

## **An Official's View**

**By Dr. Azmy**

### ***Paralympics: Humanity at its finest***

The following story came to me before I left for Australia to participate in the Sydney 2000 Paralympic games.

A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said: "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What matters in this life is helping others to win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course.

Yes, while the Olympics is a triumph of the highest qualities of sports, the Paralympics represent the work of humanity at its finest. The theme was reach for the fire; the fire in your heart, the fire in your mind, and the fire in your spirit.

Thousands of athletes, officials and volunteers gave their hearts, energy, effort and dedication to the Paralympics. It was a rewarding human sight to see athletes literally carrying each other to the bathroom in the airplane. The stewardesses, stewards and passengers all helped to make every athlete proud of him/herself.

Yes, the fire in the mind, where body and matter cannot limit the energy and power of achievements.

The fire in their spirits transcends beyond all the barriers among those athletes. It conquers not only their physical limitations, but also it generates the feeling of oneness. Human oneness where the differences of race, ethnicity, class, religion, culture background, and gender all melt into an ocean of respect, help, cooperation, and togetherness.

It is an experience which all people should see and share, Unfortunately our media is not that concerned. Very little, if any, coverage is taking place. World media in general give an inadequate attention to the Paralympics. Table Tennis was highlighted all the time. During the parade of athletes, at the opening ceremony, it was the German athletes who started throwing table tennis balls to the crowd. The U.S. contingency was led by a Table Tennis player carrying the American flag on his wheelchair. It was none other than Mike Dempsey, a table tennis champion all his life.

The Table Tennis competition itself was among 239 players, with 40 separate events. It was well organized and well run. Three venues were used, the main one with 12 tables. The other two were for practice. The Australian volunteers added an extra sparkle all over the place. You can hardly open your mouth or stand wondering where you are, and several of them will cater to your needs. They will leave their desks and literally walk with you the extra mile to find your way or fulfill your request. Forty International officials did their best to run a smooth tournament. Many of the umpires were actually International Referees. It was a great opportunity for them to practice their umpiring rather than just preach it. We all learned how to run the electronic scoreboard.

I hope my words can convey a small part of the feelings I have toward that emotional experience.

***Other News***

The following racket coverings were no longer valid starting October 1, 2000:

Double Happiness PF4-652

Meteor (no other mark)

Sunflex Spikes

TSP Spinpips

I received a letter asking about a situation when a player would be allowed to deviate from using a correct serve. The rule states that an umpire can allow some deviation in service where a player has a physical impairment which may hinder his ability to play a correct serve. The player has to show to the umpire the medical report or reason for the disability. If the player did not prove his condition to the umpire in advance, all points taken from him stand, even if he then proves his condition. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the player to inform the umpire in advance of the match.