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Sport For All:
Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against
Persons with Disabilities

Webinar

Media representation of persons with disabilities in sport

Tuesday 24 March 2026
10.00 am – 12.30 pm (CET)

Online on Zoom platform

Recommendations

Recommendations for journalists and media professionals:

- Use language that focuses on athletes' abilities, achievements, and athletic performances – not on their disability or “overcoming” narratives. Avoid stereotypical or patronising terms (e.g., “wheelchair-bound”, “despite their disability”, “inspirational” for everyday actions) and instead use accurate, neutral descriptions.
- Do not focus interviews primarily on an athlete’s backstory or adversity; highlight their training, preparation, performance, results, records, and context just as is done with non-disabled athletes.
- Prepare thoroughly for athlete interviews: study their sporting background, learn their record, and craft deeper questions that go beyond the generic (such as, “tell us about your life or your success”).
- Attend and cover smaller and lesser-known adaptive sport events (not just the biggest/Games), to get to know the athletes, the disciplines, and the nuances of the sport.
- Learn and explain the specific rules and classification systems of Para sport, so as to provide fair, informed coverage and enable viewers/audiences to understand the sporting context.
- When mistakes in terminology or framing are made, accept correction, adjust practice, and focus on continuous improvement rather than perfectionism or avoiding involvement out of fear.

Narrative and representation:

- Move the narrative from “superhero” or “inspiration” to “athlete”: normalise coverage and talk about sport, not just about “adaptive sport” or “exceptional people.”
- Use gender-neutral or proper athlete descriptors (i.e., “swimmer” rather than “the man who” or “lady” instead of “woman”) and be mindful of unbalanced language between male and female athletes.
- Avoid over-editing, emotional music cues, and visuals (e.g., “sad piano”, “Coldplay music”) that frame stories as tragic or overly sentimental.
- Integrate more lived experience into coverage (include persons with disabilities in reporting, commentary, and production).

Athlete and disability movement:

- Encourage and support athletes in using their own platforms (especially social media) to share their stories truthfully and authentically, advocating both as sportspeople and as role models.
- Recognise athletes’ right to be asked about their sport, not only their disability or accident.
- Give athletes support in media and public communication skills so they can better share their narratives and seize opportunities.

Recommendations for sports governing bodies and institutions:

- Provide and promote guides for correct terminology, representation, and do's/don'ts for media and broadcasters. The International Paralympic Committee's upcoming guide is a model for this practice.
- Focus promotional and education efforts on raising awareness about the elite, high-performance nature of Paralympic sport.
- Develop and nurture partnerships with media, researchers, universities, and brands to help grow both knowledge and authentic representation.
- Offer more and more prominent opportunities for persons with disabilities to work as journalists, presenters, reporters, production and event staff – at both disability and mainstream sporting events.

Sponsorships, branding, and year-round exposure:

- Brands and corporate social responsibility (CSR) teams should move away from purely inspirational or overcoming narratives and instead invest in and activate collaborations that highlight sporting value and year-round athlete activity.
- Commercial sponsorship activation should focus on results, performance, rivalries, and ambitions, not just on disability “difference” and personal adversity.
- Support sustainable, marketable year-round events in adapted sports (not only Paralympic Games), which can create more consistent and wide coverage and increase public interest.
- Combine adaptive sports and non-disabled sports at public sporting events to support normalisation, increase spectatorship, and grow adaptive sports' reach.

Cross-cutting recommendations:

- Normalise disability by treating athletes with disabilities the same as other athletes – fair, rigorous, and equal sports journalism, devoid of pity or patronisation.
- Encourage research, collaboration, and shared knowledge (including accountability mechanisms) between researchers, journalists, sports federations, and advocacy organisations.
- All parties (media, sport federations, advocates etc.) should proactively reach out, build relationships, and ensure ongoing dialogue about coverage improvement and knowledge sharing.
- Foster inclusion and visibility through more representation of persons with disabilities in various sports roles, and by promoting their advancement outside the context of only Paralympic or “disability-specific” opportunities.