



## PARACLIMBING DEVELOPMENT PLAN – March 2019

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### INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of five months of work at IFSC. In his work, the Paraclimbing Development officer has conducted qualitative research through interviews with key actors involved in Paraclimbing, as well as reviewing documents related to Paraclimbing and IPC guidelines.

This report, which analyses the issues currently affecting Paraclimbing, aims to provide a strategic plan for both the short and the long term with the following goals:

- Acknowledging the strength and importance of the Paraclimbing community;
- Giving credibility to the Paraclimbing movement;
- Professionalising the sport by striving to meet IPC's standards, to make the sport worth to be considered among the candidates for future Paralympic Games (i.e. Paralympics 2028)

The findings can be summarised under three main categories:

1. Sport Issues
2. Organisational Issues
3. Social and Developmental Issues

The following report will focus mostly on the first two categories, but it will also mention the third one, considering the long-term development of the sport. The appendices will also provide a draft organisational chart and draft regulations for the Paraclimbing Committee.



## SPORT ISSUES

### ON CLASSIFICATION

The classification system remains to date the biggest problem towards the growth and professionalisation of Paraclimbing: IFSC currently suffers from lack of medical expertise, diverging opinions on the classification process and a proper structure to make such process smoother.

To have a real chance to compete in the Paralympic games, we need to improve our classification process consistently, to meet the rigorous international standard set by the IPC in the IPC Athlete Classification Code, which relies heavily on three other codes of practice:

1. International Standard for Classifier Personnel and Training (ISCP)
2. International Standard for Athlete Evaluation (ISAE)
3. International Standard for Eligible Impairments (ISEI)

The ISCP sets rules for classifiers, an area where we need vast improvements. First, we need to decide whether we only want medical professionals to become IFSC classifiers, or whether we'd like to use other figures such as former athletes or coaches. On this matter, we found very diverging opinions: medical professionals who served as classifiers for the IFSC, claim their superior expertise in classifying the athletes, based on scientific rigour; other figures within IFSC (coaches and former athletes) assert that classification can be done by whoever has an understanding of the dynamics of the sport, provided that there are detailed guidelines on the different categories (Sport Classes for IPC).

The particular case of an athlete requires us to re-evaluate the Eligible Impairment, according to the requirements posed by the IPC International Standard for Athlete Evaluation. This case also makes more evident the need for a more detailed and refined classification system, to account for extreme cases such as this. The athlete was listed as AU2, but was later placed in RP2, lowering his chances to compete at high level.



Bad classification and a weak medical system can also increase the case of cheating athletes, who might exaggerate their conditions, or the changes in it, to obtain a more favourable category where they can gain an advantage over the other competitors. This is less easy to control, but it can be limited with good practice.

In this scenario, we the role of the Paraclimbing Commission needs a clear definition. A National Paraclimbing Coach admitted knowing that an IFSC Paraclimbing Commission Member (who is not a medical doctor) made some substantial changes to the classification before the WCH, based on his own understanding and application of the classification criteria, which shall be avoided. To do so, we need to strengthen our medical staff, to make classification smoother, quicker, more efficient and fairer towards the athletes. Moreover, medical decisions on classification, cannot be overturned by the Paraclimbing Commission, unless its members are classifiers themselves, and only in total cooperation with the medical doctors. The Paraclimbing Commission (or the newly proposed Paraclimbing Committee) should serve as an ally to the IFSC and to the doctors themselves, but it cannot take their place. Therefore, the recommendation is to invest mostly on medical doctors. However, in a pool of five or six classifiers, it would be reasonable to have another figure, who can support doctors with greater knowledge of the technical aspects of the sport.

The code requires to appoint a Head of Classification, who can be himself/herself a classifier or be helped by a classifier. It also requires for a Chief Classifier to be appointed: for our sake, the Head of Classification can also serve as Chief Classifier. The IPC requires also to have a pool of Trainee Classifiers, who will develop into classifiers. For Trainee Classifiers and for Classifiers, we need to set up a training plan that accounts for continuous development.

As per rule 5 of the ISCP, Classifiers need a structured process of training, performance assessment, classification and re-classification. It is fundamental to get up to speed on this, putting in place training, evaluation and classification systems. For this, measures should be taken to:

- As per rule 3 of the IPC Athlete Classification Code, as IFSC we are required to appoint a certain number of Classifiers. For this, we need to set up Classification rules, which include entry criteria, codes of conduct ect. It can then be decided whether to only included medical doctors, or to have a mix of medical doctors, physios, coaches, athletes.



- Identifying a potential Head of Classification/Chief of Classification among doctors, coaches, athletes. He/she will take an active role in organising the operations of training and certification of classifiers, as well as serving as the main figure during competitions;
- Develop a training plan and a certification path for Classifiers, to show IFSC's ability to support and train classifiers, consolidating its presence in the national federations.

After the WCH in Innsbruck, a workshop aimed at introducing the basics of classification was held by the Italian classifiers Doctors Coscia and Gigliotti, did not go as planned. Despite having the best intentions, the doctors found difficult to share insights and to “talk the same language” with the physios who attended the workshop, which was originally intended for medical doctors. The workshop was not aimed at providing any certification or qualification, but it was conceived to raise interested around the figure of the classifier, to start a new generation. This workshop can be seen as a first step towards the professionalisation of classification, but classifier training needs to have a lot more structure and rigour, to meet the standards required by the IPC. So far, we had a lot of improvisation, including some questionable events happening at Innsbruck, for which the IFSC received complaints from representatives of certain NFs. Hypothetically, some members of the Paraclimbing Committee could also serve as Classifiers, if led by at least one medical doctor to guide them. This could be a solution to solve two problems at once.

### **ON CATEGORIES**

Closely related to classification is the category system. Currently, the category scheme does not appear as flexible as athletes would want it to be. For instance, B3 and RP3 cannot be merged to other categories, potentially leaving some athletes out of the competitions. The work should be directed to find ways for all categories to be represented during the competitions, as athletes who travel halfway through the world, cannot be denying competing on the day. If merging on the day wants to be avoided, the categorisation can be slimmer, with ad-hoc merging that would reduce discrimination, without jeopardising the competition level. The B category could be perhaps merged, and all athletes can compete blindfolded, to level the playing field. Proposals on rethinking categories were made in the past by Jerome Meyer and the Paraclimbing Commission, which could be reconsidered and



reworked. Having the certainty that everyone can compete, would give the athletes a great incentive and trust towards the IFSC. If certain categories really needed to be slashed, due to the lack of competitors, and suitable merging was not possible, at least athletes should receive confirmation in advance, to avoid making travel arrangements. Organisationally, this is a key step to take towards the professionalisation of IFSC, and to improve the organisational image it displays, especially to NFs. The complaint level towards the IFSC should be kept to a minimum, especially on social media, because they can harm its reputation, as well as discouraging potential new athletes to become professionals.

### **ROUTESETTING and RULES**

Routesetting is a key point for para athletes: a good routesetting can determine their ability to successfully climb; conversely, if they believe the routes are not tailored to their physical abilities, it can be a very discouraging factor, and lead to disengagement and criticism. Innsbruck has been a massive improvement in routesetting, and the routesetters Mark Mercer (USA), Christophe Cazin (FRA) and Delahaye Yoris (FRA) have been praised by several athletes, for their great ability to design routes that accommodate their needs. The IFSC should continue in this direction and exploit the expertise of this group of routesetters, by promoting Paraclimbing routesetting to other routesetters who are willing to learn how to work with para athletes. For such reasons, the IFSC could propose to the routesetters who worked at Innsbruck to oversee a short Paraclimbing training programme/workshop where they, in collaboration with athletes and supported by audio-visual tools, could deliver a course that leads participants to gain experience as para-routesetters. This again would contribute to professionalise the sport in a meaningful way, a further stepping stone towards the Paralympic games. Perhaps this is not as urgent as the investment on medical staff, but it is something that needs to be considered in the near future, especially because that team of routesetters might not always be available. If routesetting was not up at least to the standard offered in Innsbruck in the next competitions, it would be a potentially dangerous setback in our development schedule.

Requests have also been sent to the Paraclimbing Development Officer to rethink certain rules, such as increasing the time for visually impaired Paraclimbers from 6 to 8 minutes.



## **ON EVENTS**

National federations have expressed the desire to see their athletes participating to more events, even informal ones with looser rules. The research has highlighted that not many federations have the number of athletes or the capacity to organise national competitions. For example, Romania has 8 athletes, whereas the Netherlands only have 2. Even DAV (Germany) that, with 15 athletes is one with the highest number of athletes in Europe, is not able to get any funding from the German Paralympic Federation until 2028 at least, and only if they satisfy some conditions. The fact that national events were not even organised in the UK last year, it's symptomatic of a potential problem within NFs. The IFSC can encourage NFs to organise national events, but ultimately this rests on NFs shoulders. IFSC should incentivise and support NFs in organising national events, but without taking on NFs duties.

## **ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES**

The most important thing to do is to improve IFSC's governance practices and transparency, by suspending the current Paraclimbing Commission, which suffered from lack of communication, meetings and from centralisation of authority and power in the hands of one person. The proposal is to form a Paraclimbing Committee, whose placement within IFSC's organisational structure, as well as draft regulations for it can be found in appendix to this report.

Organisationally, the purpose of this Paraclimbing Development Plan is also to anticipate potential changes in IFSC's leadership in 2021, by placing Paraclimbing on a development path that would not be hindered by other organisational changes in IFSC.

## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

The sport needs more promotion, starting at grassroots level. There are currently still few athletes. Working at grassroots level and increasing the number of athletes, would be an important step to get more elite athletes. IFSC could play an important coordinating and supporting role, but change should be fostered by national federations, working closely with gyms and physical rehabilitation centres to promote the sport.



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Promotional videos and flyers can be good additional tools to be shown and distributed in gyms and physical rehab centres, as they would convey the message in a simple and effective way.

Expertise is much need, of instructors able to deliver the basic information and knowledge of Paraclimbing in the gyms: how to train people, how to keep them from injuries and so on. Coaches who want to set up a Paraclimbing team should be incentivised.

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## PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION

As highlighted above, several steps need to be taken as soon as possible for Paraclimbing to grow. The Paraclimbing Commission has proven to be ineffective to develop a sustainable strategy for the sport's growth, so the recommendation is to restructure it, by developing first and foremost clear election rules: the suggestion is to have a Paraclimbing Committee, which represents different categories, such as medical doctors, coaches, athletes, technical delegates etc. Details of the proposal can be found in appendix.

During this year it would be needed to:

### ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

- Dismiss the current Paraclimbing Commission;
- Approve new Paraclimbing regulations for the future election of the new **Paraclimbing Committee**;
- Appoint a Paraclimbing Officer to run Paraclimbing operations and oversee the Paraclimbing Committee

### OPERATIONAL MATTERS

- Recruit a Head of Classification;
- Elaborate the material for the Classifier Training Course;
- Start the Classifier Training Course ideally with 5/6 people

In 2020 instead:

- Election of the Paraclimbing Committee;
- Event development: organising at least two events where Trainee Classifiers can be sent to;
- Develop new courses, such as the one for para-routesetters

Given the amount of work required, the suggestion is to employ a Paraclimbing Officer, who can coordinate such operations and actively liaise with the Paraclimbing Committee and, most importantly, with the IPC, for a steady and convincing development of the sport.



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## BUDGET

The budget for 2019 is approximately of 60000 Euros, which includes the Paraclimbing Officer's wage, his/her travels (to events and to IPC meetings) and, once a Head of Classification is appointed, to use some funds towards the Classifier Training Course.

## VOTE FOR THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

The IFSC kindly requests to the Plenary Assembly to vote on the following Paraclimbing Development Plan (as a whole), which is constituted by these matters:

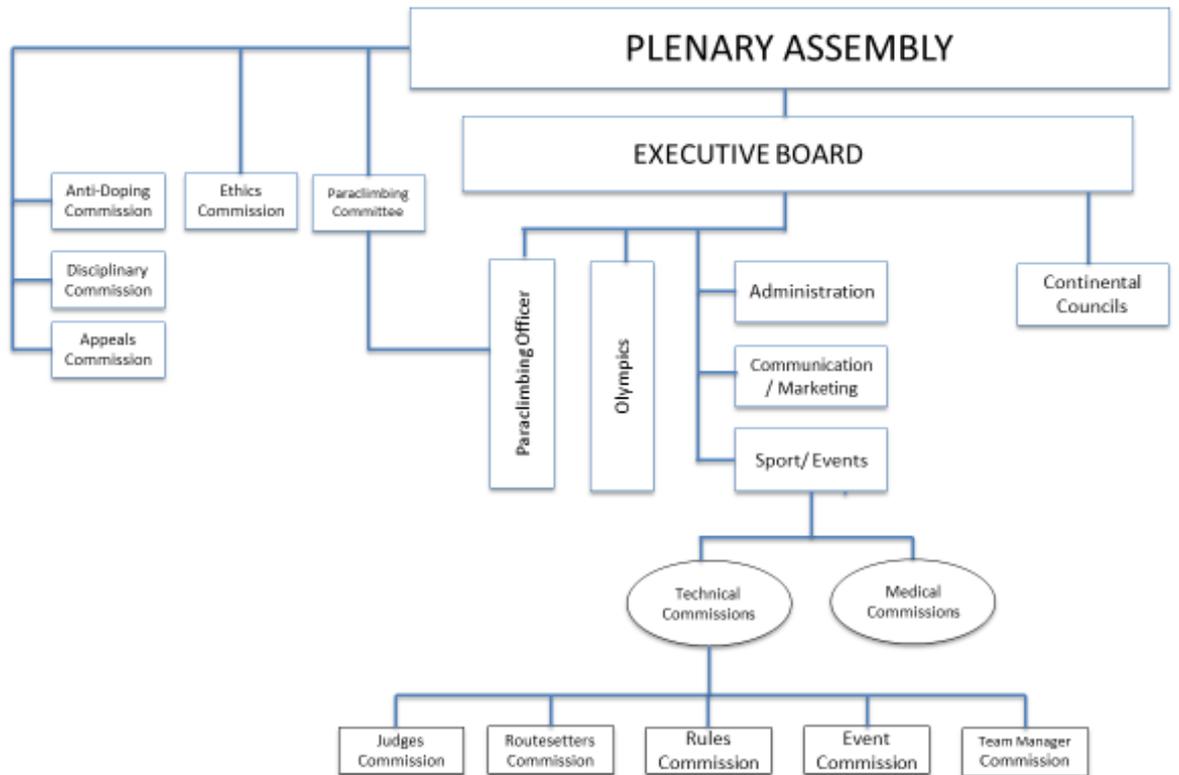
- The suspension of the Paraclimbing Commission, to allow for its reorganisation;
- The request to delegate to the Executive Board the election of the new Paraclimbing Committee, whose members shall be ratified by the PA 2020;
- The approval of the budget for Paraclimbing activities in 2019 of € 60,000;
- Draft Paraclimbing Regulations (see appendix);
- The appointment of a Paraclimbing Officer



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**APPENDIX #1**

**DRAFT ORGANISATIONAL CHART**





## **APPENDIX #2**

### **DRAFT PARACLIMBING COMMITTEE REGULATIONS**

#### **1. THE PARACLIMBING COMMITTEE**

The Paraclimbing Committee provides a permanent liaison between Paraclimbing and the IFSC.

The composition and functioning of the Paraclimbing Committee are described in the present regulations and are approved by the Plenary Assembly.

The Paraclimbing Committee is an IFSC body and therefore members shall follow the IFSC statutes.

#### **2. PARACLIMBING COMMITTEE'S GOALS**

- a) To oversee and promote climbing for persons with an impairment (Paraclimbers) on a national and international basis, striving for a fair and exciting competition;
- b) To represent the Paraclimbing community in its entirety (coaches, players, medical staff etc.);
- c) To develop inclusive policies within IFSC, aiming to make Paraclimbing accessible to physically impaired athletes as widely as possible;
- d) To develop inclusive competitions for Paraclimbers;
- e) To train and appoint International classifiers;
- f) To train international routesetters and judges specialised on para competitions;
- g) To appoint international routesetters and judges specialised on para competitions, alongside IFSC Judges Commission and Routesetters Commission;
- h) To promote and monitor trends in Paraclimbing at national, international and Paralympic levels;
- i) To research and disperse knowledge on Paraclimbing to the community;
- j) To contribute to the development of the sport to reach Paralympic status.



### 3. COMPOSITION

The number of positions available within the Paraclimbing Committee is up to 7 including the Head. The Head and the Members of the Paraclimbing Committee are elected for a 4 years term. The Paraclimbing Committee consists of the following representatives:

- Head of Classifiers to serve as Head of Committee (if he/she accepts the role);
- Athlete representative;
- Coach representative;
- Technical Delegate / Jury President;
- Medical classifying doctor (if the Head of Classification does not accept the Head of the Committee role).

### 4. INTERNAL RULES AND OTHER DUTIES

The Paraclimbing Committee meets at least once per year in person, as well as holding regular meetings via telephone and/or conferencing.

Any proposals to be sent to the Executive Board shall require a simple majority for approval.

Each year the Paraclimbing Commission shall give a report on its activity to the Plenary Assembly.

### 5. ELECTIONS

The election of the Paraclimbing Committee members shall be done during the Plenary Assembly, following recommendations of the candidates by the Executive Board. All members are elected for a 4-year term.



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The candidates to the Paraclimbing Commission should comply with the following requirements: to have never been convicted of doping, match fixing, or any serious fault sanctioned by the IFSC or national federation disciplinary commissions.

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