

# Deaf Sport and Deaflympics: Historical and Current Developments

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## 1. Introduction

The year 2024 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Jeux Internationaux Silencieux” and the “Comité International des Sports Silencieux (CISS)” in Paris, France, which took place in 1924 under the leadership of Eugène Rubens-Alcais from France and Antoine Dresse from Belgium. This is a unique opportunity to look back on historical developments in education and sport of and for deaf and hard of hearing persons in different parts of the world, especially in France, Germany and the United States of America. In the literature on severe hearing impairments a distinction is made by using a “lowercase d” which refers to the physical condition and by using the “uppercase D” reference is made to persons or organisations with a shared cultural experience of deafness, like Deaf Culture or Deaf sport (Harrison 2014). In this context, a brief overview of some core elements of Deaf Culture will be given.

From the beginning of the “Jeux Internationaux Silencieux/International Silent Games” in 1924 until the “Deaflympics” as we know them today enormous challenges had to be overcome. This also applies to the international governing organisation, the “Comité International des Sports des Sourds – CISS” which is the French acronym, and the “International Committee of Sport for the Deaf – ICSD” which is the English term. Since there is no consistent use of these terms, in most cases “CISS/ICSD” is the preferred term in this paper. Particular information is given on the Games that were hosted in Germany: Summer Games in 1931 in Nuremberg and 1981 in Cologne, Winter Games in 1955 in Oberammergau and in 1967 in Berchtesgaden. An overview of the number of athletes from Germany, their medals and ranking both in Summer and Winter Games after the unification of Germany in 1990 is also provided.

A highly important issue relates to the support for Deaf sport at grassroots level and for elite sport and Deaflympics. Some selected examples are given for both performance levels, highlighting also outstanding deaf or hard of hearing athletes. With regard to international connections of Deaf sport it is important to take into consideration the relationship between the CISS/ICSD and the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), as well as between the CISS/ICSD and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), because this might have an impact on setting the course for the future.

The final sections address the developments of the CISS/ICSD, like the introduction of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Deaf Youth Games in January 2024 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and provide some practical information taken from experiences at national and international level regarding funding and media involvement.

Expectant glances are directed towards the upcoming 25<sup>th</sup> Summer Deaflympics in Tokyo, Japan, in 2025. These Games will be a great opportunity to bring together athletes and many more people from around the world for a unique sporting and cultural event, celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Games held in Paris in 1924.

## 2. A look back: History of education and sport for deaf and hard of hearing persons

### 2.1 Some selected facts on education of deaf persons

It is important to have some knowledge about the historical developments in the field of education and sport for deaf persons in order to better understand the current situation. Deaf children were educated in a monastery in Spain since 1570, however, very little is known about the teaching methods. In 1760, a first school for deaf children was founded in Paris, France, by a monk, Abbé de L'Épée. A few years later, in 1778, Samuel Heinicke, established the first school for the deaf in Leipzig, Germany (Vogel 1999).

In the United States of America, the first school for the deaf was founded by an American clergyman, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, together with a deaf person, Laurent Clark, in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1816. His son, Edward Miner Gallaudet,

was appointed director of the “Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind” in 1857 in Washington, D.C. (Gallaudet University 2024).

In 1864, a federal law was signed by US President Abraham Lincoln which ensured financial funding and the possibility for deaf students to obtain academic degrees at this institution then called “National Deaf-Mute College”. In 1894, this institution was renamed in “Gallaudet College”. In 1986, the US Congress declared this institution to be a university: “Gallaudet University”. During the following years, students of this university actively demanded that the President and other leading staff should be deaf persons themselves. This is also currently the situation (Gallaudet University 2024).

An important event took place in Milan, Italy, in 1880. During this congress, attended by over 150 teachers of deaf persons, most of them hearing, a “Method Dispute” occurred focussing on the question if sign language should be allowed. They decided to forbid sign language and came to the conclusion that phonetic spelling (“oralism”) should be the only teaching method (Löwe 1983). On the occasion of the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of the Deaf in July 2010 in Vancouver, Canada, the resolutions of the congress in 1880 in Milan were repudiated and it was stated that “A New Era: Deaf Participation and Collaboration” began, expressing deep regret for the negative effects of the Milan resolutions and promoting the acceptance and respect for all languages (World Federation of the Deaf 2016).

Despite the fact that sign language was used in many cultures around the world and has therefore a very long tradition, it took time until the use of sign language received greater recognition and is now generally accepted (Clarke 2021) and is in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

In most countries special schools for deaf children and youth were established and still exist. Since the 1960’s, however, there was a move towards more integration/inclusion in education. The discussion whether deaf children should be educated in inclusive schools or in special schools continues to be controversial (Levesque & Duncan 2024). It is important to note the differences between deafness and hard of hearing. A functional hearing impairment or loss ranges from mild to profound. Detailed information is provided regarding key facts about deafness and hearing loss by WHO (2024).

## 2.2 The establishment of sport clubs for the deaf in Germany

In Germany, the first sport club “Taubstummen Turnvereinigung Berlin” was founded in Berlin on 18 October 1888. In the beginning, members were only men, however, during the following years the club opened the doors for women and then for the youth. On 21 August 1910, the umbrella organisation “Verband Deutscher Taubstummen-Vereine für Leibesübungen” (“Federation of German Deaf clubs for physical education”) was founded in Cologne (Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband 2010).

## 3. The core elements of Deaf Culture

It is important to clarify who is part of Deaf Culture. The history of Deaf Culture is very unique and includes many impressive developments, however, also struggles for recognition and rights (Communication Service for the Deaf 2023). Schools for deaf students with their visions and missions are very important, e.g. the “Manitoba School for the Deaf (MSD)” in Canada (2022-2023) includes the following people: “Deaf, Hard of Hearing, including those who use any kind of amplification device such as hearing aids or cochlear implants.” The main elements of Deaf Culture include:

- The use of sign language/here American Sign Language (ASL)
- Values in the Deaf community
- Traditions
- Social norms
- Identity as one of key components of a person

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of recognising sign languages and the promotion of bilingual and bicultural educational approaches. Articles 2 (Definition), 9 (Accessibility), 21 (Freedom of expression, opinion, and access to information), 24 (Education) and 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport) are particularly focussing on deaf people and deaf issues (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006).

The question of how many people in a country or worldwide are deaf or hard of hearing is difficult to answer. In Germany as in several other countries, there are no

statistics about the number of deaf people. It is assumed that 0.1% of the total population are deaf. More detailed information concerning the situation worldwide is provided by the WHO (2024). The benefits from hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive devices as well as captioning are also stressed in the documents of WHO (2024).

In contrast to documents and publications in which deaf people are mainly characterised by their hearing loss, there is a growing number of literature in which Deafness is described in terms of its intellectual, creative and cultural benefits and as an essential aspect of human diversity. Bauman and Murray in their publication “Deaf Gain – Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity” (2014) and Ladd in his book “Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood” (2003) share fascinating insights into Deaf Culture.

#### 4. From the “International Silent Games” to the “Deaflympics”

In 1924, the “Comité International des Sports Silencieux (CISS)” was founded by Eugène Rubens-Alcais from France and Antoine Dresse from Belgium. Under their leadership the first “Jeux Internationaux Silencieux” were organised from 10 to 17 August 1924 in Paris (France), shortly after the Olympic Games in the same city (Institut national de jeunes sourds de Paris 2024). The “Comité International des Sports Silencieux (CISS)” later changed its name to “Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS)”. Their motto is “Per Ludos Aequalitas” – “Equality through Sport”. Participation in the Deaflympics is restricted to persons who have a hearing loss of at least 55 dB in the better ear. It is strictly forbidden to use any kind of hearing aids. From 1924 to 1967, these games were called “International Silent Games”. For a short time the name “World Silent Games” was used and until 1999 these games were called “World Games for the Deaf” and since 2001 they have been called “Deaflympics” (Harrison 2014). Germany hosted the Summer Games twice: 1931 in Nuremberg and 1981 in Cologne.

**Table 1: Information on Summer Games in 1931 and 1981 hosted by Germany**

Year	Venue	Nations	Athletes	Sports	Competitions
1931	Nuremberg	14	316	7	43
1981	Cologne	32	1198	13	110

(Source: Schliermann 2015, 285).

Here is a short comment on the Games hosted by Germany:

In 1931, the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Games for the Deaf and the 4<sup>th</sup> CISS-Congress took place in Nuremberg, Germany. During the following years, the so-called “Gleichschaltung”, which means “conformity”, the process of Nazification, influenced society including sport in Germany dramatically and Jewish people were excluded from participation. Persons with disabilities including deaf people were perceived as “unworthy”, many of them lost their lives in “concentration camps” or were victims of medical experiments. In 1981, Germany was for the second time host of the World Summer Games for the Deaf. The 14<sup>th</sup> World Games were held in Cologne, Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), attended by 1500 athletes from 35 countries. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) sent athletes in table tennis and athletics and returned back home with one gold, one silver and one bronze medal (Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband 2010). This is worth mentioning because there were very few events during these years where athletes from the GDR participated in sport events in the FRG. These developments will be described shortly afterwards.

The first Winter Games were held in Seefeld, Austria, in 1949. Germany hosted the Winter Games twice: 1955 in Oberammergau and 1967 in Berchtesgaden.

**Table 2: Information on Winter Games in 1955 and 1967 hosted by Germany**

Year	Venue	Nations	Athletes	Sports	Competitions
1955	Oberammergau	8	59	4	11
1967	Berchtesgaden	12	77	2	10

(source: Schliermann 2015, 286)

A short comment on the Games hosted by Germany is given here:

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Winter Games for the Deaf were held in Oberammergau, Germany. Eight countries participated with 54 male and 5 female athletes. There

were some outstanding athletes, such as the Italian Giovanni Calissano, who participated in both Winter Games (Oberammergau) as a skier and in Summer Games as a shooter. He collected 42 medals and he became the most decorated athlete of the CISS/ICSD (ICSD 1924-2024). In general, it has to be admitted that the event did not reach much public attention.

In 1967, Berchtesgaden, a well-known town in the Bavarian Alps, was host of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Winter Games with 12 nations and a total of 77 athletes (64 men, 13 women) participating. Three countries from outside Europe took part: Canada, USA and Japan.

At the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of CISS in Berchtesgaden, Antoine Dresse decided not to continue as Secretary General after 43 years in this position. At this Congress, the decision was made to change the name to World Games of the Deaf. Germany participated with 13 athletes (10 men, 3 women). Mainly deaf people and local organisers gave special attention to the athletes and the event itself (Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband 2010).

It is important to describe the changes of Deaf sport in Germany. After World War II in October 1949, Germany was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Sport activities of deaf people developed in different structures in both countries, however, all-German teams took part in international competitions, e.g. in 1958 at the Deaf Chess World Championships in London, where one player came from the FRG and two players from the GDR and as a joint German team they won the Team World Championships. The situation changed when the Wall was built between East and West on 13 August 1961. For the last time, an all-German team participated at the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summer Games in Helsinki, Finland, from 6 to 10 August 1961 (Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband 2010, 80-84). Until the unification of Germany in 1990, Deaf sport developed very differently in the FRG and GDR. Athletes from both countries participated in separate teams and were successful in several events at European and world level. One year after the fall of the Wall in 1989, the German Deaf Sports Association was founded in 1990, bringing together the Deaf sport organisations from the FRG and the GDR.

It is difficult to provide solid statistical data for the years 1949 to 1990, because from 1949 to 1961 there were mixed teams from the FRG and the GDR and after that athletes competed in separate teams. A reliable overview can be given based on a

data collection of the German Deaf Sports Association for the Deaflympics after the unification in 1990.

**Table 3: Germany: Number of athletes, medals and ranking: Winter Deaflympics (since 1991)**

Deaflympics	No. athletes	Medals			Total	Ranking
		G	S	B		
1991 Banff, Canada	10	0	1	0	1	0
1995 Yilas, Finland	17	0	1	0	1	0
1999 Davos, Switzerland	18	0	0	2	2	0
2003 Sundsvall, Sweden	33	2	1	0	3	5
2007 Salt Lake, USA	21	2	1	0	3	6
2015 Khanty Mansiysk, Russia	5	0	0	1	1	14
2019 Valtellina, Italy	10	0	1	0	1	13
2024 Erzurum, Türkiye	21	0	3	2	5	12

(Source: Compilation based on information provided by the German Deaf Sports Association).



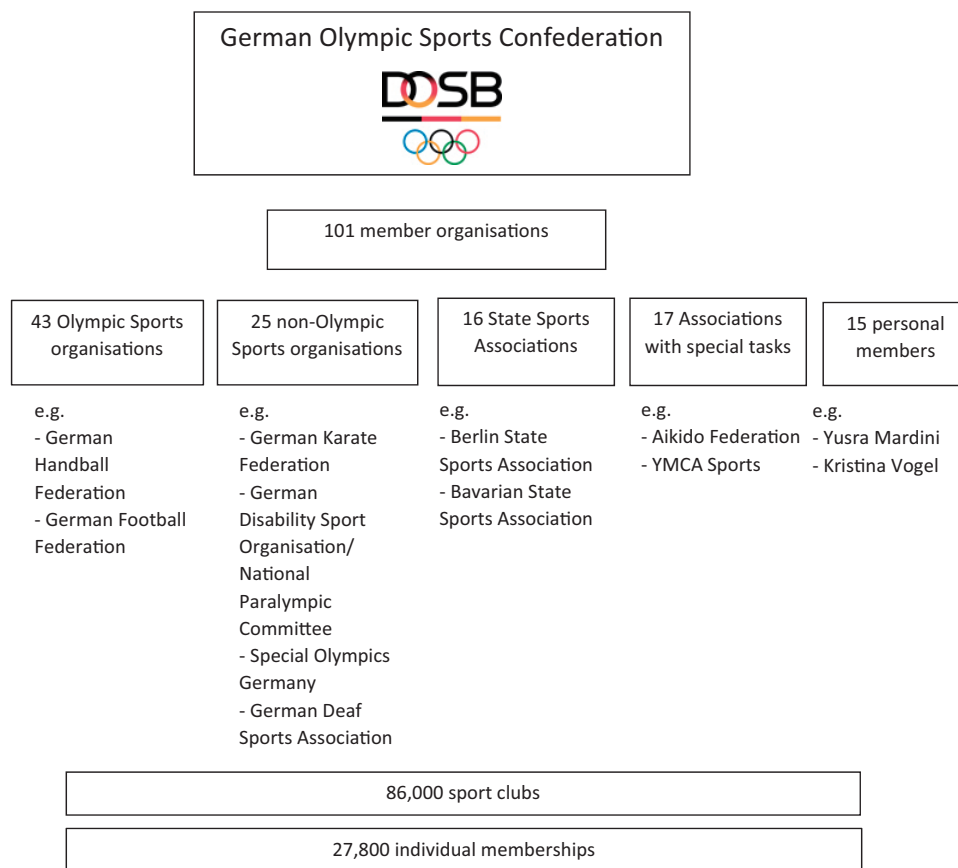
**Table 4: Germany: Number of athletes, medals and ranking: Summer Deaflympics (since 1993)**

Deaflympics	No. athletes	Medals			Total	Ranking
		G	S	B		
1993 Sofia, Bulgaria	133	8	16	15	39	4
1997 Copenhagen, Denmark	168	10	15	22	47	3
2001 Rome, Italy	173	13	21	13	47	2
2005 Melbourne, Australia	133	6	15	17	38	8
2009 Taipei, Taiwan	157	3	8	12	23	16
2013 Sofia, Bulgaria	131	3	6	5	14	14
2017 Samsun, Türkiye	105	4	5	3	12	13
2022 Caxias do Sul, Brazil	75	5	8	6	19	10

(Source: Compilation based on information provided by the German Deaf Sports Association).

The German Deaf Sports Association and the German Association of the Deaf are two separate organisations with good relations. The German Deaf Sports Association is a member of the German Association of the Deaf, which serves as a stakeholder of deaf persons in Germany and the sign language community. In both organisations hearing individuals can become members, e.g. those with deaf parents like “children of deaf adults (CODA)” (Coda International 2024), in general, leadership positions are exclusively held by deaf persons. The German Deaf Sports Association as a member of the German Olympic Sports Confederation is responsible for Deaf sport activities at all levels, from grassroots level to Deaflympics. The following organisation chart illustrates the current structure of the German Olympic Sports Confederation.

Figure 1: Significantly reduced organisation chart of the German Olympic Sports Confederation



(Source: German Olympic Sports Confederation 2024)

## 5. The “Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS)” – The “International Committee of Sport for the Deaf (ICSD)”

After the foundation of the “Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS)” and the first “International Silent Games” in Paris in 1924 important steps were taken “to address challenges that are unique and specific to the Deaf community: identifying a deaf person by their preferred mode of communication; deliberating as to whether or not Deaf people are a linguistic and cultural minority; or whether they are disabled” (Harrison 2014, 47). The French acronym CISS was used from 1924 until 2011, however, very often the English term “International Committee of Sport for the Deaf” (ICSD) was also used. Since 2011, both terms CISS and ICSD are legal names.

Therefore, in this paper CISS/ICSD is the preferred term.

In this context, Harrison emphasises three fundamental concepts concerning the unique position to be taken into consideration by the umbrella organisation CISS/ICSD: “Empowerment, Sign Language and the Concept of Disability” (Harrison 2014, 47).

All these aspects are of importance when analysing the current situation of the CISS/ICSD in relation to the Olympic Movement and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), to the Paralympic Movement and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) as well as to the Special Olympics Movement and the Special Olympics International (SOI).

The founder of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Silent Games, Eugène Rubens-Alcais, had a vision, following the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympics, to establish international competitions for deaf and hard of hearing athletes (Deutscher Gehörlosen-Sportverband 2010).

From a retrospective view, it can be stated that this idea was realised through the “International Silent Games” first in summer editions and later, in 1949, in winter editions. Despite the fact that these Games started already in 1924, they are still less known than the Paralympic Games and the Special Olympics World Games (Legg, Emes, Stewart & Steadward 2004; Doll-Tepper & Tiemann 2021).

The CISS/ICSD made many efforts during the past years to increase public interest; however, several barriers still exist, in particular, regarding communication, lobbying and visibility (Ammons 1990; Stewart & Ammons 2001; Legg, Emes, Stewart & Steadward 2004).

An important relation of the CISS/ICSD has also to be highlighted: cooperation with the “World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)”. In 2013, a “Co-operation Agreement between the World Federation of the Deaf and the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf” was signed emphasising the importance of encouraging collaborative agreements at local, national and regional levels of deaf people between the National Associations of the Deaf and the National Deaf Sports Associations, the promotion of human rights and the support towards the recognition of national sign languages. It was agreed that the official languages for communication, both in person and in writing, between WFD and ICSD are International Sign and English (World Federation of the Deaf and International Committee of Sports for the Deaf 2013). In

addition, the CISS/ICSD has made essential decisions and reached important milestones in earlier years: In 1955, the International Olympic Committee recognised CISS as an “International Federation with Olympic standing”. In 1996, the CISS/ICSD introduced the “Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year”. In 2006, the CISS/ICSD has officially joined the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

In contrast to other international sport organisations recognised by the IOC, the CISS/ICSD is exclusively organised by members of the community they serve: Deaf people (Deaflympics 1924-2024). Foster, Fitzgerald and Stride (2018) report on the socialisation and participation of Deaflympians.

The logo of the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) was designed by the graphic design artist Ralph Fernandez from the USA, who became Chief Executive Director of the organisation on 1 January 2024.



The logo symbolises the four regional confederations as well as sign language, deaf and international cultures, unity and continuity (Deaflympics 2023a).

## 6. Support for Deaf sport

### 6.1 Support for Deaf sport at grassroots level

In countries with a very structured sport club system, e.g. in several European countries, there are special sport clubs for the deaf and hard of hearing, and they have their regional and national umbrella sport organisations. In Germany for example, there are Deaf sport clubs in every state, as well as regional Deaf sport organisations and an umbrella Deaf sport organisation (German Deaf Sports Association). The “German Deaf Sports Association” is a member of the “German Olympic Sports Confederation” and belongs to the category “Non-olympic sport organisations”. Funding is provided at local, regional and national level, by the

respective government.

With very few exceptions, all activities are run by deaf or hard of hearing persons (see Deaf Culture, chapter 3). Here are some examples:

The Canadian Deaf Sports Association organised the “Canadian Deaf Games” in May 2024 in Toronto, Ontario. These games do not have a “competition” component like the World Games and Deaflympics, but they have a “participation” component with the goal to bring deaf people together in a friendly atmosphere. It also includes a National Indigenous Volleyball Team. The Canadian Deaf Sports Association is funded by the Government of Canada (Canadian Deaf Sports Association 2024).

In most European countries, there are sport clubs for deaf and hard of hearing persons where a variety of sport and fitness programmes are being offered at grassroots level. There is a growing interest in bringing into these clubs trainers, instructors and coaches who are either deaf themselves or have the ability to use sign language. Currently, there are also efforts made towards inclusive sport programmes for deaf and hearing persons, e.g. in Scandinavian countries, Germany and Switzerland.

## 6.2 Support for elite sport/Deaflympics

From an international perspective, the structures and support systems for elite sport for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing differ a lot. National Deaf sport organisations, e.g. in Germany, Austria, Australia, Norway, Canada to name but a few, receive federal government funding for the training of athletes and for competitions at national and international level. On behalf of the Australian Sports Commission Bremner and Goodman (1992) published a manual titled “Coaching Deaf Athletes”. Markov-Glazer, Elbe and Schliermann (2023) addressed the issue of mental training with elite Deaf sport athletes from the sport psychology consultants’ view. Several authors publishing of Deaf sport have noted that there is a need for more scientific research (Mesch & Clark 2023; Levesque & Duncan 2024), e.g. with a focus on girls and women, the significance of Deaf sport and the Deaflympics within the Deaf Culture (Ammons 1990; Stewart 1991; Harrison 2014). Mesch and Clark (2023) emphasise the empowerment through Deaf sport for deaf participants, their particular challenges in society and sport, their communication in sign language and their socialisation within the deaf community. Deaf sport and Deaflympics offer unique

opportunities to compete at all levels of performance up to the Deaflympics and combining these experiences with a sense of belonging to Deaf Culture. Over the past decades, the range of sports for deaf athletes has grown tremendously, leading to an increase in championships on national, continental and international level. Here is a selection of events on world level listed by the CISS/ICSD:

#### World Championships

March 2024	World Deaf Taekwondo Championships, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
April 2024	World Deaf Judo Championships, Turkestan, Kazakhstan
June 2024	World Deaf Volleyball Championships, Tomigusuku, Japan
July 2024	1 <sup>st</sup> World Deaf Youth Athletics Championships, Taipei, Chinese Taipei
July 2024	World Deaf Athletics Championships, Taipei, Chinese Taipei
August 2024	World Deaf Golf Championships, Gold Coast, Australia
August 2024	World Deaf Beach Volleyball Championships, Prague, Czech Republic
August 2024	World Deaf Shooting Championships, Hanover, Germany
September 2024	World Deaf Sailing Championships, Nida, Lithuania
September 2024	World Deaf Cycling Championships, Swietokrzyski, Poland
November 2024	World Deaf Mountain Bike Championships, Satoraljanjhely, Hungary
May 2025 (CISS 2024)	World Deaf Ice Hockey Championships, Vancouver, Canada

In addition, regional championships are being organised, e.g. Asia Pacific Deaf Games, European Deaf Taekwondo Championships, European Deaf Bowling Championships, European Deaf Handball Championships, to name but a few.

## 7. Relationship between CISS/ICSD and IPC

When the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was founded in 1989 in Düsseldorf, Germany, the “Comité International des Sport des Sourds (CISS/ICSD)” joined the new umbrella organisation.

The other member organisations were:

CP-ISRA: Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association

IBSA: International Blind Sports Association

ISMWGF: International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Games Federation

ISOD: International Sport Organisation for the Disabled

INAS-FMH: International Sports Federation for Persons with Mental Handicap

More information about the historical developments of the IPC is given by Doll-Tepper (1999; 2002) Bailey (2008), Howe (2008) and Harrison (2014).

In 1995, the CISS/ICSD withdrew from the IPC. The reasons for the withdrawal of the CISS/ICSD from the IPC were manifold. From the very beginning, the CISS/ICSD had made clear that they wanted Deaf sport to remain self-governing. In a “final agreement” between CISS and IPC in 1990 it was stated, “that the IPC would grant full recognition to CISS as supreme authority for sports for and of deaf people and that the IPC accepts and acknowledges the CISS World Games for the Deaf (both Summer and Winter) as international events of status equal to the Paralympic Games.” (Harrison 2014, 69).

However, during the following years frustration grew within the CISS/ICSD about the membership in the IPC. Finally, in March 1995 the decision was taken by the CISS/ICSD to discontinue membership in IPC. There were several reasons given, e.g. the reduction of disciplines of Deaf sport should they be part of the Paralympics, the refusal of the IPC to cover costs for sign language interpreters and their clear position to keep their autonomy. Harrison (2014) describes in detail the pros and cons of this withdrawal of membership.

Ten to fifteen years after that decision, controversial debates continue whether the CISS/ICSD should re-apply for membership in the IPC (Harrison 2014).

## 8. Relationship between CISS/ICSD and IOC

In 1955, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognised the CISS/ICSD and since 1985, the IOC granted patronage to the Games. In 2001, the IOC approved the new name “Deaflympics” replacing the previous name “World Games for the Deaf”. In 2016, the IOC and the CISS/ICSD signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” following the “Recommendation 7” of the Olympic Agenda 2020 which aimed to

“strengthen relationships with organisations managing sport for people with different abilities” (IOC, Olympic Agenda 2020).

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by IOC President Dr. Thomas Bach and ICSD President Dr. Valery Nikitich Rukhledev, a Russian sports leader and former gold medallist in wrestling at Deaflympics who was replaced in 2018 by the Australian Rebecca Horn. Rukhledev was President of the CISS/ICSD until 2018 when he was found guilty of disgraceful behaviour. Harrison (2014) describes very detailed the relationship between the IOC and the CISS/ICSD as well as between the CISS/ICSD and the IPC and other international and national organisations of sport. Within the last ten years since this important publication many changes in leadership and strategies have occurred.

On 13 June 2023 the current President of the CISS/ICSD, Dr. Adám Kósa, who had been elected President in 2022, met with IOC President Dr. Thomas Bach to discuss cooperation between the two organisations. President Kósa, who was born in 1975 in Budapest, is a Hungarian politician and was the first deaf member of the European Parliament.

The new ICSD Board led by President Dr. Kósa and Vice-President Dr. Yutaka Osugi from Japan is making important steps towards more visibility and recognition within the world of sport. Based on their strong educational background and great leadership potential it can be expected that Deaf sport will overcome historical struggles of the movement.

It is interesting to note that deaf athletes have participated in Olympic Games as early as in 1908 and 1912 when Oskar Wetzell from Finland competed in diving (Kuurojen museo 2013-2024). Harrison (2014) published a list of deaf athletes who participated in Olympic Games starting with Gertrude Ederle, a severely hearing impaired woman from the USA, who won a gold medal in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924. Gertrude Ederle was a very famous athlete because of her swimming successes and for being the first woman to swim the English Channel in 1926 (see Kilg-Meyer 2020). Harrison’s (2014) list includes Terence Parkin, a South African swimmer and participant in Olympic Games. Known by many as the “Silent Torpedo” he won the silver medal in the 200 metres breaststroke at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. Harrison (2014) focusses also on three hearing-impaired athletes from the USA who participated in the Olympic Games in 2012 in London: David



Smith (Volleyball), Tamika Catchings (Basketball, Gold) and Chris Colwill (Diving) (Harrison 2014, 278 – 279). He was fully aware that this list was not complete and he asked for additional information about deaf athletes competing in the Olympic Games. Athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing have shown outstanding performances. The Shepherd Centre in Australia is offering support and services to children with hearing loss and their families. They have recently published a list of five successful deaf or hard of hearing athletes thus empowering young people and motivating them to pursue their plans and desires (Shepherd Centre/Hear for You 2024). The five athletes are

- Shelly Beattie, a professional bodybuilder;
- Laurentia Tan, a deaf para-dressage competitor who won two bronze medals at the 2008 Beijing Paralympics;
- Derrick Coleman, a NFL footballer who played with the Seattle Seahawks, who won the Super Bowl in 2014;
- Matt Hamill, a wrestler and martial arts artist;
- Heidi Zimmer, an athlete who participated in the Deaflympics 1969 in high jump. In 1991, she reached the top of Denali, also known as Mount McKinley, and held up a banner: “DEAF WOMEN, A PARADE THROUGH THE DECADES” with the goal to advocate for deaf women. Heidi Zimmer has initiated the “Ability Summits Projects” and has the goal of climbing all seven summits as a deaf-blind woman (Zimmer 2022).

## 9. New developments: World Deaf Youth Games

The 1<sup>st</sup> World Deaf Youth Games were held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, from 15 to 22 January 2024. 71 young athletes aged between 14 and 18 years, from 16 countries participated in four sports: athletics, badminton, 3x3 basketball and swimming. Originally, it was planned to offer competitions in futsal and table tennis, however, these sports were finally not included (CISS/ICSD 2024). Part of the Games were workshops for the participants to learn about the values, functions and structures of the ICSD, ethical issues and anti-doping policies, social media as well as the role of the athletes' commission. During this event, ICSD Vice-President Osugi Yutaka met with IPC President Andrew Parsons to renew their partnership. The next World Deaf

Youth Games will take place in Chinese Taipei. For the first time, there will be European Deaf Youth Games in 2026 in Hanover, Germany.

## 10. The outlook

Efforts are being made by the CISS/ICSD to increase the visibility of Deaf sport and the Deaflympics and to encourage more persons who are deaf or hard of hearing to participate in sport, as leaders, as athletes, as coaches, as referees and as fans. This is clearly in line with the recommendations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular, with the Article 30(5). The promotion of participation of all persons regardless of their differences is crucial at all levels, from local and national levels to the international level. When focussing on the current situation at local level it would be helpful to support sport clubs for the deaf, initiate partnerships and cooperation between these clubs and those for hearing people. Shared interests could be identified also between clubs and schools and could lead to more inclusive programmes, activities and events.

With regard to developments on national level, it is important to be aware of the structural differences of the sport systems worldwide. Therefore, an example is chosen from Germany. The German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) is the non-governmental umbrella organisation with more than 27 million memberships in about 87,000 sports clubs. Currently the DOSB has 101 member organisations, including 16 regional sport organisations, 68 national sport-governing federations and 17 sport associations with special tasks.

The German Disability Sport Organisation/National Paralympic Committee, the Special Olympics Germany as well as the German Deaf Sports Association belong to the group of national sport-governing federations with their own structures and funding. During the past years, efforts have been made to initiate more contacts between these different organisations, in particular, with a focus on joint programmes funded by the German Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, such as the training of sport inclusion managers and event inclusion managers in which only persons with a disability were eligible to participate. The current President of the German Deaf Sports Association, Katharina Pape, was one of the participants of this programme and is a certified sport inclusion manager who was a staff member at the Special

Olympics World Games in 2023 in Berlin, Germany. Board members of the German Deaf Sports Association have emphasised how important it is for the development of Deaf sport to have appropriate training facilities, well-trained coaches, especially deaf coaches and coaches who can communicate in sign language. Financial support from governments as well as from sponsors are also of crucial importance. The provision of sign language interpreters, especially because of high costs, is also still lacking in a variety of situations, e.g. at seminars, conferences, meetings etc. Different governmental rules and regulations exist when comparing the situation worldwide. As far as funding for Deaf sport is concerned, there are differences whether the focus is on grassroots or elite level. Very often financial support for sport at grassroots level is given by local governments and sponsors. At elite level funding for Deaf sport is still limited to governmental support and from a few foundations and sponsors. An interesting example is “Deaf Sports Australia” which provides programmes, including “Active Deaf Programs” which are funded and supported by the Australian Sports Commission as well as government’s initiatives with a focus on school events and programmes involving deaf and hard of hearing children (Australian Sports Commission 2024).

On the international level, the CISS/ICSD is leading the organisation towards strengthening the Deaf sport Movement via the Deaflympics and the huge variety of sport events at world level. The newly established World Deaf Youth Games, for the first time organised in Sao Paulo in January 2024, are an important step forward to encourage young people to participate in elite sport and to learn more about Deaf sport and other important issues, such as anti-doping policies. It would be desirable that the next Deaf sport events will receive more public attention via the media. In this context, it is suggested to establish or expand media partnerships for Deaf sport events, in particular for the Deaflympics. For the Special Olympics World Games 2023 in Berlin, Germany, such a media alliance was successfully implemented covering the Games on and off the playing fields. The German Media Alliance was awarded the prestigious HORIZONT Sportbusiness Award in 2023 as “Medium of the Year” for bringing more attention and visibility for people with intellectual or multiple disabilities (Deutsche Telekom 2023). The important role of the media is reflected in an article of Ogoura (2024) concerning media coverage of the Deaflympics and was also addressed by Harrison (2014).

The communication between the CISS/ICSD and the IOC has continued over the past years, in particular, when IOC President Dr. Thomas Bach and CISS/ICSD President Dr. Adam Kosá met at the Olympic House on 13 June 2023 in Lausanne. The main goal of this meeting was to renew collaboration between the two organisations. President Kosa expressed thanks to the IOC for supporting and recognising the CISS/ICSD and he “assured that the ICSD is committed to ensuring transparency, accountability and engagement to principles of ethics within the organisation and its affiliated members” (Deaflympics 2023b). For the CISS/ICSD, communication with the IPC is of great importance, even if the relation in the past was not easy (Harrison 2014). Some details have been described in chapter 7. However, it is important to note that IPC President Andrew Parsons and CISS/ICSD Vice President Dr. Osugi Yutaka met on the occasion of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Deaf Youth Games in Sao Paulo in January 2024, reinforcing their partnership (Deaflympics 2023). Great expectations exist on the road to the next Deaflympics, which will be held in Tokyo, Japan, from 15-26 November 2025. There will be 21 sports included and approx. 3,000 athletes will attend, in addition, several thousand officials, referees, staff etc. will take part. This is the emblem of the Tokyo Games:



(Tokyo 2025 Deaflympics, 2024).

Prior to the Deaflympics there will be the ICSD Congress in October 2024 in Paris, France, commemorating the first “International Silent Games/Jeux Internationaux Silencieux” and the first congress of CISS under the leadership of Eugène Rubens-Alcais and Antoine Dresse. A special logo was created for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Congress in France:



From April to July 2024 a special exhibition was presented at the “Institut national de jeunes sourds de Paris” under the title “La folle semaine des premiers Jeux internationaux silencieux” (2024) describing in detail the beginning of the Deaf sport movement and the first Games. Celebrating the 100 years history is a unique opportunity to look back at the challenges and achievements of the past and to set the course for a successful future.

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## デフスポーツとデフリンピック： 過去から現代にいたるまでの発展

グドルン・ドルテッパ

2024年は、フランスのウジェーヌ・ルーベンス＝アルセとベルギーのアントワヌ・ドレッセの指導の下、1924年にフランスのパリで開催された「国際聴覚障害者スポーツ大会 (Jeux Internationaux Silencieux)」と同年に発足した「国際聴覚障害者スポーツ委員会 (Comité International des Sport Silencieux: CISS)」の100周年にあたる。聴覚障害者と難聴者の教育やスポーツにおける歴史的な発展を振り返ると、コミュニケーションや手話の使用、ろう者コミュニティにおける交流や体験共有など、彼らが対処しなければならなかった、そして現在でもある程度は直面している特別な課題が明らかになる。

国際ろう者スポーツ委員会 (CISS/ICSID) 設立後の重要な出来事について、特にドイツで開催された大会 (1931年と1981年の夏季大会, 1955年と1967年の冬季大会) に関する情報を含めて紹介する。1990年のドイツ統一後のデフリンピックにおける選手数, メダル数, 順位などの情報も提供する。デフスポーツにとって非常に重要な課題は、草の根レベルでの活動やエリートスポーツとデフリンピックに対する支援に関連している。この文脈では、デフスポーツ運動は基本的にろう当事者によって主導されていることが強調されている。したがって、CISS/ICSID と世界ろう者連盟 (WFD) の協力協定は非常に大きな意味を持つ。

CISS/ICSID と国際パラリンピック委員会 (IPC), そして国際オリンピック委員会 (IOC) の間にもつながりがあるが、これらの関係は必ずしも平坦なものではなかった。現在の計画がどのような結果をもたらすかはまだ見えていない。CISS/ICSID にとって、2024年1月にブラジルのサンパウロで開催された第1回ワールド・デフ・ユースゲームズを導入したことは重要な第一歩であり、このイベントは若者のモチベーションを高め、力を与えるものとなるだろう。また、国内および国際レベルでの経験から得られた、資金調達やメディアの関与に関する実践的な情報についても紹介する。

2025年に日本の東京で開催される第25回夏季デフリンピックに期待が集まっている。



この大会は、1924年にパリで開催された第1回大会から100周年を記念するユニークなスポーツ・文化イベントであり、世界中からアスリートや多くの人々が一堂に会する絶好の機会となる。