

UZBEKISTAN PARA SPORTS MOVEMENT HISTORY AND STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article comprehensively studies the role of people with disabilities in Paralympic competitions and the historical development of the para sports movement in Uzbekistan from 1991 to the present. The study analyzes the global history of the Paralympic movement, the dynamics of Uzbekistan's participation in international competitions, the socio-psychological role of athletes with disabilities, and the evolution of state policy in this area. Based on regulatory legal documents, reports of the International Paralympic Committee, and scientific literature, three historical stages of Uzbek para sports are distinguished. The article shows that athletes with disabilities are not only participants in Paralympic competitions who demonstrate sports results, but also are active catalysts for social change in society.

Keywords: Paralympics, people with disabilities, para sports, Uzbekistan, history of sports, social integration, rehabilitation, period of independence, national identity, inclusive society.

Introduction

The Paralympic movement emerged in the second half of the 20th century and has become a significant socio-cultural phenomenon in human history. This movement is not just a competition for people with disabilities - it is a global effort to build an inclusive world that embodies the unlimited will and capabilities of man, embracing all members of society [1].

After the Republic of Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, fundamental reforms were implemented in sports policy. The para-sports movement, which was artificially denied during the Soviet era, is now beginning to gain state attention. For more than thirty years, Uzbekistan has taken its rightful place on the Paralympic stage and achieved a number of historical achievements [2].

The relevance of the research topic is that the role of people with disabilities in Paralympic competitions and the history of para sports in Uzbekistan have not yet become a comprehensive object of scientific research. In existing sources, this topic is partially covered in a more medical or general sports context [3]. Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing scientific gap and develop new knowledge at the master's level.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the role of people with disabilities in Paralympic competitions from a historical and social perspective and to systematize the stages of development of the para sports movement in Uzbekistan on a scientific basis.

Internationally, research on parasport and the Paralympic movement has been conducted in several main directions. The first direction is the institutional history of the Paralympic



movement. I. Brittain, in his fundamental monograph, has covered the history of the Paralympics since 1948 in detail and has analyzed Ludwig Guttman's experiments in Stoke Mandeville as a historical source [4]. D. Legg and R. Steadward have studied the institutional formation of the IPC [5].

The second direction is the socio-psychological role of para-athletes. A. Howe described para-athletes as “possessors of physical culture” and studied their social status reshaping through sport [6]. K. DePauw and S. Gavron provided a theoretical in-depth analysis of the relationship between disability and sport [7].

In the Central Asian region, this direction has been practically unstudied. In Uzbekistan, G. Mirzayev briefly mentioned para sports in his general work on the history of sports [8]. M. Kadyrov considered sports for people with disabilities within the framework of social policy [9]. The methods of historical and comparative analysis, periodization and source research were used in this study. Main sources: regulatory and legal documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan, official reports of the IPC, archival materials of the OMPQ and the press of the time. The Paralympic movement began in 1948 in Great Britain on the initiative of Ludwig Guttman. This movement, which emerged in rehabilitation institutions after World War II, became the first official Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960.

From that day on, athletes with disabilities were recognized as full-fledged sports participants, not just medical patients. The role of people with disabilities in the Paralympic Games is reflected in several dimensions. First, the sports-results dimension: Paralympians set world records and prove the unlimited potential of the human body. At the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics, 4,403 athletes competed for 539 gold medals in 22 sports [10]. Second, the socio-cultural dimension: Para sports competitions are a powerful tool for changing attitudes towards disability in society. The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically emphasizes social integration through sport [11].

Third, the political-legal dimension: the Paralympic movement has had a direct impact on the development of disability rights legislation in developed countries. Disability laws adopted in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany were largely shaped by social pressure from the para sports movement [12].

After the declaration of independence of Uzbekistan, a fundamentally new policy in the field of sports began to take shape. During the Soviet era, sports for people with disabilities were not officially recognized: disability was excluded from public discussion due to the Soviet ideology that promoted the image of a "perfect" person, and Paralympic competitions were condemned as a "political game of the West" [13].

In 1993, the National Paralympic Committee of Uzbekistan (NPCU) was established. Initially, this organization consisted of 12 activists and had very limited financial resources. Nevertheless, during 1993–1995, the first sports competitions for people with disabilities were held at the republican level. In 1996, Uzbekistan officially participated in the Atlanta Summer Paralympic Games for the first time. This participation opened the country's door to the international para-sports family. Despite the booming para-sports movement, the main problems during this period were: lack of specialized sports facilities; shortage of highly qualified coaches; low public awareness; irregular financing. In 2002, the NPCU was



recognized as a full member by the International Paralympic Committee. This event was a decisive step in the international integration of Uzbek para-sports. In 2003, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Physical Education and Sports" was issued. The Decree identified the development of sports infrastructure for people with disabilities as a separate task and allocated a special budget for this.

In 2004, Uzbekistan participated for the first time with more than 30 athletes at the Athens Paralympics. In 2008, Uzbekistan won its first Paralympic medals at the Beijing Paralympics: bronze medals in weightlifting and wrestling. Over the years, the social status of para-athletes has also changed significantly. If in the 1990s they were often perceived as "sick" or "poor", in the mid-2000s they began to be recognized as national heroes.

Positive changes were also observed in the field of personnel training. Specialized courses in para-sports were introduced at the Uzbek State Institute of Physical Education (now UzDJTSU). A number of Uzbek coaches participated in international seminars and training programs. In 2014, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" was adopted. This law strengthened the state guarantee of equal access of persons with disabilities to sports activities and made para-sports an integral part of social policy [14]. The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games were one of the brightest pages in the history of Uzbek para sports. Uzbek Paralympians took 27th place in the overall team standings with 4 gold, 2 silver and 3 bronze medals - a record result in the country's history. At the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics (held in 2021), Uzbekistan confirmed its strong regional leadership status by winning 4 gold, 4 silver and 5 bronze medals.

In 2021, the "Para Sports Strategy 2021–2030" program was approved. The program identified the following priority areas: building modern Paralympic training centers; attracting highly qualified foreign coaches; developing the youth Paralympic movement; financing research and development in para sports [15]. In 2023, Uzbekistan achieved record results with 12 medals at the Asian Paralympic Games (Hangzhou) for the first time. There are four main factors that determine the national identity of the Uzbek para sports model. The first factor is the integrative role of the mahalla system. The traditional mahalla institution in Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in involving people with disabilities in sports activities. The system of identifying people with disabilities by mahalla committees, directing them to sports institutions, and providing family support is a unique Uzbek approach that does not exist in Western countries.

The second factor is the integration with national sports. The strong national traditions of wrestling and weightlifting in Uzbekistan have had a direct impact on para-sports competitions. Uzbekistan has become one of the strongest countries in the world in para-wrestling and para-weightlifting - this shows the organic integration of national sports culture with para-sports.

The third factor is the religious and cultural background. In Islamic traditions, care, kindness, and support for people with disabilities are highly valued. These values have shaped a positive attitude towards para-sport in Uzbek society and encouraged voluntary support from citizens [16].

The fourth factor is the state-led model. Para sport in Uzbekistan has largely developed from the top down, through state initiative. This is different from the Western model of voluntary



organizations and has allowed for rapid mobilization of resources, but the independent participation of civil society has not yet been fully formed.

A historical analysis of the Uzbek para-sports movement also reveals a number of systemic problems. The first problem is regional inequality. Para-sports infrastructure and competitions are concentrated mainly in Tashkent and regional centers; people with disabilities living in rural areas do not have sufficient access to sports opportunities.

The second problem is the weakness of post-competition social support. Although Uzbek Paralympians show high results in international competitions, the system of support for their careers, employment, and social protection after they finish their sports career is not yet sufficiently developed.

The third problem is the relative low level of public awareness. Paralympic competitions are much less widely covered in local media than the Olympic Games. This limits the social visibility of para-athletes and their motivation among young people. In the long term, for the development of para-sports in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to introduce the principles of inclusive culture starting from schools, develop para-sports infrastructure at the level of local communities, and expand media coverage.

This study has shown that the role of people with disabilities in Paralympic competitions is not limited to sports - they are active participants and catalysts of social change in society. Based on the analysis of the history of the para sports movement in Uzbekistan from 1991 to 2024, the following conclusions are put forward:

1. The para-sports movement in Uzbekistan has gone through a complex historical path from Soviet ideological denial to international medals. Three distinct stages – foundation (1991–2000), institutional (2001–2012) and systemic development (2013–2024) – fully reflect this evolution.
2. The participation of athletes with disabilities in Paralympic competitions has positively changed the attitude towards disability in Uzbek society and has given impetus to the formation of inclusive policies.
3. The mahalla system, national sports traditions, and Islamic values have given the Uzbek para sports model a unique national character and allowed this model to achieve social efficiency that is different from other countries in the region.
4. The transition of state policy from a passive attitude towards para sports to active support has been one of the main factors in Uzbekistan's success on the international Paralympic stage.
5. Regional inequality, weak post-competition social support, and low public awareness remain pressing issues in this area and require scientific research and government attention.

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