


Inclusion and Fair Competition

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Because of the increasingly important financial, entertainment and social roles played by sport, it is absolutely justified that in the ethical discourse of modern societies the topics of inclusion and fair play in sport are given a high priority. We are all aware that the concept of fair play or fair competition regularly gets a lot of attention in the media, not least because of the numerous attempts of fraud through pharmacological manipulation that plague many sports, including athletics. Increasingly, we hear voices saying that this situation calls the ethical basis of sport into question. At the same time, inclusion is a challenge for any modern society. This goes far beyond the area of school and education and we see that today sexual identity and disability are both hot topics.

When it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities participating in sport, it seems that politicians are unaware that there is also a positive aspect to inequality. Many inclusion efforts turn out to be unhelpful, and in terms of the sport performance capacity of individuals it is clear that not everyone can do what others can. It has been rightly pointed out that not every difference can be interpreted as inequality and that not every inequality is an injustice.

To put it another way, inclusion policy is questionable if the focus is on the absolute interpretation of the principle of social participation. Writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Christian Geyer aptly reduces this problem to a common denominator: "Inclusion is a relational term that should not be left to the ideological advocates of total inclusion. The individual is always in a conflicting field of inclusion versus exclusion. This has to do with the fact that he or she is always involved in a particular sub-system and excluded at the same time from other sub-systems."

Turning to a concrete example, earlier this year in Germany the long jumper Markus Rehm, a 2012 Paralympic champion, achieved a spectacular personal best and world-class result of 8.24m wearing a prosthetic blade. What makes this performance even more special is that it took place in the German national championships against able-bodied athletes. Rehm was allowed to compete in the event by the German Athletics Federation (DLV), after an open interpretation of the existing rules, which, of course, are meant to ensure fair competi-

tion. In fact, he won the competition and became the national champion, pushing the top able-bodied athlete into second place, and he ostensibly qualified for the German team to compete in the European Athletics Championships in Zurich later in the summer.

The DLV was said to be following the politically correct principle of inclusion, but it quickly became clear that marketing ideas played a role as well. A spectacle was looked for, and it was found. Eventually, the DLV had to explain that Rehm would not be named to the team for Zurich, referring to biomechanical findings leading to the conclusion that prosthetic blades of the type he used give an illegal competitive advantage.

The media discussion triggered by this situation was conducted intensely for several days, which was not surprising in view of the federation's change of mind. The arguments about inclusion and fair play in sport that were exchanged in this context were mainly polemical. It can only be said that some of the debaters exceeded each other in their superficiality and that the insights that emerged from the debate were at best modest. In most cases, the real issue was overlooked.

It also became clear from the discussion that not seldom leaders in sport do not understand the idea of fair play, that they do not know the meaning of their own rules and particularly that they do not have the commitment and the courage to stand for the validity these rules. Rather more often, opportunism can be observed, which not infrequently is associated with a naive faith in science. This case was not the first time that sports officials handed over their sovereignty to biomechanics on the assumption that the experts of this scientific discipline by using their theories and methods can solve a problem that is not really a scientific problem at all.

Of course, it is certain that by using the sophisticated measuring apparatus of biomechanics the sport-motor performances of dis-

abled and able-bodied athletes can be compared. Various parameters can be evaluated and their equality or inequality can be shown. However, it should be noted that almost everything discussed in this context can also be detected by non-professionals with the naked eye.

The configuration of a 400m race of a runner wearing a prosthesis is completely different from the race of an able-bodied runner. The start, the acceleration phase, the running behaviour and the stride length are all fundamentally different. When a runner wearing a prosthesis participates in a 400m race with able-bodied athletes, basically two competitions take place at the same time, and these two competitions have nothing to do with each other. In a certain race, it may be possible that disabled and non-disabled athletes will run identical times, and that in that particular race one could say there was a fair competition situation. However, this result is only valid for that particular race. Even the conditions of the next race can be completely different.

Moreover, the material properties of the prosthesis can be improved in quality so that a comparison of disabled and able-bodied athlete performances can very quickly turn out to be absurd. Today, such a situation exists in the marathon and other long-distance races. Nobody retains the idea of subjecting disabled athletes and able-bodied marathon runners in one race to the same classification because it is quite obvious that with modern wheelchairs disabled athletes can cover the distance much, much faster than the able-bodied athletes. Most of us would not even say that wheelchair athletes, as fit, courageous and worthy as they might be, are actually "running" the race.

What is true for the wheelchair athlete in the marathon or the runner wearing a prosthesis in the 400m is also true for a long jumper with a prosthesis competing with able-bodied long jumpers: it is not the same activity and it should not be judged as such.

If you watch any number of disabled long jumpers who have one normal leg and one prosthesis in the Paralympics or other disabled competition, you will see that they all take off from the leg with the prosthesis. Why? Because using the normal leg would put them at a disadvantage.

Given that none of this is really new, it must be considered almost irresponsible to allow disabled athletes to take part in important able-bodied competitions. At the most, participation as an unofficial competitor could have been considered. But even in such a situation, extreme caution would be appropriate because whenever a disabled athlete is allowed to take part another athlete is simultaneously denied a starting place. In any case, it must be clear that qualification for able-bodied national teams and setting able-bodied records are both out of the question.

However, in spite of this, disabled athletes' concerns are obvious and understandable. That a disabled athlete wants to compete with able-bodied athletes, that he or she wants to achieve the highest athletic goals possible for him or her, is logical.

But it is no less logical that politicians, the media and sport leaders all understand that rules define the sport. Of course, they can be changed if a majority votes for such a change at a rules meeting of the respective sport. However, going down this route for the sake of a misguided notion of inclusion could be fatal for athletics. For good reason, technical aids other than those that define the discipline (i.e. the pole in the pole vault) are not allowed. Throwing this rule deliberately overboard would mean the abandonment of the principle of fair competition and in the end would do the cause of inclusion more harm than good.

It is in nobody's interest if we come to a situation where able-bodied athletes and disabled athletes using technical aids are considered equal in competition. If this happens, inclusion will have trumped fair competition, and the point of sport will be lost.

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