More than the Paralympics

- Recap: Winter World Championships
- Preview: IPC Athletics Grand Prix, VISTA2013
“Sustaining momentum is key in 2013, and although this may not be a Paralympic year, it is still set to be one of the busiest yet.”

Dear Readers,

The first edition of The Paralympian in 2013 comes with a number of exciting new features and is part of the IPC’s aim to give you more in-depth information about the Paralympic Movement, whilst complementing the comprehensive daily news updates on www.paralympic.org.

Since its relaunch in February 2012, the IPC website, www.paralympic.org, has recorded over 3.5 million visitors, which is more than the last six years put together. With so much sport and good news to report on from around the Movement it is easy to see why visitor numbers continue to increase.

Sustaining momentum is key in 2013, and although this may not be a Paralympic year, it is still set to be one of the busiest yet, and it is important for all of us that we continue to build on the success of London 2012.

Evidence of this can be found with the two broadcast agreements we recently announced with EBU and Channel 4. Both deals mean the next two Paralympics will receive record coverage during the event and in the build-up through coverage of upcoming championships.

The first three months of 2013 have already seen numerous World Championships take place, mainly in winter sports, and these are covered in this edition together with the Test Events and one year to go activities Sochi 2014 implemented ahead of next year’s Paralympic Winter Games.

The main feature this edition is on the growing range of competitions athletes from around the world can choose to compete in. As the number of athletes taking part in para-sport globally increases, it is vital that they have greater opportunities to compete at all levels and a number of athletes give us their views on progress in this area.

To close I’d like to pay tribute to two amazing athletes and superb ambassadors for the Paralympic Movement – Daniel Dias and Esther Vergeer.

Brazilian swimmer Dias picked up his second Laureus Sport Award in March in recognition of the six gold medals he won at London 2012. At just 24 years old, it is unbelievable to think an athlete who has already won 10 Paralympic and 10 world titles, may still have his best days ahead of him, especially with Rio 2016 on the horizon.

As for Vergeer, what else is there to say? Unbeaten in 470 consecutive singles matches stretching over 10 years, eight Paralympic and 42 Grand Slam titles, I am not sure we will ever witness an athlete in any sport enjoy such dominance again. On behalf of the entire Paralympic Movement, I would like to congratulate Esther on her historic career and wish her well with the new aspects of her life.

Enjoy your read.

Sir Philip Craven, MBE
IPC President
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Channel 4 was awarded Great Britain’s television rights for the Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016 Games following a highly competitive tender process.

The deal includes multi-platform broadcast rights and will build on the network’s acclaimed coverage of IPC sport and reached 69 per cent of the population.

In the lead-up to Rio 2016, the broadcaster will show coverages of IPC Test Events, IPC World Cup events, IPC World Championships and IPC World Para-Minister Championships.

The IPC announced that the 2013 IPC Powerlifting Open European Championships will take place in Alicante, Spain, and the 2015 IPC Alpine Skiing World Championships will take place at the Panorama Resort in British Columbia from February 4 - March 2015. The 2015 Championships, to be organised by Alpine Canada, are expected to draw 120 athletes and will build on a successful 2011-12 World Cup final event at the Panorama Resort, as well as the Vancouver 2010 Games, which IPC President Sir Philip Craven described as the best Winter Games ever.

Wheelchair tennis star Vergeer retires

The Netherlands’ Esther Vergeer, arguably the greatest female wheelchair tennis player of all-time, announced her retirement from the sport on 12 February.

Vergeer went the last 10 years without a defeat in 470 singles matches and has been ranked No. 1 in the world since 1999. In the last decade, Vergeer, won a total of 120 successive tournaments, beating 73 different opponents, winning 95 matches 6-0, 6-0 and reaching just 18 sets of tennis. In that time, she faced only one match point – against fellow countrywoman Korie Homan in the gold medal match at the Beijing 2008 Games.
Para Snow Sport Youth Circuit kicks off

The first two competitions on the IPC European Para Snow Sport Youth Circuit took place from 27-31 January in La Molina, Spain and from 28 March - 1 April in Rogla, Slovenia.

The IPC European Para Snow Sport Youth Circuit, funded by the European Union, consists of five competition camps in alpine skiing, nordic skiing and snowboarding for youngsters with an impairment. The primary objective of the initiative is to introduce youngsters to winter sports and to provide professional training to already skilled youngsters on their way to a first competition.

Youngsters with an impairment from five EU Member States – Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain – ages 10 to 17 are involved.

Cody and Parsons join co-ordination and evaluation committees

Cody Governing Board member Ann Cody (pictured above) has been appointed as a member of the IOC Co-ordination Commission for the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games.

Cody will oversee the progress of Paralympic-specific milestones for the Games, particularly those relating to athletes, accessibility and awareness issues.

New training facility

Brazil and Latin American athletes received a major boost in January when construction plans were unveiled for the new Brazilian Paralympic Centre, which will serve as the main training venue for Paralympic athletes throughout the region.

“In recent years, the conditions for Brazilian athletes have been greatly improved,” Daniel Dias said.

“The Brazilian Paralympic Committee is handling this very well. Each year, its infrastructure improves, giving athletes more confidence.”

Dias picks up second Laureus Award

After winning the Laureus World Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Award for the second time in March, Brazilian swimmer Daniel Dias joked he did not fall asleep cradling the statuette, because his wife, Rachel Davis, was at his side in the sophisticated Copacabana Palace Hotel.

“This was an amazing experience, like a dream,” he said. “I really enjoyed this award that crowned my work in 2012. I had a fabulous time at this glamorous party at home.”

“I will simply keep doing my best and hope to represent my country well.”

“I will be a great opportunity to show the world that Brazilian Paralympic sport is growing and that we are on the right track.”

In August, Dias hopes to lead Brazil to a top-five finish at the 2013 IPC Swimming World Championships in Montreal, Canada.

Athens to stage 2013 IPC General Assembly

Athens, the Greek capital and the host city of the 2004 Paralympic Games, will stage the IPC General Assembly and Conference this November.

Elections for the IPC Governing Board will take place, as the positions of IPC President, Vice President and 10 member roles will be up for election.

More than 300 attendees are expected at the event and all National Paralympic Committees, Paralympic Sports, Regional Organisations and International Organisations of Sport for the Disabled will be invited to attend. The Paralympic Sport and Media Awards, in conjunction with Allianz, will coincide with the event.
#AskAnAthlete

The IPC caught up with USA and Canada’s ice sledge hockey team captains Taylor Chace and Greg Westlake prior to April’s 2013 IPC Ice Sledge Hockey World Championships A-Pool in Goyang, Korea.

To play in the gold medal game, allowing ourselves the opportunity to win the tournament and defend our 2012 world title.

Both teams play the same style of hockey, which is high-tempo, with lots of hard hitting. I personally believe that the games between Canada and the United States are great for showcasing sledge hockey.

Canada’s Brad Breeden because of his speed and quick shot release.

I got into hand biking as a cross training for sledge hockey, and ended up setting the record for fastest arm-propelled vehicle, I did not expect to end up racing it through the desert in Nevada.

Wheelchair racing because I have long arms and once I build momentum I can reach a high top speed, relative to my bigger size.

When it comes to single-elimination tournaments, anyone can win any given tournament. I believe we have the talent and heart to win a gold medal this year.

Canada and the United States are great for showcasing sledge hockey.

Sometimes, you just need to keep your mind and body fresh.

Wheelchair racing because I have long arms and once I build momentum I can reach a high top speed, relative to my bigger size.

If you participated in a Paralympic summer sport, too, which sport would you be most suited for and why?

What’s the oddest thing you’ve ever done in your training?

I think if I got a street hand bike made up, I would love to compete against Alex Zanardi in the hand bike road race. I would also like to try kayaking, as I have trained in that before.

2013 IPC Ice Sledge Hockey World Championships A-Pool

Dates: 12-20 April
Location: Goyang, Korea
Faces to watch in Goyang:
- Per Kasperi, Sweden
- Engeny Petrov, Russia
- Rolf Pedersen, Norway
- Seung-Hwan Jung, Korea
- Pavel Kubes, Czech Republic
- Jakub Krako, Slovakia
- Niklas Ingvarsson (guide Miguel Maiztegui), Sweden

Top winter athletes on social media

Find out which winter athletes have the biggest fan bases heading into the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games.

(Social media fan figures are as of 21 March)

1. 2,584 Amy Purdy (@AmyPurdyGirl, USA, snowboard)
2. 2,472 Josh Dueck (@joshdueck, Canada, alpine skiing)
3. 1,641 Per Kasperi (@perkasperi, Canada, nordic skiing)
4. 1,578 Niklas Ingvarsson (@Ingvarsson3, Sweden, ice sledge hockey)
5. 1,514 Anna Turner (@skiraceAnna, Great Britain, alpine skiing)
6. 914 Greg Westlake (@paralympics1, Canada, ice sledge hockey)
7. 884 Jessica Gallagher (@jessGallagher06, Australia, alpine skiing)
8. 806 Niklas Ingvarsson (@Ingvarsson3, Sweden, ice sledge hockey)
9. 642 Kelly Gallagher (@KellyGallagher, Great Britain, alpine skiing)
10. 582 Kevin Rempel (@KevinRempel, Canada, ice sledge hockey)

In February, the IPC activated its Instagram account @paralympics to bring immediate behind-the-scenes photos to its social media followers.

@Paralympic
Paralympics
Paralympic Games
ParalympicSport.TV
Facebook
Digital Bonus
The Paralympian 01/2013
Ask an Athlete

Next up! The next #AskAnAthlete will feature swimmers Sophie Pascoe of New Zealand and Summer Mortimer of Canada. Submit your questions for them prior to the 2013 IPC Swimming World Championships by tweeting @Paralympic using the hashtags #AskSophie and #AskSummer.
In January, the Sochi 2014 Organising Committee revealed the torch that will carry the Paralympic flame leading into the next Winter Games.

More than 1,000 editions of the sky-blue torch will be produced, and it was officially presented to the public in Moscow by Sochi 2014 Ambassadors Natalia Vodianova (pictured left) and Olesya Vladykina.

The torch design was developed by a Russian creative team led by Vladimir Pirozhkov and Andrei Vodyanik. The designers paid particular attention to the torch’s construction and its flame-lighting system. The construction of the torch ensures that the flame burns reliably in difficult conditions, such as strong winds, heavy frosts or any surprises that a Russian winter can throw up.

The concept behind the torch for the 2014 Games combines motifs from Russian folklore with ideas of innovation and technological breakthroughs. Dmitry Chernyshenko, President of the Sochi 2014 Organising Committee, commented: “The torch is a key symbol of the Relay. The Sochi 2014 torch combines traditional Russian motifs with the very latest technical know-how in the field of design. The elegant, extraordinary and radiant Sochi 2014 torch represents Russia’s beauty and its multi-faceted nature.”
Rio 2016 Mascot design process launched

In January, the Rio 2016 Organising Committee decided on 15 potential companies who could create the mascots for the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Paralympic Movement’s values were presented by IPC Governing Board member and Brazilian Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons.

“Anybody capable of transmitting the sense of overcoming one’s limits through the mascot, will have achieved the goal,” Parsons said. Following the briefing, the selected companies will develop their proposals together with the Organising Committee for adjustments and sharpening. Then, the best companies will be selected for the next phase, in which the mascot proposals will be evaluated by research.

The winner will eventually be selected unanimously and will receive a prize of R $50,000 for the creation of the mascots.

At the Rio 2016 mascot briefing, the whole brand concept, including the Paralympic logo, was taken into account.

Take a look back at mascots from the last four Paralympic Summer Games:

Sydney 2000
Athens 2004
Beijing 2008
London 2012
Rio 2016

PyeongChang 2018

The IPC held its first Project Review with the PyeongChang 2018 Organising Committee (POCOG) from 27-28 February.

The review covered observations from the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the organising committee structure, the Games Foundation Plan, sport, accessibility, venues and infrastructure, marketing, broadcasting and communications. The development of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic emblem was also discussed.

Allianz supporting IPC winter sports

After activating their partnership with the Paralympic Movement through 2016, IPC International Partner Allianz has transferred its communication strategy from summer sport over to winter sport.

Through sport videos and information graphics, Allianz will continue to distribute updated educational and emotional branded content in winter sport.

During February’s 2013 IPC Alpine Skiing World Championships in La Molina, Spain, Allianz was on site with a camera crew to interview top Paralympic athletes and officials, including Spain’s Jon Santacana, Germany’s Anna Schaffelhuber, Austria’s Claudia Lesch and Slovakia’s Henrieta Farkasova.

By telling stories of personal experience, the videos will aim to deliver an inspirational message to believe in one’s own strengths and abilities and embrace personal challenges and crises.

This successful production of branded content will be continued with more filming of other Paralympic sports in the lead-up to the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games, including snowboard, ice sledge hockey and Nordic skiing.

>> www.sponsoring.allianz.com/en/paralympics/paralympics
Australian Open

Japan’s Shingo Kunieda, the Netherlands’ Aniek van Koot and the USA’s David Wagner won the Australian Open men’s, women’s and quad singles titles, respectively, on 26 January at the first Grand Slam of the year on the NEC Wheelchair Tennis Tour.

It was Kunieda’s sixth Australian Open crown, while van Koot’s victory propelled her to No. 1 in the world’s women’s singles rankings.

Egypt came away with nine top finishes and Namibia had four first-place finishes, as 12 world records were broken at the Fazza International Powerlifting Championships in Dubai, UAE.

The event, which took place between 23-27 February, saw nearly 150 participants from 22 countries taking part.

TOP PERFORMERS

Claudia Loesch was one of the top performers at the 2013 IPC Alpine Skiing World Championships, winning three golds.
**IPC Nordic Skiing World Championships**

Russia reigned supreme at the 2013 IPC Nordic Skiing World Championships in Solleftea, Sweden, winning a total of 56 medals, including 22 golds.

Top medallists included Russian visually impaired skier Mikhailina Lysova with five golds and one bronze, and skier Roman Petushkov with four gold, one silver, one bronze.

Petushkov was voted the IPC’s Athlete of the Month for February after dominating the cross-country sprint, middle and long-distance races, as well as the open relay and biathlon middle-distance events.

Ukraine placed second in the medals tally in Solleftea with seven gold, 11 silver and nine bronze medals, followed by Germany with three gold, one silver and two bronze medals.

Ukraine’s Oleksandra Kononova won gold in the cross-country middle distance, after already picking up a gold in the cross-country middle and long-distance races, as well as the open relay and biathlon middle-distance events.

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Canada’s Brian McKeever (guided by Erik Carleton) won two golds at the 2013 IPC Nordic Skiing Worlds.

**TOP PERFORMERS**

[Table of medallists]

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**IPC Alpine Skiing World Cup**

The 2012-13 IPC Alpine Skiing World Cup concluded in Sochi, Russia, with events also being held in Seiser Alm (Italy), St. Moritz (Switzerland) and Rogla (Slovenia).

**IPC Nordic Skiing World Cup**

The IPC Nordic Skiing World Cup began in Vuokatti, Finland, in December 2012, before moving on to Cable, Wisconsin, USA, in January. It culminated in the finals in Sochi, Russia, which also served as a Paralympic Test Event.

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Australia’s Mitch Gourley has seen IPC Alpine Skiing grow tremendously as a sport since he first joined the circuit in 2005.
Mitch Gourley has been on the road since November and will not return home to Australia until mid-April.

The 22-year-old alpine skier is an elite athlete—a lifestyle he never expected to relish when he first joined the IPC Alpine Skiing circuit in 2005. Within the past decade, the majority of para-sports—including alpine skiing—have seen a major increase in the number of competitions offered and the level of the athletes taking part, giving the sport’s event cycles multiple focal points rather than just the Paralympic Games.

When Gourley first joined the IPC Alpine Skiing circuit, for example, 100 races were offered a season with over 300 athletes. Now, there are well over 200 races on the competition schedule with more than 600 athletes taking part.

“I’ve grown a lot with the sport,” Gourley said. “I never thought eight years ago that I’d be racing in Slovenia, and here I am.”

“It’s good to see people getting behind the sport in all kinds of areas. In eight years, I’ve grown a lot with the sport,” Gourley said. “We’re getting there,” Gourley said. “We have the number of participating nations in the world increasing from 658 to 977 in the last five years and the number of participating nations rising from 46 to 52. In para-cycling, UCI Technical Delegate Louis Barbeau said the top goal at the moment is to increase the number of participating nations in the sport from outside of Europe. Great Britain’s Jody Cundy, a specialist on the track, has been vocal about the need for a more standardised schedule of events to keep costs at a minimum.

“We don’t want to just train for four years with no races,” Cundy said. “We’d love to do races almost week in and week out and be spoiled for choice.”

IPC Nordic Skiing has nearly mirrored the success of alpine, as this season 271 athletes from 22 countries competed on the sport’s circuit—nearly double the amount of total participants from just two seasons ago.

Canadian visually impaired skier Brian McKeever said the number of stops on the circuit has increased so much that he now hand picks his events rather than having to settle for the three or four that used to be on the schedule each season.

In addition, McKeever and his teammates are now able to specialise in a discipline. McKeever focuses solely on cross-country skiing, while his compatriot Mark Arendz concentrates all of his attention on biathlon, and they hardly need to cross over due to the high number of events offered.

The sport is certainly now far removed from the days when McKeever recalls Germany’s Frank Hofele having to organise his own nordic skiing event and compete in it, too.

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Paralympic athletes compete in more than just the Paralympic Games, taking part in regional, national and international events on a regular basis.

Enhanced competition calendar

In the last decade, winter sports have quickly grown into their own unique properties, with IPC Alpine Skiing leading the way. The sport has clear competition levels now, all of which have grown tremendously, and during the 2012-13 season, nearly 600 athletes from almost 40 countries took part in over 200 competitions.

IPC Alpine Skiing participation numbers have increased due to development and funding initiatives across multiple regions, as well as awareness.

The sport’s current setup includes a condensed schedule with blocks of races in a specific region to ease travel and the transfer of equipment.

Gourley is very appreciative of what IPC Alpine Skiing has done for winter sport, and said his sport is now ready to make a consistent competition circuit, returning to the same hills year after year.

“We’re getting there,” Gourley said. “We have enough races each year, but in an ideal world we may spread them out a little bit more.

“The next step is diversifying where we go in terms of race stops. I think a really good thing that’s probably achievable as a next step is to have a consistent circuit where we go back to the same hills each season.”

Sylvana Mestre, IPC Alpine Skiing Sport Technical Committee Chairperson, has been one of the key influencers in the sport’s growth, saying she prefers to keep the sport very separate from its able-bodied counterpart, FIS.

“We keep it completely different because the situation that surrounds our athletes is completely different,” Mestre said. “They are being considered as elite athletes in their countries more and more.”

The UCI is hoping to employ the Asian Para Games and Parapan American Games as stepping stones to enhancing competitions, as well as development projects in Africa.

The IPC is also now going to focus more on the Paralympic Games, taking part in regional, national and international competitions for athletes between World Championships and Paralympic Games.

“We’re already enabled athletes to focus solely on one discipline,” Barbeau said.

“We’re now looking at incorporating some of our track events with able-bodied events. This is a work in progress.”

More sports follow suit

Following the success of London 2012, summer sports are also now on the cusp of exponential growth outside of the Paralympic Games, with the most noteworthy announcement thus far being that of the IPC Athletics Grand Prix.

Seven Grand Prix events are scheduled for 2013, providing athletes with high-level international competition and enhancing the sport’s classification, education, research and anti-doping methods.

The response of the Grand Prix announcement from athletes could not have been more positive, as now they do not have to try to seek out able-bodied events that will allow them to compete.

“I’d like to see us grow as our own sport and for people to be interested in our side of things,” Great Britain’s double Paralympic gold medallist Hannah Cockroft said.

“I’d just love to see IPC Athletics to grow as our own property and to keep it that way.”

Wheelchair tennis has seen tremendous growth as well, with the number of ranked players in the world increasing from 658 to 977 in the last five years and the number of participating nations rising from 46 to 52.

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Grassroots growth

One of the keys to further enhancing the competition schedule is not actually at the elite level, but rather at the grassroots level by creating development pathways for athletes on a sport-by-sport basis.

“If I want to sell my sport and I want the athletes to be recognised as elite athletes, we need to have a clear path of competition and a clear path of development,” Mestre said.

“It’s important to bring youth into the sport. This is why I’m concentrating a lot in development. In a lot of the sports we have old people, so we need to start moving to the bottom.”

That is exactly why the IPC European Para Snow Sport Youth Circuit was launched earlier this year.

Mestre said several regions in the southern hemisphere have skiers now, but no competitions. Starting next season, she will bring IPC Alpine Skiing events to them, rather than forcing them to start at the international level.

McKeever argued the same rationale carries over to all para-sports, as he insisted the worst thing you can do is take a developing athlete to a World Cup or World Championships event.

“That’s a brutal place to take a young, developing and inexperienced skier,” McKeever said.

“You take a new skier over and they’re racing against a Paralympic champion like Irek Zaripov in their first big race, and those guys are going literally twice as fast and that leaves developing skiers scratching their heads.”

Cundy echoed McKeever’s sentiments, stressing how poor it would be for a sport not to have any sort of development pathway.

“It’d be awful for the young talent that’s coming through,” Cundy said.

“They’ve got no small events to go to and test the waters. It’s literally trying to jump into the deep end feet first.”

Once a sport has concrete and separate elite and grassroots competitions, then the levels in between will slowly fall into place, making way for national and regional championships as the sport becomes part of a national federation.

“With the vast growth in sports’ competition cycles, one rhetorical question still hangs over everyone’s heads: Is it better to conform to the able-bodied side or keep para-sport its own entity?”

“That would obviously be unreal to follow them and maybe to ski a week behind at the same venue. That would be unreal with all the infrastructure already in place. That would be the dream.”

McKeever agreed.

“It’s not so hard to follow an existing model as compared to creating your own,” McKeever said.

“People understand the able-bodied side because that’s what’s shown on TV and accessible to the general public. If the para-side mirrors that a little bit, then people will understand what to expect out of para-sport as well.”

But at the same time, most Paralympic athletes realise it’s also time for them to step outside of their able-bodied counterparts’ shadows and become household names around the world for their own achievements.

“It’s always nice that some people want us to go parallel to the Olympic Games and compete with them, but at the same time, I’m really, really proud to be a Paralympic athlete,” Cockroft said.
IPC Athletics Grand Prix

The first-ever IPC Athletics Grand Prix is now underway, following the 5th FAZZA International Athletics Competition, which took place in Dubai, UAE, from 25-27 March.

It is the first of seven Grand Prix events this season that will provide athletes with high-level international competition, and provide a framework for the sport to further develop areas such as classification, education, research and anti-doping.

"Athletes now have a clear pathway of major international and regional events between now and Rio 2016 and beyond," said IPC Athletics Sport Technical Committee Chairperson Ed Warner.

The Grand Prix is a direct legacy resulting from the London 2012 Paralympic Games and gives athletes a more regular competition schedule.

"I was really excited when I found out about it, because it means I can line up against my best competitors again."

In addition, the IPC Athletics Marathon World Cup will take place on 21 April as part of the 2013 Virgin London Marathon, and London’s Olympic Stadium will host some of the world’s top athletes for the London Anniversary Games on 28 July.

All of the events, which will centre around July’s IPC Athletics World Championships in Lyon, France, give para-athletics fans something to follow between Paralympic Games years.

"I think the thing that’s going to bring that interest in with a lot of people and media excitement about what we’re doing, but I think the rest of the world have to grow over time is getting the public interested," Cockroft cited about what we’re doing, but I think the rest of the world have to grow over time is getting the public interested," Cockroft said.

"Hopefully we’re going to have another four years to find out about them," said Great Britain’s Hannah Cockcroft, Paralympic champion in the 200m T34 class.

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Summertime of Rivalries

Rivalries among Paralympic summer team sports have grown massively over the last couple of years, and 2013 will put some of these in the spotlight.

Take a look at the top rivalries to follow during the next few months:

Wheelchair basketball: Germany-Netherlands (women)

Background: Both nations have become powerhouses in the women’s wheelchair basketball world, with Germany winning gold and the Netherlands taking bronze at the last Paralympics. In fact, all 13 editions of the IWBF European Championships on the women’s side have been won by one of these two teams, with the Germans taking every European title since 1999.

Last match: Germany defeated the Netherlands 49-46 in the semi-final round of the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Next meeting: IWBF European Championships in Frankfurt, Germany (26 June - 7 July)

Wheelchair rugby: Belgium-France

Background: After only having a wheelchair rugby team for five years, the French squad is already making headway and the rivalry with their veteran neighbour team is heating up. Both squads have the potential to push themselves toward the top of the world rankings in the lead-up to Rio 2016 and turn a lot of eyes from Australia, Canada and USA’s programmes their way.

Last match: Belgium defeated France 54-50 for seventh place at the London 2012 Games.

Next meeting: IWRF 2013 European Championships in Antwerp, Belgium (10-18 August)

Goalball: China-Japan (women)

Background: China have always been one of the world’s best teams, but Japan recently shocked the field at the last Paralympics, becoming the newly crowned champions and providing fans with thrilling games that went into sudden death. A rivalry between these two teams was definitely born in London.

Last match: Japan beat China 1-0 to win Paralympic gold in London at the Copper Box last year.

Next meeting: Malmö Lady Inter Cup 2013 in Malmö, Sweden (2-5 May)

Football 5-a-side: Argentina-Brazil

Background: Brazil remain the only team to have ever won a Paralympic gold in the sport, but Argentina have been their toughest test on the pitch without question. With one of the world’s best players in Jefinho and the Games coming to Rio in 2016, expect the best to get even better.

Last match: Brazil defeated Argentina on penalty kicks in the semi-final round of the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Next meeting: IBSA Copa America 2013 in Salta, Argentina (19-29 September)

Who will be celebrating this summer?

MORE NOTABLE RIVALRIES:

- Football 7-a-side
  - Ukraine-Russia
- Sitting volleyball
  - USA-China (women)
  - Bosnia & Herzegovina-Iran (men)
- Wheelchair basketball
  - Australia-Canada (men)
The Paralympic Games are one of the biggest sporting events in the world behind the Olympics, yet until last summer it’s fair to say the average man on the street might not have known that.

The public may also have been used to differentiating between the two by referring to the Olympic Games as the “normal” or “proper” Olympics.

Using such terms gives the impression the Paralympics are a second-rate competition; more a novelty rather than an elite sporting event.

Until last summer, I have to say that perception was probably right.

“Has Alex Brooker gone mad? Is he having a laugh or something?”

Please, don’t throw that prosthetic at this page or send your strongly worded email just yet.

I’m talking purely in terms of TV coverage, and in those terms, the Paralympics had a long way to go before they got the same treatment as the Olympic Games.

We all knew already the Games were simply incredible. An amazing sporting event unlike any other.

The problem was many other people didn’t.

Channel 4’s coverage of the 2012 Games in London changed that in Great Britain.

When Jonnie Peacock won gold in the 100m T44, there were 6.3 million people watching. In total, Channel 4’s coverage reached more than two thirds of the British population.

More people in Britain than ever before watched and enjoyed the Games. I was lucky enough to feature on The Last Leg—a show presented by some Australian bloke and another guy whose name escapes me—which celebrated the day’s highlights and spoke about disability in a way never seen before.

I’d like to think our show complemented the phenomenal feats of the athletes and helped to change perceptions of disability in the UK.

The good news is that shows no signs of stopping. Channel 4 will provide another 500 hours of coverage from the 2016 Games in Rio, and before that, 45 hours from the Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi next year.

As the athletes continue to push the limits further year on year, it is only right that the media do the same.

Now, it’s time for other broadcasters around the world to do the same.

The 2012 Games brought the Paralympic Movement to its largest audience ever, and there’s no reason to stop now.

And in some cases it must start.

In the USA, NBC showed a paltry five-and-a-half hours of retrospective coverage. If they have sense, they will have watched their output and realised the Games deserve to reach a far greater audience.

Since the first Paralympic Games in 1960 there have been super humans. In 2012, it just so happens that so many more people got to meet them.

What other broadcasters can learn from Channel 4’s success

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“To enable Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world.”