

SPORTS

Biggest ever Winter Paralympics begin

570 athletes from 49 countries will compete for 80 gold medals

BY JIM BULLEY, ESTHER CHUNG AND KANG YOO-RIM

A successful sequel can be a difficult thing to pull off, but the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Paralympics, starting today in three locations across Gangwon, looks set to continue the legacy of last month's Olympic Games.

Over the next nine days 570 athletes from 49 countries, the most athletes to ever compete at a Winter Paralympics, will descend on Pyeongchang County, Gangwon, and the surrounding area to compete on snow and ice, pushing themselves to the limit in the pursuit of an elusive gold medal.

Heading to the Games with 36 athletes, Korea hopes to win its first-ever gold at the Paralympics, while its goal for the overall medal standing is to place 10th.

North Korea will also attend the Games, its first time competing at a Winter Paralympics, sending two athletes — skiers Kim Jong-hyon and Ma Yu-chol.

At the Paralympics, athletes will compete in 80 events across six sports — alpine skiing, cross country skiing, biathlon, ice hockey, wheelchair curling and snowboard.

Although the events at the Paralympics are similar in concept to Olympic sports, the rules are noticeably different. Paralympians are assigned categories based on their impairment. These classifications determine which athlete is eligible to compete in which event and how they are scored. As different sports require different physical activities, classifications are specific to each style of event.

Like the Olympics, the Games will begin and end with official ceremonies.

The opening ceremony, which begins tonight at 8 p.m., will officially declare the start of nine days of sports and spectacle, and at the center of it all are the athletes.

"I have always been a sport addict.



North Korean athletes and officials for the PyeongChang Paralympic Winter Games walk through the PyeongChang Athletes' Village in Gangwon on Thursday.

Until [I was] 16 years old, I practiced gymnastics at a high level, but with my handicap I always experienced difficulties with the beam that I couldn't see properly. I used to fall a lot," explained Eléonor Sana, a visually impaired alpine skier from Belgium.

In visually impaired events, athletes race with a guide runner. The guide wears a brightly colored vest with the letter "G" emblazoned on it and both the guide and the athlete have wireless communication devices attached to their helmet so they can communicate to navigate the course.

In these events, trust between the athlete and the guide is crucial. As a result, if an athlete wins a medal, their guide also gets one — providing they raced together in every heat.

Sana found a guide she could definitely trust — her sister, Chloé.

"Chloé, my sister, has been my guide since the beginning [in 2014].

We have a strong relationship based on mutual trust," she explained. "It is of course a special bond. We know each other very well and have very good communication. We don't hesitate to be honest to each other. We don't avoid confrontation sometimes. It is an advantage."

Sana isn't the only athlete competing at the Games. For Belarusian Paralympian Liudmila Vauchok, the four years between Winter Games is just too long to wait.

"Sport is my whole life," explained Vauchok. "I participate both in summer and winter sports — Nordic skiing and rowing. My first Paralympics was in 2006 in Turin. I won four medals — one gold, three silver. In 2008 in Beijing I was second in rowing. In 2010 in Vancouver I got two gold and two bronze. In 2012 in London [I got a] bronze medal in rowing."

Cross-country skiing, or Nordic

skiing, involves athletes crossing a snow-covered field in the shortest possible time frame. Athletes are categorized into sitting, standing and visually impaired for the sport, with a total of 20 gold medals available across the different distances.

The PyeongChang Paralympics will see the return of snowboard, first introduced at the 2014 Sochi Games. It has three different classifications depending on which limbs an athlete's impairment affects.

"I love what I do and so I don't have to look far for motivation," said Ben Moore, a British snowboarder. "I represented Great Britain in my first season and I've never looked back. I'm now one of the first para-snowboarders to represent my country in this sport at a Paralympic Games, which I'm really excited about."

Moore isn't the only snowboarder excited about showing off what the sport has to offer at the Games.

"I have been doing sports all my life so it is a part of my DNA," said Daniel Wagner, a Danish snowboarder and the only athlete from Denmark competing at the Paralympic Games. "I want to use my disability... It is also really important for me to inspire other people, disabled or able, and I hope I can do that [by] showing that the impossible is possible."

For some athletes, the road to the Paralympics has not been easy.

"In 1998 I had a car accident. A drunken man crashed into my car and my left leg was amputated above the knee," said Gregory Leperdi, an Italian ice hockey player. "Right after the accident I wanted to learn how to run again and got involved in track and field, where I obtained a couple of Italian records — [those in] Javelin and Pentathlon [are] still unbeaten."

"In 2004, when Italy was setting up the first Italian Para Ice Hockey [team for the] Turin 2006 Paralympics,

I was asked to try this sport," he said. "Since then I've never stopped and participated in four Paralympic games, six Group-A World Championships and four European Championships, becoming the European Champion in 2011."

In para-ice hockey, players compete on a sledge and rely on their upper body strength. As such, they use two hockey sticks that are about 80 to 90 centimeters (31 to 35 inches) shorter than ice hockey sticks used in the Olympics. Ice hockey, like wheelchair curling, also takes a physical toll as players compete regularly throughout the Games in a tournament, rather than a single event.

For Belarusian Paralympian Vauchok, Sept. 11, 2001 has particular personal significance.

"In 2001 she fell from the roof of her university residence and sustained spinal injuries," reads her profile on the PyeongChang Paralympics website. "She was following the news of the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, but her television was receiving a bad signal reception. She climbed on to the roof to adjust the position of the antenna as she had done a number of times before, but on this occasion she slipped and fell."

"The biggest challenge for me was to become a wheelchair user," Vauchok said. "As I was running before the trauma it was extremely complicated for me to realize that I would never run again. But my family supported me. Now I have a daughter, she is 6 years old and this is the main victory in my life and the biggest motivation."

The Paralympic motto, "Spirit in Motion," is a reference to the will and drive of the athletes. For many Paralympians it is important that they pass this passion on to future generations.

"When you are a para-athlete defiantly [do] not take no for an answer," explained Team GB's Wagner. "Nobody knows the right answer, so it is better to try and then maybe get to a better answer."

For Vauchok, the message is simple, "believe in yourself and invent something new, because much depends on us."

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PyeongChang Paralympics by the numbers



80 Total Number of Gold Medals
49 Participating Countries
570 Participating Athletes
6 Sports

Athletes to watch out for as the Games start

BY KANG YOO-RIM

Becoming the first country to host both the Summer and Winter Paralympics, Korea is set to continue the success of the PyeongChang Olympics starting today.

The 2018 PyeongChang Paralympic Winter Games, set to run from today until Mar. 18, will offer a record 80 gold medals, 78 in snow events and two in ice events.

Of the participating countries, the United States sent the biggest delegation — 68 athletes. Some countries will bring noticeably smaller teams. North Korea will bring just two athletes, marking the first time in history that the country will compete at the Winter Paralympics. Georgia and Tajikistan will also make their debut.

There will be 30 athletes from Russia competing under the name "Neutral Paralympic Athletes," and China, the host of the 2022 Games, has 22 participants.

French alpine skier Marie Bochet, who has already won four gold medals at the 2014 Sochi Paralympics, will return to defend her title. Bochet won gold in all but the giant slalom race in Sochi, leaving quite an impression in her Paralympics debut.

Canadian Paralympic veteran cross-country skier Brian McKeever is also one to watch. McKeever will compete at his fifth Paralympics. Having competed since the 2002 Paralympics in Salt Lake City, he has won 10 gold medals, two silver and one bronze throughout his career.

Proving that age is just a number, Dutch snowboarder Bibian Mentel-Spee, 45, enters the Paralympics as the defending champion in snowboard cross in SB-LL from the 2014 Sochi Paralympics.

Ice hockey and wheelchair curling teams compete in tournaments with games taking place throughout the Paralympics. The schedule below outlines the fixtures for the Korean teams, as well as the finals.

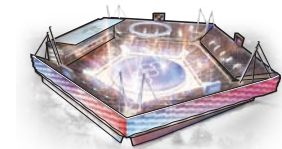
The main calendar outlines the medal games at this year's Winter Paralympics.

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Medal events

9 Friday

20:00 Opening Ceremony



12 Monday

10:00 Cross-Country Skiing

Men's 20 kilometers free — standing and visually impaired (Kwon Sang-hyeon, Choi Bo-gue, Brian McKeever)
Women's 15 kilometer free — standing and visually impaired

15 Thursday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Women's slalom — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Yang Jae-rim)



Yang Jae-rim
Ko Unsoi

10 Saturday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Men's and Women's downhill — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Marie Bochet)

10:00 Biathlon

Men's and Women's 6 kilometers and 7.5 kilometers — standing, sitting and visually impaired



13 Tuesday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Men's and Women's Super Combined — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Yang Jae-rim, Han Sang-min, Lee Chi-won, Marie Bochet)

10:00 Biathlon

Women's 10 kilometers — standing, sitting and visually impaired
Men's 12.5 kilometers — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Kwon Sang-hyeon, Lee Jeong-min, Sin Eui-hyun, Choi Bo-gue)

16 Friday

10:00 Biathlon

Women's 12.5 kilometers — standing, sitting and visually impaired
Men's 15 kilometers — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Kwon Sang-hyeon, Sin Eui-hyun, Lee Jeong-min, Choi Bo-gue)

10:30 Snowboard

Men's and Women's banked slalom — SB-LL1, SB-LL2 and SB-UL (Bibian Mentel-Spee, Park Hang-seung, Park Su-hyeok, Choi Suk-min, Kim Yun-ho)

17 Saturday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Men's giant slalom — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Han Sang-min, Lee Chi-won, Hwang Min-gyu)

10:00 Cross-Country Skiing

Men's 10 kilometer classic — standing and visually impaired (Choi Bo-gue, Kwon Sang-hyeon)
Women's 7.5 kilometer classic — standing, sitting and visually impaired
Women's 5 kilometer — sitting (Lee Do-yeon, Seo Vorum)

11 Sunday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Men's and Women's downhill — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Marie Bochet)

10:00 Cross-Country Skiing

Men's 15 kilometers — sitting (Sin Eui-hyun, Lee Jeong-min)
Women's 12 kilometers — sitting (Lee Do-yeon, Seo Vorum)

14 Wednesday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Men's Slalom — standing, sitting and visually impaired (Han Sang-min, Lee Chi-won)

10:00 Cross-Country Skiing

Men's and Women's 1.1 kilometer Sprint — sitting (Lee Do-yeon, Seo Vorum, Lee Jeong-min, Sin Eui-hyun)
Men's and Women's 1.5 kilometers Sprint Classic — standing and visually impaired (Kwon Sang-hyeon, Choi Bo-gue)

18 Sunday

9:30 Alpine Skiing

Women's giant slalom — visually impaired, standing and sitting (Yang Jae-rim)

10:00 Cross-Country Skiing

4x2.5 kilometer Mixed Relay, Open Relay

20:00 Closing Ceremony

Korea's curling and ice hockey schedule

10 Saturday	11 Sunday	12 Monday	13 Tuesday	14 Wednesday	15 Thursday	16 Friday	17 Saturday	18 Sunday
 14:35 vs. United States 19:35 vs. Neutral Paralympic Athletes Curling	14:35 vs. Slovakia 19:35 vs. Germany Ice Hockey	9:35 vs. Canada 19:35 vs. Germany Ice Hockey	9:35 vs. Finland 19:35 vs. Switzerland Ice Hockey	14:35 vs. Norway 19:35 vs. Sweden Ice Hockey	9:35 vs. Great Britain 14:35 vs. China Ice Hockey	9:30 Tie-breaker and semifinals 14:35 vs. China Ice Hockey	9:35 Bronze medal game 14:35 Gold medal game Ice Hockey	9:35 Bronze medal game 12:00 Gold medal game Ice Hockey