

To ensure competition is fair and equal, all Paralympic sports have a system in place which ensures that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for able bodied athletes.

This process is called classification and its purpose is to minimise the impact of impairments on the activity (sport discipline). Having the impairment thus is not sufficient. The impact on the sport must be proved, and in each Paralympic sport, the criteria of grouping athletes by the degree of activity limitation resulting from the impairment are named 'Sport Classes'. Through Paralympic swimming categories - or classification - it is determined which athletes are eligible to compete in a sport and how athletes are grouped together for competition. This, to a certain extent, is similar to grouping athletes by age, gender or weight.

Classification is sport-specific because an impairment affects the ability to perform in different sports to a different extent. As a consequence, an athlete may meet the criteria in one sport, but may not meet the criteria in another sport.

Swimming caters for three impairment groups - physical, visual and intellectual.

### **Sport Classes**

The sport class names in Swimming consist of a prefix "S", "SM", or "SB" and a number. The prefixes stand for the event and the number indicates the sport class the athlete competes in the respective event.

The prefixes stand for:

- S: Freestyle, Butterfly and Backstroke events
- SM: Individual Medley
- SB: Breaststroke

### **Sport Classes 1-10: Physical impairment**

There are ten different sport classes for athletes with physical impairment, numbered 1-10. A lower number indicates a more severe activity limitation than a higher number.

You will notice that athletes with different impairments compete against each other. The impact of their impairment on swim performance, however, is similar.

The following gives a few examples for impairments described in each sport class profile:

#### **S1 SB1 SM1**

Swimmers in this sport class have a significant loss of muscle power or control in their legs, arms and hands. Some athletes also have limited trunk control, as it may occur with tetraplegia. These impairments may be caused by spinal-cord injuries or polio. Swimmers in this class usually use a wheelchair in daily life.

#### **S2 SB1 SM2**

Swimmers in this sport class are able to use their arms with no use of their hands, legs or trunk or have severe co-ordination problems in four limbs. As in sport class S1 SB1 SM1, athletes mostly only compete in backstroke events.

### **S3 SB2 SM3**

This sport class includes athletes with amputations of all four limbs. Swimmers with reasonable arm strokes but no use of their legs or trunk and swimmers with severe co-ordination problems in all limbs are also included in this sport class.

### **S4 SB3 SM4**

Swimmers who can use their arms and have minimal weakness in their hands, but cannot use their trunk or legs. Athletes with amputations of three limbs also swim in this sport class.

### **S5 SB4 SM5**

Swimmers with short stature and an additional impairment, with loss of control over one side of their body (hemiplegia) or with paraplegia compete in this sport class.

### **S6 SB5 SM6**

This sport class includes swimmers with short stature, amputations of both arms or moderate co-ordination problems on one side of their body.

### **S7 SB6 SM7**

This profile is designated for athletes with one leg and one arm amputation on opposite sides, double leg amputations or a paralysis of one arm and one leg on the same side. Moreover, swimmers with full control over arms and trunk and some leg function can compete in this class.

### **S8 SB7 SM8**

Swimmers who have lost either both hands or one arm are eligible to compete in this sport class. Also, athletes with severe restrictions in the joints of the lower limbs could compete in this sport class.

### **S9 SB8 SM9**

Athletes in this sport class swim with joint restrictions in one leg, double below-the-knee amputations or an amputation of one leg.

### **S10 SB9 SM10**

This class describes the minimal impairments of eligible swimmers with physical impairment. Eligible impairments would be the loss of a hand or both feet and a significantly limited function of one hip joint.

## **Sport Classes 11-13: Visual Impairment**

Swimmers with visual impairment compete in the sport classes 11-13, with 11 meaning a complete or nearly complete loss of sight and 13 describing the minimum eligible visual impairment. Athletes in sport class 11 compete with blackened goggles.

**Sport Class 14: Intellectual impairment**

Swimmers with intellectual impairment who also meet the sport-specific criteria compete in sport class 14.