



## Preface

# Contemporary Medical, Scientific & Social Perspectives on Para Sport



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Language and culture are interdependent. One is a reflection of the other. Over the past few decades, the popular and scientific language used to describe “Para sport” has changed dramatically, signifying society’s evolving understanding of sport for individuals with impairment. “Disabled sport,” “disability sport,” and “adapted/adaptive sport” remain among the more common descriptors, while the term “handicapped sport” has all but disappeared from modern literature. In 2016, the International Paralympic Committee encouraged the use of the terms Para sport and Para athlete (capital “P,” no hyphen), a reflection perhaps of the rising sociocultural status that sport for persons with impairment holds.

We perceive a meaningful distinction between the terms *Para* and *adapted*. “Para,” a standalone prefix meaning “at or to one side of, beside, side by side,” connotes objects, activities, or fields similar to but distinct from the base word (ie, paralegal). While “adapted sport” connotes sport that has been modified from its original form (ie, wheelchair tennis), “Para sport” encompasses all independent, self-governing sports for persons with impairment, whether or not an able-bodied equivalent exists (ie, goalball). This issue is dedicated to Para *and* adapted sport.

For the athletes and communities in which they play, Para sport matters. The physical and mental health benefits of sport for persons with intellectual and/or physical impairment are well documented. Furthermore, Para sport offers public health and social scientists a platform for discussing and developing modern social inclusion programming in both resource-rich and resource-scarce settings. At all levels of competition, from youth to recreational to collegiate to elite, Para sport is a powerful, positive tool for individuals, families, and communities.