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# A Comparative Analysis of Factors Influencing Spectatorship of Disability Sport

*A Qualitative Inquiry and Next Steps*

Michael Cottingham

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Matt Walker

## Abstract

To effectively market a sport event, it is necessary to determine the factors that influence spectator attendance. While a developed line of inquiry exists on the marketing of able-bodied sports, a gap in the literature exists in the disability sport context. Thus, there is a need to examine the synergy between existing motives that have been confirmed in traditional sport versus those that are unique to disability sport. This line of inquiry will help future researchers determine whether additional factors should be considered when marketing disability sport. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the explicit and tacit motives of spectator attendance at disability sport. Findings from the Quad Rugby Nationals indicate that while some of the traditional sport spectator motives in the literature are the same, there are also unique motives, which should be used to accurately measure spectator interest in this emerging context.

**Keywords:** *disability, disability sport, sport marketing, sport promotion, consumer behavior*

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Sport marketers constantly strive to understand past, current, and potential consumers in efforts to increase attendance and revenue. Researchers play a substantial role to help achieve this goal by developing scales that examine consumers' motivations and points of attachment. While the findings of this line of research have improved our understanding of consumer behavior, limitations endure. For example, researchers have found that the scales used in these investigations are not universal and applicable in all contexts; rather, they indicated that unique, contextualized factors should be considered for sports not as frequently seen on television (Armstrong, 2002; Kim, Greenwell, Andrew, Lee, & Mahony, 2008; Neirrotti, Bosetti, & Teed, 2001). Disability sport, for example, lacks context-specific investigations, which could prove valuable to academic audiences and to sports practitioners who strive to understand what motivates spectators to consume disability sport.

The current study aims to fill the aforementioned need for research specific to disability sport consumption. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the explicit and tacit motives of spectators' attendance at the United States Quad Rugby Association Nationals. The researchers used one-on-one interviews with spectators at the 2010 United States Quad Rugby Association Nationals to achieve this purpose. Spectators were asked to state their (explicit) motives for attendance, as well as their (implicit) motives by reporting what they deemed meaningful while watching the matches. Before proceeding with the findings of our study, a review of the consumer behavior and disability sport literature is warranted.

## **Literature Review**

### **Sport Consumer Behavior**

Existing literature on sport consumer behavior has focused on spectator experiences such as motivation, points of attachment, market demand, and service quality, each of which have typically been evaluated using scales such as the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) (Trail & James, 2001), the Point of Attachment Index (PAI) (Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005), and the service quality (i.e., SPORTSERV) scale (Theodorkis, Kambitsis, Laios, & Koustelios, 2001). The evolution of established scales can be traced back to Sloan (1989), who first developed the 12-mood adjective dimensions to rate support of team. This research was furthered by Wann (1995) who created the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), which measured the impacts of these factors by way of a cohesive scale. Trail and James (2001), using Wann's scale, hypothesized that there were nine factors associated with fan attendance, and thus created the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) to gauge achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama/eustress, escape, family, physical attractiveness of participants, the quality of the physical skill of the participants, and social interaction. James and Ross

(2004) added two factors to the MSSC with the addition of team affiliation and entertainment.

In order to investigate not only factors of motivation, but of attachment as well, a succeeding study by Robinson and Trail (2005) added a PAI to a slightly modified version of the MSSC. Robinson, Trail, Dick, and Gillentine (2005) also utilized the MSSC and PAI to gauge consumer behavior and fan attendance; correspondingly, Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008) used the SPORTSERV to address service quality for fan attendance.

However, researchers have acknowledged the limitations of using existing scales in contexts *outside* of mainstream sports (e.g., Armstrong, 2002; Kim et al., 2008; Neirotti, Bosetti, & Teed, 2001). For example, the SFMS performed poorly when tested with spectators in Black culture (Armstrong, 2002) and in female sport (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002), resulting in the creation of the Black Consumers' Sport Motivation Scale (BCSMS) as well as a better understanding of sport consumption of under-examined populations. These studies were among the first to extend sport consumer behavior and motivation literature to sport subcultures and marginalized groups, and their findings allowed for scales to be modified depending on the unique aspects of each sport and population.

### **The Need for Disability Sport Consumer Research**

One line of research has advanced among the unique group of disability sport spectators. The first of these studies, by Evaggelinou and Grekinis (1998), explored spectator demographics and their relationships with athletes. More recently, several studies have utilized traditional consumer behavior scales to examine disability spectator motivation (e.g., Byon, Cottingham, & Carroll, 2010; Cottingham, Byon, Chatfield, & Carroll, 2013) and points of attachment (e.g., Cottingham, Chatfield, Gearity, Allen, & Hall, 2012). Specifics on certain studies mentioned here will be discussed in more detail shortly, but a primary limitation associated with this research is that few context-specific modifications were made to the scales used for data collection, contrary to the recommendations of Armstrong (2002) and Kim et al. (2008), who emphasize consideration of cultures within populations. To this point, Mackelprang and Salsgiver (1999) explained that persons with disabilities have "... interrelated and shared customs and traditions," which result in a specific culture (p. 29). In addition, disability culture has a number of subcultures (Peters, 2000), a primary example being disability sport. If disability sport culture is unique, then it is reasonable to surmise that existing perspectives and measures in traditional sport settings are limited or lack external validity. Therefore, existing scales should not be universally applied to disability sport contexts since they may be unable to identify the range of reasons why consumers attend.

Considering the limited work on disability sport consumption and the lack of appropriate, highly contextualized disability sport research, the current study could help provide direction on how to effectively market disability sport. Professional organizations such as the United States Quad Rugby Association (USQRA)

and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) have expressed the need to market their sport more efficiently and to maximize their limited resources on attracting spectators (IPC, 2008; IWRF, 2008), but they also lack the knowledge of how to direct their promotional strategies (Cottingham, Gearity, & Byon, 2013).

### Disability Sport Consumption

The current literature on disability sport consumers can be organized into three distinct categories: (a) spectator perceptions and media, (b) insider attitudes (e.g., athlete or practitioner) of social perceptions, and (c) consumer behavior studies. The foremost line of research concludes that the most commonly promoted viewpoint of disability sport is the “supercrip” image (Kama, 2004; Silva & Howe, 2012), prevalent in media outlets such as movies, television (Englandkennedy, 2008), and newspapers (Clogston, 1994). The supercrip character has been shown in fantasy films such as *X-Men*’s Charles Xavier and *Avatar*’s Jake Sully, as well as in real-life documentaries and news features on athletes such as Oscar Pistorius. Supercrips are defined as people who have overcome their disability in a way that may be seen as unexpected and inspiring (Berger, 2008). The supercrip trope has evolved to distinguish between ordinary supercrips who simply live an independent, capable life, and the extraordinary supercrips who excel and surpass the lowered expectations of the nondisabled world (Karma, 2004). The latter consists of athletes with disabilities as promoted by the media.

The second line of research has focused on athletes’ and practitioners’ reactions toward disability portrayals in the media. The findings of these works indicate that athletes with disabilities are actually frustrated by the supercrip identity (Berger, 2008; Hardin & Hardin, 2004, Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). However, these opinions have not been uniform. Interestingly, some athletes do not mind being cast as an inspiration to other people or athletes with disabilities, but prefer not to be used as inspirational propaganda for the nondisabled community (Berger, 2008; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). As for practitioners and their insight, one study by Cottingham et al. (2013) sought to examine perspectives of those who promote disability sport. Their findings indicate that practitioners lack general direction and have little agreement on how disability sport should be promoted.

The third line of research has focused on disability sport spectatorship. Stewart (1993) and Evaggelinou and Grekinls (1998) concentrated on the demographics of disability sport spectatorship, and to a lesser extent spectator investment in the construct of disability. These studies differed in their findings. Stewart noted that the majority of spectators attending a sporting event for the deaf were invested and knowledgeable about the deaf community, with most being deaf, employed in deaf services, or related to someone who is deaf. In contrast, results from Evaggelinou and Grekinls indicated that over 75% of those in attendance at the Stoke Mandeville Games (an elite world competition for those with mobility impairments) did not have a disability or know any of the athletes. Findings also revealed

that the spectators were motivated to attend by the desire to learn about disability sport and to encourage activity among people with disabilities.

More recent studies have made efforts to examine spectatorship quantitatively. These studies fall into one of two tracks. The first of these have taken quantitative scales designed for nondisability sport contexts and applied them to disability sport (e.g., Byon et al., 2011; Byon et al., 2010; Cottingham et al., 2012). Byon et al., (2011) and Byon et al., (2010) both utilized the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001) to identify the most salient motives of sport spectators. Results demonstrated that while factors such as drama and escape were present, knowledge was the most influential motive driving disability sport consumption. The second line has utilized theory related to disability sport to identify potential consumer behavior motives in an applied setting (Cottingham et al., 2013; Cottingham et al., 2014).

In short, though existing research has deepened our comprehension of consumer behavior, the apparent limitations make understanding disability sport consumption difficult. First, the model fit of all the aforementioned studies were acceptable, but none were good, presumably because the factors examined were not developed through discussions with spectators. Second, all of the relevant consumer behavior research on disability sport is quantitative, which may not be effective in identifying factors related to spectatorship of disability sport. Research is needed to qualitatively examine disability sport spectatorship and to discern factors previously unidentified. This will help frame future research in analyzing the whole of disability sport spectatorship and provide practitioners with more empirical information.

## Method

### Research Design

The research conducted in this investigation conforms to a basic qualitative research study, following suit of Merriam (2009). This method was chosen for its comprehensive nature as a qualitative approach that strives for exploration, pursues intellectual interest in a phenomenon, and has as its goal the extension of knowledge (Merriam, 2009). Previous investigations on consumer behavior in sport tend to be limited to quantitative approaches, so a qualitative study may give rise to unique findings.

Newman, Ridenour, Newman, and DeMarco Jr. (2003) identify nine purposes or rationales in mixed methods research, two of which guide the qualitative approach described here. One of the qualitative rationales was to *add to the knowledge base* by employing an existing theoretical framework (i.e., motive and points of attachment) commonly used in consumer behavior research. In doing so, however, researchers need to be careful when using surveys (or using the same survey across all contexts) that force respondents' selection as it may lead to a

“fictitious world.” That is, questions that do not corroborate with the reality of the respondents (Blumer, 1969) can produce invalid findings. Effectively, this study was guided by the motive and points of attachment framework, while consciously adapting the “blank slate” mindset (Merriam, 2009) used with other qualitative methods such as grounded theory.

The second rationale of the qualitative component of this study was to *explore phenomena* (Newman et al., 2003). According to symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), human beings act toward meaningful events. Thus, beyond explicitly asking participants their motive for attending Quad Rugby Nationals, we sought to understand what aspects of the game itself they found to be the most meaningful. What participants were conscious of during a game may be related to motive for attending, perhaps tacit (as opposed to explicit) motives (Polyani, 2009). We have known for some time that if consumers are unaware of their preference, they will instead unintentionally provide erroneous answers rather than saying they are unsure (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). In addition, individuals are often unable to articulate why they take specific actions, due to factors such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), issues with self-perception (Bern, 1967), peripheral persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), emotional reactions (Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Cameron, & Ellis, 1994), and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 2009). Thus, marketing strategies may be directed by understanding what participants are aware of during a game. Guided by previous research on spectator viewership, this study may significantly deepen knowledge of consumer behavior while exploring potentially new and fertile areas within the context of disability sport. This rationale leads directly to the two research questions (RQ) this study will address:

- RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What reasons do sport consumers give for attending Quad Rugby Nationals?
- RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What are the meaningful events reported by sport consumers while watching a Quad Rugby National game?

While the first research question was designed to identify people’s explicit reasons for attending, the second addresses the tacit experience of consumption. Together, we hypothesized that people would commonly express their relationship to the event or team as well as make meaning out of watching a match. By employing this novel methodology, we hope to identify possible points of attachment related to spectators and disability sport, and to explore how tacit knowledge or non-conscious thought may influence disability sport consumption.

### Site and Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to identify prospective participants (Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom sampling procedure that involved



soliciting consumers in attendance at Quad Rugby Nationals to participate in the study. Subsequently, data were collected from 27 participants attending any of the games at Quad Rugby Nationals. Participants ranged from 19–63 years of age. Fifteen participants self-identified as having a disability, and 13 participants were women.

### **Data Collection**

Over two days, data were collected via semi-structured in-person interviews by two researchers. Both were trained by one lead researcher prior to conducting any interviews and had practiced the interview protocol on each other. Each interview was audio-taped, lasted between 4–13 minutes, and occurred during a game or in-between games. Interviews were collected until the researchers observed they were not obtaining any new information, which is consistent with the purpose of theoretical saturation (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a paid, experienced transcriptionist. During this phase, all participants were given a pseudonym, and any identifying information (e.g., name, hometown) was changed. In order to triangulate the findings (Denzin, 1978) and provide more trustworthy data, all analyses were conducted by a qualitative research group. The group consisted of a professionally trained qualitative researcher, a researcher who conducted interviews, and an additional researcher who did not contribute to the design nor collection of data. In this way, the research group provided a critical analysis from varying perspectives and knowledge of the data (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009). First, the research group listened to each audio recording while reading the transcript to become acquainted with the data and to develop an initial understanding of the phenomena. Transcripts were then analyzed individually in a three-step series of successive approximation in order to achieve higher accuracy. The first step was to code the data by drawing out the smallest element of understanding called a “meaning unit.” The second iteration involved comparing meaning units and clustering them into subthemes based on similarities. The third and final iteration involved comparing and clustering sub-themes into larger themes to succinctly answer the research questions. To provide transparency of the analysis process, as well as a visual map of the findings, the researchers constructed a code map of the three iterations of coding (AERA, 2006; Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

### **Trustworthiness**

Several procedures were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, while others (e.g., member checking) were impractical and thus not utilized. Before conducting any interviews, the graduate students were questioned by the lead qualitative researcher for the purpose of identifying any researcher bias (i.e., a bracketing



interview) and avoiding the issue of leading the interviewees' response (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). By acknowledging researcher bias and by having a diverse research group analyze the data, the findings are likely to be more trustworthy.

## Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings alongside related research in sport consumer behavior and disability sport.

### **RQ<sub>1</sub>: What reasons do sport consumers give for attending Quad Rugby Nationals?**

Participants provided various reasons for attending Quad Rugby Nationals, including many of the same motives discussed in prior work, such as attachment to the sport, engagement in the sport, and education or knowledge. However, the most meaningful and salient factors that scored a frequency of or above five are (1) volunteering or working at the event, (2) family, (3) support of a team, and (4) friendship (See Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Research Question 1: Spectators' Stated Reasons for Attendance*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Volunteering and working at the event	10
Family	8
Support of a team	6
Friendship	5
Attachment to the sport	4
Engagement in the sport	3
Education and knowledge	2

**Volunteering or working at the event.** Ten participants identified volunteering or working at the event as their main reason for attending, yet often identified additional reasons for spectatorship. “I’ll give you a convoluted answer. I take a lot of pictures, so part of it is just looking for photo ops,” said Dan. Participants like Dan, even if working at the event, are still consumers who can be targeted by sponsors and who are susceptible to issues related to consumer behavior. However, to date they have not been examined as a consumer group. Studies such as Coyne and Coyne (2001) have looked at retaining volunteers, which would develop a segment of a fan base, but little literature has examined the relationship between volunteers and/or employees and consumer behavior in the context of disability sport or nondisability sport.

**Family and support of a team.** Eight participants identified family as a primary reason for their attendance. “My sister. She’s on the rugby team and I’m motivated to come because she loves it,” Monica shared. The term “family” has been studied in sport consumer behavior (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995), but has been used to mean sharing a sport with family, rather than supporting family members competing or involved in the event.

By extension, six participants identified supporting a team, in most cases “their” team, as a primary reason for attendance. “I came to support the team I started with,” stated Edgar. These participants were both former athletes turned spectators as well as spectators who had never played and who did not have a disability. This ownership of a team and desire to support it has been examined in a number of nondisability contexts and has been shown to be a strong predictor of attendance and other consumption behaviors (Dimmock, Grove, & Eklund, 2005; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail & James, 2001). However, team identification has not been successfully tested in the context of disability sport. Cottingham et al. (2012) were unable to statistically determine a construct of team identification. As one of the most salient reasons for attending, the influence of supporting a team must be examined further and perhaps reconstructed if this factor is to perform well in a quantitative consumer behavior study.

**Friendship.** Five participants identified friendship as a primary reason for their attendance. “You connect with some old friends, see some old buddies,” declared Clayton. In discussions with participants, it seemed that these friendships were not exclusively limited to spectators and participants, but in fact the friendships that motivated their attendance crossed back and forth from staff, athletes and fellow spectators. While motivations to engage in social experiences have been tested in the context of disability sport (Byon et al., 2011; Byon et al., 2010), they have not been found to be a significant motive. This may be due to the fact that the items used to measure social experience revolved around interacting with other fans. Yet most of the subjects in this study identified the experience of connecting with “old buddies.” These were former participants as well as former support staff and event coordinators. Future studies should consider developing items related

to a connection with current friends rather than interactions with strangers for the purpose of social experience.

**Other motives.** Though mentioned less frequently, attachment to the sport, engagement in the sport, and education or knowledge were each identified by more than one participant.

**Attachment to the sport.** In regards to the foremost motive, four participants stated the sport itself was the primary reason for attending the event. “I just come ‘cause it’s really fun, it’s really a fun sport to watch,” Patty shared. There are two interesting aspects to this finding. First, attachment to the sport has been identified by Robinson and Trail (2005) and was tested in the context of quad rugby (Cottingham et al., 2012). The Cottingham study found attachment to sport the most influential point of attachment. However, the frequency with which it was reported here would imply that sport was not particularly influential; in turn, points of attachment may not be particularly applicable in the context of disability sport. Second, as Patty’s quote explains, there is a strong interaction between the point of attachment (i.e. sport) and the emotional experiences; in other words, more emotional motives are directly intertwined with points of attachment. This might imply that findings in Cottingham et al. (2012) should be considered with more emotional motives.

**Engagement in the sport.** In contrast with participants who express attachment or affinity to a sport they enjoy watching, but have not ever played, three participants reported that their previous personal engagement in the sport was a primary reason for attending the event. “Well, I’ve actually been out of the game since ‘05 and I just wanted to come watch it,” Clayton verbalized. It is of no surprise that former athletes desire to attend events in the game they used to play. However, existing research has not looked at the relationship between former participation and current consumption, nor has it directly addressed the question on sport spectatorship and participation (McDonald, Miline, & Hong, 2002; Shamir & Ruskin, 1984). Efforts should be made to determine whether former athletes are more likely to be consumers of a sport.

**Education or knowledge.** Finally, two participants stated their reasons for attending were related to becoming more educated or knowledgeable about the sport. “[Watching] helps me with coaching,” Bobby answered. Byon et al. (2010) and Byon et al. (2011) found knowledge to be the most influential variable when considering future consumption, but clearly it is not the most influential factor in determining why a consumer attends an event. Knowledge may then be more a byproduct of attendance for those who will consume in the future rather than a direct motive for consumption.

**RQ<sub>2</sub>: What are the meaningful events reported by sport consumers while watching a Quad Rugby National game?**

In order to answer this research question, participants were asked to describe what they were aware of while watching a match at Quad Rugby Nationals. The six major themes, most with subthemes, identified by participants included (1) sport skills, (2) game features, (3) disability issues, (4) violence, (5) family and friends, and (6) education. An overview of these motives and their frequencies is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Research Question 2: What Spectators are Aware of While Watching*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Sport Skills</b>	23
Strategy	8
Athleticism/Strength	7
Teamwork	5
Mental skills	3
<b>Game Features</b>	13
Closeness of play	7
Excitement	3
Level of play	3
<b>Disability Issues</b>	12
Overcoming to compete	10
Supporting opportunities	2
<b>Violence</b>	9
<b>Family and Friends</b>	7
Family	4
Friends	3
<b>Education</b>	6
Watching others improve	2
Learning strategy	2
Learning about sport environment	2

**Sport skills.** The most frequently identified meaningful event consumers reported while watching a game was sport skills. Twenty-three participants identified aspects of sport skills that included strategy, athleticism and strength, teamwork, and mental skills. Of these aspects identified, there were eight participants for strategy, seven for athleticism and strength, five for teamwork, and three for mental skills. A common response for strategy was offered by Victor, “I like to see a lot of action, a lot of strategy I guess. [I] watch the different ways they’ll defend,

lock up a key player, try to keep key players open for offensive. It's fun to watch." The strategies of wheelchair rugby can be quite complex and are not fully relatable to a nondisability sport. Nuances such as key or high point players being locked up for offensive purposes requires some understanding of disability function, chair position, and chair design. Of interesting relevance, Byon et al. (2010) and Byon et al. (2011) found knowledge to be the most salient factor at predicting consumption behavior.

Kyle described how he was aware of the athletes' athleticism and strength, "He jumped up with his chair strapped on his back and ran, caught himself on the wall. Everybody was just kind of shocked." Athleticism has been examined in a number of qualitative studies in nondisability contexts (Armstrong, 2002; Trail & James, 2001, Wann, 1995) and was also tested in disability sport in the Byon motive studies (2010; 2011). Contradicting our findings is that of Byon's studies that determined athleticism and strength was not a salient variable at predicting consumption behavior. Strength has been shown to be a strong predictor of independence for those with spinal cord injuries (Hicks et al., 2003) and should be examined either in conjunction with or in addition to traditional measures of athleticism in disability sport contexts.

Regarding awareness of the teamwork involved in Quad Rugby, Morgan said, "They [athletes] are all aware of what's going on in the game, cheering, and you know, supporting each other." While some might argue that this factor was indirectly identified by Wann (1995) as a combination of eustress, entertainment, and team dynamics, this factor has not directly been studied in disability or nondisability sport consumption contexts. Finally, Steve noted that he was impressed with the athletes' mental skills, "You [the athletes] have to think ahead so much farther because they can't just everything changes so quickly." Observation of mental skills as a factor has not been identified directly in disability or nondisability sport literature.

**Game features.** The second most frequently reported meaningful event, by 13 participants, was game features. Of these aspects identified, there were seven participants for closeness of play, and three for excitement, as well as level of play. Victor identified being aware of multiple features of the game, "I like to see a close game, good sportsmanship and some good ball playing." This is an interesting finding because Byon and colleagues found closeness/drama not to be a salient variable in predicting consumption behavior. This excitement or eustress may be more effectively examined by the Trail and James' 2010 definition of drama. The latter factor was used in the context of disability sport in Cottingham et al. (2014) and similar iterations were used in Byon et al. (2011; 2010) and Cottingham et al., 2013. Lastly, Clayton spoke to his awareness of the level of play, "Nationals, it's just the elite competition. It's the best of the best." Level of play was identified by Trail, Robinson, Dick, and Gillentine (2003) as a point of attachment and has been tested in a number of contexts, but not disability sport.

**Disability issues.** Twelve participants identified disability issues, making it the third most meaningful event. Participants' responses were categorized as overcoming or utilizing disability to compete and supporting opportunities for athletes with disabilities. For example, Murray said, "Well, you have different functions, you have different, you know, some people how they overcome their disability or use their disability to their advantage or you know how they overcome, they have limited use of grip." Overcoming or utilizing disability to compete was identified by ten participants. Athletes with disabilities have a unique place in disability culture and society as a focal point of disability-oriented media (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001). Some refer to this idolatry of athletes with disabilities as the "supercrip" phenomenon (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009), where athletes are perceived as superhuman or inspirational (Sust, 1995). The idea of being an inspiration makes many athletes with disabilities uncomfortable, as there is a desire to be perceived as competitive athletes rather than as inspiration stories (Hardin & Hardin, 2004). However, addressing and utilizing one's disability to gain a competitive advantage was referenced by a number of participants and is in line with the preferred perceptions of athletes noted by Hardin and Hardin (2004).

Two participants spoke about being aware of supporting opportunities for athletes with disabilities. As stated by Ricky, "I think it's real nice that they have a sport available for people that are quads and those kinds of things that really can't participate in the other kind of athletic activities." Both individuals who identified awareness of opportunities for athletes with disabilities reported they had a close friend or family member with a disability. Ryan and Cole (2009) found that familial support is strong after a traumatic accident and does not decrease. Family members can be fervent advocates for opportunities for relatives with disabilities.

**Violence.** Nine participants spoke favorably about their awareness of violence while watching the event. Several of the participants made comparisons to other violent, traditional sports, "Of course you like it when they crash, like NASCAR, you know? Contact! It's like hockey and NASCAR. You like it when they get at it," said Craig. However, the meaning of violence did not resemble the enjoyment of aggression examined by Kim and Trail (2010), but instead the raw violence factor examined by Kim et al. (2008) in mixed martial arts. The movie *Murderball* (Mandel & Shapiro, 2005) promoted the dichotomy of perceived disability weakness and the intense violence experienced in wheelchair rugby, but research has yet to examine the juxtaposition of disability and violent sport.

**Friends and family.** While watching a game, four participants identified being aware of family and three identified friends. In acknowledgement of prior mention, family and friends were also stated as explicit reasons for attending the game, so further elaboration of the motive is not needed. It is interesting to note, however, that with respect to family, although eight participants responded to question one by stating they attended the game to support family, only four repeated

that response when asked what they were aware of while watching. Perhaps this distinction can be explained by Victor, who first stated that he was in attendance to support his son, but later stated, “I wouldn’t have come cross country, spend the money we did, if this wasn’t a positive experience for me to some degree what we’re watching today.” As previously noted, family of players has not been directly referenced in existing literature, but instead this factor was referenced indirectly in regards to experiencing sport with family (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Findings from this study indicate that family ties may increase attendance, but may be mediated by other aspects such as entertainment.

**Education.** Six participants identified education and improvement as a meaningful event of watching a game. Two participants for each of the three aspects (i.e., identified watching others improve, learning strategy and learning about the sport), identified a learning, change or growth experience. For example, Jack said, “Seeing people, how they improve over the years. How the teams improved or degrade depending on the year,” said Jack. Team improvement and watching a team advance from poor performance to stronger performance can drive spectatorship (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Contrastingly, Dan spoke about how he learned the tactics of the game, “When I first started watching, it just looked like people running around and I did not realize there were actual plays, set plays. Offenses and defenses and strategies (pause) all that kind of stuff. So it’s learning primarily,” said Dan. Another type of learning experience was exemplified by Brock, who spoke of learning about the sport environment and the uniqueness of Quad Rugby, “It’s just pretty cool to come see the different disabilities, different people (long pause) people that come from different countries... just to get to know...see how their life is.”

Learning strategy and learning about the sport environment is related to knowledge, the factor that Byon et al. (2010) and Cottingham, Phillips, Hall, Gearity, and Carroll (2014) found to be significantly influential at determining consumption behavior. Moreover, we believe the dynamic experience Kim and Trail (2010) described in a nondisability sport context is ever present in our findings. The participants of our study described learning not as a static experience, but as a process they were invested in. While it is presumed that exposure increases knowledge, acquiring knowledge has not been identified in consumer behavior literature. The education or learning process of consumers may be particularly vital to disability sport consumption as consumers would likely need to learn concepts such as disability level, classification, and how this relates to players’ roles.

### **Limitations, Implications, and Future Research**

These findings indicate that some factors influencing disability sport spectatorship are unique and distinct from nondisability sport spectatorship (e.g., overcoming disability to compete), but as a whole, many more factors are similar (e.g., attachment to team, level of play). From a promotional perspective, this means



that there may in fact be more potential for the promotion of disability sport than otherwise assumed based on current levels of coverage. Rather than developing new strategies for promoting disability sport or tapping into unique motivations to reach a specific niche, sport marketers can employ traditional factors more feasibly yet strategically. Because traditional factors in sport consumption apply, essentially marketers can be trained in the promotion of able bodied sport and simply engage in some practical modifications. Perhaps more importantly, the study strongly suggests that sport spectators perceive disability sport in the same manner as nonadaptive sports. This signifies that spectatorship can respect and appreciate disability sport in the same way it does nonadaptive sport.

From a theoretical perspective, we recommend taking current theory and corresponding scales designed to measure nondisability sport spectatorship and applying these scales to disability sport with modification based on theory and findings in this study, rather than developing completely new scales. Specifically, factors involving relationship to disability and perception of disability should be included with scales such as the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (Cottingham et al., 2014). This would provide a holistic experience related to disability sport spectatorship.

It should be noted that these findings were in the context of a single disability sport (wheelchair rugby) and data was collected at a single sporting event (quad rugby nationals). For these reasons, we would recommend examination of factors influencing sport consumption of other disability sports where athletes use wheelchairs such as wheelchair basketball and tennis, but also disability sports where athletes do not use wheelchairs such as goalball, beep ball, and sit volleyball.

A picture of disability sport spectatorship motivation is coming to light; however, understanding the factors influencing current spectatorship of disability sport is not enough. There is substantial value in identifying the motivations and the experiences of disability sport spectators as this study has provided. The fact that existing scales need only be modified (as opposed to creating new scales) indicate that spectators of nonadaptive as well as disability sport share common similarities. However, this directs research in one primary direction: the acquisition of new spectators.

The number of fans in attendance must increase in order for disability sport to grow. If the current spectators are similar to traditional sports spectators, then efforts must be made to reach new spectators and to understand how they perceive disability sport. Thus, it would be beneficial to examine the perceptions and experiences of first-time viewers of disability sport, and to determine whether or not their perceptions coincide with those of long term fans. If so, then the challenge is simply promoting the product, and practitioners can therefore strive towards drawing more attention to disability sport. If, however, the issue is that first time spectators perceive disability sport differently, this poses a greater challenge. The possibility of dissimilar spectator perceptions may be due in part to social precon-

ceived notions related to disability. These can often be negative and problematic (Livneh, 1988). If this is the case, it presents the opportunity to overcome negative stigmas and stereotypes involving the disability community.

As our research identifies fans as being quite similar, future research could focus on activities or experiences that might cause casual spectators to drop preconceived notions that impact their sport consumption, and become fans who experience disability sport as they would any other able-bodied sport. We feel our research provides the first step in this process, showing that disability sport spectators are not unlike nonadaptive sport spectators.

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