

Sport and the disabled

By ALISON PRITCHARD

Nova Scotian born Johnny Miles caught the imagination of the media and all Nova Scotians when he won the Boston Marathon in 1926 and again in 1929. His efforts are still immortalized with the annual Johnny Miles Marathon.

Another Nova Scotian is an equally proficient marathoner. In fact, Ross Sampson's finishing time of 2:15 is currently the fastest marathon time held in Nova Scotia.

Johnny Miles became a legend. Ross Sampson is virtually unknown. There is one main difference between these two men. Ross Sampson is in a wheelchair; Johnny Miles was not.

Part of the reason why wheelchair athletes do not share the limelight accorded their able-bodied counterparts is the novelty of their participation in sport. In the not too distant past, paraplegics and quadriplegics had to concentrate on survival—to participate in some form of exercise or sport was not conceivable.

The idea that physical activity may be an important element in the rehabilitation of the physically disabled was initially held during the Second World War. A new approach toward the disabled emerged with the suggestion that "it is not what you have lost but what you have left that counts."

This philosophy is nurtured by wheelchair users who strive to excel

in or to simply enjoy sports participation.

Sport provides an outlet through which the disabled person can transcend his or her disability. To be considered an "athlete" rather than "disabled" restores a sense of freedom to the individual.

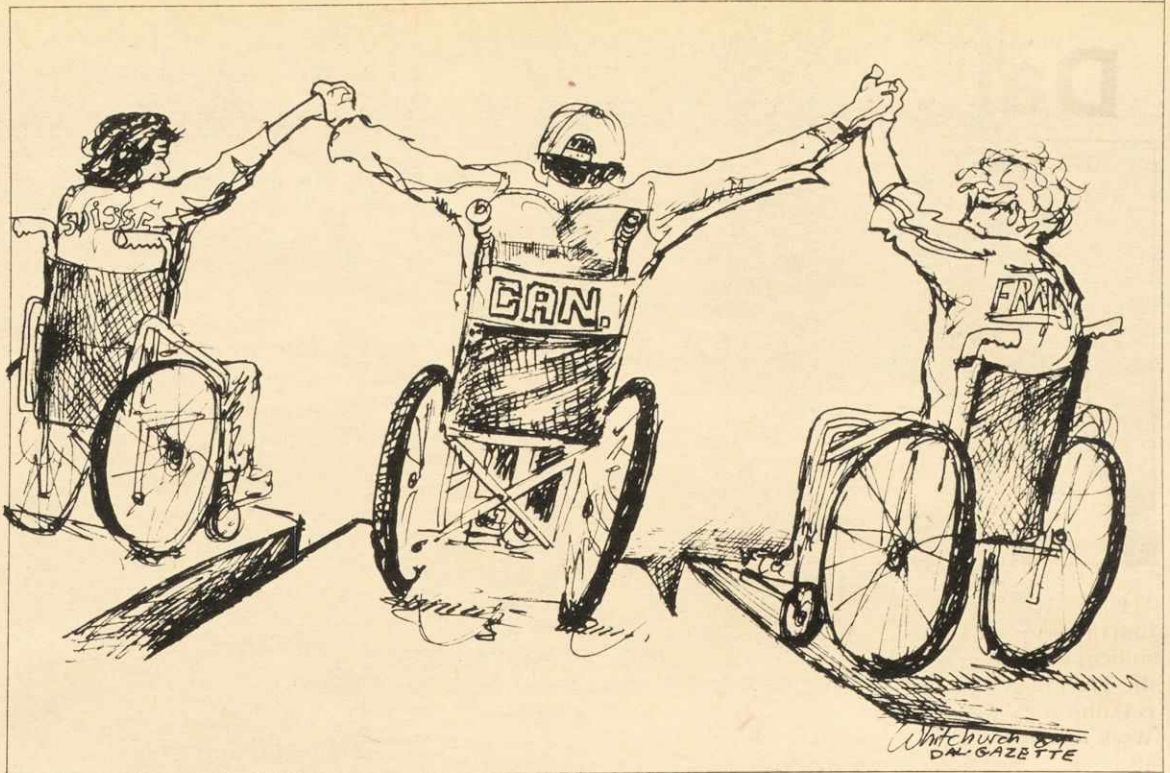
It could be that wheelchair sport's greatest accomplishment is the educational value that it promotes in the general public. Once witnessing the athletic feats of which a trained wheelchair user is capable, a reversal of the "inability" myth is inevitable.

Promoting wheelchair sports to the province of Nova Scotia has been one of the principle motives of the Halifax-based "Flying Wheels." This is a basketball team, comprised of over 20 paraplegics, who demonstrate a skill level in their game which is rarely matched.

There are other sports opportunities provided for the physically disabled in Halifax. Games such as murderball or "Quad-rugby" have been organized for the quadriplegics in the area. The Dalplex is also noted to provide a disabled swim program.

Yet the availability of and access to sport opportunities for the disabled in Halifax is sadly lacking. For example, the YMCA offers no programs for the disabled and the building itself is virtually inaccessible.

Even the Dalplex, which was built to provide "access to all," is rarely used by disabled participants.



One paraplegic woman remarked that the experience of arranging to be transported to the facility, using a side entrance and then waiting for the not-always-functioning elevators made visits to the Dalplex a chore.

Examples like this are repeated throughout the country. A recent study by Simon Fraser University found that two-thirds of the disabled population in Canada have extremely low levels of physical activity. The three most common barriers to participation given were cost, lack of facilities and, where facilities did exist, a lack of pro-

grams geared to people with disabilities.

The disabled community has made great strides (or glides?) since the days when they were considered incapable invalids. It seems, however, that sports participation is one area which requires greater focus. Recreation facilities should provide greater ease of access to the disabled and there should be a broader choice of programs and better advertisement of such programs.

Just think about it for a minute. If you were suddenly relegated to life in a wheelchair, wouldn't you appreciate having the same range

of opportunities open as you had had before?

*Olympic Gods
come down and see
Our wheelchair athletes
In their light wheelchairs . . .
. . . Hurling ahead
Testing their muscles
Against a load of lead . . .
Admire the splendid contests
Watch the bright wheels spin
Smiling intently
Tightening each face
Forgetting palsies
In the wheelchair race . . .*

(From an address given at the 1982 Pan American Wheelchair Games) □

Olympic retrospective

Politics and the Olympic Games

By MARGO GEE

For anyone who believes that international sport is only an athletic event, a quick glance at the Los Angeles Games is all that is needed to change this opinion.

The conspicuous absence of the Eastern bloc countries reveals political intrusion which cannot be ignored. The interaction of sport and politics, leading to large-scale boycotts, is now considered the biggest problem facing the modern Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Games have always involved a political element. It is inherent in any international event where national flags, anthems, and uniforms are constantly paraded. Even the founder of the Olympic Movement, Pierre de Coubertin, was not above the sentiments of nationalism. As a Frenchman, one of his main reasons for resurrecting the Olympics was to build character, vitality and a spirit of competition among the apathetic French military force.

The London Games of 1908 saw the first blatant political manoeuvring. During the Opening Cerem-

onies, the Americans refused to dip their flag to King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, thereby insulting their hosts and scandalizing the international sport community. Since then, nations have employed the Olympics for a variety of political purposes.

First, the Games are seen to provide a forum for international understanding and cooperation. According to de Coubertin, writing in 1896, the way to avoid wars, prejudice and misunderstanding, was to bring the youth of the world together every four years for "amicable agility". This is an aim of both the Olympic Movement and political leaders. However, it is often overshadowed by less altruistic political action.

The Olympics have been used to display propaganda. The 1936 Berlin Olympics were designed by Hitler to be a glorification of the Third Reich. More recently, both Moscow and Los Angeles have been accused of showcasing their country and ideological system to the detriment of the Games themselves.

The Olympics offer nations a chance for international prestige

which may not otherwise be attainable in political or economic arenas. Many smaller and developing countries have been "put on the map" by their medal-winning athletes. Examples which come to mind are Filbert Bayi of Tanzania and Kip Keino of Kenya, both outstanding distance runners.

Diplomatic recognition has been the root of much political controversy in the Olympic Movement. Canada's insistence in 1976 that Taiwan compete as Taiwan, as opposed to China, became more of a media issue than the African-led boycott of the Games that year.

Using the Olympics as a means of protest has been the most highlighted political ploy. The Games have provided a stage to protest unacceptable conditions within countries, as well as deplorable situations on the international scene.

Who can forget the image of John Carlos and Tommie Smith giving the Black Power Salute on the podium in Mexico City? This was repeated four years later by other black Americans protesting racial discrimination in the United States.

Boycotts of the past three Summer Games have involved international affairs. In 1976, thirty-two nations, mainly African, walked out in protest of New Zealand's participation. New Zealand had maintained sporting contacts with South Africa—a nation practising apartheid, or, legislated racial discrimination.

Anti-apartheid groups construed this to mean that New Zealand

condoned the South African system of government and, therefore, must not be allowed to participate in Olympic competition. The IOC did not see it that way, so New Zealand stayed and all but two African nations went home.

In 1980, Jimmy Carter declined the invitation to Moscow because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He called for Western allies to join him in the protest. The end result was that 56 nations boycotted the Olympics that year with very few exceptions in the Western world.

In retaliation, some say, the Soviet Union convinced its satellites to join their boycott of Los Angeles in 1984. Reasons cited included; housing shortages, security problems, and the choice of Los Angeles, referred to by TASS as a "polluted den of vice".

What, if anything, have these boycotts accomplished? First, an entire generation has been deprived of viewing or participating in a "complete" Olympics. Neither the U.S.A. nor the Soviet Union have altered foreign policy because of them. Perhaps the boycotts only served as an embarrassment to the host countries on which the score has been evened out.

The 1976 boycott was marginally successful. It did not change apartheid in South Africa. But, it did focus world attention on it, with the result of increased sanctions against sport participation involving South Africa. This has caused changes in South African sport, if only on the international level. Therefore, it would appear that

boycotts aimed at issues involving sport itself are the most successful.

The National Olympic Committees met recently in Mexico City to discuss a possible boycott of the 1988 Olympics to be held in Seoul, Korea. According to the Director of Sport Canada, Abby Hoffman, the I.O.C. was unrealistic in selecting this venue. More than twenty per cent of nations participating in the Games do not recognize South Korea. Another boycott could spell the end of the modern Olympic Games. It remains to be seen if the National Olympic Committees can overcome this threat.

Possible solutions include staging some events in North Korea. But, who will decide what sports this will include and which countries will be allowed to compete there? Others believe that the Games should return to their original site in Greece. However, Greece is not at all enthused about this idea, considering the staggering financial costs involved. Another idea has been to eliminate all the trappings of nationalism such as flags, uniforms, and the involvement of political leaders. After all, in ancient times athletes competed in the nude and accepted their awards without flags or anthems.

It is unlikely that the I.O.C. will adopt any of these suggestions. It is only recently that they have owned up to some of the problems that politics may incur. Let's hope they haven't been too late in taking action.

For, to ignore the impact of politics on the Olympics is not only naive, but a prescription for the end of the Olympic Movement. □