



To: NPCs / IOSDs practising swimming
IPC Swimming Officials (classifiers and technical officials)

01 March 2010

Re: IPC Swimming Classification Update

Dear Colleagues,

At the last STC Swimming meeting in Bonn, classification in IPC Swimming was discussed in great detail. Classification is the cornerstone of Paralympic competition, and consequently the IPC Governing Board and IPC Swimming STC are steadfast in the commitment to undertake a review of the sports classification system to strengthen the system and ensure it meets:

1. the needs, demands and expectations both of the athletes of today and the generations to follow; and
2. the provisions set forth in the IPC Classification Code.

This communication aims to provide the IPC Membership an overview of the recent activities undertaken while at the same time encouraging all NPC's practicing IPC Swimming to participate actively in the classification review process.

1. Classification Advisory Group

Instead of the appointment of an individual as IPC Swimming Head of Classification, with the agreement of the STC, IPC has decided to appoint a 'Classification Advisory Group' that will take shared responsibility on all classification matters that fall under the mandate of the IPC Swimming Head of Classification. The group consists of:

Anna Zurowska (POL)
Brendan Burkett (AUS)
Conrado Jaubert (ESP)
Julie O'Neill (USA)



Together with the STC and the IPC Management Team, this group will monitor the review process of IPC Swimming Classification Systems in all impairment groups (S1-S14). As we proceed with the different initiatives, the group will be extended with experts on classification for visual impaired swimmers and swimmers with intellectual impairment.

2. Swimmers with physical impairment (actual system S1-S10)

IPC Swimming will initiate a review of the so-named 'functional classification' system (S1-S10) and the STC mandated professor Brendan Burkett (Sunshine Coast University, Brisbane, AUS) to lead this process. Prof. Burkett will bring together a research group that consists of swimming experts and scientists in both Paralympic and able-bodied swimming. The exercise will be conducted in compliance with the IPC Position Statement on Paralympic Classification ([IPC Handbook, section 2, 4.4](#)) and will benefit from the experiences gained from the review of the classification rules in IPC Athletics.

The IPC Swimming Membership will be engaged in this review process as we proceed.

3. Swimmers with visual impairment (S11-S13)

Athletes with a visual impairment are currently classified under the provisions of the IBSA Classification Rules, adopted by IPC Swimming. Those rules are based on the medical assessment of visual acuity and visual field, and do not match the requirements set forth in the IPC Classification Code to reflect a sport-specific classification system.

Following the IPC Swimming Summit last June, the VI-classification workgroup initiated this exercise, and liaised with actual classifiers, researchers, eye-care specialists and sports experts to identify the relevant parameters that impact participation in the sport of Swimming. The outcome is that the most significant factor is the parameter 'visual acuity' and a proposal to revisit the current S11-S13 system in that direction is currently being developed.

In the near future a proposal will be shared with the IPC Swimming Membership as part of a wider consultation round. IPC Swimming liaises with IBSA on this matter to achieve harmonization of the classification system of both Federations.



Awaiting the implementation of a revised system, IPC Swimming will further standardize 'on-site' testing. This is consistent with the role of IPC Swimming for the sport under the IPC Classification Code. The revision will include the obligation for visual impaired swimmers to present themselves for classification with Clinical Evaluation Records that will have to include detailed information on different visual acuity and visual field parameters (which currently make up the classification system). A Memo with detailed guidelines on requirement for classification under the actual system will follow in the next weeks.

4. Swimmers with intellectual disability (S14)

Further to the decision of the IPC General Assembly last November, IPC Swimming is working towards the inclusion of ID swimmers by using a sport-specific classification system. IPC Swimming has engaged expert sport scientists to develop such a system under the mandate of the IPC – INAS-FID Joint Working Group that had been created in 2008. A more detailed overview of the project has been communicated to the IPC Membership in the [Memo of 15 December 2009](#).

To provide athletes with intellectual disability the competition experience necessary for them to prepare for the 2010 IPC Swimming World Championships and the London 2012 Paralympic Games, and to provide the researchers with the evidence base necessary to test and refine the systems that will be required for successful re-inclusion, opportunities were created in 2009 for athletes with intellectual disability to participate in dedicated regional and world-level competitions. This process will be continued throughout 2010, and is a joint initiative of IPC and INAS-FID.

The IPC has taken a governance decision to include S14 swimmers progressively. This implies that in the initial phase only a limited number of events will be provided. The IPC motivates its decision to have a limited S14 programme by the complexity of the current project and the historical context in which this all needs to be seen. As we proceed with the project and increase the capacity to manage the classification process in terms of operations (e.g. training and certification of classifiers, planning of classification evaluation schedules, extra number of swimmers to enter an event), the number of events and total number of S14 swimmers allowed to enter events will be increased.



On the basis of observations at previous events, considering interim findings from the ongoing investigations, and guided by the model of a direct relationship between 'cognitive functioning and sports performance' determinants in the sport of IPC Swimming, the research group that takes the lead on the IPC Swimming ID Classification project has proposed the following events to be included in this initial stage:

- 200m Freestyle
- 100m Breaststroke
- 100m Backstroke

This choice is based on their experience that pacing, stroke frequency and complexity of (anticipating to) turning and regaining speed are the main components within this 'activity limitation – impairment' model.

Considering timelines for announcement of events and qualification periods to be adhered to which coincide with the current investigation, IPC decided that the London 2012 Paralympic Games programme will match the Eindhoven 2010 IPC Swimming World Championships programme for S14 swimmers. This will allow for the swimmers to focus on these main events. These events will have 'full medal' status at the 2010 World Championships.

The IPC and INAS-FID jointly decided not to use existing INAS-FID rankings as no full guarantee could be given on the validity of the findings (both from an eligibility perspective, as well as from a sport-technical perspective). Consequently, the S14 class will be 'populated' with swimmers first, prior to setting qualification standards. No MQS therefore will apply for S14 swimmers for the 2010 IPC Swimming World Championships. NPCs however are allowed to set MQS for their own national qualification processes at their convenience. The entry criteria for S14 class were circulated to all NPCs and are published on the IPC Swimming website.

5. Rule Change Procedure and Timelines

The IPC, upon recommendation of the IPC Swimming STC, will progressively approve and implement proposed classification rule changes. These rule changes may apply to sport class profiles or to processes, procedures and assessment methods to be used in classification. In this way, the sport of Swimming will move forward to



comply with the provisions of the IPC Classification Code fairly and at a sensible pace.

On some issues the IPC may determine that endorsement from the IPC membership is necessary prior to a decision being ratified.

Until a decision by the IPC is taken, and an implementation plan accepted, all athletes being classified for IPC Swimming shall continue to be classified based solely on the current systems.

I reiterate that since 01 January 2010 only the following sport class statuses apply in IPC Swimming: N, R, C, NE. Consequently, protest opportunities, with the exception of the Protest under Exceptional Circumstances, only apply to swimmers with sport class status N or R and in accordance with the provisions of the rulebook actual at date.

NPC's wishing to provide comment on all of the above are invited to forward these to IPC Swimming Sport Manager Agnes Szilak via email ipcswimming@paralympic.org.

I am similarly happy to discuss this or any other IPC Swimming matters and may be contacted via e-mail ipcswimming@paralympic.org as well.

Thank you for your support of IPC Swimming and I hope that this communication clarifies the status of the different classification review processes for you.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J D Blaine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jane D. Blaine
Chairperson
IPC Swimming Technical Committee