

What are some
important
factors in
assessing
competitive
sport for
children with a
disability? ►



At every level, real competition means players compete against others of the same ability.

There are many sports and many levels of competition for people with a disability. The Paralympic Games represent the peak of disabled sports and are held shortly after the Olympic Games. Athletes who are Deaf have their own World Games. The Special Olympics are for individuals who are mentally challenged.

On a recreational level, activities can be adapted to allow a child to play sports with friends in the neighborhood. Sometimes it's a simple matter of tailoring an activity to meet the needs of a child with a disability. Sometimes, adapting is just not possible.

To choose an appropriate activity for a mentally-challenged child, parents must take into account the child's size, degree of coordination, health and fitness level, maturity, and motivation.

They need to ask: What are the child's cognitive abilities? What are the child's social skills? Will the child have trouble keeping up? Is there any risk in participating? Parents have to decide how active and competitive they want the activity to be. Because a child needs positive experiences, parents should have realistic expectations. A 12-year-old with the mental capacity of a four-year-old will not be able to concentrate at a two-hour practice.

Competitive sport for children with a disability must have enough competition to keep them interested, but not so much that they go away in tears. Parents and coaches should encourage children so that they want to come back. The rules of the game should be modified to suit the developmental level of the player.

*“Athletes have to know you care,
before they care what you know.”*

Jack Donohue

Former national men's basketball coach

Reference Notes

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- 3 Ibid., pp. 136.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 142.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 137-138.
- 6 Scanlan, T. (1986) Competitive stress in children. *Sport for Children and Youths*. Champaign: Human Kinetics. pp. 113

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