

Paralympic Winter Sports – Brief Description

Wheelchair Curling

Wheelchair curling will be contested for the second time in Paralympic history at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Paralympics.

Two coed teams play against each other, taking turns pushing 19.1 kilogram stones down a sheet of ice towards a series of concentric rings or circles. The objective is to get the stones as close to the bull's eye of the rings as possible. A game consists of eight "ends" or innings, during which each four-person team "throws," or slides, eight stones. Each team member throws two stones per end. Athletes use their hands or an extender cue to throw the stone, at which time their wheelchair must be stationary. Unlike in Olympic curling, there is no sweeping of the ice. The team with more stones closer to the center of the rings at the end of the game is the winner.

Ice Sledge Hockey

Since its debut on the Paralympic program in 1994, Ice Sledge Hockey has become one of the most popular sports in the Winter Paralympics.

Ice sledge hockey follows the rules of the International Ice Hockey Federation rules granted with slight modifications. Players sit on aluminum or steel sledges fitted with two blades and hold two double-ended stick in each hand. One end of the stick is used to pass and shoot the puck while the other has a sharp pick that is used to push the sled. Eight teams compete in round-robin tournaments, and top seeded teams advance to the playoffs. Each team may have a maximum of six athletes on the ice during three rounds of 15 minute periods. As in Olympic ice hockey, the object of the game is to score the most points by hitting the puck into the other team's net.

Cross Country Skiing

Making its debut on the inaugural Paralympic program in 1976, Paralympic cross country skiing includes the use of two basic techniques: *classical*, where the skis move parallel to each other through machine-groomed tracks in the snow, and *free technique* where skiers propel themselves in a manner similar to speed skating, pushing off the edge of their skis.

Paralympic cross-country athletes compete in men's and women's individual events over distances ranging from 2.5 km to 20 km. Each race uses a staggered start with one athlete starting every 30 seconds. In the relay event, each team member skis one leg of the race and the first team to cross the finish line wins.

Biathlon

Included in the 1988 Innsbruck Paralympics, Biathlon combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting similar to the Olympic biathlon competitions. The competition is now open to athletes with a physical disability and blindness/visual impairment.

There are two different biathlon events. In the first, athletes ski three laps on a 2.5 km loop stopping twice at the shooting range where they take five shots at a metal target 10 meters away. Each target has a row of five plates, each 15 mm in diameter, which the athlete must hit. The athlete must ski a 150 m penalty loop for each missed target. In the second, longer distance events, competitors race around the 2.5km loop five times and stop four times at the shooting range. In this event, a one minute time penalty is added to the overall skiing time for every missed target. Visually impaired skiers use acoustic cues for fixing their target.

Alpine Skiing

Part of the inaugural 1976 Paralympics in Sweden, alpine skiing has grown to include slalom, giant slalom, downhill, super combined, and super G events for both men and women. Skiers can reach speeds of more than 100 km per hour on a vertical drop that ranges in length from 120 to 800 meters, weaving in and out of up to 75 gates.

Athletes are classified as standing, sitting or visually impaired and compete against other athletes with a similar disability. Skiers with a visual impairment ski with a guide who paves a course using voice signals. Other athletes with locomotive disabilities use equipment that is adapted to their needs including single ski, sit-ski or prosthetic aids and stabilizers.

For more information regarding the various Paralympic Sports, please visit the International Paralympic Committee's website. http://www.paralympic.org/release/Winter_Sports/