



Robert Steadward



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## An Interview with Dr Robert Steadward, President of the International Paralympic Committee

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### Introduction

Dr Robert Steadward has been the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) only president since its inception in 1989. Within the Olympic movement, he is an active IOC member having roles on the 2000 Commission on Reform and Olympic Truce Foundation.

He has also been an integral driving force behind the growth and development of the Paralympic Games. The Games themselves have their historical roots dating back to 1948 when Sir Ludwig Guttmann organized a sports competition involving World War II veterans with a spinal-cord injury in Stoke Mandeville, England. Olympic-style games for athletes with disabilities were then organized for the first time in Rome in 1960 with the Toronto Games in 1976 being the first time that other disability groups besides those with spinal-cord injuries participated.

Today, the Paralympics are an elite sport event for athletes with disabilities from a variety of disability groups, with the number of athletes participating in Summer Paralympic Games increasing from 400 athletes in Rome in 1960 to over 4,000 at Sydney, 2000. Since the VIII Paralympic Summer Games (Seoul 1988) and the V Paralympic Winter Games (Tignes 1992), the Paralympic Games have taken place at the

same venues as the Olympic Games. The VIII Paralympic Winter Games will take place in Salt Lake City, USA, in 2002, the XII Paralympic Summer Games in Athens, Greece, in 2004 and the IX Paralympic Winter Games in Turin, Italy, in 2006.

As the IPC and the Paralympic Games have evolved, so too have the marketing goals. Here Dr Steadward (RDS) talks with David Legg (DL) of Mount Royal College about how the IPC's marketing capabilities have evolved, the challenges facing the IPC, and current issues facing the IPC's marketing efforts.

**DL: Please review how the IPC has been marketed, not necessarily since the official beginning of the Paralympic movement, but more since the advent of disability sport.**

**RDS:** The modern history of sport for people with disabilities centered on the Stoke Mandeville hospital in England following the Second World War. I think that people have to keep in perspective, however, that this is what the history books say, but there were other programs going on around the world as well. In Canada there were a lot of physical activity, education and sport programs for persons with disabilities, before, during and after the First World War. These types of events also ►



occurred in the United States. So even though Stoke formally started the disability sport program, there were other sport programs (for persons with disabilities) going on. We can, of course, use Stoke as a starting point and / or measuring stick, but I still think it is important to recognize these other events.

What we have to recognize is that, at the time, Stoke Mandeville was only concerned with spinal injuries so it really took a significant amount of time before other disability groups started. This interest came to the foreground in 1964 when Sir Ludwig Guttmann started to interact with other Europeans as they dealt with sport for other disabilities such as visual impairments. Rather than create another organization, Guttmann developed the International Sport Organization for the Disabled (ISOD) to bring everyone under one umbrella. It was not until 1975, when the first international disability sport games were held at Stoke Mandeville with blind and amputee athletes.

**DL: Prior to 1976, was the Paralympic movement focused only on spinal-cord injuries?**

**RDS:** Yes. Up until the 1976 Paralympics in Toronto. However, before that there were multi-disability games in North America. In fact the first Pan American Games (for the disabled) were held in Winnipeg in 1967 and these games were not just for those with spinal injuries but also for amputees, etc. Canada had already hosted integrated multi-disability games during the 1960s and 1970s but was not able to take amputee athletes who used wheelchairs to the Stoke Mandeville Games as they only allowed competitors with spinal injuries.

**DL: As far as marketing is concerned, did it change because of the evolution from a wheelchair only to multi-disability format?**

**RDS:** No, I would not say that marketing and sponsorship were related to the historical growth from a single disability to multi-disability situation. Through the 1960s and 1970s I think the reason why sport (for athletes with disabilities) was not marketed and promoted very well was simply because of the problems associated with a particular attitude and philosophy. The Games were promoted because of rehabilitation benefits where physiotherapists, doctors, nurses and orderlies ran them. There was not a sporting or high performance philosophy.

**DL: That has obviously changed. Are there different challenges now in trying to promote the Paralympic movement using a sport-only focus versus a rehabilitative and medical model?**

**RDS:** No, I do not think so. I think that the difficulty is not so much the medical / rehabilitation mentality or model versus the sport model, as much as other sporting organizations trying to fight for rights, recognition and exposure. The market is getting quite saturated these days with all of the various sporting events.

**DL: Recognizing that, how do you make yourself unique in the eyes of a corporation you want to sponsor your event?**

**RDS:** First of all, we are unique, because we focus on a specific sector of the population. Thus, if we approach the corporate society,



do we want to plead the attitude of a charity, or do we wish to come at them saying we are a legitimate sport organization? I think that the Paralympic Games has in the past been promoted as a charity, but I think we are moving away from that. That is why it is more difficult to get funding from the advertising and sponsorship side of these corporations.

**DL: If marketing is a relationship in that you have to give something in order to get something, what can you offer these corporations?**

**RDS:** What we have to do is evaluate what corporations are receiving from other events and organizations that they are sponsoring. What is it about them that makes them want to sponsor? We have to then ask ourselves what do we have that is the same, better or different?

I think we have the uniqueness of our events because it focuses on disabilities and because the world is becoming a more inclusive society. People with disabilities are becoming more educated, becoming more involved in regular aspects of society, whether that is living in their own homes in the community or whether it is participating in regular employment. People with disabilities are becoming much more visible in the general public. This has an effect on corporations.

We have to take advantage of this by pointing out that while people are disabled and integrated into society they are also integrated through sport. This should legitimize the corporation's interest in sponsoring or supporting Paralympic sport.

We also have to recognize that there is only so much money to go around.

Finally, we have to get over the problem of the chicken-or-egg situation where sponsors will get involved only when you can show them substantive data that you have good media coverage of your event both in the electronic and paper media. The other side then is trying to convince the media that you can attain the advertising needed to pay for the programs.

**DL: That provides a nice segue to my next question. What is the current status for televising the Paralympic Games?**

**RDS:** Right now with the contract we (the IPC) have in place, we have given the host organizing committee the full rights to market our events and to use our logo to raise money through sponsorship and promote television coverage. They get to keep all of the revenue. We felt that this would be in our best interests right now because we know that there is not a lot of money that is going to be generated. At least if we give them that opportunity to use our marks and promote them through sponsorship and marketing, it would give the host organizing committee an incentive to raise more money and an incentive for them to put in place a host broadcaster. One of the things we have had to include now and in the future is the requirement of the host organizing committee to actually put in place and pay for the host broadcasting. Once that is in place then it makes it easier to provide the signal for various commercial outlets that want to send that signal back ►



home. There is a cost for that, but if we give them all of the revenues from the rights holders then it is much easier to sell to the host organizing committee. The incentive is there to pay for the host broadcasting.

We are now moving into a stage where we might have to look at sharing that revenue because we are bringing more and more to the event because it is more popular, it is gaining more credibility, more profile, more status, and more visibility. There have been a number of media outlets, particularly television, around the world that are exposing more and more of our athletes (with disabilities) and our events to the general public.

**DL: Do you foresee a day when the television rights for the Paralympic Games will be a money generator?**

**RDS:** It was a significant money generator for Sydney. When you compare the amount of money they spent for the host broadcasting and the amount of money they generated from revenue from the rights holders, they made a significant profit.

**DL: Comparatively to the IOC and the Olympic Games, obviously there is no comparison with television revenue and sponsorship. Do you think that sponsorship for the Paralympic Games will ever equal the types of numbers generated for the Olympics?**

**RDS:** It may not reach those same types of numbers but it may reach in proportion the same kinds of numbers. In fact, it will likely reach it much sooner. It is important to

remember that the modern Olympic Games started in 1896 and there was not any profit turned from television and major sponsors until 1984. Before that there were no sponsorship and television contracts whatsoever. It was really Los Angeles in 1984 where they (the IOC) started generating large profits. Our modern Paralympic Games, as I refer to them, did not start until 1988 in Seoul, South Korea. So here we are 12 years later generating significant profits, and with the contracts we have got in place now for host broadcasting and Web-casting, the future looks much better.

*(A new agreement was recently signed between the IPC and IOC that requires the Paralympic games broadcasting in 2008 and beyond to be included under the guise of Olympic Broadcasting contracts.)*

**DL: Do you think that Web-casting will become a significant revenue generator or a focus for the marketing and promotions of future Paralympic Games?**

**RDS:** That is a huge question which is very difficult to answer. About 1,000 people spent two or three days in December (2000) arguing and discussing that very topic, looking at sport and new media. In the past when you have a host broadcaster producing a signal and the rights holder purchasing that signal, you control what signal they get, you control where it is going, how it is being distributed, and where it is being distributed. You have got absolute and total control. With Web-casting you are looking at computer technology integrating with television and you have absolutely no control. As soon as it



leaves the host broadcaster to the Internet it is potentially on every television set and computer in the world. We (the IPC) are going down that road and we do not know what it is going to do but we are prepared to take that risk.

The IOC is not. The IOC is worried because of a control factor and the broadcasters are worried because they see the Internet coming in and providing a much better situation for the spectators. What the spectator can do at home is zero in on a particular event and a particular time. If it is on the television they have no control. The IOC is concerned because the Web-cast goes into so many households and, in comparison to the broadcasters, the amount of revenue for the IOC for Web-casting is very small.

I think that they recognize that the world is immersed with electronic information technology, and so they are going to have to look at it seriously in the future. You could not get this (World Wide Web) kind of signal ten years ago and what is it going to look like in another ten years? So the IOC have to be concerned and they have to ensure that it is an integral part of their Games because I do not think the traditional television broadcasting is going to be the wave of the future.

**DL:** Please describe an example of a successful and an unsuccessful marketing venture for the IPC.

**RDS:** We have had a number of successful marketing contracts in the past 12 years but they are not at the level where we could say

that they were a definite marketing thrust or strategy to generate significant dollars. However, one successful strategy that relates to sponsorship began with me speaking with the president of the Lillehammer Olympic and Paralympic Games. We spoke about the IPC's future and I stated that it was necessary to establish a permanent headquarters with professional staff. That was obviously going to take a lot of money and so the first time we really started marketing our event or our movement was when I started marketing our headquarters. I gave the world an opportunity to submit bids. A lot of people felt that I was wrong to expect countries to come forward, provide money, space, and equipment for our headquarters because that was not only greedy but automatically it prevented a lot of countries from bidding. Ultimately Bonn, Germany, was selected to host our headquarters and we received from the German Government a 13,000 square foot building and another \$5 million for renovations, upgrades and operations.

I think that the negotiations we had with WeMedia as our future host broadcaster and Web-caster combined were also very successful. They are now going to be in place for the next three Paralympic Games, until and including Turin, Italy. That could be worth anywhere from \$50 to \$200 million.

*(WeMedia recently returned the broadcast and Internet rights for the 2002, 2004, and 2006 Paralympic Games to the IPC. WeMedia partly failed to fulfil its obligations outlined in a memorandum of understanding with the IPC and thus the contract was nullified.)*

I think that the marketing company that ►



we hired out of Canada to take charge of developing our marketing program was a huge failure. It was a failure in that it did not raise dollars but it was successful in that it gave us an indication and showed us what we did not do right or where we failed.

**DL: What did the IPC learn? What did the experience tell the IPC?**

**RDS:** It told us many things. It told us about the kind of contract we want to sign with future marketing companies or individuals. It told us that we need to have an in-house, salaried person in the marketing area. We should not have a company representing the IPC when they are really not the IPC. It showed us that we put too much faith, confidence and trust in the company and let them drive the project as opposed to us saying: "This is what we have, this is how we are going to get there, and we are hiring you to take us there". We gave them all of that; we gave them the opportunity to determine where we are at, where we are going to go, and how we are going to get there. All we should have wanted them to do was drive the car, be the chauffeur.

**DL: Is there currently an IPC staff person responsible for marketing and sponsorship?**

**RDS:** We hired a person last July (2000) who at the time was also working for the Sydney Olympic and the Sydney Paralympic Games. He was working on a contract with us up until the end of December (2000). But what is marketing? There is a whole scheme of things. You want someone to be a fund

development officer, you want someone to be a marketer and promoter, you want someone to go in and initiate the call, you want someone to close the deal, and someone who can manage the contract. You also want someone who can work with foundations and other gifts of giving. So it is all marketing but there are specialties within the specialties.

**DL: Will you have to hire specific people on a contract basis to fulfil all of those specific roles or are you expecting this one person to take on the gamut of responsibilities?**

**RDS:** Right now we will start with one or two people co-ordinating as many of these as possible, recognizing that they come with strength in one or two areas and not in others. In addition to that, because the marketing firm we previously hired did not achieve what we had hoped, and in order for us to learn from that situation and put a better marketing strategy in place, I formed an IPC marketing task force. Their specific task was evaluating our current marketing situation, what we should be doing, what do we have to sell, and how are we going to do it? That marketing task force had people both from inside and outside our movement that met on three or four occasions and wrote a report tabled at our Executive Committee meeting last May (2000) in Cairo, Egypt. The report was accepted with the first recommendation to hire a staff person in the marketing area.

**DL: By having the Paralympic Games occur two weeks after the Olympic Games, does that**





**influence how you market the Paralympic Games or pursue sponsors?**

**RDS:** I think it does but we believe, for many reasons, that at the present time it is in our best interests to have the Paralympic Games immediately following the Olympic Games. As long as we want to be an integral part of the IOC and the Olympic movement, that is where they are going to be placed. If the Paralympic Games were held before the Olympic Games there would be a much greater gap between them, maybe two or three months.

There are so many activities around the Olympic Games in preparation for the Olympics that are not done until the last month or two that our Games would be a disaster because everybody would be focusing on getting the city ready for the Olympics. There would also be difficulties with the television companies setting up, because that is one of the most important parts of the Games right now and they cannot afford to come in and put all that equipment and personnel in place two or three months in advance.

We just believe that so much effort is put into the Olympic Games that we would rather benefit from what is put into place for them, what they have learned, and make alterations for our Games rather than going in ahead and interfering with all the Olympic preparation.

**DL:** Was there ever any thought given to looking for bids to host the Paralympic Games from cities other than those bidding for the Olympic Games?

**RDS:** For a nano-second, yes.

**DL:** So you do not perceive that happening in the future?

**RDS:** No. Some people think that we should go to the cities that did not get the bid but then we would be considered second class. If we went to another separate-bid situation, the cost would be prohibitive. It is a cost benefit to host both Games under one festival umbrella at the same site. Also, the IOC, as much as we do, believe that we can benefit from each other in the marketing, television, promotion, and awareness areas if we work together rather than apart.

*(IOC President Jacques Rogge and Dr Steadward are meeting during the 8th IAAF World Championships in Edmonton, Canada, in August in part to discuss the implementation of an IOC-IPC marketing plan)*

**DL:** Has the inclusion of athletes with an intellectual disability influenced how the IPC markets itself or how it has gained any sponsorship opportunities?

**RDS:** It has not in the past but it will in the future and I do not know if it has had an adverse effect but it has not improved it at all. The problem with Spain made us realize that we were going to have to go back and revisit the concerns that were brought to our attention when we first allowed athletes with intellectual disabilities to be a part of our movement.

*(At the Sydney Paralympic Games, 10 of the 12 members of the Spanish men's basketball team for athletes with intellectual ➤*



*disabilities were not genuinely disabled and team members had to return their gold medals).*

There was a great reluctance on the part of many countries and many athletes to include them as part of our events because they do not have any kind of "disability" that prevents them from participating in able-bodied events.

Also, it is very easy to classify individuals with a physical disability where it is very difficult to determine intellectual disability. Where is the cut-off point and how do you evaluate that? The experience with the Spanish basketball team has caused us a great amount of grief and we have no way of telling how this is potentially going to affect our marketing in the future.

**DL:** Are there any particular industries that are avoided or that you would not accept sponsorship dollars from? For instance, if a brewing company or a tobacco company wanted to sponsor the Paralympic Games, would that be accepted?

**RDS:** There are some companies that are more aligned with us, particularly if you look at orthotics / prosthetic manufacturers. There are also other products, such as tobacco *per se* that certainly would not be accepted by our organization. However, we could go to another company which is acceptable and they may own that tobacco company anyway. We just do not want to be seen to be directly supporting the promotion of tobacco industry because of the severe health effects.

Drinking beer and wine from time to time does not have, from my way of thinking, a

direct harmful effect. So beer companies and wineries are acceptable and they have been used in the past.

A big debate within our movement is the acceptability of pharmaceutical companies as marketing partners but again pharmaceuticals in their appropriate way are fine.

**DL:** My last set of questions pertains to the relationship between the IPC and the IOC. Are you limited in any way to what companies you can approach because of your relationship with the IOC?

**RDS:** It depends. Right now we're still right in the middle of negotiating the second part of our contract with the IOC and the two areas that we are having the greatest challenge completing in fairness to both organizations are television and sponsorship. Right now if we split our sponsorship into two areas, one would be Games sponsorship and the other would be IPC sponsorship.

For suppliers, licensees and corporations who might sponsor our movement, and particularly our headquarters, we could go to anyone. If it is sponsorship for the Paralympic Games I think that we have to be prepared to respect the product categories that are part of the TOP "V" program for the IOC.

*(The TOP "V" program refers to the Olympic Partners with "V" representing the fifth iteration of the program. The current TOP partners include Coca Cola, Schlumberger, John Hancock, Kodak, McDonalds, Panasonic, Samsung, Sports Illustrated / Time, VISA and Xerox.)*





**DL: Does the IPC receive part of the TOP sponsorship?**

**RDS:** Absolutely. I think it was \$20 million that went from the Sydney Olympic organizing committee to the Paralympic budget. In Athens, \$50 million is going from the Olympic side of the fence to the Paralympics and that money has to come from somewhere. Basically it's coming from the sponsorship. At the present time we're prepared to respect those sponsors because of the money we derive. Now if we felt we could independently generate more revenue from different sponsors and provide the organizing committee with that kind of support, we would say that we are going to get our own sponsors and they may be different products and even competitor products. But at the present time, we cannot afford to not respect that agreement.

**DL: Do you perceive a day when you would be in direct competition with the IOC?**

**RDS:** No.

**DL: Last question. If you were to be hired as the marketing director for the IPC what would you set as realistic goals for the next three years?**

**RDS:** While it is important to set some goals, I would have to back up a step and find out exactly what was the current status and state of affairs for the entire movement. That means evaluating the national Paralympic committees, what kinds of contracts they have with sponsors, the size of these contracts, and the conditions of the contracts.

We would also need to know what events are marketable with the IPC. Are we looking at marketing just the Paralympic Games or are we looking at marketing the regional and world championships? Are we looking at license fees or suppliers, sponsors, or anything in between? There would need to be a considerable amount of time to complete an evaluation of the whole organization.

Then it would take some time, maybe six or eight months, to complete a worldwide study on the Paralympic movement to find out if anybody knew anything about the movement. If only one person out of 100 knows anything about the Paralympic movement and 95 know something about the Olympics and everything in between, then we know that we have a big challenge ahead of us.

It is going to take an awful lot of background work, research and preparation before even setting foot outside of our door and making the first knock to get a major sponsor. But in doing that I think that there could be some short-term goals to get suppliers in place to provide the necessary equipment to run the organization.

**DL: Thank you Dr Steadward for your time.**



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## **Biographies**

In the world of health, fitness, lifestyle and sport for persons with a disability, **Dr Robert Steadward** has over a period of 35 years become an icon. Dr Steadward is a ►



professor of Physical Education at the University of Alberta, Director of Sport Counseling for the Edmonton Sport Institute, and founder and CEO of The Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement. Among many volunteer capacities, he is President of the International Paralympic Committee, the second largest sport organization in the world, and, within the Olympic movement, he is an active IOC member.

In Canada, Dr Steadward has received numerous awards recognizing his efforts including being named an Officer of the Order of Canada, the nation's highest civilian honour. Internationally he has been recognized by receiving an Honourary Doctor of Laws degree, from Leuven University, Belgium.  
(<http://www.steadwardcentre.org/>)

**Dr David Legg** is an instructor of Adapted Physical Activity and Sport Management at Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and recently completed his PhD at the University of Alberta under the tutelage of Dr Steadward.

As a volunteer, Dr Legg is a board member of the Canadian Paralympic Committee, chairman of the board for the Multiple Sclerosis Society Calgary Chapter and assistant coach for the Canadian Wheelchair Rugby National Team. (<http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~dlegg/>)

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