



11.16 seconds to run the 100 metres at the Beijing Olympics isn't bad, especially considering the world record time established in 2009 is 9s59. The only difference between the two runners, Oscar Pistorius and Usain Bolt, respectively, is that the former is a double below-knee amputee who runs with the aid of carbon fibre artificial limbs. Oscar's incredible run took place at the Beijing Paralympics in 2008; ever heard of them? You certainly have, but are you actually planning on following them in London on 29 August?

The name comes from the Greek preposition "παρά; para", meaning "alongside", "in parallel with". The Paralympics are held "alongside" the Olympic Games, as has been the case since the Seoul summer Olympics in 1988.

What message do the Paralympics carry to the world? "Acceptance and appreciation for people with a disability. The Paralympic Movement builds a bridge which links sport with social awareness thus contributing to the development of a more equitable society with respect and equal opportunities for all individuals"¹.

The United Nations adopted a convention which states that "the energy and talent of the Paralympic athletes demonstrate that the human spirit knows no boundaries ("Spirit in Motion" has been used as the official motto of the Paralympics since 2004). The United Nations continues to strive for the realization of universal human rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities empowers those who are ready to break-through any boundaries in our society"².

Behind each Paralympic story is a hero; the story of a woman or a man who has overcome many personal obstacles in order to achieve the pinnacle of their career, and who has the right to be considered in equal value to anyone else in the world.

This summer, instead of turning on your TV to watch a movie or a show, why not switch over to the Paralympics for real stories of individuals who have defied the odds.

Sources:

¹ The IPC: <http://www.paralympic.org/TheIPC/HWA/AboutUs>

² The United Nations: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp/www.disstudies.org/images/default.asp?id=1418>

Additional links:

- <http://www.london2012.com/paralympics/sports/>
- <http://www.paralympic.org/Events/London2012>