

SIR PHILIP CRAVEN

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is not only the world governing body of Paralympic sport, but also the International Federation of 10 different sports. Sir Philip Craven has led the IPC as President since 2001. During this period, the IPC has gone from strength to strength with ever-increasing participant numbers and continuously improving performances at World Championships and Paralympic Games, ultimately culminating in the 'best Games ever' in London in 2012. Para-athletes are indeed inspiring and exciting the world and leaving their host countries as more accessible and inclusive societies for people with impairments. As a five-time Paralympian himself, Sir Philip embodies the Paralympic values of courage, determination, equality and inspiration, as few others do.

- 2005** Knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for services to Paralympic Sport
- 2001** Elected President of the International Paralympic Committee
- 1994** Won gold at the European Champions Cup
- 1988** Became the inaugural President of the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation
- 1988** Competed at his fifth consecutive and final Paralympic Games
- 1984** Elected Chairman of the Basketball Section of the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation
- 1973** Won gold at the wheelchair basketball World Championships
- 1972** Attended his first Paralympic Games, competing in athletics, swimming and wheelchair basketball
- 1971** Wheelchair basketball gold at the European Championships
- 1970** Won gold with the Great Britain wheelchair basketball team at the Commonwealth Games

Sir Philip, you are looking back at an impressive 14 years of leading the IPC. What do you consider as your major achievements during this time?

What I don't look at are my personal achievements, but rather the progress that has been made by the Paralympic Movement and the IPC in those 14 years. I am very proud that we are now an international sports organisation that does not have the word 'disabled' in its title. We are about sport and individuals who practise, coach and administer sport in the very best of ways. I am also proud that we have been able to develop a commercial programme and that major companies around the world now understand what the Paralympic spirit is and want to be part of it.

I am also very pleased that the Athlete Classification Code, originally developed by the IPC in 2007, will go live with a new version on 1 January 2017.

Finally, I firmly believe in teamwork and partnerships and the excellent working partnership we now have with the International Olympic Committee bodes well for sport worldwide, as we move into the future.

Do you think your stamina is a result of your sporting career, not only with regards to your mental stamina, but also your physical health?

Well, taking physical health first, I am absolutely certain that if I had not had a most demanding physical sporting career – playing international wheelchair basketball for the best part of



20 years – then I would not have been in the right physical shape to have taken on the presidency of the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation from 1988 to 2002, then the presidency of the International Paralympic Committee from 2001 until now.

With regard to my mental stamina, I think we can equate that to determination, which I think I may have always had, from the day I was born. But of course, that determination is also one of the four values of the Paralympic movement. Coming back to the physical side though, it is very important to be physically strong if you are undertaking a role as demanding as the President of the International Paralympic Committee.

In your outstanding career as a Paralympian, have you ever felt limited by injury or illness?

No. Injury through sport is simply part of a sporting career. You have to accept it and bounce back from it. Illness on occasion is part of life, you may just have to submit to it, recover from it and move ahead.

How important was your physician to you at the time? What did you expect of them?

If you mean a sports physician during my playing career, I didn't have one so I can't really answer that question!

If you're referring to my rehabilitation after my rock climbing accident when I was 16 years old, I think that maybe a particular nurse and a particular physical trainer had far more influence on me than the physician. I saw wheelchair basketball being played

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outdoors from my hospital bed window in 1966, only 2 days after my accident. This obviously inspired me to believe that, whether in a wheelchair or not, you can play sport and play at a very high level.

Para-athletes challenge the perceptions and long-held beliefs of medical staff just as much as established pain management and return-to-play guidelines. What would you recommend to medical staff caring for the first time for para-athletes?

I have no personal experience of pain management, because I don't have any pain. And as I said before, I did not have a sports physician during my playing career, so we did not know what return-to-play guidelines were.

When medical staff are working with para-athletes for the first time, the first thing I would say, is that the medical staff should not be of the opinion that they are 'caring' for anybody. They are part of a support team for a para-athlete or several para-athletes and this is part of a support team that is trying to get the very best out of a para-athlete, therefore they are assisting or supporting but they are definitely not caring for para-athletes.

The IPC's vision is 'To enable para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world'. Where do you see the role of medicine and science in achieving this vision?

If we look to the beginning of the vision to enable para-athletes, that is to empower. Medical and scientific staff have to support the empowerment of para-athletes to achieve their own sporting excellence. You are not doing it for them, but you are supporting them in their ambitions.

And then if we look further on, achieving sporting excellence, well of course medicine and particularly sports science can play a significant role there again in support. It is the athlete who has to do it, but we know of the great support that can be given by sports science and also by medicine should there be a particular problem in competing in a particular sport, or an individual athlete has a particular medical problem. With regard to inspiring and exciting the world, that really is the job of the athlete and that is what



Image above: Queen Elizabeth II is presented with three Paralympic medals by Sir Philip Craven ahead of the opening ceremony for the London Paralympic Games, 2012.

Image left: German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere and his wife Marina de Maiziere pose with International Paralympic Committee President Philip Craven and his wife Joceyln, at the 25th Anniversary Gala Dinner of the International Paralympic Committee at Maritim Hotel in Berlin, Germany, 2014.



para-athletes and Paralympians do, whether it is at the Paralympic Games or in their daily practise of sport.

What is the primary role of the medical team looking after Para-athletes in your view?

I have had very little experience of this first hand, however, as I have said before, the medical team is now a crucial part of the support staff team to a para-athlete or to a national Paralympic team competing in an international event. So it is a very important role, supporting the sporting athleticism of the athlete and ensuring that athlete competes at the highest possible level based on their training and the conditioning of their bodies and minds.



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Image above: Sir Philip Craven and Akio Toyoda sign a sponsorship agreement between the IPC and Toyota Motor Corporation.

Image left: Sir Philip Craven in a classic defensive position eying Leo van Eijk of Holland, 1974.



Do you see major differences between the role and responsibility of the medical team as compared to able-bodied athletes?

Paralympians are athletes, Olympians are athletes. Medical teams support both. However, both medical staff and team physicians at events must have the experience and expertise to deal with medical issues specific to the para-athlete, like stump care or shoulder problems in wheelchair users, that might not necessarily be sport-related, but may have a significant impact on their sport participation and daily living if not properly looked after.

In your United Nations speech last year, you encouraged everyone in the world to 'realise and maximise your potential through practising sport'. Scientific evidence indicates that this might particularly apply to the health potential of people with disabilities. Do you see a role for the IPC in promoting sport and physical activity with the aim of improving the health of this community?

Yes, with regard to everyone in the world realising and maximising their potential through practising sport. What we mean by that is that obviously by practising sport you should be in a fitter and stronger physical condition than if you just sit around doing nothing and use four wheel transport, whether that be a wheelchair or a car, to get to places. Of course, there are the physical aspects, but what I really meant was the acquisition of life skills, particularly by young people in practising sport in schools and in sports clubs. It's



Image: Sir Philip Craven shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the 2014 Sochi Paralympic Games.

not the winning all the time, it is about the winning and learning from losing and bouncing back and many other life skills. Learning teamwork, learning to respect your opponent, learning to give your best and to play within the rules. Those are just some of the life skills that can be acquired.

With regard to the IPC's role in promoting sport and physical activity to a specific community, I don't believe that that community exists. The community of the 'disabled' – strike that from the dictionary. However, persons who may, owing to an impairment, feel that they aren't capable of getting fit and practising sport, that is a major role of the IPC to promote sport and just show what it can do, whether it is for an individual to become a Paralympian and compete at the Paralympic Games or whether it is the use of para-sport as a vehicle to develop their lives and move on to a more active and enjoyable life.

The IPC Athletics Championships in Qatar, despite heat and humidity, saw multiple world records and personal bests. What is your message to this country following the event?

My message to Qatar is that they put on a fantastic World Championships in considerable heat, but I think that this was

planned for by the organisers and by IPC Athletics. It was also planned for by the athletes and their team support staff. It just goes to show that Paralympians and para-athletes at the World Athletics Championships in Doha were able to deal with the warm to hot weather conditions and put in their best performances. So thanks to Qatar and I think that when a further para sport event is staged in your great nation, then all I would ask for is that the people of Qatar come out in their thousands to support the athletes because it is great sport, as the privileged few who went along to the championships saw and were inspired by.

Katharina Grimm, M.D.