

Opportunity for Athletes with Disabilities

If you're an athlete with a disability, you may want to consider an opportunity to try a new sport: rowing. In 2005, the International Paralympic Committee announced that rowing would be added to the roster of events for the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

Currently only about 14 national rowing federations have active national programs for paralympic rowing. With such a strong tradition of competitive rowing in Ireland, the Irish Amateur Rowing Union (IARU) wishes to establish a programme here.

As a sport, rowing is easily adaptable to people with a wide range of disabilities. Three functional classifications have been established for international competition. Leg, Trunk and Arms (LTA) is for those who can complete the full rowing stroke using leg drive, body swing and arm action. This classification would include athletes who are visually impaired, who have a one leg amputation or who have Cerebral Palsy and are ambulatory. The Trunk and Arms (TA) category is for athletes who do not have use of their legs and so row with a fixed seat and some back support. This category would suit many wheelchair athletes who have good upper body strength and good aerobic capacity. The third classification, Arms (A), is for athletes who row with their arms only in a single scull with a fixed seat and support back. This classification includes athletes with spinal cord injury and who have full use of their arms. The designated events for international competition are a coxed four for the LTA, a double scull for the TA and a single scull for the A category. The events have equal opportunities for women and men.

“Our objective is to interest some athletes with disabilities, who are training regularly, are aerobically fit and are keen to take on a new challenge”, says Martin Corcoran, Chief Executive Officer of IARU. “This programme is very much in its infancy and the logistics of training and equipment still have to be resolved. However, if we are to realize our goal of having Irish rowers participating in future Paralympic Games we need to get started. The first steps are to identify some athletes with a drive to train hard and work with us to develop a strong paralympic rowing programme in Ireland”, says Corcoran.

Anyone who would like more information about getting involved in paralympic rowing is asked to contact Martin Corcoran at (01)6251112 or by email at ceo@iaru.ie

