

## **THE PARALYMPIC GAMES, HISTORY**

The earliest beginnings of the creation of athletic Games for people with disabilities can be traced back to World War II and the efforts of one man, a doctor from England named Ludwig Guttmann. Known as the “Father of Sport for People with Disabilities,” Dr. Guttmann was a strong advocate of using sports therapy to enhance the quality of life for people who were injured or wounded during World War II.

Dr. Guttmann organized the 1948 International Wheelchair Games to coincide with the 1948 London Olympics. His dream was of a worldwide sports competition for people with disabilities to be held every four years as “the equivalent of the Olympic Games.” Twelve years later, his dream became a reality.

The first Paralympic Games were held in Rome, Italy, in 1960 and involved 400 athletes from 23 countries. Originally, only wheelchair athletes were invited to compete. Since that time, the Paralympic Games have grown dramatically. The present-day Paralympic Games include six major classifications of athletes.

The Paralympics are held in two seasons: summer and winter. Athletes with disabilities have been competing in the Winter Games since 1976. Sweden hosted the first Winter Games, which included 12 countries competing in Alpine and Cross-Country Skiing events. In 1992, the four-year cycle was modified so that the Winter and Summer Paralympic Games coincide with the Olympics.

Sir Ludwig Guttmann died in 1980, but his vision of sport for athletes with disabilities continues today. Clearly the value of sport in the lives of athletes with disabilities extends far beyond its rehabilitative benefits. This years Paralympic Games will be in London, UK.