

EBU in Action - Eighth Episode: Running towards inclusion: the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games

Intro

[Music]

(Neven): Welcome to a new episode of the European Blind Union's podcast, "EBU in action". A podcast where we bring you the latest news on the lives of blind and partially sighted persons in Europe. My name is Neven Milivojevic. And here joining me, I have my co-host and colleague Paweł Masarczyk. Hello, Paweł.

(Paweł): Hello, Neven. How are you?

(Neven): Well, I'm very well, it's been a wonderful summer. What about you?

(Paweł): Same here. Hot, but productive. And I could also relax a bit, so I can't complain.

(Neven): Wow, that's great. Well, it's been hot here too, but not so productive maybe. But anyway, it's great to have you back and, of course, it's a pleasure to talk to all our listeners again or, at least, having some contact with them.

Just before starting, Paweł, I just wondered, have you brought your sports gear to host this episode?

(Paweł): Yes, I have. In fact, I have my climbing shoes. They are not very comfortable, but they shouldn't be. They should keep your feet stable on the hooks that you're climbing on the wall. So yeah, I do have that and I'm so ready to jump into our topic of today.

So much sport has been happening last summer. I mean, the Euro Championship, the Olympics and, of course, the Paralympics.

(Neven): Well, as you say, we are all dressed today for this occasion, which is that we will feature a very special episode on the 2024 Paris Paralympics, which took place very recently. And today, we will listen to the voices of some of those who participated and made this fantastic event possible.

(Paweł): From the athletes to the organizers, not forgetting, of course, the disability advocates who made this event happen. We'll hear from so many people who will prove to us how essential sport is in our lives and

what influence it has, especially, on persons with disabilities, among them also blind people.

(Neven): Yes, indeed. I'm really excited about this episode. So what do you say, Paweł? Have you already tied up your sneakers? Are you ready for us to start?

(Paweł): Yes, I am so ready to jump into this.

(Neven): OK, so three, two, one, let's go.

Focus segment: Running towards inclusion: the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games

[Music]

(Neven): as said a few moments ago, the 2024 Paris Paralympics will be the main subject of today's episode. Persons with disabilities were the main characters of this fantastic event which gathered many persons around the world. Apart from the competition, this type of events also remind us about the importance of making sporting events and physical activities more accessible for our communities.

And we would like now to welcome our friend and colleague, Nacho Lopez, who sits at the EBU office in Paris. You've been covering all these interesting aspects during these last weeks. So, hola Nacho, how are you doing?

(Nacho): Hello, Neven.

(Neven): How are you?

(Nacho): Yes, I'm quite fine. I've also enjoyed the summer as much as you have done. And I'm ready for action with this very interesting episode which will cover, of course, the 2024 Paralympic Games that took place in Paris recently.

(Neven): OK, so let's start then.

(Nacho): Yes, as said in the introduction, we got the chance to talk to many of the people that took part in the event, whether from a sporting point of view as well as through the organization of the event. Also through its coverage and just as a disability advocate attending to the event.

And quite frankly, I was very surprised and very touched by all the inspirational stories and great insights that we had the chance to listen to.

Now, just going deeper into our subject of today, I just would like to introduce the first interview of our segment. I had the chance to talk to a blind judoman coming from Italy named Dongdong Camanni. He shared his very inspiring personal story and journey to become one of the Italian representatives in the area of Paralympic Judo. And without further to add, I would just like to share with our dear listeners his story.

INTERVIEW WITH DONGDONG CAMANNI

(Nacho): Hello Dongdong Camanni, first, I would like to start with your performance at the event, could you just give us an overall analysis of it?

(Dongdong): Thank you, hello. And thank you for this invitation. Paralympic Games is a particular competition, I think. It's different from every competition I participated before. I participated to a lot of competitions, in Kazakhstan, in Cagliari, in Birmingham, but Paralympic Games are really different.

I felt different emotions. I cried, I laughed, a lot of things. I was really excited and now, also, I'm excited to speak about this. Paralympic Games gave me great emotions and are a great experience in my life. But, of course, I'm not really satisfied of my result because I got the seventh place in the competition.

But I know that I could be more, I could be better. And so, I'm not completely satisfied but I lived a really exciting experience.

(Nacho): I would like, now, to know more about your sporting background. When did your passion for the sport start? And at what time did you decide to consider it at a competitive level?

(Dongdong): Yes, thank you. First, I think it's important to explain something about me, how I discovered the sport. I was born in China, in 2003. I was abandoned at a monastery, when I was only three months. I had cancer, I was ill and my parents abandoned me.

But there was a lot of people that wanted to help me, a lot of people who wanted to give me a life. Thanks to them, I was adopted in Italy when I was one year old and I spent two years in the hospitals to defeat this cancer. But when I was three years old, I was a child full of determination, full of strength, full of emotions.

And I was really, really excited to practice sport. And I discovered the sport when I was four years old. At first, I was a swimmer for five years. And then, I discovered Judo. And Judo became my great passion, became my life and became the world where I discovered people, I discovered social relationships, I discovered a lot of things which are very good for me, and also for my life.

(Nacho): a very inspiring story indeed. If you had to compile your career highlights, what moments would define your career as a blind sportsperson?

(Dongdong): Of course, I have five moments in my life that I would like to underline. At first, a competitive training in which I discovered what it means to train as a competitive athlete.

I remember this training because I was young, I was a child and I remember that, on that day, I was really tired after the training. In this training I understood what it means to train for a dream, to train for a competition, to train to do something in the sport.

Another important moment in my career as a blind Paralympic athlete is the European Para Youth Games in 2019, a competition where I got the second place, the silver medal in G1 66 kilos, when I was young, I was only 15 years old. This was a great confirmation for me, for my coach, for my friends and for everybody that believed in me.

Another important event in my career is dated in 2021 when I won an Italian championship with persons without a disability. And for me this is the event that creates everything because the Italian Paralympic team saw me and decided to call me for the international competition.

The fourth one is the bronze medal that I got for the World Championship in Baku, Azerbaijan, where I felt great emotions because it was the first competition of this level in which I participated and I was really excited. And I can say it is difficult to stay with emotions during a competition. And I remember it very well because I cried a lot because I was young in the International Paralympic competitions.

And the last one is the Paralympic Games. I was really excited to enter in the arena, it was really beautiful.

(Nacho): In a more general way, what value does sport have in itself as a means to foster inclusion of blind and partially sighted persons in society?

(Dongdong): I think sports it's one of the best means for inclusion of blind and partially sighted people. I know really well the world of Judo. In Judo, we have to improve and develop our skills in the perception of the world, in the perception of the space, in the perception of the body in the space.

And this is great for blind and partially sighted people because we have to pay attention to every movement, to everything. And also, we have to learn to do different movements that we don't do every day, for example, rotations or particular techniques.

Of course, this movement can give us and can develop in us a lot of perception that we can use, for example, when we are walking on a road, of course, and we have to improve these skills. Judo can give you this ability.

(Nacho): finally Dongdong, one final question: what are your goals as a sportsman? Is there any message that you would like to share with the community of persons with disabilities?

(Dongdong): Yes, of course. My goal, at first, is the participation to the next Paralympic Games because I would like to live more other moments like Paris 2024.

I would like to cry another time. I would like to be excited like these days, and I would like to get a medal. And so, I would like to go and to qualify for Los Angeles 2028. I would like to give a message to everybody who is listening to this interview.

Because like me, I would like everyone to follow their dreams because I think it's really important. But following dreams is not simple. Of course, we have to do sacrifices. We have to develop determinations. We have to really believe in what we have, what we would like to get.

And like me, I started as a young boy, a young judoka and with a lot of training all the days, in the morning and in the afternoon. And always, I get these results. So for everything in life, I think with determination, we can get our dreams.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Dongdong, for your time. It was a pleasure to listen to you here at "EBU in action".

END OF DONGDONG CAMANNI INTERVIEW

(Neven): Oh, what an impressive story and very wise words we hear from Dongdong. So, Paweł, do you think we will see him getting a medal in Los Angeles 2028?

(Paweł): I very much hope so, because you can tell from this interview how much determination is there and how much work Dongdong has put into everything he's achieved so far. I think he's got a great chance of scoring one.

(Neven): yes, and it's a difficult sport. I think it's really amazing. We have here from Sweden, actually, a girl who is called Nicolina. She got the bronze medal in Judo now in the Paralympics and she got a child just eight months before she went there to Paris, so it's kind of amazing. I think the sport is quite amazing.

(Paweł): Yes. And I was not very surprised, but optimistically shocked to hear that Judo - I mean, it's logical when you think about it, but it was nicely phrased- improves your spatial awareness because what we usually associate with sport is that you do it to improve your health, of course.

And some people who are more competitive are doing it to compete, to prove themselves against other very dedicated and very engaged sports people. But it actually provides you with skills that you can use somewhere else, like mobility and orientation. I didn't completely expect that, and I think it's a great thing to take away from what Dongdong has said.

(Neven): Indeed. It empowers people, sports. So, Nacho, you are still with us. Do you have any reflection after listening to the interview you made?

(Nacho): yes, if I may jump in and just to play a metaphor in here. I was very impressed and emotionally touched by the determination, as Paweł said, that Dongdong showed throughout his career and, also, his life.

Because as we listened to his testimonial, he had a lot of problems during his childhood and he had to go through a lot of things. But the element that moved me the most was his determination to bring down barriers and even achieve greater heights in the future.

You know, all the experiences he's gone through, that gives him the energy to go on and establish new objectives and set new goals in order to improve himself as a sportsman and also to try to improve his results

as a Paralympic. It was a very, very touching testimonial, I have to say, and it was really a pleasure to learn more about his experience.

[Music]

(Nacho): now changing subjects, Neven, before introducing our next guest, I would just like to let you know that we had the chance to visit the headquarters of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. I have to say that I was very impressed by the facility.

It was very good, very new. And well I can say that I was left speechless once I entered the building. There we had the chance to interview one of the people who was involved in the organization of the event. We're talking about Ludivine Munos, who was the Head of Paralympic Games Integration and also a three-time para swimming gold medalist.

She won the gold medal in 1996 in Atlanta, in the year 2000 in Sydney, and in 2004 in Athens. It's an impressive sporting curriculum, isn't it, Neven?

(Neven): Indeed. It will be very interesting to hear her reflections on this.

(Nacho): Yes. And again, I can tell you it was a very insightful interview. I would like to share with our dear listeners the insights of Ludivine Munos, the Head of the Paralympic Games Integration for the 2024 Paralympic Games.

INTERVIEW WITH LUDIVINE MUNOS

(Nacho): What's your exact role within the committee? What tasks are you in charge for?

(Ludivine): Hello, my name is Ludivine Munos and my specific role is Head of Paralympic Games Integration. That is, I have to promote, to push all the specific contents from the Paralympic Games. And for example, I am the Head of Accessibility Content from each Olympic and Paralympic Games during four years.

(Nacho): in terms of accessibility and inclusion, what lessons did the Paralympics Committee learn from last editions? What good practices would you underline from past occasions? And how did you transform this into the Paris 2024 edition?

(Ludivine): in first, when we started with the project of Paris 2024, my previous director had to put all the content of accessibility directly on the strategy. And when they hired me and my manager for accessibility, we

decided to have a specific accessibility strategy voted in the Administration Council. Moreover, we read all the content from the IPC Guide, which provides details of what is accessible for athletes.

We had the chance to look at everything from Tokyo. And for example, in Tokyo, we had the challenge to be sure that we had no changing during the Olympic and Paralympic Games because they decided in Tokyo to change many things.

It was very hard for the PGI and accessibility team and we learned something on that. But we learned specific contents that Tokyo provided a very good level of accessibility. We had the chance to show and to see everything what it was accessible in the city, in the different venues. And every athlete can be everywhere in Tokyo.

(Nacho): Regarding its coverage, do you think that spectators with disabilities were able to follow up the event in an accessible way through AD, audio subtitling, etc?

(Ludivine): Because we decided to push all the content from accessibility before the start of the Olympics, it was easier for spectators to go everywhere on the venue, even in Olympic and Paralympic Games. That's why it's very easy to go everywhere with the Olympic Games. And we provided four different solutions to help the spectator to have a good experience.

This innovation took place in France and Europe and we had audio description for six sports during the Olympic Games and nine sports during the Paralympic Games. And the specificity was to have directly the description in the game's time web app.

We had another innovation, which is a tablet, a vision tablet. We can have the movement of the ball at every moment in the tablet. And we had another innovation during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which is a helmet.

You can zoom directly to the athlete, to the feet of play to be sure that you can see everything. And the last one, it was to have a robot for the different children who can't go directly to the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

They can have an experience in the hospital and see everything in the background of the feet of play, like warm-up or everything. So, it was very new to help spectators to have a good experience.

(Nacho): last question: recently, several French NGOs underlined the French government's failure to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, something that was flagged by the Council of Europe last year.

What was your experience with the various authorities in that regard when organizing the event?

(Ludivine): When we prepared the Olympic and Paralympic Games, we have very two big chances. The first one was the possibility to work together with the city of Paris, with statesmen like the Ministry of Sport, with the region, with different partners like airport or train companies, to choose to push some different new levels for accessibility.

Another example, we had 1,000 taxis in Paris, which were totally accessible, before we had just 200. In more than the group that we can provide during four years, we had the chance to have a very accessible village for athletes: 2,800 apartments will take place in legacy, totally accessible for persons with disability or for old people. That's a very important legacy.

Now you have a very big quarter, which is very and totally accessible. It could be a very good carrying for the French to be sure that if you build this strategy before, everything can be accessible with less money that you can imagine.

(Nacho): Thank you very much for this very interesting interview and thank you very much for your contribution, very insightful contribution, to "EBU in action".

(Ludivine): Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH LUDIVINE MUNOS

(Paweł): Yes, thank you Ludivine. This was very interesting, especially in regards to all the innovative features that were employed at this year's Paralympic Games. Audio description: we knew that one already, but it's good to see that it's ever present at every event, especially an event that encompasses the determination and sportsmanship of persons with disabilities. So, great that it's there.

But what really drew my attention is the haptic tablet that was used to present some of the ball sports to persons who are totally blind. I don't know, Nacho, have you had a chance to test it in real action, or was it not possible, really?

(Nacho): no, Paweł, I didn't have the chance to try this, but it's surely a very great invention and a great chance for blind and partial sighted people to be able to follow up the action in real life.

By the way, just to let you know, our Executive Director, Lars Bosselmann, wrote an article about the importance of people with disabilities and in our case, as EBU, people with visual impairment, about their right to follow up sports events live and in an Op-Ed piece in the magazine Social Europe.

He reflected on that, on some of the many things that were introduced during the Paralympic Games. And actually the tactile tablet that you mentioned, Paweł was one of the items that caught my attention the most. It was most definitely a very good solution and I think it's very practical.

(Paweł): yes, that's great to hear. Hopefully we will hear about it more and possibly test it in action at some other events, maybe in France, maybe somewhere else. Hopefully it spreads. Neven, how do you find the solutions employed at this year's Paralympic Games? Did you ever participate in like a sports events as a person who watched it and experienced a similar level of dedication?

(Neven): Well, I do have to commit that I didn't really follow the Paralympics so much, but what inspired me is that how excellent it is to learn from each other. I mean, she was talking about what lessons they could draw from the Tokyo Paralympics, for instance and then kind of develop this further in France.

And hopefully, the next Paralympics in 2028 in Los Angeles could work; I mean, in four years, a lot of technical development will happen and hopefully it will be even more accessible the next time for more people.

[Music]

(Nacho): Now, I would just like to jump to our next interview because during the period of the 2024 Paralympics in Paris, I met Laetitia Bernard a blind journalist who works for Radio France and who actually covered the 2024 Paralympics.

A very good testimonial actually of the event. Also for your information, Laetitia is a six time para equestrian champion in France and also a member of the triathlon club "Expatriés" in Paris. Also, quite a sportive person, just as we are, eh guys?

(Neven): Well, maybe you, I'm not so sportive, but I think it's great with commitment and sports.

(Nacho): Indeed, yes. In her testimonial, you will find a lot of very insightful experiences and I can tell you: Laetitia is a very experienced not only athlete, but also experienced journalist. I would like to share with both you, Neven and Paweł, and also with our dear listeners, the very interesting testimonial of Laetitia Bernard, a blind journalist from Radio France.

INTERVIEW WITH LAETITIA BERNARD

(Nacho): As a journalist, I would like to know more about your personal perspective in covering the 2024 Paralympics. Is it your first event of that magnitude? How was it like?

(Laetitia): No, it was not the first time for me for the Paralympic Games. I covered for the French Radio four Paralympic Games before. The first time was in London, in 2012, and also Río as summer games. And I also covered two winter games: Sochi, in Russia, and Korea, in 2018. And I was not in Tokyo because of COVID.

(Nacho): This kind of events help us to raise awareness of the importance of giving visibility to the blindness and partial sight community at large. Does it also have a positive impact in bringing down barriers and challenging stereotypes?

(Laetitia): Yes, they have a positive impact. That's unbelievable. I couldn't imagine that impact before the Paralympic Games in Paris. I wouldn't have guessed it would be so amazing because, for instance, when I took a bus today, I have four or five people who proposed me to have a seat, or who proposed to help, etcetera.

And that was not so massive before and there was not so easy to do that. They were more afraid, more shy and today, I think yes, with the mediatization, it's really easier.

(Nacho): In line with the previous question, and since you're a blind journalist, do we also need more people with disabilities in media (newspapers, radio stations, TV broadcasters, podcasts, YouTube channels) to raise awareness of the importance of sports in our communities?

(Laetitia): Yes, we need, we are not enough. And the more you have people with disabilities visible, the easier it will be for everybody after.

Yes, we need to have, it would be great that all the people with disability, blind or wheelchair, for instance; it would be good that we can see people in wheelchair, journalists with a wheelchair on the TV, it's important.

And also, of course, from even newspapers, even if you cannot see the journalist, if the journalist has a disability, he can, I don't know, but he can have his proper feeling and describe maybe a little bit differently. And that's important for the diversity.

(Nacho): Over the years, we have seen an increase in the coverage of Paralympics. This year's edition, a record of more than 225 media rights holders, broadcasters, web streamers, digital, social and audio platforms covered the event. Could you please give us a reflection on that? Is there any area in which you feel this coverage of Paralympic Games could be improved in the near future?

(Laetitia): It could be improved, but it's amazing if you are comparing with 10 years ago. Before London, there were no media, and in Paris, that was really great. But for instance, I just have had a conversation with other journalists from the south of France and they say they had a reporter from their magazine for the Olympic Games.

But not for the Paralympic Games because they didn't want to go in Paris and they said that their readers are not interested in the Paralympic Games. So it's that, it's not finished. We are on the good way, but we have to convince again and again, so it's possible to be better.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Laetitia, for your contribution to EBU in action.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH LAETITIA BERNARD

(Neven): Great, thank you very much, Nacho. I think it was a very interesting perspective to cover. And I mean, of course, visibility is really, really important. But also, this other part, which is more about representation in the terms of the views, thoughts and knowledge.

Persons with disabilities must be more represented in the world of media. And I find it very interesting to see how this develops further. I don't know, Paweł, do you see any development in terms of that we have more possibilities, now with artificial intelligence, with more web-based channels and social media?

Do you see these possibilities for a more increased number of journalists with visual impairment?

(Paweł): I would hope so because social media give you the possibility to be the journalist yourself to some extent, less or more professionally. I would also put a lot of faith in community radio stations, in the smaller ones, which nevertheless have a lot of carrying force in the local communities to cheer for their local Paralympic athletes.

And let's hope that this number increases because this is nothing new to hear, that the media outlets say that Paralympics are not worth showing or not generating enough income or enough interest. But it's even more shocking to hear from regular people, like everyday people you meet, that Paralympic sports are not real sports.

And it's shocking to me every time I hear it, and unfortunately it still happens that you even hear it from persons with disabilities themselves. That because it doesn't look visually the same as the regular sports, as the mainstream sports, it is not actual sports. And if you hear the story of Dingdongs, you can tell they couldn't be more wrong because Paralympians put a lot of effort as well.

They train as DongDong said for their dream. They are trained for something. They have a goal. And I believe that in itself is worth exposing to a wider public.

(Nacho): if I may jump in, Paweł and Neven, I also think that people with disabilities are very important in the media landscape. I'll tell you why, and also as a person who's worked in media outlets in the past.

I think that since media change constantly, because as of today, we're not only speaking about newspapers, radios and TV like we did in the past, especially in an era with constant technological changes and where digital media outlets and new formats of contents appear, it's also very important to allow persons with disabilities to be on board, also to pinpoint the best ways in which these new forms of content could be accessible.

[Music]

(Neven): so, Nacho, going further towards the involvement of a community and so, you actually made one more interview, didn't you?

(Nacho): yes, actually, and you know why? I'm pretty sure that for this episode you, Neven and Paweł were missing the correspondent' section

that we usually do. But today for this episode, we had the chance, the very good opportunity to meet Pádraig Healy, from Vision Sports Ireland, who is an organisation who is under the umbrella of our Irish National Member, Vision Ireland.

We had a very good chat with Pádraig Healy, he is a very insightful man, with a lot of knowledge in the area of promotion of sports among the visually impaired community. And now I would like to share his testimonial and also allow our dear listeners to learn more about Pádraig Healy role at Vision Sports Ireland.

INTERVIEW WITH PÁDRAIG HEALY

(Nacho): so here we are with Pádraig Healy, the National Sports Development Manager for Vision Sports Ireland. Pádraig, could you tell us what's the mission of Vision Sports Ireland? And also, could you tell us a little bit about your role in the organization?

(Pádraig): Sure, no problem. So I guess, to begin with, the mission of Vision Sports Ireland is to promote sport and physical activity for people who are blind or vision impaired across Ireland, of which there are just under 300,000 people, according to the latest census, who are blind or visually impaired across the country.

And my role within Vision Sports Ireland is to lead a small team, five staff, and collectively we run programs, events, training and education and increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity and sport for people with a vision impairment. So I guess that's a really short summary of the role of the organization, our mission and my role within the team.

(Nacho): What are the main barriers that blind and partially sighted people encounter in their access to sporting activities? What initiatives has Vision Sports Ireland carried out to help them remove these?

(Pádraig): Yes, that's a really good question. So in recent years, we've worked with the Dublin City University for Ireland's first PhD research study on the physical activity levels of adults and children who are blind or visually impaired in Ireland.

And some of the findings are stark, to be honest, in that. 79% of adults with a vision impairment are not meeting the physical activity guidelines. And 91% of children are not meeting the physical activity guidelines, which for children, it's 60 minutes of moderate physical activities every day.

So I guess what that data is indicating to us is that more needs to be done to create opportunities in the community. But to answer your question around what initiatives are we rolling out as an organization, we're putting a huge emphasis on the training and education pillar of our strategy.

We have a Training Education Officer and we developed a vision sports awareness training, which is a one and a half hour online training course, which is targeted at coaches, teachers, volunteers, all with the aim of increasing capacity in the community and increasing awareness of vision impairment and ensuring our members have a more positive experience when attending mainstream activities.

But also, we work closely with over 17 national governing bodies for sport. And we work with them to make their sports accessible. We develop programmes; we have three visually impaired swimming hubs. We have twelve visually impaired tennis hubs with Tennis Ireland. We have football hubs with the FAI, the Football Association of Ireland. So on and so forth.

So I guess, working with our key stakeholders to make their sports accessible, but also, we're focusing on health promotion and physical activity.

And in that regard, during COVID-19, we introduced online exercise series. We have yoga, Pilates, movement, balance, stretch, and nature connections. And we have almost 50 Vision Sports Ireland members participating in that series each week.

So, we see technology as a huge opportunity for us to reach our members in their home and removing the barriers of transport, which from our research, over 55% of people indicated that transport was the biggest barrier for them participating in physical activities.

We need to use technology and allow us to reach more people in more areas, to move more often.

(Nacho): your organization has helped many visually impaired sportspeople in your country by engaging with your activities. Has anybody reached the competitive level or has been called for big events such as the Paralympics?

(Pádraig): I guess as an organization, our priority is physical activity, which I've mentioned, but we strongly encourage the pathway. And it's

always wonderful when we identify a member who's willing to put in the commitment, the dedication and make the sacrifices that it takes to become an elite para athlete.

We're delighted that Jason Smith is, it would be our most well-known member who attended a MayFest event back in 2005 and subsequently went on and became a six-time Paralympic gold medalist and world record holder.

As recent as two years ago, we had another member, um, Josephine Healion, who attended a Vision Sports Ireland event. She's with Tullamore Cycling Club and I'm delighted to say that she participated in her first ever Paralympic Games this week here in Paris.

So I guess those athletes are huge ambassadors for Vision Sports Ireland members and they highlight what can be achieved with hard work and commitment.

So, we've had Róisín Ní Ríain pick up the silver medal, her first ever Paralympic medal this week. And we've had Katie-George Dunlevy win silver again, so we were very lucky. At the moment, we have some world class high-performing athletes within the Paralympics Ireland team who are visually impaired and who are all members of Vision Sports Ireland, which we're really pleased with.

(Nacho): as a representative of Vision Sports Ireland, what are the challenges and opportunities that you foresee for your organization in the future?

(Pádraig): I guess, to begin with the challenges, funding is often, I guess, a real factor that the organization has to manage in that we're funded from Sport Ireland and that we're receiving annual funding.

So, it can be quite difficult to plan in the long term, so I guess that's a real challenge for us in accessing funding in order to be able to grow and reach more people. Opportunities? I think there's opportunities for nations across Europe to collaborate more, to learn from each other.

There's some work being done, some research at the minute, just to ascertain what activities are happening in European countries. So I think there's a huge opportunity there across the Union for us to work more closely together and potentially advocate for greater funding towards physical activity for those citizens, European citizens who have sight loss or who are blind.

Also, I see technology being a huge opportunity as well over the next decade. And I think again, that's something, information and learnings, that we can share across the sector and across the Union, it would be very much welcomed from Vision Sports Ireland.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Pádraig, for this very insightful interview. And we wish you from the whole EBU community, the best of luck for your future efforts in Vision Sports Ireland.

(Pádraig): Thank you very much for having me on your show.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH PÁDRAIG HEALY

(Paweł): thank you, Pádraig, for your input. I think also Vision Sports Ireland recently released a book, right? The publication where they portray the persons who made a significant contribution to sports in Ireland, when it comes to blind and partially sighted people, so successful sports people of the country.

You can, of course, read it, feel free to take a look at it. But I think this dedication shows that it's worth it investing in this kind of sports and promoting the people who will also represent your country at some point.

Neven, what do you think? How is it comparably like in Sweden? Is also that level of promotion put into Paralympic Sports?

(Neven): I think the main challenge in Sweden is that if I, at least, look at the community of visually impaired persons who do sports, and especially if I want to do competitive sports, the main challenge is to actually get the everyday support we need to be able to train, to be able to organise life in such a way so they actually can reach the level to become competitive and to participate in Paralympics or other international arrangements.

But, of course, we do have a Paralympic Sweden. And we, I mean, there is some promotion, but I believe that that there should be a stronger commitment from the society. And I believe this is very important, that I'm sure not only Sweden, in many countries, that when we do advocacy about the rights of persons with disabilities and we talk about everyday needs we also need to include the perspectives of the importance of doing sports and also that some people actually are able to do it on a higher level.

I don't know, Nacho, do you have any reflection after listening to your interview?

(Nacho): I think that it was very impressive to listen to the commitment of Vision Sports Ireland in promoting inclusion among blind and partial sighted people in the area sports.

Also, the importance of ensuring that physical activity is accessible for everybody. I was also glad, very glad to listen from Pádraig the testimonials of people who have made a very good progress in sports at a competitive level.

It's also very, you know, satisfying to know that, as we listened earlier on while listening to the testimonial of DongDong, to listen how people, through effort and hard work, they end up being able to compete at the higher level.

But of course, as you, as you spotted on Neven, it's also very important, for institutions and stakeholders working in the sports field to make sure that these activities are accessible for our communities because, after all, it's not only about being able to compete at the competitive level. It's also about the whole health benefits that come right away with it, isn't it?

(Neven): absolutely. And I think that in many cases, persons with visual impairment, blindness, I mean, they can't even get to the activity itself. I mean, so, we have some very basic things to work on.

Well, I think we had a lot of sports today, Paweł. Do you feel inspired of doing some sports now, after all this inspiration?

(Paweł): Definitely. Actually, thanks for reminding me because I was supposed to send that email to sign up for the para climbing course. So I hope I'll do that over the weekend.

(Neven): Wonderful. And you Nacho, any new sports coming up for you?

(Nacho): Well, I'll do my swimming and I'll consider climbing as well.

(Neven): Fantastic.

(Nacho): Indoor climbing (laughs).

(Neven): (laughs too) OK. Well, first of all, Nacho, thank you so much to you for the great interviews and for making this episode so exciting today. Thank you very much. Our regards to all our colleagues in the EBU office.

(Nacho): thank you very much, Neven. And also, let me congratulate both you, Paweł and Neven for your hosting, also Emiel at the sound. I

think that you all deserve a gold medal for making this great episode together.

(Neven): Thank you. Thank you also Paweł for great co-hosting today. And I wish you a very nice start of the autumn then.

(Paweł): thank you. Same to you and to our listeners. And, of course, to you, Nacho, a gold medal to you also for the excellent interviews.

(Nacho): Thank you very much.

[Music]

(Neven): And as mentioned, but worth mentioning it again, a great thank you to our sound master, Emile Cornelisse, in the Netherlands, who do this great technical things around our podcast and the audio.

And, of course, a great thanks to all of you who are listening to us. And, of course, if you would like to subscribe to the “EBU in action” podcast, you can do so by contacting. Or you can also do it in your podcast reader which you usually use.

Would you like to know more about the work of European Blind Union? You can visit our webpage or contact us. And all that information, which is useful, you can find like contact information in the show notes. And by that, I say thank you for this episode. Bye bye.

(Paweł): Bye bye.

(Voiceover): “EBU in Action” is co-funded by the European Union.

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