

Assistance and Support Systems for French Deaf Athletes: Historical and Contemporary Elements

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The ambition of this contribution is to study and demonstrate the various workings of the current system of accompaniment, support and management of sport by deaf or hearing-impaired people in France. But, as many people are undoubtedly aware of, deaf sport has a particular historical dimension, especially in France in the paradigm of deaflympism and this aspect is envied and must be mentioned in this article to better contextualize our purpose. This dimension will enable us to better identify our analysis in this period of commemoration of the Centenary of the first International Games in Paris in 1924 and of a new transformation of the system of support and care for deaf sportspeople in France since January 2024 (Séguillon, 2024b). Historically, the sport movement for silent people, in other words deaf people, was born in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, almost everywhere in the world, especially in the United States of America and above all in Northern, Eastern and Western Europe. Japan was a little behind when silent sport movement was created in the first half of the 20th century, and only joined the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) in 1935, at the London Games (Gannon, 1981; Stewart, 1991; Séguillon, 2024b).

In this historical context, of the construction of the deaf sport movement, a movement designed by the deaf, for the deaf. France movement for the deaf-mute has a privileged place, being at the origin, with French-speaking Belgium at its borders, a few days after the closing of the VIII Olympic Games in Paris, of the organization of the first International Silent Games, true Olympic Games for the deaf in 1924 and the creation of the ICSD in Paris on August 16 with the Frenchman, Rubens Alcais, at its head (Séguillon, 2002, 2023).

We can then identify support of all kinds and nature, starting with that of the deaf community itself, a community constituted more than two centuries ago and which, on the whole, was the first supporter of the introduction and development of silent sport within the international deaf community (Mesch & Mesch, 2018; Meziani & Séguillon, 2020). In France, support also came from the hearing sport community and in particular from the National Sports Committee unlike the French Olympic movement. Indeed, as we shall see, such support was lacking from the hostile French Olympic Committee, at least in part, to the international development of deaf sport through Olympism at its birth (Séguillon, 2024b). Support also came from French hearing sport newspapers, such as the now-defunct *Miroir des sports* and the daily sport newspaper *L'Auto*, which is still published as *L'Équipe*. Support was also political, especially from those in charge of sport in France at the time, and from MP Henry Paté, who was High Commissioner for Sports and Physical Education at the end of the First World War. From 1920 onwards, the French State and its Ministry of Sports or its equivalent awarded operating subsidies, as well as subsidies for special events such as the 1924 International Silent Games in Paris, an event also partly subsidized by local authorities, in particular the city of Paris, which for many years was a regular and privileged partner of France's deaf-mute sports association. Last but not least, silent sport was sometimes financed by donations and bequests from wealthy individuals - and there were quite a few of them - who were sensitive to sports for the deaf. All these forms of support for deaf sports in clubs and at national and international events have endured over time, and today take other forms, notably private and commercial in the form of sponsorship or patronage (Séguillon et al., 2013; Séguillon, 2002, 2023).

In this contribution, we will attempt to briefly apprehend and specifically see what support system has been implemented for deaf sports at both international and national levels. We will also look at what the French government has offered or enabled in deaf sports, and the role of local partners, which is mainly a private initiative with a public service mission. In other words, the aim is to find out how deaf sport has been organized as an autonomous structure for ninety years within the French Deaf-Mute Sports Federation from 1918 to 2008 and has been then, from that date onwards, within the French Handisport Federation and the French Paralympic and Sports Committee today, with international deaf sport and its athletes

being welcomed, since the beginning of 2024 by the French Paralympic and Sports Committee, a new operating space. Ultimately, we need to know how deaf athletes prepare for major international sporting events, in particular the Deaflympics. Are the same arrangements in place for deaf athletes as for disabled athletes, or for athletes preparing for the Olympic Games?

From a methodological viewpoint, the study includes contemporary documentary collections, and in particular the archives of the French Ministry of Sports, the French Handisport Federation and the French Paralympic and sports Committee, the ICSD in Lausanne, as well as a corpus of interviews with the French Paralympic and sports Committee management, the management of the French Handisport Federation and the two main leaders of deaf sport in Europe and worldwide, the President of the European Deaf Sports Organization (EDSO) and the President of the ICSD. For historical information, we have consulted the archives of the now-defunct French Deaf Sports Federation, those of the ICSD and the newspaper *Le Sportsman silencieux*, the leading press organ of the French deaf-mute sport movement from 1914 to 1934 (Cantin, 2019b; Séguillon, 2017, 2023).

This contribution is structured in three parts, with an introduction and a conclusion in the form of a forecast for the development of France and International deaf Sport. The purpose of the first part is to provide a historical context for international deaf sport in relation to the Olympic and Paralympic movements, and to highlight the similarities and differences between para-sport and deaf sport. After presenting the international organization system, the second part of this contribution will investigate the specific national organization system in France. In particular, we will study the organization and support of deaf sport during the 90 years of its operation within an autonomous structure, the French Deaf-Mute Sports Federation, then during its absorption by the French Handisport Federation over the following 15 years. Finally, the third section, the largest in terms of volume, describes the current organization of sport for the French deaf, particularly since January 1, 2024, within the French Paralympic and Sports Committee and the results of the last two Deaflympics, the Summer Deaflympics in Brazil in 2022 and the Winter Deaflympics in Erzurum, Turkey in 2024. This third part also describes the support and coaching system for deaf athletes in France, particularly in terms of coaching, agreements with governing federations, types of contracts for deaf athletes, and compares the attention provided

to deaf sportspeople in relation to French Olympic and non-Olympic athletes, as well as Paralympic and para-sport athletes.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Name of organization
CCSSF	Comité de Coordination des Sportifs Sourds de France
CCSSF	Coordination Committee for Deaf Sportsmen and Sportswomen in France
CNOSF	Comité National Olympique et Sportif Français
CNS	Comité National des Sports
COF	French Olympic Committee
COF	French Olympic Committee
COFLAPSH	French Liaison Committee for Physical and Sports Activities for the Disabled
CPSF	Comité Paralympique et Sportif Français
EDSO	European Deaf Sports Organization
FFH	Fédération Française Handisport
FFSA	Fédération Française du Sport Adaptée
FSSF	Fédération Sportive des Sourds de France
FSS-MF	Fédération Sportive des Sourds-Muets de France
ICC	International Coordinating Committee of World Sports Organizations for the Disabled
ICSD	International Committee for Sport for the Deafs
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IPC	International Paralympic Committee
ISSC	International Silent Sports Committee
UN	United Nations

International support for the silent sport

On February 14, 2024, at a working meeting at the National Institute for Young Deaf People in Paris, in preparation for the Centenary festivities of the ICSD and the first International Silent Games in Paris in August 2024, the President of the ICSD, Adam Kosa [deaf], and his European counterpart, EDSO President Yosif Stavrakakis

[deaf], point out the cordial, even good relations with the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee and between the Deaflympic, Paralympic and Olympic movements since the early 2000s, which marked the real recognition of the Deaf Sports Games (Deaflympics). These new relations have materialized in particular through the reappropriation and possibility, by international deaf sport (ICSD) in the image of the Paralympic Games, of finally using the term “Olympic” in the name of its main international sporting event. The Deaflympics were born in 2001, replacing the World Deaf Games, which themselves had replaced the International Silent Games, created in 1924 in Paris, in the 1960s (Jahan et al., 2024; Séguillon, 2024b).

If relations between the Deaflympic, Olympic and Paralympic committees have become good, according to our interlocutors and leaders of the International (ICSD) and EDSO, this support is quite recent on the scale of the history of sport. This was not the case previously, particularly at the birth of the silent sports movement at the beginning of the 20th century and between the two great French sport characters and the two international committees, Baron Pierre de Coubertin [hearing], for a time President of the French Olympic Committee and/or the International Olympic Committee, and Rubens Alcais [deaf], great organizer of the first Silent Games in Paris in 1924 and President of the ICSD. Indeed, after several years of pressure, Baron Pierre de Coubertin obtained from the French political authorities of the time, a ban on the use of the term “Silent Olympic Games” for the first International Silent Games in Paris, thus moving the term, and indeed the Olympic sport movement, from the public and free domain to the private and lucrative domain, while, at the same time, the French deaf sport movement was granted full political support from the French state and recognition of the administrative and sporting authorities (Séguillon, 2023, 2024b).

After recognition of the ICSD by the IOC in the early 1950s, and after a status quo of almost fifty years, relations between the two organizations gradually changed, or even improved, as we might say, from the 1980s onwards. This period also saw the disappearance of the amateur requirement for participation in both the Olympic Games and the World Deaf Games. It was then for the first time that an IOC President, Julien Samaranch, took part in the opening of the Silent World Games in Cologne, West Germany, in 1981. From the Silent World Games of yesteryear, to

today summer and winter Deaflympics, and since 1985, the flags of both the IOC and the ICSD have been hoisted simultaneously at the opening ceremony of the Games, testifying to the good relations between the two international organizations. At present, relations between the IOC and its current President, Thomas Bach from Germany, appear to be good, according to President Adam Kosa. There seems to be a cordial understanding, for the first time since the Olympic and Deaflympic movements came into existence at the beginning of the 20th century³.

During our meetings with President Adam Kosa, he reaffirmed that the IOC is today a stakeholder in the International Committee of Sport for the Deaf (ICSD) and wishes, for example, to play a definite part in financing and organizing the commemorations, in 2024, of the anniversary of the first International Silent Games in Paris in 1924 and the creation of the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD). It is said that, following the meeting of Presidents Adam Kosa and Thomas Bach at the Olympic House in Lausanne on June 13, 2023, the IOC wishes, in one way or another, to participate in the organization of the fiftieth International Congress of Deaf Sport, on October 3 and 4, 2024 in Paris. This financial participation seems to be a first, as the deaf sport movement has, according to the compiled archives and our knowledge of the field over many years, never had any financial support from the Olympic sport movement, at best, very occasionally, from sport movements or international federations. Perhaps this is due to current inclusive issues promoted by various international structures, and in particular communities such as the United Nations (UN), the European Community, which promote inclusion, or UNESCO?

The same cannot be said of the relationship between the international Paralympic movement and the ICSD. The international Paralympic movement was first built and developed away from deaf sport in the 1940s, in the early years of the future Paralympic sport, and even more so from the start of its institutional constitution in the 1960s (Marcellini et al., 2000; Ruffié & Ferez, 2013; Séguillon et al., 2013; Marcellini & Villoing, 2014). Indeed, it was not until the end of the 1980s, and in particular September 22, 1989 in Düsseldorf, when the International Paralympic Committee was created to replace the International Coordinating Committee of World Sports Organizations for the Disabled (ICCWSOD) set up in 1982, that we witnessed the formal constitution of an international Paralympic movement with the timid presence of the deaf sport movement within it. From then on, we saw the beginnings of a

rapprochement under pressure, if not from the deaf sport movement, and the rapprochement sought between the two movements by the management of the Paralympic Committee under construction and by its president at the time, Robert Steadward. The aim was to federate what political decision-makers had categorized as Paralympic sport, i.e. disabled people, whereas the very expression and aims of deaf sport were at odds with the conceptions of the dominant hearing majority of the time (Séguillon, 2002, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). Since at least the 19th century, deaf people have been trying and even more so deaf athletes since the International Silent Games in Paris in 1924, to claim the normality of deaf people when it comes to sport and physical education, since deaf people neither need nor wish to adapt to para-sports and Paralympic sports.

In this context of misunderstanding initiated by hearing decision-makers, and given the refusal of the deaf to assume the status of disabled or handicapped people, deaf sportsmen and sportswomen were left with no other option than to withdraw from this socially questionable attempt at grouping, which was fundamentally contested by the deaf community. So, at the thirty-fourth Statutory Congress of Deaf Sport in Ylläs [Helsinki] in Finland in 1995, the delegates voted unanimously, in response to this hearing vision, for the pure and simple withdrawal of the deaf sport movement from the IPC (Séguillon, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). In 2004, the conflict between the ICSD and the IPC came to an end and led to the separation of the two organisations by means of an agreement acknowledging this incompatibility, an agreement that was renewed and strengthened in 2016 between the IOC and the ICSD, sealing the relationships between the two organisations, and an agreement that remains in force today.

This issue and this connection or grouping arose in the 1960s-1970s in the world and in France when a new category was created and with the conceptualisation of the successive notions of handicapped, then disabled people, then socially-disabled people. The deaf sports model was then, by a ricochet or indirectly, called into question by the very evolution of this categorisation and this new model, or even this approach to diversity and difference. A change of conceptual paradigm, that of Wood (1980), was then denounced, a paradigm which put forward in a conceptual scheme the social disadvantage of the person, the deficiency and the incapacity, the whole constituting then the notion of handicap. This new model placed the deaf in the category of disabled or handicapped people, despite the fact that for two centuries, as

we shall see, the deaf have never ceased to proclaim their bodily, cognitive and social normality (Stiker, 1982; Fougeyrollas, 2010; Séguillon, 2017).

Since the nineteenth century, deaf people, and then deaf sportspeople in the first half of the twentieth century, have been proclaiming their hostility to the 'quality' of abnormal which they were labelled, and then of disabled, asserting, on the contrary, through the practice of sports, their full membership of social normality, not finding themselves handicapped in any way, but possessing a language as their only particularity, categorising themselves as a linguistic minority (Delaporte, 2002; Kerbouc'h, 2012; Encrevé, 2012; Benvenuto & Séguillon, 2014; Meziani & Séguillon, 2020). Deaf sport will then have the function of displaying the normality of the deaf, of showing hearing society all the normality that the deaf carry with them when they practise sports and beyond, in everyday life, work, leisure and in all the compartments of social life. Silent sport seeks to assert a particular sociability and a specific identity.

In this context, for international and national activists and promoters of deaf sport, when deaf people play sport, they are first and foremost deaf people who play sport, not sportspeople who are deaf. This paradigm shift occurred in the 1970s, profoundly transforming the relationship between deaf people and sport. This paradigm shift transformed deaf sports players into deaf sportspeople, a concept that was confirmed in 1979 when it was decided, by the deaf sportspeople themselves, who were gradually brought to think that they were disabled under the influence of the biomedical vision of disability, that they were characterised solely by their hearing impairment and no longer by the social aspect or that of the group (Séguillon, 2017). This was to happen at the twenty-fifth Congress in Méribel-les-Allues, France, perhaps by chance of organisation and scheduling. It was then decided that, from then on, in order to take part in the World Silent Games, it would be necessary to produce an audiogram and indicate hearing loss, prohibiting some people from taking part and authorising others, which had not been the case until then.

Previously, it was sufficient or necessary to belong to a deaf sports club, i.e. to a structure under the social control of the players themselves and which did not leave the recognition of deaf sports status to technological or medical control external to the deaf community stigmatising the sportsperson because of his or her hearing loss (Mottez, 2006). Still relevant today, the question of what characterises a deaf sports

player or a deaf athlete dates back to 1924 and therefore to the birth of the international deaf sport movement. The answer to this fundamental question makes it possible, at a given moment, to know and determine who can participate and/or who should be excluded from deaf sports competitions. It is a question of determining who is authorised to take part in the competition and what level of hearing loss the competitor must have, i.e. a battle linked as much to the problem of categorisation that deaf sport shares with para-sport as the inevitable cheating in these examinations or tests, but that is another story.

In short, we can say that support for the international deaf movement is clear today, particularly from the IOC. However, the gap between the Paralympic movement and the Deaflympic movement is still wide, both in terms of organisation and support. In this international context, it should be emphasised that France was one of the pioneer nations in the construction of the ICSD and its decision-making structure, in the wake of the creation of the French sport movement in 1918, six years before the ICSD. However, its activities deteriorated in the second half of the century with the gradual withdrawal of financial support from the French state, which led to its demise in the early 2000s. As a result, the French sports movement and its federation experienced difficulties linked to financial restrictions. With the French Deaf-Mute Sports Federation no longer receiving substantial subsidies for its development, it was left with no other option than to scuttle itself in 2005 and join the French Handisport Federation in 2008 in the form of a commission.

The organisation of deaf sport in France from 1918 to 2024

After ninety years of operation (1918-2008), the French Deaf Sports Federation closed its doors following chronic dysfunction over a number of years. During this period, everything changed in France, as did the ICSD as we saw in the first part of this article. In France, the national situation was of the same nature and had the same effects as the international situation. Due to the same international causes, the national effects are identical in terms of relations between the deaf sport movement, the para-sport movement under construction at the time and more generally with the French sport movement. In 1992, José Vazquez, President of the French Deaf Sports Federation, co-founded with the Presidents of the French Handisport Federation and

the French Federation for Adapted Sports, the first French Liaison Committee for Physical and Sports Activities for the Disabled (COFLAPSH).

This Committee is a new form of organisation desired and wanted by the international para-sport bodies as we have just said, but also by the French government through its Ministry of Sport. The challenge is to set up a space for meetings and exchanges in order to promote dialogue and to find out whether a future is possible for the three components identified as having specific needs, and to consider a common organisation, which is necessary if not desirable, according to a point of view that we describe as that of hearing people. There are institutional reasons for this grouping, as the administrative bodies responsible for sport in France would like to see a confederation of organisations dealing with people who are said to be disabled, or categorised as such, such as deaf sportspeople. Officially, this is to facilitate communication and organisation, as much as for financial reasons, in accordance with the wishes of the ministry in charge (Séguillon et al., 2013; Meziani & Séguillon, 2020).

In 1996, one year after the international deaf sport movement withdrew from the International Paralympic Committee, COFLAPSH was renamed as the French Paralympic and Sports Committee. On this date, deaf sport regained its full autonomy in line with the international position on para-sport, as it did not fit into this new organisation reserved solely for people with disabilities, which as we have already mentioned, deaf sports players thought they did not. It should be remembered that this decision by French deaf sports players was taken in coordination with the international deaf sports bodies, in particular the ICSD. This desire for autonomy from the French sporting and para-sporting bodies was short-lived. The French Deaf Sports Federation was cornered by the French supervisory ministry, which pushed the deaf sport movement, unnaturally, towards the sport movement for the physically disabled and the blind. However, deaf sports players do not want an integration project developed outside of them, outside of their choices and outside of the deaf community in general. They reaffirm that the community belongs, not to a stigmatised group such as the disabled, but to a linguistic minority (Mottez, 1976, 1977, 1979a, 1979b; Mottez & Markowicz, 1979; Cuxac, 1983; Bertin, 2010; Séguillon, 2017; Bedoin, 2018; Cantin, 2019a).

In 2005, the French Deaf Sports Federation went out of business and was dissolved

in 2008. For those willing, it became part of the French Handisport Federation. In order for deaf sport to continue to institutionally exist in France, the former directors had no choice but to integrate the rest of the deaf sport movement into the French Handisport Federation and join the world of disability and maladjustment, the only solution imposed by the French Ministry of Sport. From then on, a limited proportion of deaf sports players from the now defunct French Deaf Sports Federation joined the French Handisport Federation within a commission for deaf sport, created for the occasion. From then on, deaf sport was under the supervision of a federal body for people with disabilities, the French Handisport Federation, whose president was not deaf. However, the statutes of international deaf sport organisations stipulate that national bodies must be independent, elected and headed by a deaf person. A controversy was ensued.

French deaf athletes are banned from taking part in international competitions under the French Handisport Federation banner, a decision taken by the European and world deaf sport structures: the European Deaf Sport Organisation (EDSO) and the ICSD. The latter ended up suspending deaf sports players affiliated to the French Handisport Federation from all international competitions, thus preventing French deaf sports players from taking part in international meetings organised by the international deaf sport movement. Faced with this ban, the commission was dissolved and a new structure was created within the French Handisport Federation: the Coordination Committee for Deaf Athletes in France which marked both the provisional 'victory' of the French Ministry of Sport and the 'defeat', or perceived as such, of deaf sports players. Through this action, the French Handisport Federation recognised, at least in part, the specificity of the deaf sport community within it and enabled deaf sports players to be reintegrated into the international deaf sport movement and, once again, deaf sports players to take part in the Deaflympics. This decision concludes three years of tension between the French Handisport Federation and the ICSD. The decision taken in Rome by the members of the ICSD followed a vote in favour of the creation of a Coordination Committee for Deaf Athletes in France. The opposition between the French Handisport Federation and the ICSD thus ended in a compromise that was largely unfavourable to deaf sports players and the ICSD, or was perceived as such, but nevertheless allowed French deaf sportspeople to once again take part in international competitions and meetings,

including the Deaflympics (Séguillon et al., 2013; Séguillon, 2022).

Following this merger and the transfer of deaf sportspeople from the French Deaf Sports Federation to the French Handisport Federation, and after fifteen years with the French Handisport Federation, deaf sports players have partly resumed their wandering and have just joined the French Paralympic and Sports Committee on 1 January 2024, for international matters. They have therefore just returned to a structure that they partly created in 1992 with COFLAPSH and that they left in 1996, thirty years ago. This could be seen as a snub to the shared history of para-sport and deaf sport in France. Whether within the French Paralympic and Sports Committee, the French Handisport Federation or the French Deaf Sport Federation, French silent sport has been built with the help and support of public policies, in particular through the granting of state subsidies and with the help of the Ministry or Secretariat of Sport since the birth of sport in France, as well as the aid granted by local authorities: municipalities, “départements” and regions. Silent sport, the sport of the deaf, has benefited from this since the birth of the French sport movement. As early as 1920, deaf sport received political support through the appointment of Henry Paté, Secretary of State for Sport and Physical Education, and the first subsidies for the Federation and then for clubs. This was avant-garde support for silent sport. These aids and subsidies were also provided by local authorities, in particular the “Mairie de Paris”, which regularly subsidised the national silent sport movement and loaned sports facilities for the first Olympic Games for deaf mutes in 1924, thus establishing a system of financial support for deaf sports in France. This system lasted for around fifty years in France until the 1970s. This state-run system was then gradually called into question and, depending on the political sensitivities of successive governments, the French state’s powers were transferred to private structures linked to the commercial sector.

From that time onwards, the French state played an increasingly minor role in the running of sport and the French sport movement. Its disengagement is notorious in favour of the French sport movement and in particular the French National Olympic and Sports Committee and later, for para-sport, the French Paralympic and Sports Committee. For France deaf-mute sport movement, this transformation was violent, with its disappearance within an autonomous structure, as we have seen. In fact, the deaf sport movement was called into question following the conceptual paradigm shift

linked to deficiency and incapacity, that of including the deaf in the category of people with disabilities when they had done nothing but voice their opposition to this new categorisation. Following this profound evolution and in parallel with the French sport and para-sport model as we have described it, seeing a continuous decrease in State subsidies, the French deaf sport movement is constrained as, for example, when the president of the French Deaf Sport Federation in 1993 had to mortgage his own flat to make it possible for the French deaf sport delegation to participate in the World Silent Games in Sophia, Bulgaria (Meziani & Séguillon, 2020). Since then, the autonomous deaf sport movement has gradually turned in on itself and eventually died out. It then joined the disabled sport movement without any real development plan (Séguillon & Fougeyrollas, 2024).

To close this second part, we can say that deaf sport, like para-sport or sport in France, is now only partially under the control of the French State, to the benefit of the French National Olympic and Sport Committee and the French Paralympic and Sport Committee in particular. In the year 2024, we have been witnessing a transformation in the organisation of deaf sport in France, with it partially migrating, for the international level, from the French Handisport Federation to that of the French Paralympic and Sport Committee, thus reorganising, in continuity with the previous system piloted by the French Handisport Federation, the system of support for the deaf sport movement and the accompaniment of its high-level practitioners, as we will now see.

Current support for deaf athletes in France

Since 1 January 2024, and even more so since 23 January, deaf sports have been transferred to the French Paralympic and Sport Committee at international level, and are grouped together in an inter-federal commission known as the 'deaf' commission for all matters relating to relations with international deaf structures, and in particular relations with the ICSD and the EDSO. According to the French Paralympic and Sport Committee website (March 2024), "at the request of the French Disabled Sport Federation, the French Paralympic and Sport Committee has organised itself to become the French representative of the ICSD at international level and of the EDSO". It should be noted that international competitions for deaf

and hearing-impaired athletes are placed under the sole aegis of the ICSD. This international committee has only one representative in each member country, and while since 2008 “this representation was organised by the French Handisport Federation, it is now organised by the French Paralympic and Sport Committee”.

The decision to transfer powers to the French Paralympic and Sport Committee was ratified by the French Handisport Federation General Assembly in April 2023, and this only affects the registration of French deaf sport teams in international competitions and dialogue with the ICSD. The French Handisport Federation would also like to reaffirm, through its National Technical Director, Grégory Saint-Géniès, and on its website, “its attachment and commitment to develop sports for all people with sensory disabilities, and in this case, for deaf and hearing-impaired people”. This mission “begun in 2008 and firmly anchored in each of the disciplines for which it is responsible (...)” is at the heart of the concerns of the French Handisport Federation, which at the same time ‘wishes to strengthen its links with all those involved in the deaf community’ (Fédération Française Handisport, 2024). This transfer follows an initial revolution that took place in 2017. At that time, the Ministry of Sport undertook a transformation of para-sport and delegated certain practices to leading one-sport federations. The delegation includes, in particular, the organisation of sport in France and the issuing of sport regulations, the management of high-level sport and the awarding of national titles, in particular French championships.

The French Handisport Federation also remains the leading federation offering physical and sport activities for people with physical and sensory disabilities. Since 2017, the French Handisport Federation has no longer been the only federation to organise sports for the deaf in France, and the French Handisport Federation website states that it “no longer has the legitimacy to represent all disciplines to international bodies”. It should be noted that nothing is said about deaf sport specifically. As a result, deaf sport now appears to be a para-sport, or even assimilated to Paralympic sport, as its presence on the French Paralympic and Sport Committee may indicate. In fact, the mission of the French Paralympic and Sport Committee includes leading and coordinating all the member sport federations in order to develop sport for people with disabilities, “forming and leading the French team at the Paralympic Games or any other international competition under the aegis of the International Paralympic Committee or the European Paralympic Committee, and contributing,

alongside the member federations, to establishing a favourable environment to the performance of the French Paralympic teams”(Fédération Française Handisport, 2024).

Deaf sportspeople are then grouped together within this ‘deaf’ inter-federal commission. The members of this commission will be able to “discuss the issue of sports practice by deaf people in their respective federations and make proposals to develop this practice”, bearing in mind that except for the president the members of this ‘deaf’ inter-federal commission are not deaf. Therefore, this commission may or may not have the requested skills in taking into account the characteristics and needs of deaf sportspeople, particularly in terms of communication. With a few exceptions, deaf sportspeople are supervised by professionals from the federations who have little or no sign language skills, who know the sport but not deaf sportspeople specifically, and who are therefore unable to communicate properly with the people concerned, due to a lack of suitable communication tools. This is a problem in terms of social participation and equal treatment, and a huge lack in the system for supporting the performance of deaf sportspeople (Fougeyrollas, 2010).

As far as the athletes themselves are concerned, nothing has changed since 1 January 2024. There are currently no plans to create a para-sport status for deaf athletes within the French Paralympic and Sport Committee, as was the case with the FFH. It should be remembered that “sport remains organised by the clubs of the various federations”, which remain the decision-makers in terms of support and assistance for deaf sportspeople. It should also be remembered that only the “national technical directors of these federations remain in charge of funding, preparation and selection of the French teams”, i.e. a large part of the support system for deaf sportspeople. In other words, deaf sportspeople can obtain the status of high-level sportspeople like para-sport people or French sport people via the governing Olympic and non-Olympic federations. They can be registered on the ministerial lists by the leading one-sport federations and obtain top-level status, under an Olympic, sport or para-sport contract, which is a definite help and a first-rate support.

The Commission for the Deaf will therefore not be responsible for directly selecting the deaf representatives for the various competitions and in particular for the Deaflympics. The ‘deaf’ commission will only be a partner for this selection with the federation concerned or, failing that, with the French Handisport Federation. The

French Handisport Federation remains a privileged partner, but no longer a governing body. The French deaf football and deaf volleyball teams, for example, are supervised by the governing federations and their non-deaf trainers use signed French on the fringes and very rarely, if ever, sign language, which can be prejudicial to the proper reception and monitoring of French deaf sportsmen and women.

In continuity with the missions of the Coordination Committee for Deaf Athletes in France in operation before 31 December 2023 within the French Handisport Federation, the only missions of the “Deaf” Commission will ultimately be to proceed with sports entries for French teams entered in official international competitions under the authority of the ICSD on the basis of selections made by the National Technical Departments of each federation involved in deaf sports; to manage international relations with the ICSD and the EDSO. This innovative system will be part of the new system of support and assistance for deaf sportspeople in France as from 1 January 2024, in continuity with the international system that has been in operation within the French Handisport Federation since 2008. For national practices other than those selected by the Deaflympics, the French Handisport Federation organises practices and finances the various deaf sports currently classified as non-paralympic para-sports, which raises questions insofar as a large proportion of deaf sportspeople, particularly the oldest and those involved in the governing bodies of international deaf sport, do not see themselves as para-sportspeople even though they think they are deaf sportspeople.

Finally, the status of this “Deaf” Commission is beginning to become clearer. It is made up of representatives from the various federations organising deaf sport and chaired by a deaf athlete, as required by the ICSD’s statutes, as mentioned above. It thus makes it possible for the French Paralympic and Sport Committee to join the ICSD so that this body is representative of International Committee of Deaf Sport. From now on, it is stated that “communication between France and the ICSD will therefore go through the channel of this commission” and we add, as a precaution, if this commission is qualified by the International Committee of Deaf Sports (ICSD). The question remains unanswered to this day and hangs on the decision and vote on this possibility at the next International Congress of Deaf Sport on 3 and 4 October 2024 in Paris, a question that appears to be on the agenda of the congress.

The results of the last summer Deaflympics in Caxias do Sul from 1 to 15 May 2022

are very gratifying for France deaf sports, given the organisation and support for deaf sports, perfectly illustrated and translated in the book published following the Deaflympics⁴. From 1 to 15 May 2022, fifty-six athletes from ten disciplines and six federations (handisport, golf, judo, tennis, badminton and volleyball) shone in Caxias do Sul. Together, they enabled the French Deaflympics team to climb to eighth place in the ranking of nations with sixteen medals, eight of which were gold. In the context of high-level sport for deaf athletes, there is no specific support for those athletes as such during major hearing competitions, such as Paméra Losange, French champion in the 200 metres in 2023, who took part in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, as she is supported by the Ministry of Sport under the responsibility of the French Athletics Federation. On the other hand, support is provided at meetings and competitions for the deaf, such as the Deaflympics. For example, in para-judo, the French para-sport staff are both particularly qualified in judo and, in addition, are supervised in para-sports sections and trained by judo specialists, sometimes from the main institutions for young deaf people in France (Auger, 2020).

In the more or less recent past, deaf sports coaching was exclusively the preserve of deaf people, perhaps as a result of a lack of training in the areas of training technology and coaching staff training. The latter may have the communication tools to transmit information, but they rarely, if ever, have the technical and tactical skills to do so. Today, within Olympic and non-Olympic governing federations, technical and tactical skills may be present, but often without the means to communicate and transmit information, thus compromising the quality of potential sport performance and selecting only the hearing impaired in certain individual events and no longer the deeply deaf, or only in certain collective activities such as football or volleyball in France.

Based on the results of the last Winter Games in Erzurum, Turkey from 2 to 12 March 2024, we can highlight various cases of deaf athletes and the support they received during their preparation in their club or training and monitoring structure. The French delegation was small, consisting of five members including Nicolas Sarremejane, a deaf skier. The latter is perhaps the most emblematic case, as he was the French flag-bearer at these Deaflympics and the thirty-three year-old Nicolas Sarremejane was taking part in his third Winter Deaflympics. By winning the Super-G, accompanied by Thomas Luxcey on the third step of the podium, they

opened the medal count for France at the Deaflympics 2024, starting on 3 March. A member of the French national team since 2008, Sarremejane is one of the few deaf sportsmen and women to benefit from high-level sportsman status as an athlete, as well as some assistance in the form of departmental or regional subsidies after having fought hard to obtain them, according to his own statements on France-info radio. In the case of Antoine Collomb-Patton, a tool-making technician, he confirms that he “does not make a living from his sport”⁵. The 27-year-old works full-time, although he has managed to rearrange his working hours since last year thanks to a supportive company: “I start work at 5am and then go back to training at 1pm. The cross-country ski lanes close at 4.30-5pm, so I have no time to lose”, he explains on France-info public radio. But his fight doesn’t stop there, far from it: “As the Deaflympics are not recognised as a high-level competition, because the International Deaf Sport Committee is not a member of the International Paralympic Federation, we have no access to medal prizes or financial aid”.

This last aspect, that of financial support for deaf sportspeople, must be mentioned at the end of this contribution. Olympic and Paralympic athletes receive bonuses depending on the medals they win and the colours they wear. There are no such bonuses for French deaf sportspeople who have won medals at the Deaflympics. As a result, deaf sportspeople such as Nicolas Sarremejane and Thomas Luxcey, despite their good results and the medals they won at the last Deaflympics in Erzurum, did not receive any performance bonuses, unlike Olympic and Paralympic athletes. This may be a weakness in the system for assisting and supporting deaf sportspeople to achieve their best performances. Through this discrepancy, it is clear that deaf sportsmen and sportswomen are not considered on an equal footing with Paralympic or Olympic athletes.

The argument put forward for not granting a bonus to deaf sportspeople can nevertheless be widely accepted. Deaflympics-type events are, in fact, of very variable quality every four years. Their level, as in 2009 in Taipei, Hong Kong [China], can be compared to real Games, close to the Olympic or Paralympic Games, or, as in 2017 in Samsung, Turkey, more like regional Games, fun and good-natured to be sure, but far from the standards of top-level performance (Auger, 2020). For the leaders of French para-sport, and in particular Jean Minier, director of the French Paralympic and Sport Committee, it is urgent that international deaf sport “gives itself a high-level

status and that the Games can be covered by the television media” and thus attract sponsors so as to truly exist at an international level. This would enable “deaf sportspeople to finally obtain bonuses for their results, a form of support for deaf sport as it should be”⁶.

Listening to the French participants in these latest Winter Deaflympics, the positions of some and others are tending towards a rapprochement with the Paralympic world, with the latter presenting themselves as deaf or even disabled sportspeople, rather than as deaf sports players and a linguistic minority as deaf sportspeople used to conceive of themselves. The latter, moreover, do not present themselves as deaf, but as hearing-impaired, which is particularly revealing of who they are in general, and not as deaf people with a singular identity belonging to a group, a community. The hearing impaired do not, or do not necessarily, belong to the world of deafness or the deaf, all the less so for the athletes taking part in these Games interviewed by France-info public radio. They do not in any way belong to specific deaf clubs, but are integrated into hearing clubs or organisations, which necessarily requires less hearing loss in order to be able to take part in training and understand instructions without the help of French sign language [FSL] or interpreters. They are no longer, or not, the same sportsmen and women or athletes; they are no longer deaf, but hard of hearing or hearing impaired. So they want to be recognised “on the same level as other disabilities”. “I’m fighting for that” says Nicolas Sarmejane. “We have to try to change things and open up our borders”, add the multiple Deaflympics medal-winning alpine skier. Antoine Collomb-Patton sees it the same way:

“I’ve been training with the French Paralympic Nordic ski team since 2020, and it’s the team that helps and supports me. It would be a great step forward if we were included in the 2030 Games [read Paralympics]. That’s my next dream! To be able to take part in such a competition at home, in my resort of La Clusaz, that would be magical...”

A wish far removed from the historic demands of the deaf sport community and the positions of the International Deaf Sport Federation.

Conclusion

For the moment, French deaf athletes are preparing actively and with all possible care for the future international event in Japan, in November 2025, within an international organisation that is still autonomous and its Committee, the ICSD, while at the same time being part of the French Paralympic and Sport Committee, i.e. a structure that refers to the world of disability. This positioning may seem paradoxical to a number of observers. In addition to the challenges of positioning a community's identity, this stance calls into question the organisation of the sporting world, the exclusivity of its categories and the possibility of multiple affiliations. Are deaf sportspeople already para-sportspeople, even though some deaf people feel that they are first sportspeople, although they are deaf, but would like to take part in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games⁷, Los Angeles 2028 or Brisbane 2032 if their level allows them to? Are deaf sportspeople faced with a choice: to take part in the Olympic Games or the Paralympic Games? If this is the case, what does this alternative mean for the deaf sport movement, which has been claiming from hearing-speakers a place in the world of normality since the first International Silent Games in Paris and the creation of the International Deaf Sport Federation (ICSD) on 16 August 1924?

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Endnotes

- 1 Didier Séguillon is a specialist in the sciences and techniques of adapted physical activity and shared motor and sports practices, and the author of numerous articles and books on the deaf, sport and sport for the deaf. Today, he is a researcher and emeritus university lecturer at Paris-Nanterre University (France).
- 2 Sylvain Ferez is a sport sociologist at the University of Montpellier (France). Deputy-Director of the "Health, Education and Disability" research unit, he has carried out research on the socio-historical dynamics of the development of sport for people with disabilities.
- 3 Interview conducted in March 2024.
- 4 The aim of the book *Deaflympics, Caxias do Sul - Brazil 2022* is to leave a record and preserve the memories of a magical competition. Through the photos taken, the book retraces the wonderful adventure of these XXIV Olympic Games for the deaf and hearing-impaired.
- 5 "Deaflympics: between the need for recognition and the culture of difference, the struggle of deaf athletes to be heard", article written by Clément Mariotti Pons, *France-info (Sport)*, France Télévisions, published on 2 March 2024.
- 6 Interview conducted in March 2024.
- 7 Like Paméra Losenge, for example.

フランスのろう者アスリートへの支援とサポートシステム：歴史的要素と現代的要素

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本稿の目的は、フランスにおける聴覚障害者（ろう者または難聴者）を対象としたスポーツの援助、サポート、および管理の現行システムがどのように機能しているかを検討し、明らかにすることである。

歴史的に見ると、ろう者あるいは聴覚障害者のためのスポーツ運動は、1875年頃から1925年頃にかけて、特に米国や北欧、東欧、西欧を中心に世界各地で誕生した。日本ではこの運動の発展は若干遅れ、20世紀前半にようやく始まり、1935年のロンドンにおける国際ろう者競技大会の際に国際ろう者スポーツ委員会（ICSID）に加盟した。このような歴史的背景の中で、「ろう者による、ろう者のための」スポーツ運動が形成されるに至る。フランスはろう者スポーツの国際的な枠組みの発祥と発展において特別な地位を占めている。1924年にパリで開催された第8回オリンピックの閉幕直後、フランスは国境を接するフランス語圏のベルギーとともに、ろう者の真のオリンピックである「第1回国際ろう者競技大会」の組織に関わり、8月16日にはフランスのE・ルーベンス・アルケを会長としてICSIDが設立されたのである。

本稿では、ろう者スポーツに対して国際的および国内的にどのような支援システムが構築されてきたのかを概観したうえで具体的に考察する。また、フランス政府によるろう者スポーツに対する支援や、主に公共サービスを担う民間のイニシアチブである地域パートナーの役割についても検討する。すなわち、1918年から2008年までフランスろう者スポーツ連盟という独立した組織として、また2008年以降はフランス障害者スポーツ連盟やフランス・パラリンピック・スポーツ委員会（フランスの国内パラリンピック委員会）の下で、どのように90年間にわたって組織されてきたのか、さらに2024年初頭以降、フランス・パラリンピック・スポーツ委員会が新たな運営体制として国際的なろう

者スポーツやその選手たちを受け入れている現状を明らかにすることを目的とする。

最後に、ろう者選手が国際的な主要スポーツ大会、特にデフリンピックに向けてどのように準備を行っているのか、また、彼らにも障害のある選手やオリンピックに向けた準備を行う選手たちと同様の体制が整備されているのかについて検討する。