



AUSTRALIAN
PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Classification

Classification in Paralympic Sport

What is Classification?

Classification is a term used frequently when referring to Paralympic Sport. It is the system that forms the structure of all Paralympic competition.

Athletes who belong to six different disability groups can compete in Paralympic sports: amputees, cerebral palsy, vision impairment, spinal cord injuries, intellectual disability and a group which includes those that do not fit into the aforementioned groups (“les Autres”). These athletes have impairments in the way their body structures and functions work, that lead to a competitive disadvantage in non-Paralympic sport. Classification is put in place in Paralympic sport to ensure that winning is determined by athletic skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes who are able-bodied.

This same principle exists in other sporting classification systems; such as age group competitions for juniors, male and female competitions, or weight divisions (or classes) in boxing and weightlifting where athletes of similar structure such as age, gender or weight are grouped together to allow for as fair competition as possible.

As each Paralympic sport requires different athletic skills, each sport has its own unique set of classification rules, which includes a set of minimal disability criteria that is specific to their sport. Where an athlete demonstrates sufficient limitations compared to athletes without impairment, they are generally eligible to compete in Paralympic sport.

Classification involves an assessment to determine how their impairment influences their sport ability, regardless of their level of training or development. Generally, classification involves athletes undergoing physical, medical or cognitive testing, demonstrating sport skills, and being observed during competition.

All athletes should have access to opportunities to compete and be classified in their chosen sport in Australia.

What is a Classifier?

A classifier is an official who provides sport specific classification assessments, to determine in which class an athlete with a disability will compete. Classifiers work in a voluntary capacity at a state, national and international level. Classifiers work closely with their relevant sport organisations, as well as with the Australian Paralympic Committee, International classifiers and other national classifiers.

Classification systems are sport specific and to classify requires a high level of understanding of the demands of that sport, as well as the ability to determine how impairment impacts on an athlete’s ability to compete in their sport. Classification is most important for international or elite competition, but classification at a national level is important to allow young athletes to goal set, to determine their competitiveness in relation to athletes in the same class, and to begin the pathway toward international competition.

Types of Classifiers

International Federations have two different types of classifiers: medical and technical. Some federations use only one of these, and some use a combination of both. In Australia, we aim to have national level classifiers for each sport in line with the mix of medical and technical classifiers that the international federations use.

Medical Classifiers

In general, medical classifiers are registered as medical doctors, physiotherapists, psychologists or ophthalmic professionals depending on the disability group they classify for. In addition to a strong understanding of the relevant sport, these classifiers have expertise in:

- Diagnosis and interpretation of medical assessment procedures
- Physical disabilities (eg neurological and orthopaedic conditions and injuries), vision impairments, intellectual impairments
- Assessment procedures relevant to disability group such as muscle strength and range of motion, hypertonia scales, limb length, visual acuity/field, cognitive testing parameters.
- Determination sports activity limitation resulting from the impairment

Technical Classifiers

Technical classifiers are those who have a very high level of technical expertise in their particular sport. In addition they should also have an understanding of the disability or impairment groups that are involved with their sport. They may be experienced coaches, sport scientists or human movement specialists or experienced ex-athletes.

What is expected and what are the opportunities?

The Australian Paralympic Committee works in partnership with the National Federations for the sports to identify the needs for future classifier development. The process involves identifying suitably qualified and experienced individuals who are interested in becoming national or international classifiers in targeted sports and geographic areas. Those national classifiers who achieve a high degree of experience and excellence may have the opportunity to train to become international classifiers in due time.

A national classifier in a given sport can expect to participate in a minimum of 1 state based classification day yearly as part of a classification panel. They may also be asked to act as part of a classification panel for their chosen sport 1-2 times yearly at National events around Australia. Costs associated with interstate travel for classification will be met by the organisation hosting the classification day or event.

Training in the relevant sport classification system will be provided, and potential classifiers will be supported by the National Federations for the sport, the Australian Paralympic Committee and where possible by more experienced Australian Classifiers for the sport.

This is an exciting opportunity to get involved in Paralympic Sport in Australia.

Which Paralympic sports have classifiers in Australia?

Alpine Skiing, Athletics, Boccia, Cycling, Equestrian, Football 7-a-side, Powerlifting, Rowing, Sailing, Shooting, Swimming, Table Tennis, Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby and Wheelchair Tennis.

If you would like to know more, please contact:

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