

Athletes with a Disability

Not Different, But in Addition

Athletes with a Disability (AWADs) are first and foremost athletes. For this reason, virtually everything in the able-bodied Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is applicable. The able-bodied LTAD model and its resource paper, Canadian Sport for Life, should be the starting point for all athletes. No Accidental Champions (See www.ltad.ca) is therefore only concerned with additional factors that need to be considered when working with athletes with a disability.

Between 10% and 14% of Canadians have a disability and, for optimum health, it is critical that all Canadians, with or without a disability, fully engage in physical activity. Canadians with a disability who aspire to the highest levels of sport performance also need a sport system to help them achieve their goals. Canada's outstanding international success in Paralympic sport, Special Olympics and other sport for athletes with a disability is well known, but there is concern that Canada's pool of talented athletes with a disability is aging and being depleted. Canada therefore needs to develop the next generation of athletes with a disability to their fullest potential.

For this reason, and to ensure the long-term health of its population, Canada is creating a LTAD model for athletes with a disability.

Sport for individuals with a disability has grown tremendously over the last few decades. Nowadays, virtually any sport available to an able-bodied athlete can be pursued by a person with a disability at both the recreational and competitive levels. Basketball is no different.

High performance competitive basketball for athletes with a disability is organized by the Canadian Wheelchair Basketball Association which is responsible for the LTAD model for athletes with a disability. It closely parallels the LTAD model for able-bodied athletes.

At the world level, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is an organization that parallels the International Olympic Committee, overseeing the Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games are held in the same city as each Olympic Games, usually 2 to 3 weeks after their close. Wheelchair basketball is a major Paralympic summer sport.

It is important that more is done to make basketball known and accessible to athletes with a disability. This requires that people involved in the sport make sure athletes with a disability are aware of the opportunities to play basketball. Also the first time the athlete has contact with the sport is crucial time for both the coach and the athlete. Both may feel a little apprehensive. It takes more courage for an athlete with a disability to try a new sport. Anything that basketball coaches and leaders can do to lessen this fear will go along way to actively inviting persons with a disability to try basketball.

