

Sport

Rugby World Cup: Thank You Japan

By Derek Wyatt

Huge congratulations to South Africa for winning their third World Cup. They seem to do



Rugby World Cup will not be remembered for much. The Japanese were wonderful hosts and their team was the team of the tournament. Shame on the same founding fathers which clubbed together to stop Japan hosting the tournament in 2011. Let us hope that America, Canada and Argentina combine to present themselves as the candidates for hosting in 2027. Last year, I made a approach to both the North American RFUs but my emails must have been lost in the ether.

Of the games, none were more

Photograph © Getty Images

Paralympians on the path to success

By Anandi Shah

Tokyo 2020 is almost upon us and once again, the world has the chance to see history being made both in the Olympics and of course the Paralympic Games.

The first Olympic Games took place on 28th July 1948, as did, the Stoke Mandeville Games for the Paralympians. Since then, The Paralympics has grown from 400 disabled athletes in 1960 to 4,328 para-athletes in the 2016 Games.

Sadly, Paralympians are significantly underfunded compared to their Olympic counterparts; it is still essential for disabled and female athletes to secure their own funding required to train and compete on the world stage.

Path to Success is an organisation that helps disabled female athletes, achieve the funding they require to train and compete. The founder, Anita Choudhrie, hosted a glamorous *Path to Tokyo* Gala on 3rd October to raise money for competing in the next Games. Choudhrie deems that the lack of funding stems from insufficient knowledge about these games. Whilst sporting events such as the *Invictus*

Games champion disabled athletes, "a lot of money generally goes to the Olympians and not so much the Paralympians."

She stresses the need for more governmental intervention to ensure adequate funding: "Paralympians are not into politics or administrative issues. We must have representatives who would ensure the rest of the world is aware of what's happening."

The Gala raised a grand total of £59,000.

Two Paralympians, who attended the event, are successful in their own fields:

Mary Wilson, a former army nurse, who survived a Taliban attack, was diagnosed with MS in 2004. Ten years later, on 11th September 2014, she became the first female captain at the *Invictus Games*, with medals in Swimming and Discus and met the Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry. She is fighting to become the first Scottish woman to compete in Badminton, which will also make its debut in the upcoming *Paralympics* in Tokyo 2020.

Louise Sugden is a powerlifter and former international wheelchair basketball player. She has competed in 6 European championships, winning bronze in five of them. She brought home a gold from the 2011 *Paralympic World Cup* and competed in the 2008 Beijing and 2012 *London Paralympic Games*. She retired from wheelchair basketball in 2016 and a year later, took up Para-powerlifting. She won a silver

medal at the 2018 *Commonwealth Games* just 9 months later.

Both these women have competed on an international level and yet they have disparate training regimes, unique to their personal capabilities and health.

A key component of training is to remain motivated to maintain strength, or so they say. "I think it's a myth that you can be motivated all of the time. But actually, it's when you're not motivated and you still train that it really counts."— Louise Sugden

"There are negatives as well, when you feel so unmotivated that you have to drag yourself out of bed, but then once you've done it, all the endorphins are going and you feel much better."

Both athletes, have faced constant underfunding, and are supported by *Path to Success*.

Mary surmised why there is such a lack of funding for female Paralympians, criticising the government and other sporting bodies for not "sharing money fairly. Sports are meant to be inclusive for anybody and it certainly isn't."

Whereas Louise receives funding for every weight-lifting target she meets, she comments: "Other sports are very underfunded and driven by results."

A persistent issue is the perception of Paralympians. Mary feels that more integrated games should be put into place: "I'm sure some of the Paralympic athletes could beat some of the Olympians!"

London 2012 was a game-changer

that started to alter this, which Louise lauds. She praised the *Commonwealth Games* last year, which showcased integrated events. However, she still feels that there's "more room for improvement", remarking the outrage over empty stadiums in the Doha Stadium of the 2019 *World Athletics*, a regular occurrence in *Paralympic* sporting events.

When it comes to inspiring the next generation, both athletes provide pearls of wisdom.

"Don't pay attention to what everyone else thinks or focus on your appearance, just do what your heart says and give it your best shot. The world is your oyster. I'm 55 and who would have thought I'd be number 6 in the world!"— Mary Wilson

Louise provides a pragmatic approach: "Work hard, because you don't get anything for free...Enjoy it as well. If you don't, you'll never give as much as if you do."

It is perhaps unfortunate that in this day and age, where we believe that everyone is on a level playing 'field', disabled athletes are still not receiving the crucial funding required to compete. Paralympians have been hailed as 'super-humans' and judging by Mary Wilson and Louise Sugden, one can see why. There are many disabled female athletes in similar situations and we can only hope the world wakes up and the right people help to secure funding, ensuring they are all on the path to success.