



International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability

PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER 2009

These are exciting times for the Paralympic movement in general and for INAS-FID in particular, as there are many important events occurring at more or less the same time. This newsletter provides a summary of the achievements of the past few months and looks forward to some of the more significant events taking place during the next few months.

Global Games

The second INAS-FID Global Games took place in the Czech Republic during the early part of July. More than 700 athletes from 34 countries took part in seven medal events (athletics, basketball, cycling, futsal, swimming, table tennis and tennis) and two demonstration events (judo and indoor rowing). We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to our Czech hosts for their organisation of a truly memorable event.

Global Games are always important, but this year they assumed an even greater significance: providing an invaluable opportunity for IPC/INAS-FID sponsored researchers to test the new systems and procedures that are being developed with a view to securing the re-inclusion of athletes with intellectual disability in future Paralympic Games. By the end of the Games, approximately 420 athletes had been tested and the researchers have asked me to thank all concerned (athletes, coaches and managers) for making this possible.

Unfortunately, despite the damage to INAS-FID's reputation caused by the events of Sydney 2000, there is still a continuing need for vigilance in ensuring that INAS-FID competitions are only available to athletes whose eligibility has been confirmed in advance through registration with our Secretariat. The process of checking and, very often, re-checking athlete registrations prior to this year's Global Games was both long and complicated and, in the end, 58 athletes from five different countries had to be excluded from competition.

None of these decisions was taken lightly and everyone associated with this process felt genuine sympathy for the athletes and nations affected. Sadly, such decisions are sometimes necessary, both in the interests of preserving Games viability and, especially at the current time, of protecting and enhancing INAS-FID's reputation within the wider Paralympic community. I can only hope that member nations will appreciate the need for such a tough stance and lend their full support to the efforts of INAS-FID and IPC to secure the re-inclusion of athletes with intellectual disability in future Paralympic Games.

London 2012

I have reported many times on the progress that is being made by the IPC/INAS-FID joint working group. In May's newsletter, I was able to confirm that both the conceptual framework developed by the working group and its proposed action plan had been approved by the IPC Governing Board and the INAS-FID Executive Committee. Since then, there has been another major breakthrough, in that IPC and INAS-FID will jointly propose to this November's IPC General Assembly that athletes with intellectual disability will be eligible to compete in the Paralympic Games of London 2012. The full text of this motion is as follows:

Motion submitted jointly by the IPC Governing Board and INAS-FID:

The IPC General Assembly (i) acknowledges the progress made by the joint IPC/INAS-FID Working Group in defining and assessing general eligibility, sport specificity and on-site testing and protest management; (ii) notes that the system currently developed uses a scientific approach that is compliant with the IPC Classification Code; and (iii) notes that effective sports input has been ensured.

Thereby, the IPC General Assembly confirms that the criteria and processes for the re-inclusion of athletes with an intellectual disability (ID) in Paralympic sport as specified by previous IPC General Assemblies have been met.

Therefore, subject to compliance with the sports specific minimal disability scores outlined in the attached rationale, the IPC General Assembly recognises that athletes with intellectual disability will be eligible to compete in the respective International Federation sanctioned competitions, including the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Having the IPC Governing Board so positively associated with this motion will send a very powerful signal to the entire IPC membership. However, nothing is guaranteed and we must not be complacent. Every national member of INAS-FID should do everything within its power to ensure that its own National Paralympic Committee travels to Kuala Lumpur in November intent on voting in the right way. Please do not leave this to chance ... talk to your NPC.

Secretariat

I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute both to Nick Parr and to Mencap, his employer. Given the burden of responsibility resting on our Secretariat (especially in relation to athlete registration), Mencap has allowed Nick to work in support of INAS-FID until that fateful day in November when our involvement in future Paralympic Games will be decided once and for all. For several months now, Nick has worked tirelessly on INAS-FID's behalf and the many compliments that I am already receiving from different parts of the world are well justified. Mencap has also agreed to employ Karon Nicol for two days a week until April 2011 and, for this too, INAS-FID is truly grateful.

Conflicts of Interest

Concerns raised by individual members even before this summer's Global Games were confirmed in Liberec: too few people are trying to do too many jobs. I realise that, in an organisation like INAS-FID which is almost totally reliant on volunteers, there is a tendency for those with energy and commitment to take on more than might otherwise be sensible,

but the risks are self-evident and should be avoided. At the Global Games there were several people who were 'wearing more than one hat'; for example, acting as both national team manager and INAS-FID sport director. Apart from the fact that, almost inevitably, this means that neither job is done as effectively as would otherwise be possible (and, even if this were not the case, the potential for accusations of partiality is ever present), such duality of role is clearly prohibited in INAS-FID's Handbook, which requires that 'the Sport Technical Officer must not be a member of any team participating' (Section 30.2, Part 4c). In future, I would like to see this ruling applied more rigorously, so that conflicts of interest can be avoided and so that all team managers and sport directors can give undivided attention to their primary roles and responsibilities. INAS-FID's reputation and the quality of its competitions can only benefit as a result.

However, I have also been concerned recently by another potential conflict of interest that, no matter how well intentioned, risks detriment and damage to INAS-FID both in the short term and the longer term. I have known for some time about the existence of an International Down's Syndrome Swimming Organisation and Geoff Smedley (its President) is already aware of my concerns about precedent and fragmentation. Apparently, in Puerto Rico another such organisation was spawned: on this occasion, for athletics. Am I alone in thinking that the perceived need for such a 'splinter movement' might usefully have been discussed within INAS-FID before any decision was reached to create what is likely to become a rival organisation? It may well be that such a discussion took place before my election as President, but I make no secret of the fact that, as the current President, I consider this development to be incompatible with the best interests of INAS-FID and potentially very damaging to its future integrity.

Eligibility and Registration

I have already commented on the efforts of Karon Nicol, Nick Parr and others to ensure that all athletes who intend participating in INAS-FID competitions are properly registered. At the time of writing, there are 1,795 athletes on the Secretariat's database. This is a remarkable achievement under difficult circumstances and, in future, the process will be helped immeasurably by the appointment of an International Panel of Eligibility Officers. During the past few months, expressions of interest have been received from nine individuals, seven of whom (all qualified psychologists and including representatives of three different continents) have been provisionally appointed. The position of Head of Eligibility has been accepted by Professor Jan Burns from England. Jan is Clinical Psychology Programmes Director at the Canterbury Christ Church University and already an active participant in the joint IPC/INAS-FID research programme. I look forward to Jan's involvement, both on the Executive Committee and as head of the new team of Eligibility Officers, at the earliest opportunity.

Please note that, to allow the new Panel to be effectively engaged, all applications for athlete registration should reach the Secretariat at least three months before the start of the relevant competition.

New Members

The following nations were elected to membership of INAS-FID during the last General Assembly: Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador and the USA. Since then, the Executive Committee has also approved applications from Bangladesh, Malaysia and Turkey. I am delighted to be able to welcome these new members and to wish them a long and fruitful experience within the INAS-FID family.

Executive Committee

Unfortunately, our newly elected Treasurer, Jose Costa Pereira, has resigned. I am discussing with other members of the Executive how best to fill this vacancy (through co-option) and I will advise the membership of the name and contact details of our new Treasurer at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I am opening an INAS-FID bank account here in England and I will arrange for a transfer of funds from the account still held in Budapest as soon as possible.

On a brighter note, members may be aware that, for some time, the Executive has carried a vacancy because of its inability to identify a representative of the North Africa/Middle East region. I am really pleased that this vacancy has at last been filled and that, at least until the next General Assembly, meetings of the Executive will be attended in this capacity by Dr Hossam Mostafa from Egypt. Hossam is a medical doctor and Secretary General of the Egyptian Paralympic Committee.

Other Events

Early in September, the International Paralympic Committee hosted in Bonn a celebration of the 20th anniversary of IPC itself and the 10th anniversary of its Bonn headquarters. This event was attended on INAS-FID's behalf by me as President and by Marc Truffaut as Technical Officer. A few days later, I flew to Tokyo to represent INAS-FID at Asian Youth Para Games in which there was competition for athletes with intellectual disability in both athletics and swimming.

Later this week, I will fly to Reykjavik, where the Icelandic Paralympic Committee is hosting IPC European Swimming Championships and where, as in Tokyo, events will be included for swimmers with intellectual disability. Next month, apart from INAS-FID's own Executive Committee meeting which will take place in South Africa, our Hong Kong member will organise World Indoor Rowing Championships.

And then, in Kuala Lumpur on 21-22 November, the IPC General Assembly will vote on the re-inclusion of athletes with intellectual disability in future Paralympic Games, starting with London 2012. As I have already said, please do all that you can to ensure that your National Paralympic Committee votes in the right way: the future of our athletes, from a Paralympic perspective, is in their hands ... talk to them! Although nothing can be taken for granted, I am optimistic that, with your help, my next newsletter will be able to report on the end of nine years of Paralympic exclusion and the beginning of a new era of Paralympic opportunity for elite athletes with intellectual disability.

Dr Bob Price
INAS-FID President