

Paralympics Games, Barcelona

STRENGTH OF SPIRIT, SPORTSMANSHIP

Editorial Staff

One month after the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the Olympic venues were host to the Paralympics, a gathering of disabled but very competitive and determined athletes from nearly 100 countries. While receiving only sparse media coverage, these special games were in many ways as successful and exciting as the big O.

The Olympic stadium of Montjuic, with a seating capacity of 100,000, was filled to capacity every day during the Paralympics. The crowds, mostly comprised of the local citizenry, cheered the athletes with great enthusiasm. An estimated 1.5 million spectators attended the Paralympics.

DCs Douglas Greene and Clayton Heatley, both from the San Francisco area and members of the Federation Internationale de Chiropratique Sportive (FICS), were there to provide chiropractic care to the athletes of all participating nations. Drs. Heatley and Greene worked as volunteers on the Olympic Organizing Committee of Barcelona (COOB), and also with the International Olympic Committee during the Olympic Games.

Many of the disabilities of the athletes at the Paralympics were the result of spinal cord injuries, with subsequent paraplegia or tetraplegia. Some of the athletes had cerebral palsy, and numerous competitors were amputees. These athletes showed a strength of spirit, sportsmanship and camaraderie that was inspirational.

An American sprinter with a leg prosthesis came within 1.8 seconds of Carl Lewis' 100-meter world record. There was a Frenchman, totally armless and legless, who was a medal winner in swimming. A German boy with one leg and no arms won a gold medal in table tennis: He played with a racket attached to his shoulder. There were blind judo competitors; legless volleyball teams; wheelchair basketball teams and tennis players; and soccer players with cerebral palsy.

Drs. Green and Heatley hope the chiropractic profession will continue to expand its role and involvement in disabled sports and future paralympics. They feel that doctors of chiropractic, working as a team with the trainers and the medical staff, can do so much for such motivated athletes. Their efforts will be, as they were at the 1992 Paralympic Games in Barcelona, very deeply appreciated.

The doctors described their involvement as "a precious jewel of an experience." Special among those memories were the closing ceremonies: Everyone was celebrating, people were "dancing" in their wheelchairs, trading shirts, pins, hugs, kisses and handshakes; some were weeping -- they did not want it to end.

The flame of the 1992 Paralympics has been extinguished, but only until 1996 when it will be relit in Atlanta, where many good friends will reunite.

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