The Paralympic Games

by Ellen Baldwin
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Over fifty years ago, a doctor named Dr. Ludwig Guttmann began treating wounded soldiers at a hospital in England. These soldiers had injuries that had left them paralyzed.

To help his patients, the doctor wanted to try a different kind of treatment. What would be the best? It turns out that sports was the best medicine of all.

The doctor organized a special sports event so his patients could compete with patients from other hospitals. The first competition for athletes in wheelchairs took place on July 29, 1948 in England. This was also the date of the opening of the 1948 Olympic Games. These games were also taking place in England.

The timing of both sports events wasn’t by chance. Dr. Guttmann had a very special dream. He wanted people with disabilities to compete in a world wide sports competition that would be held every four years. It would be just like the Olympic Games.
A basketball game is played at the 1955 International Wheelchair games (below). Athletes race in the 1967 games (right).
Athletes compete in the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul, South Korea.
The Paralympic symbol seems to be in motion, just like the motto of the event. It is “Spirit in Motion.”

THE FIRST PARALYMPIC GAMES

Four hundred athletes from 23 countries competed in the first Paralympic Games in 1960. At first, only athletes in wheelchairs could compete. But over time athletes with different disabilities joined the event. The first Winter Games took place in 1976.

Today the Paralympics are held every four years, winter and summer, following the Olympic Games. The Paralympic athletes demonstrate their power and abilities in the same stadiums as the Olympic events. They follow a tough training process, too.
The Summer Paralympic Games have changed over time. Almost 4,000 athletes took part in the 2008 summer games in China. They represented 146 countries from around the world. These star athletes took part in twenty sports, including archery, athletics, cycling, football, swimming, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair tennis. For the first time, rowing was added to the program. By the end of summer games, 339 records were broken. Some athletes competed in more than one event.

The American team carried the flag during the Opening Ceremony of the Summer Paralympic Games in Beijing, China, 2008.
After working hard to improve their skills, Paralympic athletes face the same challenges as any Olympic athlete. During the Wheelchair Basketball games, the teams play on a court that is the same size as the Olympic basketball court. But players use wheelchairs to get up and down the court.

In 2008 the excited crowd cheered wildly as the five men on the Australian and Canadian teams competed for the gold medal. There are four, ten-minute periods during the Wheelchair Basketball match and even a fraction of a second counts! The winner? The Australian team beat the Canadian team, 72 to 60.
Rudy Garcia-Tolson was another star during the 2008 Summer Paralympics in China. He learned to swim after his legs were amputated at the age of five. After learning to overcome his fear of water, he had one goal. It was to beat a swimmer with legs. He has done that and much more! By the age of 15 he had won his first gold medal in the Paralympic Games.
THE WINTER PARALYMPICS

Since the first Winter Paralympic games in 1976, different sports have been added to these games. Today there are five events, including alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and sledge hockey. In 2010, more than 500 athletes competed in these five sports at the Winter Paralympic Games in Canada.

One of the most popular sports is ice-sledge hockey. It is the Paralympic version of ice hockey. Crowds love the fast speed of the sport. Players use two-blade sledges instead of skates, so the puck can pass under the sledges. To shoot the puck players use two sticks, which have a spike-end for pushing and a blade-end for shooting.
Lauren Woolstencroft is a Canadian skier who won five gold medals at the 2010 Winter Paralympics. In fact, she set a new record for the most gold medals won by any athlete in the Winter Paralympics at a single game. Although Lauren was born missing part of her left arm and both legs below the knees, she began skiing in competitions at 14 years of age.
PARALYMPIC RISING STARS

Tatyana McFadden is one of the best wheelchair racers in the world. In 2004, when she was just fifteen years old, she won two medals at the Summer Paralympics. She was the youngest member of the United States track and field team to compete at the games. In college, she was a member of both the wheelchair racing and basketball teams.
Tatyana’s will to succeed has contributed to her athletic achievements. At the 2008 Summer Paralympics in China, she won four medals, including three silver ones. That means she was in second place. But her next goal is the 2012 Summer Paralympic Games. There, she’s going for the gold. And this time she hopes to win it!
Jerome Singleton is another athlete to watch. Why? Because he’s known as the fastest amputee on the planet. When he was a teenager, Jerome began competing in several high school sports, despite having his right foot amputated as an infant. He will graduate from two colleges with degrees in three fields! Some athletes like a flexible schedule, but Jerome prefers a structured one. That way he can study and train at the same time.
Jerome wants to keep running and begin a career in prosthetics. Then he can help disabled people move with artificial limbs and braces. In 2008 he won a silver medal. He also helped the U.S. team win a gold medal in the relay race.

Jerome Singleton, left, poses on the podium at the Summer Paralympic Games in 2008 in China.
Responding

**TARGET SKILL** Sequence of Events

What Summer Paralympic Games did Tatyana McFadden compete in first? Which games did she compete in next? Which games does she want to compete in? Copy and fill in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First</th>
<th>Tatyana McFadden competed in the 2004 Summer Paralympic Games.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Next</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finally</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Write About It**

**Text to World** What is something you would like to learn about one of the athletes in this book? Write a paragraph telling what you want to know.
TARGET VOCABULARY

athletes  
compete  
contribute  
flexible  

fraction  
improve  
power  
process  

TARGET SKILL  Sequence of Events  Tell the time order in which events happen.

TARGET STRATEGY  Question  Ask questions before you read, while you read, and after you read.

GENRE  Informational text  gives factual information about a topic.
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