

How Paralympics Differs from Special Olympics*

Special Olympics is the largest sports organization in the world with more than 4,500,000 athletes. To qualify for the Special Olympics, athletes must have intellectual disabilities. There are competitions in over 94,000 local, national, and regional events every year in more than 170 countries. The Special Olympics organization does a fabulous job of educating the public about their mission (from their website):

... to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community

The **Paralympics**, on the other hand are for athletes with physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy, missing limbs, or multiple sclerosis. The Paralympic Games host about 4,000 athletes with physical disabilities in 20 sports. Para athletes are a much smaller group, with a much smaller overall footprint. Paralympics are held once every 4 years following the Olympic Games: the competition always takes place in the same country and the same venue. Just like the able-bodied Olympics, the Paralympics have summer games and winter games.

The Paralympic Games were organized in 1960 in parallel with the Olympic Games. Just like the able-bodied Olympic Games, the Paralympics are a high-level international competition. Paralympic hopefuls train and cross-train daily, use physiotherapists and nutritionists, coaches and clinics, books and videos with the dream of being named to the team. Equestrian was added as a Paralympic sport in 1996 and currently includes one discipline: para-dressage.

**Excerpted from an article with permission from Para-Equestrian Pam Hardin*



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