SIR LUDWIG GUTTMANN: CREATOR OF A WORLD SPORTS MOVEMENT FOR THE PARALYSED AND OTHER DISABLED

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'If I ever did one good thing in my medical career, it was to introduce sport into the treatment and rehabilitation programme of spinal cord sufferers and other severely disabled.'

Of course, members of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia will know that this was but one facet of Sir Ludwig's great work, but perhaps the one that has had the widest impact on the whole world.

I am very honoured, therefore, that as Sir Ludwig's closest co-worker for 35 years I have been asked by Mr J. Cosbie Ross and Mr Phillip Harris to contribute to this special edition of *Paraplegia* in honour of Sir Ludwig's 80th birthday.

It was a hot sunny day in July 1948, when the late King George VI was opening the Olympic Games in London, that symbolically Sir Ludwig launched the first Stoke Mandeville Games for the Paralysed at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury. Since the opening of the Spinal Centre in 1944 he had introduced sporting activities and in particular archery as part of the comprehensive treatment programme of his patients; this archery competition between six paralysed ex-servicemen and two ex-servicewomen from Stoke Mandeville and eight paralysed ex-servicemen from the Star and Garter Home was the first experiment in a competitive sphere.

We were all delighted with the success of the venture but it was only Sir Ludwig who recognised the revolution he had started in the whole outlook of such severely disabled people, and had the vision to see that through the potentialities of sport one day our paralysed sportsmen and sportswomen would be holding their own 'Olympic Games' which would win the respect of governments and the public throughout the whole world.

On looking back, I feel that the climate prevailing in those early days of the National Spinal Injuries Centre was the best and perhaps the only way in which the sports movement of the paralysed could have developed into today's 'Olympic Games for the Paralysed', and our paralysed men and women become the banner-bearers of sport for other types of disabled. There was no question of whether the patient *wanted* to undertake sport—like work, Sir Ludwig introduced it into the dynamic treatment programme of spinal cord injuries with the same importance as that of bladder or skin care. As a result, the majority of our patients came to *like* sport and to recognise not only its physical but also its social advantages. When we received the first spinal bus from the British Legion—an old, converted London bus noted for utility rather than comfort—our paraplegic archers were able to travel to matches with able-bodied clubs and to other sporting events, which opened up a whole new world to them.

In developing this young sports movement Sir Ludwig was able to fire the enthusiasm of many dedicated workers, such as remedial gymnasts, physiotherapists and able-bodied technical experts. Amongst the pioneers in this field may be mentioned Mr 'Q' Hill, a remedial gymnast seconded from the Army and Miss Dora Bell, Superintendent Physiotherapist of Stoke Mandeville Hospital, and Mr Frank Bilson, former British National Archery Champion, who instructed 'Q' in the art of teaching archery. Thousands from all over the world have since followed in their footsteps for there is nothing more exciting or more rewarding than active involvement in the sports movement of the disabled.

The earliest example of 'team' competitive sport was introduced by Sir Ludwig and 'Q' in 1944, when they adapted the game of polo, using shortened walking sticks and a little wooden disc with wheelchairs as 'mounts'. This proved a stimulating if somewhat rough sport, particularly for the local footballers or physiotherapy staff against whom our paraplegic players pitted their skills, and on surveying the carnage after a more than usually boisterous match Sir Ludwig decided that polo must give way to basketball. Today, wheelchair basketball is one of the most popular of sports, and a first-class international wheelchair basketball match can arouse as great an excitement amongst the spectators as can an international football match.

It was not long before sporting activities spread to other spinal units in Great Britain and teams converged at Stoke Mandeville annually for the National Games. Other sporting events were gradually introduced—fencing, field and track, table tennis, snooker, weight lifting. When the Ministry of Pensions built a swimming pool at the National Spinal Injuries Centre, swimming was added to the competitions, and likewise bowls when the outdoor bowling green was built.

In 1952, a team of Dutch paraplegic war veterans made their way across the Channel to join their British comrades at Stoke Mandeville in the first international sports competition for the paralysed. Thus, Great Britain and The Netherlands had the honour to become the co-founders of the International Stoke Mandeville Games for the Paralysed which have since embraced over 70 countries.

In the early years, the Stoke Mandeville Games, both national and international, were held on the front lawns of Stoke Mandeville Hospital and the visiting teams accommodated within its confines. However, as the Games grew bigger and the hospital busier, we moved to the field at the back of the hospital for our sports events and gradually built 'temporary' accommodation huts for the visiting teams.

A Paraplegic Sports Endowment Fund was set up with its own committee and officers, and grants were made by friends, such as the Royal Air Force Association, towards the building of these accommodation huts. Over the years, the Fund added to the facilities of the sports ground and defrayed expenses of the Games. Stoke Mandeville continued to give help through its staff and services in all aspects of Games, and this was greatly appreciated by Sir Ludwig and his co-workers.

In 1960, Sir Ludwig founded the British Sports Association for all types of Disabled (B.S.A.D.), of which he is still President, so that the sporting and accommodation facilities at Stoke Mandeville became increasingly used for sports meetings of the disabled of all kinds, including disabled children. We were, of course, martyrs to our English weather, and many a contest has been carried out in drenching rain or bitter winds in order to get through the games schedules. Moreover, the wooden accommodation huts had to serve also as dining rooms, recreation rooms and refuge when the weather was bad.

Even such uncomfortable conditions did nothing to dampen the ardour and enthusiasm of our disabled athletes (though I am not so sure about the able-bodied helpers!). However, Sir Ludwig—again with foresight and vision—determined to

build at Stoke Mandeville, the birthplace of our sports movement, a Sports Stadium primarily for the disabled but which would also open its doors to the able-bodied, particularly children, to assist in the integration of our disabled fellowmen. The Paraplegic Sports Endowment Fund went into action, and within 1 year not only was the great complex of Stoke Mandeville Sports Stadium built, but all the money needed to build it had been raised, thanks to countless friends, including grants from the Aylesbury Borough, Bucks County Council and Dept. of Education. The Stadium was officially opened by Her Majesty The Queen during the 1969 International Stoke Mandeville Games, since when, thousands of disabled sportsmen, sportswomen and children from all over the world have come to look upon it as 'home'. The Paraplegic Sports Endowment Fund evolved into the British Paraplegic Sports Society, and one of its responsibilities is the financing and running of the Stadium under the chairmanship of Sir Ludwig.

A number of facilities have since been added, the main one being the Indoor Bowls Centre, named after Lady Else Guttmann, Sir Ludwig's late wife. This has contributed enormously to the pleasure not only of our disabled but to the residents of Aylesbury and District, particularly the elderly. Many old-aged pensioners spend happy hours playing bowls, thus relieving themselves and their wives of the boredom of old age. It has also provided a sport in which disabled and able-bodied can participate on equal terms with the Social Club bar a comfortable place where they can relax in friendship. A separate building has also been erected for additional accommodation and is used throughout the year by visiting teams. Thanks to the great generosity of our Dutch friends, augmented by grants from Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Sports Council, we are in the process of building an all-weather, synthetic-surfaced six-lane, 400 metres running track, which is due to be officially opened in May next year.

Side by side with the development of the facilities and the sports movement of the paralysed generally, has gone the setting up of international rules, based as far as possible on the rules of the sport for the able-bodied. The International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation (I.S.M.G.F.), of which Sir Ludwig is the Founder President, is responsible for governing the Games, which are held annually at Stoke Mandeville, with the exception of the Olympic Years, when they are held abroad, if possible in the country of the Olympics. The I.S.M.G.F. has a well-developed structure of Council of Member Organisations, Executive Committee, Medical and Technical Committees and sub-sections of sport. The success of the Games is based on sound medical classification, and we are grateful to those doctors, under the chairmanship of Dr van der Maas of the Netherlands, and in particular Dr C. McCann of the U.S.A. for devising an excellent Guide to Examining Doctors carrying out medical classifications, who have given such devoted time and experience to this particular aspect. If any of the Members of the I.M.S.P. not yet involved in this important work would like to become closely associated with the Games (and they would indeed be most welcome), please get in touch with Sir Ludwig.

The first 'Olympics for the Paralysed' were held in Rome in 1960, followed by Tokyo 1964, Israel 1968, Heidelberg, Germany, 1972. In 1976 at the 'Olympics for the Disabled' in Toronto, Canada, in addition to the spinal cord injured of the I.S.M.G.F., it was possible to include sections for amputees and blind of the International Sports Organisation for the Disabled (I.S.O.D.) of which Sir Ludwig is also President. This was indeed another great step forward in spreading the international sports movement of the disabled, which has a much wider significance than has sport for the able-bodied. The ideals of the international games for the

disabled are embodied in the symbol of the three intertwined wheelchair wheels representing FRIENDSHIP, UNITY and SPORTSMANSHIP, rejecting racial, religious and political barriers—and so far, though with increasingly difficulty, both I.S.M.G.F. and I.S.O.D. have succeeded in resisting governmental and political pressures. But, above all, our international games for the disabled have had unparalleled success in bringing home to medical, paramedical organisations and the general public alike that a severe disability is no barrier to respected citizenship and that with the modern methods of treatment and rehabilitation even those with spinal cord injuries and other severe disabilities can become useful members of society. That is why Sir Ludwig, as an eminent neurologist and neurosurgeon, could make the statement with which I have opened this article.

At nearly 80, Sir Ludwig knows that he has still work to do before he can pass on the baton. His burning ambition is to build a permanent accommodation hostel for disabled sportsmen, sportswomen and children on the field adjacent to the Stadium. All he needs is half a million pounds and some good friends. Already plans are in hand and all of us concerned with Stoke Mandeville Sports Stadium and the Games are determined to give Sir Ludwig as much support as we can to help him fulfil his cherished dream of creating the first 'Olympic Village for the Disabled' at Stoke Mandeville Sports Stadium.

When Sir Ludwig had a private audience with Pope John XXIII, on the occasion of the first 'Olympics' in Rome in 1960, that great man, overcome with emotion, exclaimed to Sir Ludwig—'You are the de Coubertin of the Paralysed!' Perhaps a strange tribute for a neurosurgeon, but one which I know Sir Ludwig prizes as amongst his highest.