

## The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 20/05/2020

*The purpose of this update is to keep everyone within the Paralympic Movement informed of the latest developments with the COVID-19 pandemic and how it relates to the Paralympic Games and Para sport.*

This week our guest contribution to the newsletter is from Ralf van der Rijst, Performance Manager at Nederlands Olympisch Comité\*Nederlandse Sport Federatie (NOC\*NSF), the Dutch NOC/NPC that is responsible for the Paralympic elite sports.

Van der Rijst explores the efforts it took for the NOC\*NSF to re-open their training centres in the Netherlands at the beginning of May. This included working closely with their national government and developing clear and tailored protocols for each sport to return to training.

We hope this article will be of use to some National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and International Federations (IFs), especially those planning a return to sport.

We continue to use the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC's) digital channels to increase awareness of all the positive work that is taking place in the Paralympic Movement right now. Sports, NPCs and athletes continue to do amazing work around the world, but we wanted to highlight one inspiring story this week.

Shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak, Colombian powerlifter Fabio Torres set up a foundation called 'Gestión, Amor y Vida' (Management, Love and Life) to 'assist people with disabilities, older adults and children of low income' in Bogota.

Along with his wife Arelis Cantillo Villegas, Torres has created a vital lifeline for many disadvantaged people in Bogota who are struggling to live during the pandemic.

He explains: "We are doing this so that many people who live of their day-to-day work, who used to sell fruit or other kind of food in the streets, and can no longer do so, have something to eat. There are many people with disabilities who are also athletes, and we support them. We do it without resting, but now we need support and collaboration from everyone to continue helping more people."

Click [here](#) to see a video of his story, which also includes donation link.

We really want to use this mail to highlight initiatives that NPCs and IFs are doing, but also show work that they are doing to restart sport. If you would like to let us know about your story or raise awareness of any other initiative, then please get in contact at [media@paralympic.org](mailto:media@paralympic.org)

This week's update contains the following information:

- **Preparing sports and athletes for a return to training, by Ralf van der Rijst, Performance Manager at the NOC\*NSF**
- **IPC and Tokyo 2020 updates, including four more sports having updated qualification regulations**
- **World Health Organisation update**
- **Latest media statements from the IPC - 'Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes'**

### **Preparing sports and athletes for a return to training, by Ralf van der Rijst, Performance Manager at the NOC\*NSF**

Since the lockdown started in the Netherlands on Sunday, 15 March, our athletes weren't allowed to train in their national training centres because of government rules. This meant they had to train at home and try to optimise the circumstances there to keep up their training as best they could. Creativity was needed to create a workable home training situation, because it wasn't clear how long these measures would apply.

And at that time also, there was the pressure of not knowing what would happen with the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games and its qualification path. Therefore, we were in close contact with the national federations about the impact of the lockdown on the athletes, and also about what they needed to do to continue training.

### **Have close contact with the government**

From 15 March, we have been in close contact with the national government about when it might be right to reopen the training centres for each sport, and under which conditions this would become possible. We were aware that asking the government for special dispensation for high performance sport was tricky, so in return we know it was important to show that sport was being responsible and working hard to minimise risk.

There was a lot of shared responsibility to make it happen. As an organisation that represents all the training opportunities for the elite

sport athletes, we were clear that we could only work on behalf of elite sports, so NOC\*NSF needed to certify what elite sports were. Then there was also engagement with the national federations who organise everything for the athletes.

From 23 March we knew that the Tokyo 2020 Games and many other events were postponed, and we had to adjust to this new situation. The need for specific training became less urgent and with our national federations we worked on tailor-made solutions for each programme and each athlete.

### **Develop clear protocols**

The next step was asking each of those federations to develop clear protocols for how they might safely be able to return to training.

It's important to have an open dialogue with stakeholders. We have been in close contact with our national federations. As we have been chiefly responsible for the structure of the reopening process together with the specific sports, it's important that there is an information flow from us to the technical directors and head coaches. It's the head coaches who have the continuous conversation with the athletes and understand their concerns and can feed that back up.

### **Our reopening in May**

Since 1 May, nearly every Paralympic and Olympic athlete in the Netherlands has been able to go back and train at the national training centres, that were adjusted by the national federations to the conditions of the protocols. Each sport has made their own protocols for reopening their national training centre and they presented that to an expert team, who had to give the green light.

The main principal for the protocols was that everyone needed to adhere to the three most important government rules here in the Netherlands:

1. When you have a cold or a flu or when someone in your family has fever symptoms, then you stay home.
2. You respect the hygiene protocols for washing and sanitising hands, the use of toilets, etc.
3. You keep your 1.5m distance, at all times. For the sports, it's meant certain things had to be adapted: in judo and boxing it currently means no contact, while in rowing they have been allowed a 1.4m distance between rowers.

## **Be adaptive in behaviour**

One thing no athlete can escape it that there is a new normal at training centres. Everywhere you walk, there are spray hand sanitisers and reminders to wash your hands. There is also sanitiser and paper towels to clean all equipment. To reinforce the distancing, we have spent a lot of time taping out 1.5 metre distances on the ground. All these visible and repeated communication of the measures are also implied to create adaptive behaviour of everyone involved.

And while it is also important to remind people to do the right thing, it is also necessary to have structures in place if any athlete does not go along with the rules. There needs to be proper reporting structures and an ability to provide constructive feedback to that person.

One thing to note, is that not all hygiene protocols in each country will be the same. Here in the Netherlands for example, our government does not advise wearing masks. All nations have different protocols so find out what is advised in your country before implementing policies.

## **Not all sports are the same – boccia is our exception**

Some athletes are continuing with their routines at home for a bit longer because they see no need to travel to their national centre. Currently our athletes can travel to and from the centre daily but cannot live there.

It's also not the case that all sports are back, with boccia a special exception. We started the conversation with their national federation on what was needed for reopening the national training centre.

It soon became apparent that most of their athletes had to travel on public transport to get to the training centre. That meant more public contact and an increased likelihood to get infected. We took into consideration that some of those athletes have a higher risk of infection and that it may have a bigger impact on their body. It was decided not to open the national training centre but to optimise their home situation as quickly as possible for now.

The national federation has created a very workable home situation to train. And as there are no competitions in the next few months, there was no urgent need to open the national training centre. A solution was found that fits those athletes and that sport.

## **Remember we are in a privileged position**

We have come from two months of home training, and now we have some training. I know the Para swimmers pre-lockdown used to train for two hours and now, in this new environment, they have 30 minutes less. However, it is at least 90 minutes to be thankful for.

In sports, we are in a privileged position, we have to be a good example. We can do our job, whereas a lot of people cannot. It's a good mindset to have at this moment, focus on the things you can do and don't be distracted by the things you can't influence.

The situation for instance created possibilities like opportunities to improve your knowledge: there are a lot of examples of athletes who took the time to follow courses and of national federations that organised webinars on interesting subjects.

The reassuring thing is that from what I have seen so far, the athletes do appreciate being able to train. They were excited to be able to do the thing they love to do, and that's a nice thing to see.

### **Make the best of your situation**

It's also progress. There's been a lot of hard work to make it possible for athletes to return to training. There were a lot of meetings with the government, a lot of paperwork by the national federations to develop the protocols, a lot of effort to ensure the training centres were ready for the athletes. I'm glad to see that hard work is paying off.

If there is one lesson we have learned, it is to make the best of the current situation. Whether you are an administrator, a coach or an athlete, have an open mind just now. And stay healthy!

Click [here](#) to read the reaction of Dutch Para Swimmer Lisa Kruger about returning to training

### **IPC and Tokyo 2020 updates**

#### Tokyo 2020 Qualification - four more sports added

This week, there was a further update from the IPC on Tokyo 2020 qualification. There are now updated qualification regulations for equestrian, taekwondo, sitting volleyball and wheelchair rugby.

This means 15 of the 22 sports on the programme of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games have updated qualification regulations. The four new sports join archery, athletics, boccia, goalball, powerlifting, rowing,

shooting, swimming, triathlon, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair fencing.

We are in regular contact with all International Federations, and we hope to have a complete set of qualification regulations published in the coming weeks.

The most up-to-date version of the Tokyo 2020 qualification regulations can always be found here: <https://www.paralympic.org/tokyo-2020/qualification-criteria>

### Tokyo 2020 Classification

The IPC assessment and planning around future classification opportunities related to Tokyo is ongoing. In addition, as some countries plan for the resumption of sporting activities, the IPC has sought input from medical and classification advisors to support the development of a set of recommendations regarding classification hygiene, safety and infection control. Further communication with the membership on both topics will follow shortly.

### Para sport event postponements and cancellations

The list of cancelled Para sport events remains on the IPC website and is being regularly updated. You can find details [here](#).

### **World Health Organisation update**

According to World Health Organisation's (WHO's) latest Daily Situation Dashboard on 20 May 2020 10:21 CEST, the number of confirmed worldwide cases have risen to nearly 4.76 million. John Hopkins University of Medicine is reporting that over 1.7 million people have fully recovered.

The WHO note that there is a still a long way to go in this pandemic. Between Tuesday and Wednesday of this week there were 106,000 new cases of COVID-19, the most in a single day since the outbreak began. Almost two-thirds of these cases were from just four countries.

There is however better news in research and development. The solidarity trials for a vaccine for COVID-19 now include 3,000 patients in 320 hospitals across 17 countries.

Also, this week, the WHO concluded a productive World Health Assembly, which had an unprecedented solidarity from governments and heads of

state form around the world. They signed a historic consensus resolution on COVID-19 and the way ahead.

The WHO have welcomed member states' commitment to lift all barriers universal access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. This includes the important milestone that COVID-19 vaccines should be classified as a global public good for health in order to bring the pandemic to an end. Additionally, it was announced that collaboration to promote both private sector and government-funded research and development should be encouraged. This includes open innovation across all relevant domains and the sharing of relevant information with WHO.

The IPC continues to use the WHO and their [site](#) as its main source of information regarding the COVID-19. It provides regular situation reports and have a wide range of guidance on health and protection, travel advice, as well as extensive myth-busting and technical guidance sections.

#### WHO's WhatsApp messaging service

WHO's WhatsApp messaging service is providing the latest news and information on coronavirus in seven languages: Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

#### Arabic

Send "مرحبا" to +41 22 501 70 23 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017023?text=مرحبا](https://wa.me/41225017023?text=مرحبا)

#### English

Send "hi" to +41 79 893 18 92 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41798931892?text=hi](https://wa.me/41798931892?text=hi)

#### French

Send "salut" to +41 22 501 72 98 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017298?text=salut](https://wa.me/41225017298?text=salut)

#### Hindi

Send "नमस्ते" to +41 22 501 73 41 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017341?text=नमस्ते>

#### Italian

Send "ciao" to +41 22 501 78 34 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017834?text=ciao>

### Spanish

Send "hola" to +41 22 501 76 90 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017690?text=hola](https://wa.me/41225017690?text=hola)

### Portuguese

Send "oi" to +41 22 501 77 35 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017735?text=oi>

## Latest IPC media statements

### Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes (drafted 18 March, reviewed 30 April)

At the IPC, the health and well-being of Para athletes is our top priority and we are working hard to gather as much information as possible on the potential impact of COVID-19 to provide appropriate advice.

Concern has been raised that Para athletes may be at more risk of severe disease from COVID-19, in the same way as has been stated for elderly people and for people with certain underlying health conditions.

However, the Paralympic athlete population is not a homogeneous group. Para athletes are all individuals with very different underlying conditions and health needs, so the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19 is not appropriate or representative of an individual athlete's risk.

Nevertheless, because of the severity of the impairment or any associated immune deficit or chronic condition, some athletes could be more vulnerable. There are no current studies on the potential impacts of coronavirus on Para athletes. The honest answer is that we don't know because this is a new strain of coronavirus and there are very little data available.

Consultation with the IPC Medical Committee and International Federation medical experts, as well as information provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), indicates that there has been no evidence that an athlete with disability in general have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Para athletes are also more experienced than is the general population to following hand hygiene, coughing etiquette and general infection



avoidance procedures as part of illness prevention education - this has been a principle of Para athlete education for some time. However, at this time we all should be even more vigilant in this regard.

The IPC will continue to seek advice from the WHO, but ultimately athletes are the best judge of their own body and their medical needs.

Our advice for Para athletes is that they should follow the current medical guidance from the WHO and their national guidelines on prevention and seek advice from medical professionals. We would urge any athlete displaying the symptoms to report to their local medical authorities without delay.

#### Important website links

- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)