 (female) have been participating in para-sport competitions since 2011, whereas Para-athlete 3 (male) started in 2014. Para-athletes 1 and 2 participate in shot put, javelin and discus, while Para-athlete 3 competes in track events (100m, 200m, 400m and 800m). Para-athletes participate based on classification. Para-athlete 1 to 3 are classified as F34, F33 and T34. Classification determines which impairments groups can compete in within a specific sport and which athletes based on impairment level can compete against each other.<sup>23</sup>

A brief summary of their main achievements are presented in Table 3. It is evident that all three para-athletes are highly successful. Para-athlete 1 is also Qatar's first athlete to win a medal in any sport at the Paralympic Games - he won silver in the shot-put at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games.<sup>24</sup> History was also made by Para-athlete 2 at the 2016 Games when she won silver in the shot put and became the first female Qatari athlete to win a medal at the Paralympic Games. Additionally, Para-athlete 1 has a world record, championship record, two Asian records and an Asian Para Games record. Para-athlete 2 has five Asian records and two Asian Para Games records.

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<sup>23</sup> Brittain, Ian. 2018. "Key Points in the History and Development of the Paralympic Games." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Paralympic Studies*, edited by Ian Brittain and Aaron Beacom, 125-149. London, UK: MacMillan.

<sup>24</sup> AlKass, 2018. "Team Qatar athletes aim to continue medal success at Asian Para Games." AlkassDigital, 7 October. <https://www.alkassdigital.net/NewsDetails.aspx?id=122>

<b>Para-athlete 1</b>	<b>Para-athlete 2</b>	<b>Para-athlete 3</b>
London 2012 Paralympic Games – discus (6), shot put (9) & javelin (7) and also the flag-bearer for Team Qatar	GCC Athletics Championships 2013 (Doha) – discus (2), shotput (4) and club throw* (1)	GCC Athletics Championships 2013 (Doha) – 200m (3) and 100m (3)
GCC Athletics Championships 2013 (Doha) – discus (1), shot put (1) & javelin (1)	IPC Athletics World Championships 2013 (Lyon, France) – shot put (17)	2014 Asian Para Games (Incheon, South Korea) – 100m (3)
IPC Athletics World Championships 2013 (Lyon, France) – discus (9), shot put (7) & javelin (4)	2014 Asian Para Games (Incheon, South Korea) – discus (1, Asia Para Games record), shot put (1, Asian Para Games record)	GCC Para Athletics Championships 2015 (Doha) – 400m (2), 100m (3)
2014 Asian Para Games (Incheon, South Korea) – discus (5), shot put (1, Asian record) & javelin (3)	GCC Females Championships 2015 (Oman) – discus (2) and shot put (1)	IPC Athletics World Championships 2015 (Doha) – 100m (8), 200m (11) and 400m (12)
GCC Para Athletics Championships 2015	GCC Para Athletics Championships 2015	Rio 2016 Paralympic Games – 100m (4, 8) and

(Doha) – discus (2), shot put (1, Asian & World record) & javelin (2)	(Doha) – discus (3), shot put (1) & javelin (4)	also the flag-bearer for Team Qatar
IPC Athletics World Championships 2015 (Doha) – shot put (4)	IPC Athletics World Championships 2015 (Doha) – shot put (5)	World Para Athletics Championships London 2017 – 200m (9) and 100m (7, 8)
IPC Athletics Asia-Oceania Championships 2016 (Dubai) – discus (2), shot put (1) & javelin (3)	IPC Athletics Asia-Oceania Championships 2016 (Dubai) –shot put (1, Asian record)	2018 Asian Para Games (Jakarta, Indonesia) – 100m (4) and 800m (5)
Rio 2016 Paralympic Games – shot put (2) & javelin (8)	Rio 2016 Paralympic Games – shot put (2, Asian record)	World Para Athletics Grand Prix Paris 2019 – 100m (2) and 400m (1)
World Para Athletics Championships London 2017 – discus (5) shot put (1, Championship record) & javelin (5)	World Para Athletics Championships London 2017 – shot put (2, Asian record)	
2018 Asian Para Games (Jakarta, Indonesia) – shot put (8) & javelin (6)	2018 Asian Para Games (Jakarta, Indonesia) – shot put (2) & javelin (5)	



World Para Athletics Grand Prix Paris 2019 – shot put (3)	World Para Athletics Championships Dubai 2019 – shot put (8)	
World Para Athletics Championships Dubai 2019 – shot put (4)		

Note: Club throw is the equivalent to hammer throw in Olympic programme; club throw was introduced at the 1960 Paralympic Games, dropped from the 1992 Barcelona Games and reinstated at London 2012.

Table 3: Summary of para-athletes' achievements (Source: QPC)

Both QPC administrators have extensive experience in the Paralympic movement. The QPC Technical Expert started his career in the Paralympic movement in Tunisia. Since 1997 he's been a coach for track events and between 2000 and 2004 he was technical director of the Tunisia Paralympic Committee. After the 2004 Paralympic Games he joined the QPC. The QPC Athletics Head Coach has been at QPC for about the same duration, having joined in 2003. He has more than 33 years of experience in athletics coaching (able-bodied and para-athletics) including three national teams in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. Besides coaching he has also helped to organise many national and international tournaments. He has coached at five Paralympic Games (and achieved two gold, two silver and two bronze medals) as well as at seven IPC Athletics World Championships (achieving two gold, one silver and six bronze medals). That's on top of Asian and African Para Games and Athletics Championships. He has also coached athletes who have broken 44 records (two Paralympic, six world, six Asian, three African, ten GCC and 17 national).

### *Early years and introduction to the Paralympic movement*

Para-athlete 1 joined QPC in 2008 whereas Para-athletes 2 and 3 joined in 2010. Para-athlete 3 started with javelin and then changed to wheelchair racing. The para-athletes shared some of the challenges they experienced in their early careers. Para-athlete 1 indicated that he did not know about the QPC and at the time (2007) there was very little awareness. His physiotherapist told him about the QPC and he applied in 2008. The Technical Director told him everything about the training, the competitions, and the benefits of training on an individual's health. Para-athlete 1 added:

“In the beginning, the difficulty I had was that there was not many games - only athletics - but the sports were limited and the awareness of the Paralympics was less. Nowadays, there is much variety like wheelchair racing and the awareness is more.”

Para-athlete 2 found out about QPC from her mother's friend - a nurse at one of the main hospitals in Doha. Her mother wanted her to start something to enjoy as a substitute for sitting at home. Her first participation was at the 4<sup>th</sup> Fazza Athletics Competition in the UAE and after one year of training she won the gold medal at the GCC Athletics Championships. She added:

“For me there was not such a difficulty to mention because the club supports me fully in training and equipment. The challenge was to challenge myself to improve skill and keep winning medals.”

Para-athlete 3 shared that he was having physiotherapy at a hospital in 2010 when his doctor told him about the QPC and added, “I was not having any idea about a club for the special needs.” He applied to QPC and was coached for two years in javelin throw but felt it was not suitable for him. He added:

“Then I focused in wheelchair racing; it was comfort for me. Thank god I participated in competitions in wheelchair racing and I got medals, I succeeded.”





Figure 1: QPC Para-athletes and Officials at the 2016 Rio Games

The Technical Director added that QPC has a contract with this hospital and, thanks to their expertise in special needs, they are able to bring Paralympic members to the QPC. As a result, a large number of athletes come from the hospital. He indicated that in the beginning they only had basketball and athletics; they didn't have wheelchair racing as a sport as they only possessed a few chairs and couldn't use them during training. In 2010 they ordered ten new wheelchairs as part of a process which took almost 1-2 years. They also signed a contract with a specialist coach for wheelchair racing. Consequently, in 2014, they were able to start attending

competitions where wheelchair para-athletes could participate as well. The Technical Director further expressed that:

“In the beginning it was a bit difficult because they said no one knows about Paralympic sport and even that, the biggest challenge was the families (the parents) when they bring them here they said ‘we don’t want media exposure, no photos, no full names,’. There was no acceptance. But nowadays, it’s much easier to deal with parents as they have more awareness. We’ve also worked with several specialized schools and increased the sports we can offer. We changed everything and made huge progress in the club; when I came there was one or two coaches and one physiotherapist. We started bringing coaches to Qatar because we had a huge number of athletes. We worked hard for the QPC and the athletes. We started a school Olympic program. In the first edition we just participated in the “Aspire Dome” with six players as exhibition. Now we have a Paralympic programme and last year more than 100 children participated with us from local schools. This is very, very important for us and a huge achievement.”

### *Current challenges*

Para-athlete 1 revealed that his biggest challenge is that due to him winning medals at Championships or at the Paralympics, he feels committed to maintain the same level. He added, “It’s hard when you are on the top to stay there; everybody is aiming to your target.” Para-athlete 2 shared that she is “currently training more as I’m seeing other players progress and their development is a motivation for me to reach their level.”

The para-athletes were also asked about how they were impacted by COVID-19 and the postponement of the Tokyo Games. Para-athlete 1 said:

“Likee everybody staying at home at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, we become sad or depressed because coming to the club promotes our psychological condition. The Para-athletes who mostly stay at home get depressed; coming to the club helps them in influencing their emotional state, they become more talkative, more extrovert, meet friends at the club and become physically active. My experience in COVID? At the start of quarantine I felt sad and angry because usually I come to the club to train 4-5 hours daily and when the Tokyo competition got cancelled I got some emotions like my colleagues - sad and angry. However, the big problem now is that we stayed at home for three or four months so it's hard to start training again at the same level as before. In the first month of quarantine I trained at home but after that I stopped training for three months.

The Technical Director also shared that “at QPC our goals are not just medals, medals come second; we have to work with them more socially to improve our Para-athletes' lifestyles, most importantly.”

Para-athlete 2 tried to stay focused on her training during COVID-19: “I exercised at home especially for my abdomen and back, sustained my healthy diet, because gaining weight is not an advantage for me.” She added that she initially felt

sad but then she adapted to it: “I started exercising at home to prevent muscle stiffness and continued in my healthy diet.” Para-athlete 3 reported that:

“I felt almost the same as my colleagues, but my difficulties were that wheelchair racing requires a special track. But I did my best and kept training. Four months were quite a duration; I got depressed a little because it’s hard to leave a habit especially this habit. I hope for the next competition, I will be successful and achieve a world record.”

The Technical Director shared that the main challenge relates to budget:

“I think the most important thing is the budget - if we have money we can do many things, if we don’t have we try but it’s not the same. We are doing our best but you know since maybe five or six years now the budget in all federations has been cut and this is a really big problem for us. Because, for example, for those who want to participate in the Paralympic Games they have to qualify and if we don’t have budget then their chances will decrease. Also, we cannot take other Para-athletes for training camps without budget.”

The Technical Director also illustrated how the budget impacts on coaching resources:

“In addition, we need more coaches because I prefer that a coach trains three athletes alone and focuses on them and that we have other coaches

to work with others. Therefore, the budget is important for everything especially if we want to open for other types of sports - for example, table tennis and swimming. Currently, we don't have a swimming pool and most of the pools here are not accessible for para-athletes."

Regarding the pandemic, he confirmed it had caused them to stop all activity. They were unable to participate in competitions due to travel restrictions and the athletes' need for training. Moreover, most of their participation is in Europe which was not considered safe under the current circumstances.

#### *Paralympics as a vehicle to promote social inclusion*

The Para-athletes and the Technical Director were asked about their views on the role of the Paralympics in enhancing social inclusion. Para-athlete 1 shared the following:

"Before 2008 I remember one athlete, his family and friends were asking why do you play sport? Why you are doing it; it's more difficult for you with your disability? Nowadays people's reactions are "Wow, good for you!" and "Excellent! Go abroad; do more competitions". Paralympic athletes' families are now more proud of them and they support them. Therefore, how people think about the Paralympic sport has become different to how it was ten years ago. It has changed a lot."

The Technical Director shed light on how the QPC has assisted in changing perceptions over the years so that there is more social inclusion for Para-athletes and disability sport:



“We worked since 2006-2007 with the schools not only for the Olympic programme but to organise some events for the disabled students. It’s very good and maybe we reach 20 events each year. Many of them in the beginning they started organizing just for their students but now they are open to engage students from other schools. It’s very, very good and at QPC we are always there to support them, to help them, to organize with them; this is what we did for the last years. We tried with the Education Ministry to work with physical education teachers for collaboration with Qatar Olympic Committee.”

The Technical Director added that they also worked with one of the main hospitals to bring people to QPC; however they had to stop some activities due to budgetary constraints. A lack of budget impacted on the ability to offer more training camps or competitions. He further indicated: “However, we still try to organize “open day” here in the campus or in other venues.”

### *Legacy of the 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships*

The Para-athletes and the Technical Director were asked how it felt to participate at home in the 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships and about the legacy of the event.

Para-athlete 1 noted that it was the worst experience for him since he finished in fourth place but with the support of his family and QPC he went on to achieve a silver medal at Rio:

“Yes, my experience was the worst, for me it was the worst. You know why? Because before the competition I broke the world record in GCC competitions while, in the World Championship I got 4<sup>th</sup> place. The competition was in Doha. After the competition I wanted to stop playing sport but my family and the club encouraged me to continue playing and then I participated in Paralympics and won second place.’

Para-athlete 2 had a similar experience. She finished fifth at the World Athletics Championship in Doha after winning the GCC competition; however she also went on to win silver in Rio. It seems like the pressure of performing at home made it challenging but they did not give up. Para-athlete 3 also shared how he arrived a few minutes late for one of the events, and how the Technical Director personally requested for him to be allowed to compete. He finished 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, in the 100m, 200m and 400m respectively.

The Technical Director shared some of the challenges in raising awareness of Para-athletes and improving accessibility in Doha. He indicated that it didn’t raise awareness much in Doha but they worked hard in making the stadium (at Qatar Sports Club) accessible for everyone, especially the spectators:

“We made four big elevators accessible for wheelchair users and it was really, really good. They could go up to see the competition; it wasn’t there before we worked on it for the competition. Thanks to the Ministry and Qatar Sports Club they helped to make it really accessible, until now they use

these improvements even for the Olympics events. Also they worked on some rooms in hotels to make it accessible because you know sometimes it's not easy - we need to remove doors, or adjust halls so it was good for our athletes.”

The Technical Director added that had it not been for the event in 2015, most of the changes would not be there. In terms of building on this legacy, he emphasised that in terms of the vision to grow Paralympic sports in Qatar, if Qatar ever organizes the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the funding challenge will be overcome. Seemingly, there is still a lot of work to be done in relation to leveraging para-sport events for raising awareness of people with disabilities, improving accessibility and policy changes.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the Paralympic movement has its roots in the 1948 Stoke Mandeville Games, the IPC was only founded in 1989 as a collective voice for advocacy. While the Paralympic Games has grown in recent years, with over 4000 para-athletes from 159 countries participating in Rio 2016, Qatar only made its debut at the 1996 Paralympic Games where one para-athlete competed in powerlifting. Rio 2016 was the most successful Paralympics for Team Qatar, with 3 Para-athletes participating, including the first woman. She medalled along with one of the other team members. These Para-athletes along with QPC administrators shared their personal journeys to shed light on the Paralympic movement in Qatar. The 2015 IPC World Athletics Championships played an important role in the Para-athletes' success in Rio and,

while the event created a certain level of awareness and led to structural changes at the venue and hotels being instituted to accommodate athletes and spectators with disabilities, there is much more to be done. The Paralympics is viewed as an important vehicle to promote social inclusion. However, one of the major obstacles limiting the growth of the movement is budgetary constraint. It was further underscored that a future Olympic and Paralympic bid could address this challenge.

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## TEACHING NOTES

This case study creates awareness for disability sport and considers how it is practiced by athletes with disabilities by drawing on the experiences of a few Qatari Para-athletes and administrators. It also attempts to provide an overview of the Paralympic movement and the Qatar Paralympic Committee in particular. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the hosting of a major Para-athletic event can assist in not only enhancing the performance of Para-athletes but also in creating awareness and inclusion, albeit that so much more still needs to be done. Lessons learned may also be applicable to disability sport in the broader MENA region.

Students are asked a range of questions more broadly about the importance of disability sport and the Paralympic movement, its development in the MENA region and the extent to which it can be promoted further in the region.

### Question 1: What important outcomes can the Paralympic movement achieve?

The opening question relates to locating the Paralympic movement within the broader context of social inclusion, and can also be linked to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (such as Good health and well-being and Reduced inequalities).



The case study identifies the broader objectives of the Qatar Paralympic Committee in relation to health and well-being which goes beyond the performances at para-events. The case study also illustrates how an event can help achieve enhanced awareness of individuals with disabilities. Students can also refer to legacies of other para-events to ascertain how different types of legacies can be achieved for the Paralympic movement and how para-events can be improved in the MENA region in this regard.

**Question 2: What impact has the Olympics Games had on the Paralympic movement?**

The second question relates to the impact of the Olympic Games on the Paralympic movement when the Paralympic Games returned to being hosted in the Olympic city. It had a positive impact on the Paralympic movement in terms of participating nations. During this period the relationship between the International Olympic Committee and the IPC also strengthened, with several agreements being put in place. The media impact of the Olympic Games, and the increasing number of accredited media also had a positive impact on the media coverage of the Paralympic Games. However, it still does not get as much coverage as the Olympic Games and in order to address this, the IPC established an internet-based free view television service, ParalympicSport TV.

**Question 3: Discuss the merits of integrating disability sport into international and national federations.**

The third question relates to major steps taken to integrate Para-sport into relevant international sport federations and whether other sports can learn from cycling. The international cycling federation, Union Cycliste International (UCI), is considered best practice for its integration of para-cycling. This has resulted in many positive impacts in terms of the growth and professionalism of the sport, in addition to increasing accessibility at all events. It has also led to integration at a national level for many national cycling federations, with Australia, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands all viewed as examples to follow.

### **Additional Resources**

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