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Paralympic movement in Malaysia: The achievement of high-performance para sports

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ABSTRACT

The article elaborates on the achievement of the Malaysian athletes with disabilities locally and also in international scenes. Malaysian athletes start to participate in international competition since 1962, and local games had been organized back in 1982 with the introduction of the Paralympic Games. The article also illustrates the medal achievement where Malaysian contingent achieved a total of 1700 medals at the ASEAN Para Games from 2001-2017. In FESPIC and Asian Para Games, a total of 582 medals was won from the year 1982-2018. At the FESPIC and Asian Youth Para Games, a total of 189 medals won from the year 2003-2017. The highest achievement came from the Paralympic games as Malaysian won 11 medals in total from the year 1962-2016. More need to be done to establish para sports in Malaysia with the support of every parties including the government and the media.

Keywords: Paralympic movement; training; medals; para sports



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INTRODUCTION

The nature of sports for the people with disabilities was similar as the sports for the able-bodied where there are many advantages such as developed endurance and strength, performance enhancement, develop strongest mind, increased self-confidence, and also quality of life improvement (Abdullah et al., 2008). In recent decades the Paralympic movement had transformed significantly around the world (Howe, 2008; Thomas & Smith, 2009). Recreation and rehabilitative purpose are the prime intention of the Paralympic Movement, until it evolves into several type of competitive sport that provide pathways to the emerge of the Paralympic Games. The main idea of the Paralympic Movement is to show the determination, courage, ability through high-performance sport. These are the real expression of determination and the exploration of one's boundaries to achieve what people think is not realistic (Bailey, 2008). Persons with disabilities can make their own choice in terms to improve themselves through exercise rehabilitations and develop their skills in various sports. Because of that, they can possibly start to dedicate their life into sports at the same time to enhance their quality of life (QoL). The Paralympic Games is a sporting platform for persons with disabilities to demonstrate their willingness to overcome their challenges (Jee 2018).

The study of para-athletes has certain methodological challenges. Many studies lack randomisation and few have control groups against which comparisons can be made. There are less scientists who understand the athlete with an impairment leading to fragmentation in the scientific literature (Thompson & Vanlandewijck, 2013). But even though still new, the impressive progress achieved in the performance of the para-athletes can be seen through higher achievements of new world records and this is contributed largely to the knowledge on different training approach and their dedication in their practice and also the sport science element. The world is now seeing the progressive in professional involvement of international disability sport is, with the high interest and attention given by the communities to the sports of athletes with disabilities (Doll-Tepper, 2002; Innenmoser, 2002; Keuther, 2000; Quade, 2000; Scheid et al., 2000). This is also significant with the current transform is changing the landscape of the Paralympic movement in Malaysia. This article is evidence of the emergence of the Paralympic movement in Malaysia.

The History of the Paralympic Movement

It was fifty years ago when the Paralympic Movement were developed as a superb milestone for para-athletes. All began in July 1948, at the same time when the Games of the XIVth Olympiad opened in London, a German neurosurgeon named Ludwig Guttman, who been offered to establish Stoke Mandeville Spinal Injuries Unit in Aylesbury in 1944, mooted the idea that sport can be as part of a process of rehabilitation for patients with spinal injuries. He then organized a small sports competition for 16 Second World War veterans with spinal cord injuries at Stoke Mandeville hospital in England (Lenskyj & Wagg, 2012). His opinion states that there are three important things why persons with disabilities need to be engage in sports; a) sport as a curative factor, b) the recreational and psychological value of sport and c) sport as a mean of social re-integration (Brittain, 2012).

As his involvement in physical activity is getting more serious, he can view the idea to assemble people with similar injuries together: sport assists them to meet and try to achieve for own goals. The first Stoke Mandeville Games has been organized on the same day with the opening day of the Olympic Games was being held in London in 1948. Now, the Paralympic Movement is established as a global sporting phenomenon with a superb celebration of competitive sports that enliven the dreams, with many are participating to achieve excellence (Bailey, 2005). The Paralympic Games is surely a global interest for disability sport and some past studies have proof that it can have a major impact upon perceptions regarding people with disabilities for both non-disabled society and for other people with disabilities, some of whom may be inspired to participate in sport (Brittain, 2010).

Paralympic Term

The term 'Paralympics' has been in debate over so many years. In Malaysia, there are different ways that individuals and organizations (including people in the National Para Sports Associations- NPSA) have used it, and how the description of the origins and the meaning. Those days, the term for the games always mentioned 'para' that was associated with paraplegia, combined with 'Olympic' – it has been associated with the Olympic games itself (Bailey, 2008). As time progressed, the International Coordinating Committee (the committee before the formation of International Paralympics Committee-IPC) carefully discussed and came up with the word of 'para' as 'being attached to' or 'parallel to' – to recognized that the Paralympics were been explained as the involvement of disability groups competing in a larger scale of the sporting events that were equally as the Olympic Games (Bailey, 2008). Even Guttman (Guttman, 1949) strongly wanted the use of the word 'Olympic' must be exist, and this is where International Olympic Committee is reluctant to recognize because to protect its copyright. He is firm with his decision that along in his living years, he accepts the games as the "Olympics" and the sport for the disabled was as ideal in terms of the spirit of the Olympic Games for the able-bodied' (Jennings, 1996). The word "Paralympic" has been combined from three sources: The Latin word "par" ("similar" or "the same"), the Greek word "para" ("next to" or "alongside"), and the "Olympics" (the Paralympic Games is being held parallel to the Olympic Games)' (Reinecke & Reiff, 2002). The official name as the Paralympic Games had been recognised since 1988 edition in Seoul, Korea (Bailey, 2008).

History of the Paralympic Movement in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the competition for persons with disabilities started in 1962 (or maybe later). It was not a very encouraging situation when there is a lack of related activities and finances. The involvement at the international level began in 1962 when H.R.M Storey came back to Malaysia, after meeting with Ludwig Guttmann to establish a powerlifting team. The team consisted of one athlete and one manager represents Malaysia at the 19th International Stoke Mandeville Games 1970. Malaysia also took part in the 1970 Commonwealth Games, held in Edinburgh, Scotland where they bring home a silver medal. This is considered as a good milestone in competitive sports for the disabled in Malaysia.

Paralympic Council of Malaysia (PCM) or NPC Malaysia

Mr H.R.M Storey, the late founder of Persatuan Orang-Orang Cacat Anggota Malaysia, Mr. H.R. M. Storey dispatch a Malaysian contingent to Stoke Mandeville Games in early 1970. He together with Y. Bhg Dato' Zainal Abu Zarin, Mr. Kassim Abd Rahman and Mr. Radha Krishnan mooted the idea of forming 'Majlis Sukan Orang Cacat Malaysia' and quickly registered it with Registrar of Societies on 18 May 1989, with their intention to developed sports for disabled persons in Malaysia and gave chance to the nation best athletes to compete at the Asian and International levels games. In 1996, the Majlis Sukan Orang Cacat Malaysia had been changed their name to Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC) (also known as "Majlis Paralimpik Malaysia") and MPC eventually was recognized by the Government as a sole National Sports Body for the Disabled.

A non-profit organization named the Malaysian Sports Council for the Disabled was established in 1989 and then changed to Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC) in 1996. The MPC had seven affiliates, including disability organizations, which represent six disability categories such as visual impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, hearing impairment, dwarfs and cerebral palsy. The first national competition was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1982, with 2 sports being contested (track and field and swimming). The biennial games were held by the Malaysian Council of Rehabilitation together been assisted by the Development of Social Welfare Services. In 1998, the first national games were held called Sukan Paralimpiad Malaysia. There were many editions of the games were held, and it was getting bigger in terms of participation of the athletes across the nation, with various disability/condition.

In 1992, the para-sports were placed under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development by the Malaysian government then and approved an allocation of funds for the development of disability sports. The para-sports eventually grew slowly but progressively and in 2003, the government decided to place para-sports from the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development to the Ministry of Youth and Sports (under National Sports Council). This is to ensure that the allocation of funds can be channeled to conduct proper systematic training and development of para-athletes.

National Competition -Malaysian Paralimpiad

Since 1982, Malaysian Paralimpiad is a biennially multisports and multievent sports competition been organised. Formerly it was called National Sport for the Disabled, then changed to the Malaysian Paralimpiad in 1998. Athletics and swimming were the two only sports in the programme from 1982 to 1996. The sports programmes increased where 20 sports—judo, athletics, swimming, sitting volleyball, archery, wheelchair tennis, wheelchair basketball, lawn bowls, badminton, powerlifting, table tennis, goalball, fencing, boccia, cycling, football, shooting, tenpin bowling, sailing and chess in 2006. The number of participants also increased significantly from 550 participants at the first games in 1982 to 1207 in 2006. The games got a boost when ASEAN countries participated in 1990 and, in 2002, some countries from Asian region also participated. Since 1992, various states in Malaysia were hosting the games. This only possible with the support from the state governments, the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the state Athletics Amateur Associations. The main objective of the Malaysian Paralimpiad as a platform to identify athletes who were talented and also at the same time to develop more local coaches, technical officials and classifiers. The name of the championship

was called as Paralimpiad Malaysia from its 10 to 18 editions. In 2018, the Ministry of Youth & Sports took over and changed its name to Para SUKMA starting from 19th edition onwards in Perak (refer table 1).

Table 1. Overall Participation in the Malaysian Paralimpiad Games

Year	Host	No of participating states/countries	No. of sports	Total athletes	Organized by
1982	Kuala Lumpur	14	2	550	SWD & MCR
1984	Selangor	14	2	650	SWD & MCR
1986	Penang	14	2	750	SWD & MCR
1988	Kelantan	15	2	828	SWD & MCR
1990	Malacca	17 (including ASEAN countries)	2	853	SDW & MCR
1992	Terengganu	17 (including ASEAN countries)	2	980	PCM & state
1994	Johore	15 (including ASEAN countries)	2	1200	PCM & state
1996	Sarawak	19 (including ASEAN countries)	2	978	PCM & state
1998	Selangor	14	10	877	PCM & state
2000	Kuala Lumpur	23 (including ASEAN countries)	17	1239	PCM
2002	Kuala Lumpur	23 (including ASEAN countries)	16	937	PCM
2004	Kuala Lumpur	15	20	1081	PCM
2006	Kuala Lumpur	15	16	1203	PCM
2008	Kuala Lumpur	15	14	1910	PCM
2010	Malacca	15	16	1368	PCM & state
2012	Pahang	15	17	1900	PCM & state
2014	Perlis	15	9	1000	Perlis
2016	Sarawak	15	9	1407	Sarawak
2018	Perak	15 (PARASUKMA)	10	1244	Perak
2020	Johor	(PARASUKMA)			

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

*SWD -Social Welfare Department

*MCR -Malaysia Council of Rehabilitation

*PCM- Paralympic Council of Malaysia

Malaysia Para Athletes at the International Scene

Malaysian para-athletes have already achieved commendable recognition through their performance at the international level. This achievement needs to be exposed so that people in Malaysia and other parts of the world can view this as a progress towards their success in participation and medal prospect winning. This is to show that Malaysia para-athletes also contribute to the development of sports in Malaysia. Since there are no articles available to date regarding the achievement of Malaysian para-athletes, this can be a reference for any parties who are interested. The data are extracted from the main source that is from Paralympic Council of Malaysia. Team Malaysia or the Malaysian contingent participate at the 1st ASEAN Para Games held at their backyard in 2001. Since then, never missed participating in each edition of the games.

Table 2. Malaysia Achievement in ASEAN Para Games

Ed	Year	Host city	Country	No of athlete	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1 st	2001	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	188	143	136	92	371
2 nd	2003	Hanoi	Vietnam	102	56	41	45	142
3 rd	2005	Manila	Philippines	118	80	41	30	151
4 th	2008	Nakhon Ratchasima	Thailand	180	82	74	46	202
5 th	2009	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	258	94	81	71	246
6 th	2011	Solo	Indonesia	122	51	36	45	132
7 th	2014	Naypyidaw	Myanmar	232	50	49	41	140
8 th	2015	Singapore	Singapore	191	52	58	47	157
9 th	2017	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	331	90	85	83	258
10 th	2020	Manila	Philippines		Canceled due to COVID-19			

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

Malaysia achieved a good result since the first edition (refer table 2), from only two sports (athletics and swimming) contribute the total medal tally to the distribution of the medal tally from 13 sports during the 2017 edition. This shows that the nation did not have a shortage of athletes when exposing their talent to the international arena. The host country decides the total number of events and usually, they will decide on some of the games that they are capable to win more medals rather than just organize any sports. Of course, the same issues will arise when organizing the games for the disabled is that the total number of events, the medals distributions, the classifications are the items that always been debated to get consensus from each participating country.

Malaysia has also been participating in Asian Para Games in the latest three editions since 2010 in Guangzhou, China. Before the establishment of the ASIAN para-Games, the FESPIC Games or Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled was the multi-sports games in Asia and South Pacific were held from 1975 until 2006. The FESPIC games had been organized because there were limited opportunities for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific to participate in sports at the time. The establishment of the new organization called the Asian Paralympic Council in Busan in 2002 with Dato' Zainal Abu Zarin, president of the Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC), as the first founding president. The Asian Paralympic Committee (APC) have been established in 2006 from the mergeing exercise between the Asian Paralympic Council and the FESPIC Federation. Dato' Zainal was elected as the president for the APC. The Asian Para Games have been organized from the establishment of APC since 2010, replace the FESPIC Games (refer table 3).

Table 3. Malaysia Achievement in FESPIC Games

Ed	Year	Host city	Host country	No. of athlete	G	S	B	Total
1 st	1975	Oita	Japan		Did not participate			
2 nd	1977	Parramatta	Australia		Did not participate			
3 rd	1982	Sha Tin	Hong Kong	30	7	13	7	27
4 th	1986	Solo	Indonesia	46	19	22	12	53
5 th	1989	Kobe	Japan	26	4	15	18	37
6 th	1994	Beijing	China	52	1	15	18	34
7 th	1999	Bangkok	Thailand	54	1	10	9	20
8 th	2002	Busan	South Korea	158	2	28	37	67
9 th	2006	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	288	44	60	71	171

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

The last edition was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia when the country was allowed to host a larger scale of multi-sports events for the para-athletes. Then in 2004, the FESPIC Federation has been dissolved and the Asian Para Games took place (refer table 4).

Table 4. Malaysia Achievement in Asian Para Games

Ed	Year	Host city	Host country	No. of athlete	G	S	B	Total
1 st	2010	Guangzhou	China	115	9	13	23	45
2 nd	2014	Incheon	South Korea	128	15	20	27	62
3 rd	2018	Jakarta	Indonesia	126	17	26	25	68
4 th	2022	Hangzhou	China		future games			
5 th	2026	Nagoya	Japan		future games			

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

Malaysia also participated in the FESPIC Youth games and Asian Youth Para Games. This is a good platform for the youth para-athletes to show their courage and determination to excel at this stage (refer table 5). Unlike the able-bodied sport where it enjoyed the full participation as early years and sustained support of young talented athletes that can sustain the level of competitiveness at the high level sports participation in the long term (Figott & Collins, 2004), the scenario is different when involving disabled athletes.

Table 5. Malaysian Achievement in FESPIC Youth Games and Asian Youth Para Games

Ed	Year	Host city	Host country	No. of athlete	G	S	B	Total
FESPIC Youth Games								
1 st	2003	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	48	36	36	27	99
Asian Youth Para Games								
1 st	2009	Tokyo	Japan	83	5	7	10	22
2 nd	2013	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	200	19	22	18	59
3 rd	2017	Dubai	UAE	12	5	1	2	9

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

Malaysia athletes also took part in the Paralympics games since the games held in Heidelberg 1972. Participation by Malaysian athletes at the international stage shows that they can be the best among the rest. Although this is a world-class event, Malaysian athletes show that can excel and even won medals (refer to table 6).

Table 6. Malaysian Participation at the Paralympics Games

Year	Host city	Host country	No. of athletes		G	S	B	Total
			M	F				
1972	Heidelberg	W Germany	4	0	0	0	0	0
1988	Seoul	S. Korea	12	2	0	0	1	1
1992	Barcelona	Spain	10	0	0	1	2	3
1996	Atlanta	USA	6	0	0	0	0	0
2000	Sydney	Australia	8	2	0	0	0	0
2004	Athens	Greece	15	4	0	0	0	0
2008	Beijing	China	8	3	0	0	1	1
2012	London	England	16	6	0	1	1	2
2016	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	17	2	3	0	1	4
2020	Tokyo	Japan				?		

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

The Paralympic Games is an international multi-sports event that take participation interest of the para athletes, including from muscle power impairment (e.g., paraplegia, quadriplegia, muscular dystrophy, post-polio syndrome and spina bifida), passive range of movement impairment, limb deficiency (e.g., amputation or dysmelia), leg length difference, short stature, hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, vision impairment to intellectual impairment (International Paralympic Committee [IPC], 2018). The proof that so many para-athletes from different countries are participating shows that the game is getting the imelight from the globe. Para-athletes have already won medals since 1988 edition with 1 bronze in weightlifting from Mariappan Perumal. In 1992, para-athletes brought back medals from weightlifting (1 silver and 1 bronze) again from P. Mariappan and Cheok Kon Fatt and athletics (1 bronze) from Mohamad Khasseri Otman. In Beijing 2008, Siew Lee Chan ended Malaysia's 16 years without any medals by bagging a bronze medal in powerlifting. In 2012, Hasihin Senawi won an only bronze medal in the men's individual recurve W1/W2 (wheelchair category). And in 2016, history was created when Malaysia bagging 3 gold medals and 1 bronze medal (all from athletics) from Mohamad Ridzuan Mohamad Puzi, Abdul Latif Romly, and Muhammad Ziyad Zolkefli, while a bronze came from Siti Noor Radiah Ismail.

The Commonwealth Games which started in 1930, was held every four years and it was a very unique game and sometimes called an inclusive game. This is because events for athletes with disabilities were included in 1992 as exhibition events, and since 2002, it became part of the games program. Every medal winner was included as a part of the overall medal tally of the participation country (refer table 7).

Table 7. Malaysia Participation at the Commonwealth Games

Year	Host city	Host country	No. of athletes		G	S	B	Total
			M	F				
2002	Manchester	England	9	6	0	1	2	2
2006	Melbourne	Australia	6	3	0	0	0	0
2010	Delhi	India	6	2	0	0	0	0
2014	Glasgow	Scotland	6	2	0	0	1	1
2018	Gold Coast	Australia	6	1	0	1	1	2

Source: Paralympic Council of Malaysia

Malaysia para-athletes won 2 medals at the 2002 edition in Manchester through Mohd Hisham Khaironi (1 silver in track and field) and Cheok Kon Fatt (1 bronze medal in the bench press). The para team did not achieve any medals during the 2006 and the 2010 edition. They brought back one bronze medal in 2014 through Jung Yee Khine in powerlifting. During the 2018 edition, Muhammad Afiq Ali won a silver medal in track and field sprint event and a bronze medal from Yee Khie Jung in powerlifting.

Malaysia Participation in Other Games

Malaysia also participated in other multisport events that have been organized by the International Organisations of Sport for the Disabled (IOSDs), who plays a major part in developing para-sports around the globe. They are independent organizations recognized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) act as the sole representatives of a specific impairment group. They give assistance in developing sport for para-athletes from the grassroots level right to the elite level. They are the governing body for some of the impairment specific sports in the Paralympic Games program.

This IOSDs games such as International Blind Sports Federation or IBSA Games, Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association or CPISRA World Games, International Sports Federations for Persons with Intellectual Disability or INAS Games, International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation or IWAS Games.

Some Considerations

The heartbeat of disability sports in Malaysia is within its various rehabilitation centers and national para sports associations. It is normal to view para-athletes to achieve certain standard of performance at the highest level. Limited opportunities for them to compete in national competitions is a disadvantage, and with a small pool of athletes who are ready for competitions as compared to those in regular sports, but not all of them will be elite athletes. it is needed about two years and more to develop a good para athletes in national and international competitions (Brazuna & Mauerberg-deCastro, 2001). Unlike some countries who excel in disability sports such as China, Germany, USA, in the case of Malaysia, there are very few pools of athletes because they tend to depend on a small pool of para-athletes from the early generation of athletes. Athletes' quick rise and sustainability in the sport are two important characteristics of disability sports. Para athletes have limited access to assistive technology and sports equipment, less media coverage and sponsorships, issues on ethical and doping, treatment in injuries during their sport involvement, and cases of retirement (Mauerberg-deCastro & Campbell, 2016).

One more important thing that need to be look into is the media intention towards athletes with disabilities. It is not a secret that more severely impaired and female athletes with disabilities are subject to an even greater level of neglecting by the media. It is argued that para-athletes receive less media attention in the country due to their bodies, by association of their impairments, contradicting images of athletic type and normality of the person (Flindall 2018). Female para-athletes are subjected to an even greater level of discrimination because of their bodies neither suit to 'normal' conceptions of athleticism nor femininity/sexualisation; different from which, particularly female, abled-bodied athletes are often displayed (Chang et al., 2011; Chang & Crossman, 2009; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001).

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As with Malaysia government funding for Paralympic sport in future years is consistently depends upon medal success and so in this situation is, therefore, always on the lookout for the next Paralympic star or at least a new trend of finding them in order to secure the future funding upon which everyone's livelihoods depend. Classification will be another area that need to be strengthen along with the development of the para-athletes. This matter can be realised when engaging with those interest parties including the medical personnel, physiotherapist and occupational therapist together with sports technicians.

CONCLUSION

The overall development of para-sports in Malaysia seems to be very rapidly since 2000. But to view it as a superb achievement by seeing the results, more need to be done to upgrade the development of para sports in Malaysia. Even though there are some numerous achievements by the athletes in the international arena, there are certain issues that need to be looked into. One of the issues been detected is that there is a lack of any nation-wide cooperation between disability and able-bodied sport as well as a lack of proper structure high-performance disability sports especially in the state due to inadequate financial and human resources. More effort through the collaboration from various organizations needs to gather for a tremendous achievement. This article discussion is limited to the achievement and the evolution of para sports in Malaysia. Some recommendations that can be elaborated here are the evolution of para sports in Malaysia is growing but not rapidly. More research, development and innovation need to be organized so that the achievement is tremendously visible at international arena. Domestically, more funding, seminars, workshops, trained personnel are some of the elements that need to be look into very detail.

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