



Classification 101

What is Classification?

Athlete Classification in the Paralympic Movement is a key feature of Para-sport, defining the structure for competition. Classification systems are unique to each Para-sport (International Federation) and perform two critical functions:

1. Define who is eligible to compete in Para-sport, and
2. Group athletes into sport class(es).

Sport class criteria and parameters are defined and put in place by each respective sport IF with the aim of minimizing the impact of impairment and to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, etc., the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes who are able-bodied.

International Classification Code [the “Code”] & History

Classification has evolved significantly since the inception of the Paralympic Movement. Initially classification was based on medical evaluation, taking little account of the impairment impact on sport performance. Over time, many sport IFs recognized the downfalls of medically-based evaluation and in the 1980s and 1990s functional classification systems began to emerge. During this time there was no overarching governance for Para-sport classification and robustness of systems varied from sport to sport.

In 2003, the International Paralympic Committee [IPC] developed a classification strategy with the overall objective to support and coordinate the ongoing development of accurate, reliable, consistent and credible sport focused classification systems and their implementation. This led to the approval of the first International Classification Code in 2007 and associated International Standards. The 2007 Code became effective in March 2010. Key aspects of the 2007 Code included the mandate for evidence-based classification systems, consistency across IFs with regard to sport class status and protest/appeal protocols, and establishment of international classifier education pathways.

As Para-sport evolves, so too does classification. Between 2013-2015, the IPC sought feedback and input from key stakeholders – NPCs, NFs, IFs, classifiers – to update and modify the 2007 Code. This resulted in the current IPC Athlete Classification Code adopted by the membership in November 2015. The 2015 Code is effective as of January 2017 with compliance required by January 2018.

The 2015 Code is supplemented by five international standards:

- International Standard for Athlete Evaluation
- International Standard for Eligible Impairments
- International Standard for Classification Data Protection
- International Standard for Protests and Appeals
- International Standard for Classifier Personnel & Training

International Sport Class Status & Sport Class

The Code defines three (3) international sport class statuses for allocation following athlete evaluation. A sport class status is allocated to each athlete to indicate evaluation requirements and protest opportunities.

The three international sport class statuses are:

- C – Confirmed
- R – Review
- FRD – Review with a Fixed Review Date

A sport class is a category defined by each International Federation [IF] in which athletes are categorized by reference to activity limitation resulting from impairment for that particular sport. Athletes are allocated a sport class (or sport classes as relevant) based on the classification rules of each IF. Ineligibility to compete is considered a sport class.

Classifiers & Classification Panels

A classifier is a person authorized as an official by an IF to evaluate athletes while serving as a member of a classification panel. Classifiers are trained and certified for a particular sport by the respective IF.

A classification panel is a group of classifiers empowered by the rules of the respective IF to evaluate athletes, allocate a sport class and designate a sport class status. International classification panels must include a minimum of two classifiers [an IF may require more than two classifiers constitute a classification panel].

Each IF must establish the following positions:

Head of Classification: a classifier responsible for the direction, administration, coordination and implementation of classification matters for the IF.

Chief Classifier: a classifier responsible for the direction, administration, coordination and implementation of classification matters for a specific competition.

What is a protest?

A protest is the procedure by which a formal objection to an athlete's sport class is made and subsequently resolved. Protest procedures for each sport are included in the classification rules of the respective IF.

What is an appeal?

An appeal is the procedure by which a formal objection to the manner in which classification procedures have been conducted is submitted and subsequently resolved.

The International Paralympic Committee Board of Appeal on Classification [BAC] is the appeal body for the Paralympic Games. Each IF must designate an Appeal panel in their classification rules. An IF may defer this responsibility to the BAC.

National Classification – U.S. Paralympics

It is incumbent upon each National Paralympic Committee (NPC) that is a signatory of the Code to ensure that national classification policies and procedures are in compliance with the Code.

The responsibilities of the NPC as per the Code include:

- Ensure that national classification rules conform with the Code and make recommendations for Code compliance
- Develop and implement a policy for its members to comply with the Code and establish procedures to address non-compliance with the Code
- Promote the development of a national classification strategy

The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) is the NPC and a signatory of the Code. All National classification policies and procedures are implemented through the USOC's Paralympic Division (U.S. Paralympics).

As the NPC for the United States, and a signatory of the Code, U.S. Paralympics shall assume all governance for national classification.

Any classification conducted outside the scope of the National Classification Policies & Procedures will neither be recognized nor upheld in any official proceedings.

Organizations conducting classification in the USA outside of the scope of the National Classification Policies & Procedures may be sanctioned for non-compliance.

National Classification Policies & Procedures – U.S. Paralympics

The U.S. Paralympics National Classification Policies & Procedures outline national classification information and systems in compliance with the Code.

U.S. Paralympics classification documents are available as PDF downloadable files at www.usparalympics.org.

National Sport Class Status & Sport Class

National sport classes will strictly adhere to the athlete evaluation guidelines set out by each respective IF. There will be no variation from the IPC/IF sport class evaluation system and the respective sport class designations in the national classification process.

The four national sport class statuses are:

- NP – National Provisional
- NN – National Classified
- NR – National Review
- NC – National Confirmed

National Classifiers & Classification Panels

National classification panels are defined on a sport by sport basis in the sport specific documents that supplement the USA Classification Policies and Procedures.

National classifiers, approved by U.S. Paralympics and/or the respective sport National Federation (NF) to conduct national classification within the United States, shall be designated with the following levels of education/certification:

USA Trainee

- An individual who is in the process of classification training and education nationally by U.S. Paralympics and/or the respective NF, but who is not yet certified as a Classifier and may not be an appointed member of a Classification Panel at a national competition. This individual is unable to allocate a national sport class.

USA National Classifier

- An individual who has successfully completed the relevant training and education nationally by U.S. Paralympics and/or the respective NF and is approved to be a member of a Classification Panel at a national competition. This individual may allocate national sport class(es) and sport class status.

U.S. Paralympics shall establish the following positions (national):

Head Domestic Classifier (HDC): A classifier who has the highest level of international authorization (i.e. Level 2) education and experience or equivalent for the respective sport and who will work at the direction of U.S. Paralympics and/or NGB/HPMO to facilitate Code compliance for the sport within the United States. The HDC may be filled by a staff member (who may or may not be a classifier) at the respective NGB/HPMO.

Chief Classifier (CC): The Classifier responsible for the administration, direction, co-ordination and implementation of Classification matters for a specific competition.

Online Resources

International Paralympic Committee – www.paralympic.org

U.S. Paralympics – www.usparalympics.org