

THE JOURNEY OF WOMEN
IN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY IN

BRAZIL



PARADESPORTO
BRASIL + ACESSÍVEL

BEATRIZ LUCENA RAMOS
CIRO WINCKLER

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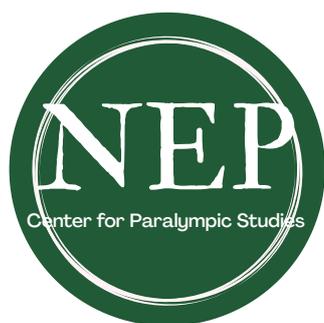
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FOREWORD

I have worked and volunteered in the parasport community—from grassroots to international levels—for more than 45 years, and I feel privileged and honoured to provide the foreword for this publication.

As Director of Competitions and Development for World Wheelchair Rugby (WWR), I also chair the WWR Women’s Task Group. Established in 2024, the Task Group was mandated to guide the development of a strategic approach to increasing female participation in wheelchair rugby worldwide.

The Women’s Task Group set out to gather input from the global community through focus groups, surveys, and interviews to identify barriers and develop strategies to advance gender equity within our sport. This work resulted in the publication of a series of Playbooks designed to support member countries and their clubs in creating more equitable and inclusive development pathways for women, and embedding gender equity into the WWR strategic plan.

Since the inception of the Women’s Task Group, we have witnessed meaningful growth in female participation in wheelchair rugby globally. This progress includes the introduction of try-it days, women-only training camps and competitions, an increased number of women receiving official classification, women-only team entries in open competitions, targeted awareness campaigns, and the announcement of the first Women’s World Championship, to be held in 2026.

Brazil has played a significant leadership role in advancing this vital work toward gender equity. This book provides a compelling narrative of the journey undertaken by the Brazil Wheelchair Rugby Association (ABRC) to support and grow the game for women. Setting the scene, it offers a history of wheelchair rugby in Brazil, along with essential information about the different versions of the sport, classification, rules, and a timeline, all presented in a succinct and accessible manner. It also outlines the history of women in sport within the Paralympic movement, the desire to increase female participation across the Paralympic movement, and highlights the low number of women who have competed in wheelchair rugby at the highest level.

FOREWORD

As the book delves into the experiences of women involved with ABRC - as coaches, support staff, analysts, and athletes - I was deeply moved by the honesty and personal nature of the stories shared. What stood out most was the enthusiasm and commitment to the sport demonstrated by everyone profiled. Their stories are both moving and motivating.

ABRC has continued to raise the bar in its support of gender equity, whether through sending the first female-only technical support staff with a team to an international competition, hosting the first-ever national women-only championships, or capturing this important work within this publication. I encourage other WWR members to look to ABRC as a leader, to learn from their experiences, and to work collectively toward increasing female participation in wheelchair rugby globally.

A key strategy in furthering the Task Group objectives is educating and informing our members about the challenges many women face when first engaging with the sport and in sustaining their participation along the competitive pathway. At the same time, it is equally important to highlight the unique, positive, and enriching experiences enjoyed by women who participate in wheelchair rugby.

This book represents an important step forward in our collective efforts to build a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for women in wheelchair rugby. It offers valuable insight into the voices of participants both domestically and globally, and reinforces our findings through the development of the Playbooks. Women need to see themselves represented and actively participating in the sport to support their continued involvement.

I am excited by the timeliness of this publication, as it supports and complements the meaningful work currently underway. The authors and contributors are clearly passionate and deeply committed to ensuring that women are a full and integral part of the sport. Thank you for your continued dedication to advancing gender equity in wheelchair rugby globally.

Kathy Newman
World Wheelchair Rugby
Director, Competitions & Development



Chapter 1

Ciro Winckler
Elke Lima Trigo
Ruth Eugênia
Beatriz Lucena Ramos

Women in the Paralympic Games

INTRODUCTION



The participation of women in the Paralympic Games has been a topic of growing relevance and analysis in recent decades, marked by both significant progress and persistent challenges.

The Paralympic movement originated during World War II. In 1944, neurologist **Ludwig Guttmann** created a rehabilitation center for people with spinal cord injuries at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in the United Kingdom. In this space, sport was incorporated as an essential part of the physical, psychological, and social rehabilitation of war veterans.

As a rehabilitation mechanism, the **first Stoke Mandeville Games** took place on **July 29, 1948**, with 16 military athletes, all former members of the British Armed Forces, competing in wheelchair archery, including two women. This event is recognized as the starting point of the Paralympic Movement.



The presence of women, although symbolic at that time, represented the beginning of a gradual process of inclusion of women in Paralympic sport. In **1960**, with the holding of the **first Summer Paralympic Games**, female participation was still limited, with few events offered to this group. However, over the following decades, equity policies and the offering of new sports to women have driven a steady growth in this representation.

Historical data demonstrates significant progress in female participation in the Paralympic Games. In **1988**, women accounted for **22.06%** of athletes; over the following two decades, this share increased to **34.60% in 2008**. From that period onwards, the growth rate intensified, reaching **44.48% in 2024**, reflecting the effects of policies and measures implemented since the early 2000s to promote gender equality in the Paralympic movement.



The presence of women in the Paralympic Games reflects not only quantitative progress but also the Paralympic movement's commitment to the principle of an inclusive society, in which minority groups, including women, **gain visibility and social recognition through sport.**

BARRIERS TO THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Gender inequality at the Paralympic Games reflects historical trends similar to those observed at the Olympic Games, prior to the implementation of intentional equity policies.

In this context, women with disabilities face multiple and intersectional barriers, including:



Gender stereotypes and discrimination, that limits the opportunities in sport.



Stigmas about appearance and femininity, which affect the public perception of female athletes.



Unequal **national investment** and **cultural differences** between continents.

Absence of women in **leadership positions** and **decision-making** processes in sports.



Lack of **family and community support** for women's participation in sports.

The unequal allocation of **resources for socio-cultural** projects directly affects the development and retention of girls and women with disabilities in physical activity and sports.

These factors are exacerbated by a lack of accessible infrastructure, a shortage of qualified coaches, geographic isolation, restrictive religious norms, and insufficient sports initiatives in schools and communities, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Women's access to sports is a decisive factor for **autonomy, empowerment, and social inclusion**. Sports participation strengthens self-esteem, expands support networks, and generates positive role models for new generations, contributing to a more just, diverse, and egalitarian society.

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

Several international initiatives have been implemented to promote gender equality in sport. A significant milestone was the **Brighton Declaration**, drafted in **1994** by the International Working Group on Women and Sport, which established fundamental principles for increasing the participation and recognition of women at all levels of sport.

In 2014, the declaration was updated, becoming the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration, expanding to include physical activity as an essential part of organized sport. It highlighted the need to foster a sporting culture that allows and values the **full participation of women in all aspects of sport and physical activity**, recognizing the importance of more inclusive and equitable environments.

In light of this scenario, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) adhered to the Declaration in 1997, driving concrete actions such as:



Increased number of women's events and adjustments to the classifications.

Creating quotas for women in competitions and management positions.



Training and mentoring: leadership programs, training grants for women, promotion of female coaches and sports managers.

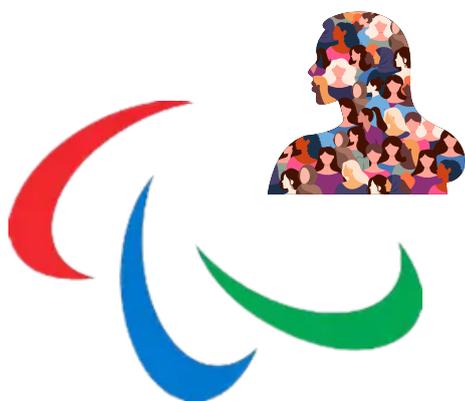


Awareness campaigns about gender equality.

Encouraging balanced media coverage of female athletes.

In line with these initiatives, the "**IPC Women in Sport**" Committee was established in 2003, responsible for advising and consulting on strategies and actions aimed at increasing the number of female athletes, coaches, officials and leaders in the Paralympic world.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY AT THE PARALYMPIC GAMES



Wheelchair rugby is officially a mixed-gender sport in the Paralympics – men and women can play together. But in practice, female participation is still very small. Up until the Tokyo Games, only **seven women** had competed in the history of the Paralympic sport. This represents only **1.6% of all athletes** who have ever played wheelchair rugby in the Games.

This difference also appears in other international competitions. In the last two World Championships, for example, the numbers show how **limited** female participation still is: in **2018**, there were **6 women** among 130 athletes (**4.6%**), and in **2022**, **13 women** among 138 athletes (**9.4%**). Adding both tournaments together, there were only **19 women** among 268 participants – about **7.1%** of the total.

When compared to the overall growth of women in the Paralympic Games, this difference becomes even more evident. Between **1988 and 2024**, female participation in the Games increased from **22.1% to 44.5%**. However, in the wheelchair rugby, women still only represent **2.2% of the athletes**.



Despite these low numbers, the scenario is beginning to change. **More and more women are becoming interested in the sport**, and new **initiatives are emerging to encourage this participation**. Training programs, local teams, and visibility campaigns are helping to create space for more women to step onto the court and show that wheelchair rugby is also a place for them.



CONCLUSION



The trajectory of women in Paralympic sport shows how **inclusion is a constantly evolving process**. From the first athletes at the Stoke Mandeville Games to the significant presence of women in almost half of current Paralympic sports, each achievement represents an **important step towards equality**.

However, as the wheelchair rugby case makes clear, there are still sports where this presence needs to grow significantly. The small number of female players is not a sign of lack of interest, but of structural, cultural, and historical barriers that still limit women with disabilities' access to high-performance sports.

Overcoming these barriers requires **concrete and continuous action** — more training opportunities, investment in women's teams, media visibility, and women's leadership at all levels of sport. Every incentive policy, every girl who finds inspiration in a female athlete, every new team that is formed represents real progress.



The future of the Paralympic movement depends on continuing to create opportunities **for all people, regardless of gender or disability, to compete, lead, and inspire.**



Sports give women confidence; they learn how to lead and make decisions.



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Chapter 2

Beatriz Lucena Ramos
Ciro Winckler

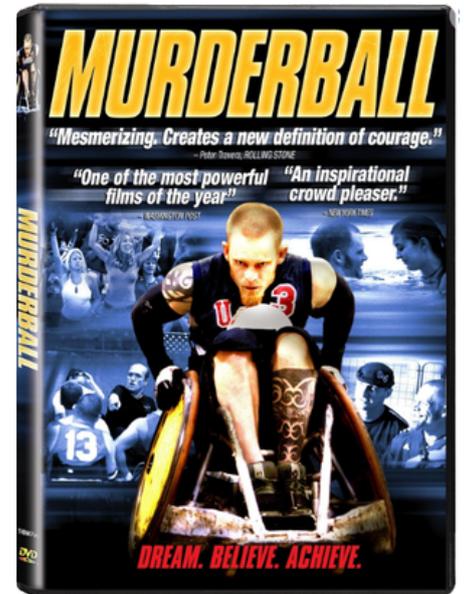
Introduction to Wheelchair Rugby

INTRODUCTION

Wheelchair Rugby, originally known as **murderball**, was created in 1977 in Winnipeg, Canada, by a group of **people with quadriplegia** who were looking for alternatives to wheelchair basketball.

The official governing body is **World Wheelchair Rugby (WWR)**, and in Brazil, the **Brazilian Wheelchair Rugby Association (ABRC)**.

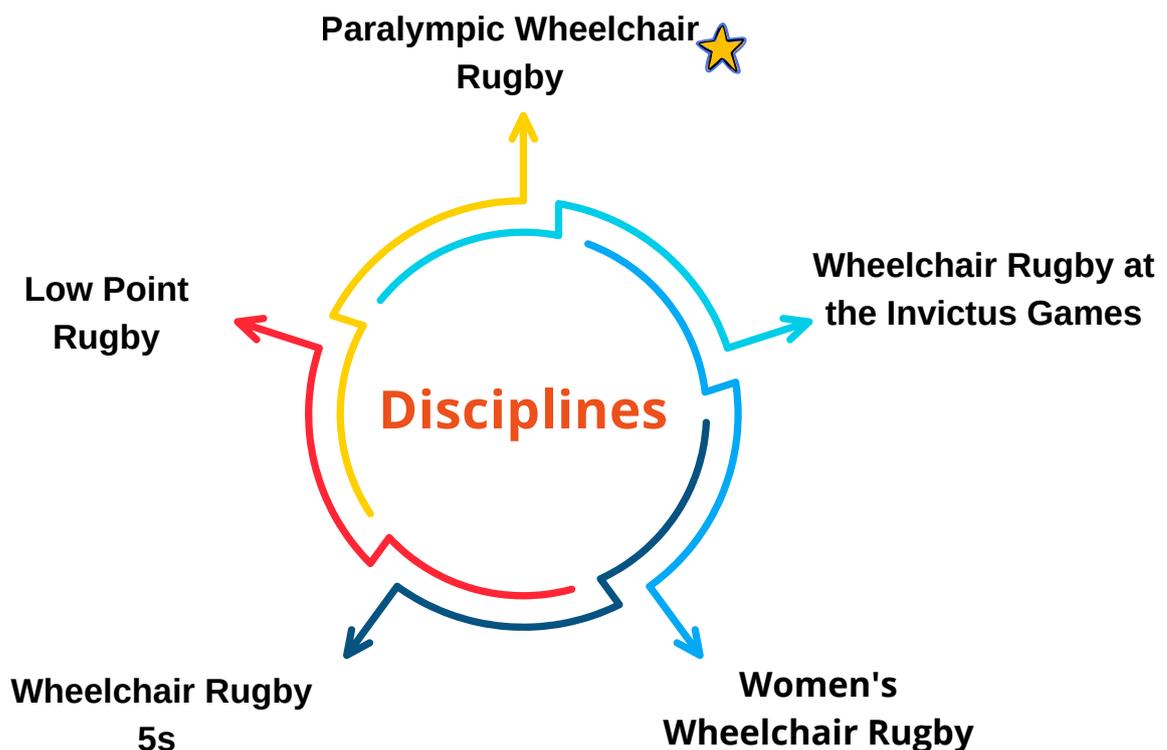
The sport is practiced by **men and women** with disabilities, in which they all compete **together** on the same team and in **mixed** tournaments.



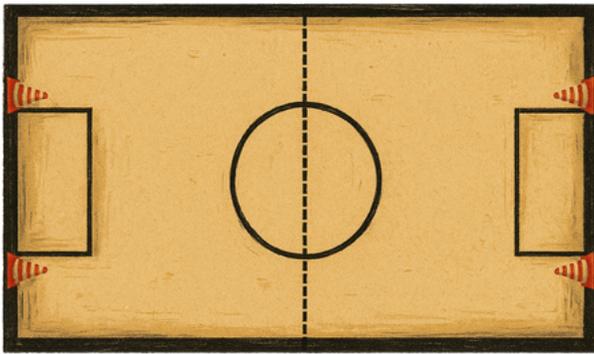
To be **eligible**, athletes must have an impairment affecting at **least three limbs**, which may include diagnoses such as spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, amputations, polio, and other neurological conditions (Chapter 4).

It is a fast-paced contact sport with spins and locks, where **contact between the wheelchairs** is a key component and what draws the most attention.

Currently, it is practiced in five distinct disciplines, which broaden its possibilities for participation and competition; each has its own characteristics.



CHARACTERISTICS OF PARALYMPIC WHEELCHAIR RUGBY



wheelchair rugby court



28 meters long by 15 meters wide



The distance between cones is 8 meters, and the width is 1.75 meters.



A round ball, inspired by volleyballs, used to improve players' grip.

Players can move the ball by any means (throwing, rolling, dribbling, or resting it on their knees) and in any direction.

GOOOL

A try is a goal or point in wheelchair rugby.

A try is scored when a player in possession of the ball crosses the opponent's goal line with at least two of their wheels.



Defensive chairs have a front grid (bumper) that players use to secure and hold their opponents' chairs.

Offensive chairs are designed for speed and mobility; they have a rounded bumper to prevent the player from getting stuck in the opponent's chair.



The use of gloves, trunk wraps, leg and foot wraps, and other protective equipment is permitted and essential for the comfort, safety, and performance of athletes.

PARALYMPIC WHEELCHAIR RUGBY RULES

There is a bonus for the team that has a woman on the court:

Each team consists of:



4 athletes

8 total points

*Cap. 4

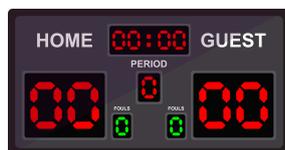
0.5
1.0

an additional 0.5 to 1.5 for each woman

an additional 2.0 to 3.5 for each woman



4 timed eight-minute periods



40

seconds to attempt to perform the try

12

seconds to pass the half-court line with possession of the ball



Seconds to bounce or pass the ball, leave the scoring area, or put the ball into play.



3 technical periods of

60

seconds per stage of the game

PENALTIES



30

Seconds in case of fouls or until the opposing team scores a goal, if this occurs before that time or loss of possession of the ball.

Disqualifying foul; the athlete must complete the full 40 seconds.

Fouls
Infractions



Rulebook

International
rules for the
sport of
Wheelchair
Rugby

Want to know more?

WORLD WHEELCHAIR RUGBY (WWR). Wheelchair Rugby International Rules. Sheffield: WWR, 2025. Disponível em:
<https://worldwheelchair.rugby/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/241223-Wheelchair-Rugby-International-Rules-WWR-FINAL.pdf>.



Chapter 3

Luis Gustavo de Souza Pena
Beatriz Lucena Ramos
Ciro Winckler

History of Wheelchair Rugby in Brazil

TIMELINE OF WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

1977



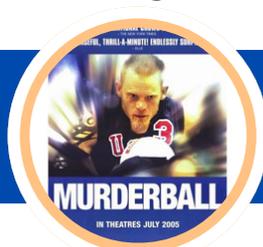
Creation of wheelchair rugby (initially called murderball) in Canada.

1978



The first organized competition.

1979



Canada's first National Murderball Championship.

1982



First international tournament, played between Canada and the United States.

1989



First international tournament with the participation of a country outside of North America (Canada, United States and Great Britain).

1990



The sport was presented as an exhibition event at the World Wheelchair Games.

1991



Official recognition of Wheelchair Rugby as an international sport for athletes with disabilities by the International Federation of Stoke Mandeville.

1991



A single functional classification system has been created for this sport.

1992



Foundation of the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation, originally called the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation, currently known as World Wheelchair Rugby (WWR).

1994



Official recognition by the International Paralympic Committee as a Paralympic sport.

1995



Hosting of the first European Championship and inauguration of the Wheelchair Rugby World Championship.

TIMELINE OF WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

1996



Inclusion of the sport as a demonstration event at the Atlanta Paralympic Games.

2000



Debut as an official sport at the Sydney Paralympics.

2005



Wheelchair Rugby arrives in Brazil.

2008



Creation of the Brazilian Wheelchair Rugby Association.

2008



Brazil participates in the first edition of the Tournament of the Americas, called the Maximus Tournament at the time.

2008



First edition of the Brazilian Championship.

2009



Brazil hosts the Maximus Project II and participates in the first Americas Championship, in Buenos Aires.

2011



Winning the first medal (bronze) at the Tournament of the Americas and holding the first Brazilian Second Division Championship.

2014



Inclusion of Wheelchair Rugby in the Invictus Games and creation of the World Wheelchair rugby Athletes' Council.

2015



Debut at the Parapan American Games in Toronto. The first edition of the Women's Cup was held.

2016



Brazil is participating in the Paralympic Games for the first time, in Rio de Janeiro.

TIMELINE OF WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

2017



Second edition of the Women's Cup, with the participation of one Brazilian athlete "Tinha".

2017



Rugby 5s launch.

2017



Brazil wins bronze medal at the Wheelchair Rugby Americas Cup in Paraguay.

2019



Brazil finishes in fourth place at the Parapan American Games in Lima.

2022



The World Games in Birmingham feature the low point game.

2022



Brazil wins third place in the Tournament of the Americas, securing an unprecedented spot in the World Championship, held in Denmark.

2023



Third edition of the Women's Cup. The first all-female team to participate in the Brazilian Second Division Championship.

2023



Brazil hosts and wins the South American Wheelchair Rugby Championship and won the bronze medal at the Parana American Games.

2024



First Women's Wheelchair Rugby Tournament in Brazil.

2024



Fourth edition of the Women's Cup and debut of the Brazilian Women's Wheelchair Rugby Team.

2025



Brazil hosts and wins the silver medal at the Wheelchair Rugby Americas Cup.



Brazil will host the Wheelchair Rugby World Cup in 2026.

HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY



The **first recorded practice** of wheelchair rugby in Brazil was in **2005**, at the World Wheelchair and Amputee Games - Tribute to Peace, held in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil formed its **first team** with paraplegic and quadriplegic athletes and participated in the competition, although it was not officially recognized.

As a legacy of this event, the first two Brazilian teams in this sport were created: **Rio Quad Rugby** and **Guerreiros da Inclusão** (Warriors of Inclusion), both in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with athletes remaining from the 2005 team.

In 2008, **ABRC** was founded and the **1st Brazilian Championship** of the sport was organized, with the participation of three teams. In the same year, the **first official Brazilian National Team** was formed to compete in the Maximus Tournament, held in Colombia.



Since then, 17 editions of the national championship have been held, in addition to the creation of regional tournaments and the Champions Cup. Currently, wheelchair rugby is practiced competitively in eight states, with 13 teams in the national ranking; as well as 8 Development Centers and 8 wheelchair rugby Schools.

A significant milestone in the **development of wheelchair rugby in Brazil** was the participation of the Brazilian national team in the **2016 Rio Paralympic Games**. In the process of preparing the team for this event, initiatives were undertaken to **form human resources** (coaches, referees, classifiers) and **increase the competitive experience** of Brazilian athletes (increasing the number of national tournaments, greater participation in international tournaments, and internationalization of the coaching staff).



HISTORY OF BRAZIL IN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

At the end of the Rio 2016 cycle, some initiatives continued in subsequent cycles, such as the creation of new clubs, which led to an increase in the number of teams participating in the Brazilian Championships. Another relevant fact was the **beginning of the Brazilian Development Team in 2016**, which enabled the renewal and discovery of new talents for the main team in the following years. The development of Brazilian wheelchair rugby continued in the following cycle, with Brazil achieving its best ranking in the world, reaching **ninth place in 2019**.



The cycle leading up to the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games was marked by **unprecedented achievements** for the National Team, such as its first participation in a World Championship, with an 11th place finish in the 2022 edition in Denmark. The spot was secured with a **bronze medal** at the **Americas Cup**, held in the same year.

Also in 2022, the first **wheelchair rugby Development Centers** was created in João Pessoa, in a partnership between ABRC and the Federal University of Paraíba.

In 2023, Brazil **hosted the South American Championship**, held in São Paulo, and **won the title**. In the same year, it reached the podium for the first time at the **Parapan American Games - Santiago**, by defeating Colombia in the **bronze** medal match.



HISTORY OF BRAZIL IN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

However, setbacks also marked the journey. In 2024, Brazil experienced a decisive moment in the wheelchair rugby when it competed against Germany for the last spot for the Paris Paralympic Games. This led to an adjustment in planning to find new athletes.

In this sense, wheelchair rugby grew in the **Northeast region** with the creation of three teams, including the formation of the **first Brazilian Women's National Team**, which competed in a tournament in France at the end of that same year (story told in chapter 7). The importance of these actions lies in the fact that, in addition to increasing the number of practitioners in Brazil and strengthening the sport, the women's national team had two athletes integrated into the National Program the following year (2025).

The year 2025 marked Brazil's first appearance in the **Copa América final** against the United States, in an edition hosted by the city of São Paulo, something also unprecedented. With this result, the sport equaled its best ranking internationally, returning to **ninth place**.



With a focus on qualifying for the **2028 Los Angeles Paralympic Games**, Brazil will host the World wheelchair rugby Championships in 2026, a competition that guarantees direct spots for the Paralympics. Furthermore, in 2027, the team will compete in the Lima Parapan American Games, a subsequent tournament that could also secure qualification if Brazil reaches the final.



HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

Brazilian National Team Technical Staff			
Year	Coach	Assistant Coach	President
2008	André Velloso	Carlos Sigmaringa	Luiz Claudio
2009	Brian Muniz	Mateus Campana	
2010	Brian Muniz	Gabriel Mayr	Eduardo Mayr
2011	Rafael Botelho	Antonio Manuel	
2012	Antonio Manoel	Rafael Botelho	
2013	Benoit Labrecque	Luis Gustavo Pena e Rafael Botelho	
2014	Benoit Labrecque	Luis Gustavo Pena	
2015	Luis Gustavo Pena	Ana Paula Ramkrapes	Luiz Claudio
2016	Rafael Botelho	Luis Gustavo Pena	
2017	Ana Paula Ramkrapes	Antonio Manoel	
2020	Rafael Botelho	Thomas Bidusz e Brian Muniz	José Higinio
2023	Benoit Labrecque	Ana Paula Ramkrapes, Luis Gustavo Pena e Jackson Lemos	
2024	Benoit Labrecque	Ana Paula Ramkrapes e Luis Gustavo Pena	
2025	Benoit Labrecque	Ana Paula Ramkrapes e Luis Gustavo Pena	



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Chapter 4

Karina Santos Guedes de Sá

Para Sport Classification of Wheelchair Rugby

INTRODUCTION

In the world of Paralympic sports, there is a range of disabilities, with different levels of impairment, competing together in various modalities. Knowing this, it did not seem fair to put athletes with greater impairment, that is, greater motor limitations, to compete directly with athletes with less motor impairment, since the latter would have a functional advantage over the more impaired athlete.

With this in mind, to prevent the impact of disability from being a biasing factor in the results of sports competitions, the **para sport classification system** was created, which was previously based on medical and functional concepts and is currently based on scientific evidence.

In this way, this **system groups** athletes into classes according to their functional characteristics. Thus, the objective of the classification is:

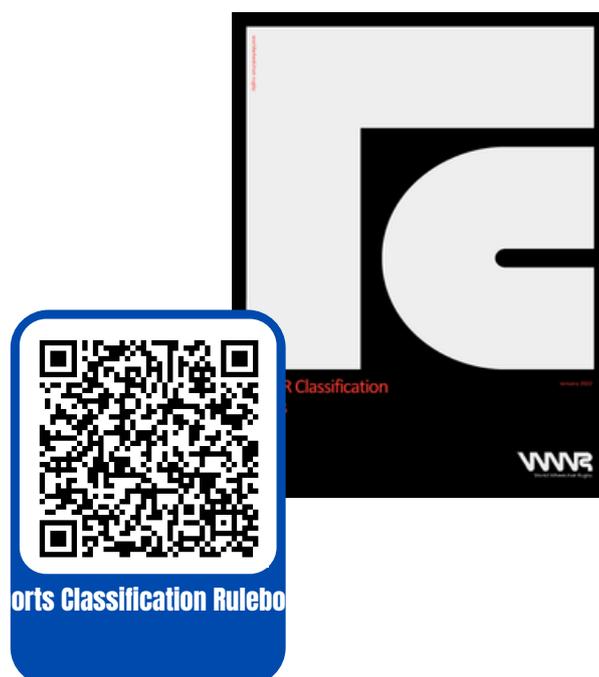


To define the **minimum impairment** required to be eligible to compete in that Para sport, thus providing a framework for determining who can and cannot compete.



Grouping athletes into sports classes helps to **control the impact of impairment on competition outcomes** and ensures that athletic excellence determines which athlete or team will be victorious.

Each Paralympic sport has its **own rules and a system for evaluating and classifying athletes**, but all must follow the basic classification principles determined by the International Paralympic Committee, as it is the main governing body for Paralympic sports.



Furthermore, **individual and team sports have distinct classification systems.** In individual sports, the athlete's class determines the type of event in which they will compete; for example, in athletics, athletes with upper limb disabilities compete only with their peers (classes T45 – T47), with the letter in the class code corresponding to the event (track).

In team sports, such as wheelchair rugby, classes are determined by points, represented by numbers, and each team has a maximum number of points they can achieve on the court. This is because, in team sports, different disabilities compete together and also against each other.

Thus, this points system aims to guarantee equal opportunity for different functional levels, equalizing the functional potential of each team to a predetermined maximum number.

The first classification system for wheelchair rugby was based on **medical diagnosis** and only had 3 classes, determined by the athlete's level of spinal cord injury. This system was modified in 1991, **grouping athletes based on wheelchair rugby sporting activities**, since other etiologies, besides spinal cord injury, became eligible in the modality. And this system continues to be constantly updated as new classifications are made.

Classification based on the athlete's disability.

Classification based on the athlete's functionality in their specific sport.

Classification based on scientific evidence.

Multidisciplinary research on classification leads to valid and robust classification systems, where **evidence informs how athletes are grouped** into sport classes to provide fair and meaningful competition.

These systems will ensure **integrity and credibility** in para sports competitions and the Paralympic Movement.

ATHLETE EVALUATION PROCESS



The wheelchair rugby classification process is divided into 4 stages.



Assessment of eligible impairment and underlying health condition

This step takes place before the competition. Initially, the athlete's medical documents are sent to the event organizers to verify eligibility for the impairment.



Physical assessment or impairment assessment (confirmation of minimum disability criteria)

After eligibility is confirmed, the athlete reports to the classification panel on the first day of the event. At this time, the minimum impairment criteria are evaluated to confirm whether the next steps in the process can be followed. If the minimum criteria are not met, the athlete receives the status of Not Eligible (NE). This means that, formally, this athlete cannot participate in official competitions.

Once the minimum impairment criteria are confirmed, a physical evaluation takes place in the same session. During this evaluation, trunk tests and assessments of the lower and upper limbs are performed to measure the level of functional impairment. In addition, tests relevant to the athlete's type of impairment are conducted.



Technical assessment

Next, a technical evaluation is conducted in which the athlete performs activities specific to the sport. This stage takes place in a controlled, non-competitive environment. The athlete performs wheelchair propulsion, short and long-distance passes, dribbling, etc. After this stage, the athlete receives an initial class to begin the competition.



4

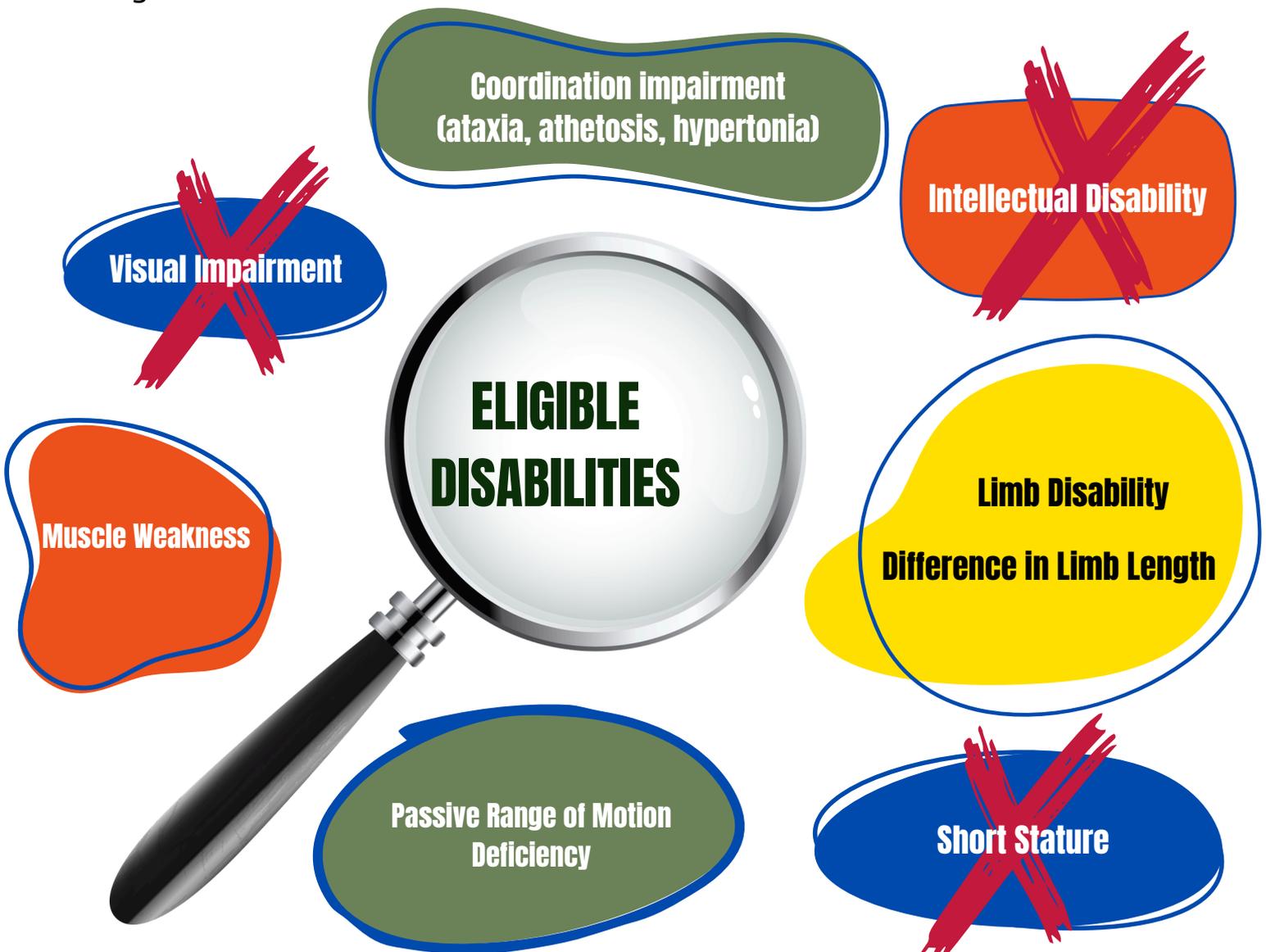
Observation in competition assessment



This stage takes place throughout the competition, during which the athlete will be observed during matches in a competitive environment. The evaluation occurs during the athlete's first appearance and must take place during the preliminary rounds (or at the end of the group stage) of the competition. Each athlete undergoes a sports evaluation at least three times before receiving a confirmed sports status classification (C).

ELIGIBILITY

These are the minimum impairment criteria that an athlete must meet to be eligible for Paralympic sport. In the wheelchair rugby, eligible athletes have physical disabilities that result in impairment of at least three limbs. The following disabilities are eligible:



MINIMUM IMPAIRMENT CRITERIA

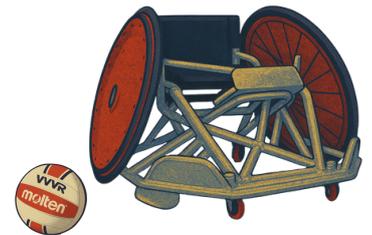
To assess the minimum impairment criteria, major and minor standards were created.

MAJOR CRITERIA

These criteria indicate advanced control and significant functionality. If the athlete presents 1 or more, they may be considered ineligible (NE).

-  Consistent ball control in all planes with one hand, in challenging situations, on both sides.
-  Protect the ball above your head with both hands, maintaining control of the chair with your trunk and hips.
-  Ability to control with one hand and with both hands (alternately).

MINOR CRITERIA



The minor criteria are divided into 2 fundamentals: activities with the chair and those with the ball.

ACTIVITIES WITH THE CHAIR They assess the use of the trunk and legs for movement and balance:

-  Using the trunk to propel, change direction and speed by gripping the rim or wheel on either side.
-  Controlling the chair and maintaining balance without using your hands, even when experiencing impacts.
-  Ability to "jump" with the chair out of defensive barriers (using trunk and legs to lift the wheels off the ground).
-  Ability to "jump" with the chair out of defensive barriers (using trunk and legs to lift the wheels off the ground).

MINOR CRITERIA



ACTIVITIES WITH THE BALL

They assess ball control, reach, and coordination:

- Hold the ball above your head with both hands for 5–10 seconds with partial trunk control.
- Protect the ball above your head with partial trunk control, without controlling the wheelchair.
- Pass the ball 15 meters using one or two hands with the aid of trunk movements (flexion, extension, or rotation).
- Control the ball in all planes with the fingers of one hand while holding the chair with the other.
- Perform safe and consistent passes in all directions with one hand.
- Reaching outside the chair's cone to catch, bounce, or retrieve the ball from the ground without using your arms for positioning.

According to this assessment, eligibility by major and minor criteria is determined as shown in the table below:

Athlete's situation	Criteria	Result
Does it have one or more major criteria	-	Not eligible
It has 3 or more minor criteria	No major	Not eligible
It has up to 2 minor criteria	No major	Eligible for observational assessment

CLASS CHARACTERISTICS

wheelchair rugby is divided into 7 classes, ranging from 0.5 to 3.5 points, according to three main criteria: **function on the court, wheelchair skill, and ball control.**

CLASS 0.5

ROLE ON THE COURT

Blocker

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Slow acceleration, limited maneuverability, use of biceps for propulsion, forearm on the wheel

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Reception on the lap, "underhand volleyball pass" and "flip pass"

CLASS 1.0

ROLE ON THE COURT

Blocker with occasional reception

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Limited multidirectional maneuvers, partial trunk stabilization

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Weak chest pass, forearm or wrist catch

CLASS 1.5

ROLE ON THE COURT

Blocker and ball repositioning

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Greater strength and arm length, effective contact with the wheel

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

One-handed pass (assisted), limited ball security

CLASS 2.0

ROLE ON THE COURT

Emerging ball handler

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Strong shoulders, good pushing speed, long wheel contact

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Effective chest pass, limited security due to lack of finger flexion

CLASS CHARACTERISTICS

CLASS 2.5

ROLE ON THE COURT

Fast playmaker

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Excellent strength, advantage in the rim of impulse

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Safe dribble, one-handed overhead pass, two-handed reception

CLASS 3.0

ROLE ON THE COURT

Ball handler and fast playmaker

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Excellent maneuvers, higher speed, good grip

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Complete control across multiple planes, one-handed dribbling, secure passing and receiving

CLASS 3.5

ROLE ON THE COURT

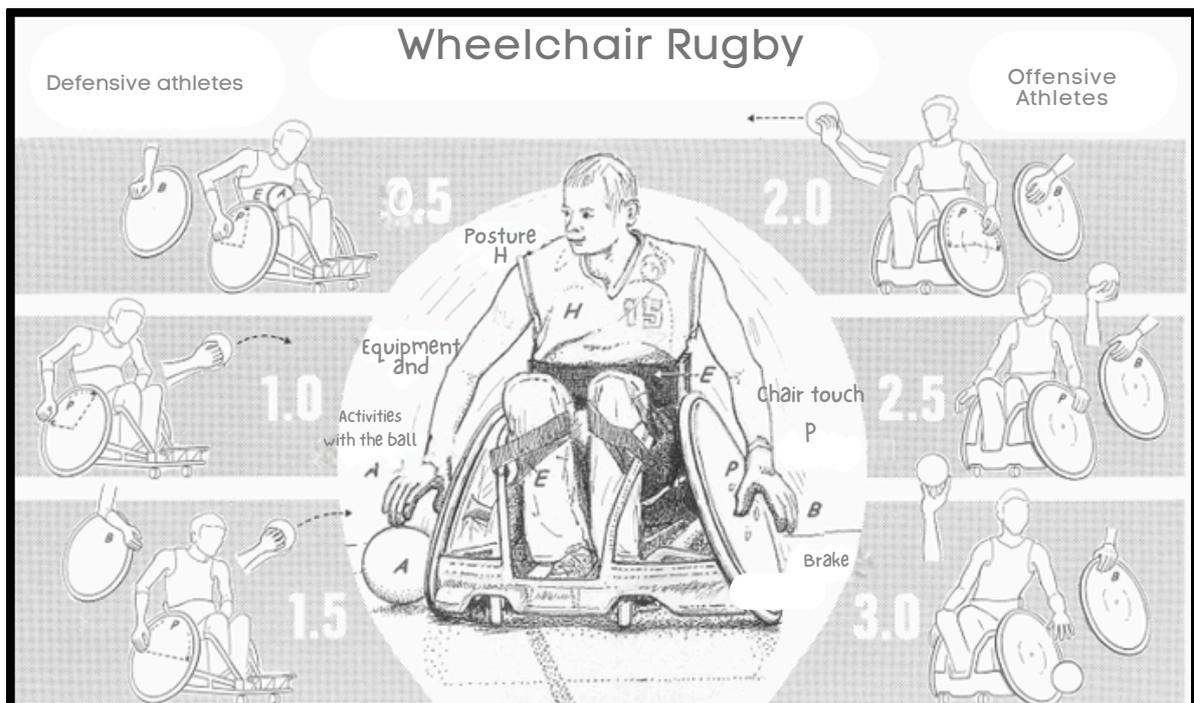
Major ball handler, No. 1 ball carrier

CHAIR SKILLS/FUNCTION

Trunk stability, fluid chair handling

BALL SKILLS/FUNCTION

Precise and long-range passes, maximum safety in receiving and controlling the ball



IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF CLASSIFICATION IN THE DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF TEAMS

The impairment directly impacts an athlete's level of functionality, and accordingly, the athlete is classified. In this way, **each class presents specific characteristics** that need to be considered by coaches and that directly impact technical and tactical aspects.

CONCLUSION

Para sport classification in the wheelchair rugby is not just a regulatory tool, but also the **foundation that ensures equity, inclusion, and sporting excellence in the discipline.**

By grouping athletes with different levels of functional impairment into a strategic scoring structure, the system allows the game to be competitive and fair, stimulating individual and collective technical and tactical development.

More than just determining who can compete, the **classification directly influences** team formation, defines roles on the court, and guides coaches' tactical decisions. As new researches are incorporated and practice advances, this system continues to evolve, reaffirming its importance in the Paralympic landscape.

For athletes, coaches, and classifiers, a deep understanding of the evaluation process and the practical impacts of classification is essential to promoting not only better performances but also a **fairer, more respectful, and inclusive sporting culture.**



Want to know more?

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Chapter 5

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Ana Paula Boito Ramkrapes
Rodrigo Rodrigues Gomes Costa
Bruna Pereira Carvalho Figueiró Avelar
Frederico Ribeiro Neto
Cleonete Reis
Hawanna Ribeiro
Valéria Schmidt
Fabiula Da silva pinto
Ciro Winckler

History of Women in Wheelchair Rugby in Brazil

INTRODUCTION



The trajectory of women in wheelchair rugby in Brazil is marked by pioneering spirit and the conquest of space in a sport considered **predominantly male**. The female presence, whether as athletes, coaches, or role models, has helped transform the sport and open new paths for future generations.

This chapter seeks to **recover and value the most significant milestones** in this history: from the first Brazilian female coach, through the pioneers who believed in wheelchair rugby from its beginnings, to names of great impact, such as Tininha, whose trajectory left an unforgettable legacy for the sport.

Historical moments will also be presented, such as the arrival of the **first women** to the Brazilian **National Team**, and the formation of the **first women's team** to compete in a game, a National Championship, and a Brazilian Championship, highlighting how each stage represented not only a sporting victory, but also a social and cultural one.



Thus, this chapter not only recounts facts, but celebrates the courage and determination of the women who helped write the history of wheelchair rugby in Brazil.

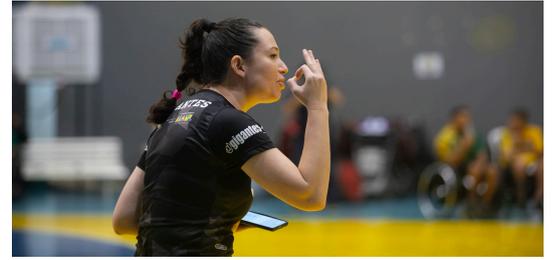
ANA PAULA, THE FIRST FEMALE TECHNICIAN IN BRAZIL

Ana Paula was the first woman to take on the role of **head coach of a club** in Brazil, as well as the first to **lead the Brazilian National Team** in that sport. Reports from various sources even indicate that she may have been the **first woman in the world to hold the position of head coach of a national** team. Currently, Ana Paula works as an assistant coach for the Brazilian National Team, and is recognized as one of the most respected professionals in the sport in the country.

Ana invites the reader to learn and understand her journey, her path into the sport, the challenges she faced throughout her career, and the strategies she developed to remain and assert herself in a space historically marked by male power relations. More than a chronological narrative, it is an account that articulates experience, reflection, and identity, offering insights into the place of women in Paralympic sport and, in particular, in wheelchair rugby.

THE CAREER PATH OF A FEMALE WHEELCHAIR RUGBY TECHNICIAN.

wheelchair rugby is a sport predominantly played by men, although it is a mixed-gender sport with rules that allow women and men to play together in the same game, sharing the same court.



It is also a notoriously aggressive sport: collisions between chairs are allowed, and not surprisingly, its original name is Murderball. To achieve the ultimate goal, territorial conquest, the sport requires a high degree of tactical and strategic planning.

With so many specific details, the last thing you'd expect is a woman as the coach. Historically, women occupy positions that require caregiving tasks, since we're taught to do them from the time we play with dolls, in addition to being sweet and docile. The problem is that I love bittersweet foods, so while I'm doing elaborate makeup before entering a crucial game, I'm also going over the entire tactical strategy in my head.

Becoming a female wheelchair rugby coach, the first in Brazil and the first to coach the Brazilian National Team, led me down to an unknown path. This text is not intended to overemphasize my journey or portray me as a victim, but to share how I felt in the face of some challenges that marked me and how I reflected on the impact they had on me. To that end, I chose to organize this text based on thematic events, maintaining a chronological order.

Being invited to speak about my journey as a woman and coach in wheelchair rugby from the perspective I have today is like opening a treasure chest of memories that has been locked away for a long time. Some memories bring smiles and laughter, others bring reflections on moments that hurt so much that I needed to keep them there, out of sight. But, even with this mix of emotions, I believe it's worthwhile to choose some memories (good and bad) to reflect on them during a time of growth for women in wheelchair rugby, especially as coaches.

Let me make it clear from the outset: my purpose is not to show the "right path" to follow when facing challenges, especially since that journey is completely riddled with mistakes, decisions that could have been better, and choices that only make sense later, but which served as stepping stones for learning and maturing. My purpose is simple and, at the same time, profound: to share the most significant and challenging experiences, with brief reflections, so that if any woman reads this chapter, she can feel that she is not alone. That, at some point in this space-time, there is another woman holding her hand.



A BRIEF TIMELINE

I first encountered wheelchair rugby in 2011, during my second year of undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Physical Education at the State University of Campinas. At that time, I received a social assistance scholarship from the university to work in the Exercise Physiology Laboratory, which gave me early access to the study of training physiology. Initially, I only went to watch and help the athletes get equipped for training, which led me to develop great friendships with some of them.

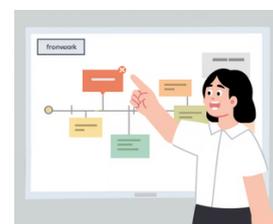
At the end of 2012, some athletes decided to leave the university-affiliated team to form an independent team, *Gigantes (giants)*, and they invited me to join them. I went with the great hope of helping with their physical conditioning, since I studied training. But in the very first tournament, in Brasília, I unexpectedly took on the role of coach. I knew nothing about tactics, but I knew their physical potential, what constituted a good or bad pass, and, most importantly, the passing potential of each player. So, I focused on the thought: I'm going to pretend this is a training session and focus on the aspects I can evaluate.

And that's when my stress began. Not because of the result, because I don't even remember what it was, but because of the indignation of seeing those athletes making simple mistakes, things they repeated every single training session. Throughout the game, I tried to get them to do things I was sure they knew how to do. Did I use pedagogical methods? Of course not! I externalized my indignation in a way that probably scared more than it helped. I've always been too expressive to see athletes making mistakes by doing things completely different from what they trained for, or doing nothing at all. Today, my work methods have changed a lot, but the indignation and the urge to "strangle" an athlete when they invent something random in a game are still part of me.

I will always shout at the games, I will always be holding the athletes' hands. I respect them as professional athletes and I don't give up on any play, I stay there, standing until the final whistle. But this way of leading has bothered more people than I imagined. And when a woman bothers them, misogyny usually finds painful ways to deal with the discomfort.

In 2014, I was called up for the first time to the Brazilian National Team as an assistant coach, a position I held until mid-2015. At the beginning of 2016, I took over the Development Team, with my assistant coach, Antônio Manoel (affectionately called just Manél), with the goal of developing new or inexperienced athletes, teaching basic concepts so that they could, in the future, join the main Brazilian National Team. At the beginning of 2017, also alongside Manél, I took on the project of a Paralympic Cycle with the main Brazilian National Team, which would last until 2020.

Before discussing the specific experiences of that period, it's worth sharing some of my own experiences regarding the development of my identity as a coach, as well as the labels that came to mind when I was a coach.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY AND LABELS



This identity did not develop naturally, nor was it well received. "Exaggerated," "hysterical," "crazy" were part of the extensive vocabulary that characterized a woman who manages her athletes, demanding and believing in better athletic performance.

"Authoritarian" was perhaps the label I heard most often, coming from people who, I'm sure, are unaware of the epistemology of the word. Authoritarian because athletes who arrived late to practice would make the whole team pay the penalty; because she tried to make everyone follow the same plan or game; because, at times, she didn't want to follow the opinion of athletes without any training or experience in training methods, but who were giving their opinions from a position laden with responsibility and pressure.

I come from a very strict upbringing. From a very poor family, my parents had to work hard to support eight children. My mother, the strongest woman I know, was always very strict and demanding. I learned to be the same way; of course, today, maturity shows me, countless times, that I really exaggerated, that I had approaches that could impact athletes more negatively than positively.

Still, I actually saw myself differently, as a demanding coach, obsessed with athletic performance, both that of the athletes and my own. And I studied the paths to achieving peak performance.

But I was a woman leading men, countering the expectation of women being associated with caregiving; I assumed a position of power and decision-making. And being a woman in that position, the first, and until that moment the only one, forced me to wear heavy armor and hold tightly to a shield or protection. My identity was constructed as a form of protection. So I decided that I would use this shield against all the terms thrown at me, like stones, accompanied by sarcastic glances, so that I could do my job without being shaken by the opinions of others.

The resistance I felt as a female coach varied greatly. Some athletes understood and shared with me the intense energy of a game, recognizing the expression of emotion that surfaced in that context. Other athletes felt motivated. Others froze when they heard someone yelling at them, regardless of who it was. But there were those who frowned and were specifically bothered by it being a woman yelling. Curiously, when the same thing happened in games with the clubs, where male coaches spoke more harshly and even yelled, I saw completely different behaviors from the athletes.

The athletes from *Gigantes* quickly got used to my style because, in their daily lives, they saw that my shouts were more related to demanding better performance during games. I always respected the athletes as athletes and made it clear that it was their family's job to applaud anything they did on the court, but I was the coach; I demanded that they perform at the same level they showed during training.

What's most striking is how bothered the athletes from other teams were by the shouting I did with my own. Once, during a national championship, a player from another team came up to my athlete and said: "I don't know how you can stand Ana yelling in your ear; I wouldn't fit in as an athlete for the Giants." When he told me, I laughed and said sarcastically: "He can rest assured, I would never call him up for our team." But this made me reflect. What really bothered that man and other male athletes? How can I be bothered by shouts that weren't even directed at me?



And then the reflection began to intensify as that championship progressed. I started observing the behavior of other coaches, some with an aggressive tone of voice, others who also yelled at their athletes all the time. Why do male voices bother people less than female voices? Why are male coaches in other sports, who have a similar approach, seen as "demanding," "leaders," while I am the "hysterical" one?

But this resistance, often explicit, relates to the form of communication and treatment. When the subject is the intellectuality of the tactical and strategic knowledge of the sport, the resistance is more subtle, the traps are almost invisible, requiring constant attention and energy expenditure. I have a jargon that I would use a lot whenever I brought up some tactical or strategic scheme, or some other pedagogical training method, and I would say that I "would have to defend a thesis," because I needed to support the logical thinking I had developed and I usually resorted to references, almost always from a coach. Only then did the athletes change their expression of distrust to one of "ah, okay, that makes sense, we can try to do it." Of course, it would be unfair to generalize, as there are some athletes with whom I did not feel the same resistance.

MY TIME WITH THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEAM

In 2014, I was called to join the main National Team as an assistant coach, in a plan that would extend to the 2015 Parapan American Games in Toronto, Canada. We had a great participation, in which we reached the game against Canada, an important match against which there was no expectation of winning. But it was in the bronze medal match that we lost to the Colombian team.

I always say that the final result of a game isn't entirely under our control, but our performance is. And there, Colombia played better.



The sum of this, along with other problems, such as the difficulty in providing a timely strategic response, or the team's psychological apathy in the face of a game that was more difficult than expected, and also the feeling of a lack of team unity, since had been a fight a few days before, all influence the outcome of a game, and in a collective team, everyone has a share of the blame, even if minimal. The fact is that, between this event and the next one the National Team would participate in, only one person was cut from the team: me.

Many things happened before and during that championship, small and large problems that arise when working in a group of people, but the blame for the defeat fell on the woman's shoulders. As if the fight that occurred between athletes, involving my name, was the main reason for the result of the last game, and the blame was entirely mine. The problem wasn't my exclusion from the team; I manage that very well, I have no attachment to the vanity of being on the national team, but being the only one cut among professionals and athletes exposed to Brazil that "the guilty one" had been "penalized." This brought me the feeling that bothers me the most, that of being wronged. Could I have done many things to avoid the fight? Of course, but that wouldn't have completely prevented the final result of the game, especially since thinking that way is disrespectful to the Colombian National Team, as if it wasn't their performance that made them win the game, but rather our mistake. But that hurt me, and it hurt deeply.

I left the national team and continued my work at *Gigantes*, but, at the beginning of 2016, ABRC founded the Development Team, which I took over as coach, with Manuel as assistant coach, while the main team prepared to participate in the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. The objective of this youth team was to work with new athletes who generally did not participate in decisive games for their clubs, teaching them the fundamentals and basic concepts of the sport.

After the experience of being cut in 2015, from the first day of the first week of training, I decided to wear only loose clothing. I took my husband's shorts and t-shirts and wore them so they would see me as a professional, not as a woman. It's amazing how many strategies a woman needs to develop to be seen as a professional.

While we were developing our work with the Development Team, I was called up to join the main National Team for a tournament held in the Czech Republic, Rugbymania, as a performance analyst. I accepted the offer to help the team prepare for the Paralympics. I scouted the games and showed the results to the head coach immediately afterward. At the same time, I continued my work at *Gigantes*, with the Development Team, and my master's degree, where I studied exercise physiology in individuals with spinal cord injuries.

At the beginning of 2017, the board invited Manél and me to take over the main National Team for a Paralympic cycle, that is, until the competition for a spot in the Tokyo Games, 2020.



We put together a strategic plan, which included tournaments that could help the team rise in the world rankings. We studied which teams would be present in each one and which ones we could beat, studied our opponents and our own athletes, and developed study materials for the athletes; everything was thought out and studied with great dedication. And then we began an arduous task, to which I dedicated all myself.

The project lasted from 2017 to 2020, and we went from 18th to 9th place in the world ranking. But I experienced a rollercoaster of emotions. It's impressive how much the wheelchair rugby managed to take me to the top of the mountain, to feel like I had found my purpose in life, the feeling of fulfillment, of doing what I love, generated feelings that seemed too big to contain. But, at the same time, some experiences took me straight to rock bottom, an accumulation of pain that numbed me over time, to the point where I pretended that wheelchair rugby had never been part of my life. The only useful aspect of hitting rock bottom is knowing exactly what it's like down there, and knowing how to climb back to the top.

I had people who supported me. Besides my sister, who, being a historian and researcher of topics related to feminism, supported me in reflecting on the experiences I was living through, some athletes not only showed in their attitudes that they saw me as a professional, regardless of gender. On the technical team, Manél and Pedro never let go of my hand in any of the moments when the current hit me head-on.

My experience as a woman who was the head coach of the Brazilian National Team, with a man as my assistant coach, has brought me some insights that illustrate a subtle, invisible burden that falls on women, forcing us to always be alert to the details. Luckily for me, Manél is an incredible, sensitive person who has always sought knowledge about these aspects related to the differences between being a man and a woman in leadership positions.

I could cite several times when I felt supported and that made a big difference in this journey. Sometimes when I wanted to express something, or some idea, whether to the board or the athletes, and I felt too tired to "defend another thesis," I would ask Manél to speak, since if a man spoke, he would be received differently by most, but he would continue speaking: "No, they need to learn to listen to what you have to say. I will be by your side, supporting you and giving you cover, but you have to show that they need to respect you in your position."

I can recall all the times when, before a game started, the table referee would bring the score sheet to the coach to check information about the athletes and sign it. And often the international referees would hand the score sheet to Manél to sign, even when I was by his side, and he would insist on refusing to sign, pointing me out as the coach. This doesn't mean the referee didn't accept the fact that a woman was a coach, but rather shows how far removed that situation was from the daily routine of the professionals involved in the sport. And what had I done? I smiled and said "different, huh?!", took the score sheet and signed it, writing my name very legibly.

But some events occupy a significant space in my memory. The first was when a professional from a European team asked me what my role was in the Brazilian National Team, and when I said "head coach," he expressed a surprised look and said, "Wow, a woman head coach of wheelchair rugby? A sport that requires so much reasoning and strategy." At that moment, I froze, not because I was shaken, but because I wanted to understand if he was negatively surprised, since it's unusual for a woman to hold a position that demands reasoning and strategy, or if he was positively surprised, because finally a woman was occupying a position that requires reasoning and strategy.

Within seconds, that doubt echoed in my head. "Could the culture shock lead me to misinterpret that statement? Why are Brazilians so expressive, so different from many Europeans?" And so, the choice I had was to embrace the idea that he would be pleasantly surprised, because if it were the opposite, only he would feel the negative energy of that thought, but, assuming the optimistic side of the situation, at least I would leave feeling lighter. So, in response, I smiled and said, "That's right!" And now I was passing on the possible doubt to him, possible because, if my answer was consistent with what he said, great; if not, he would be confused if I had understood what he said. Then I left there smiling and shaking my hair.

But the event that struck me most, and prompted personal reflection, occurred at the closing ceremony of a classic Polish event, the Metrocup, held in a large space. The organizers had hired a trio of musicians who, wearing long red dresses, impressed with their performances on cello, violin, and harp. Of course, I stood to watch, leaning against one of the hall pillar. At that time, the national team uniforms were still made by a company that used only men's rulers to cut the clothes, which made them difficult to adapt to the female body and left us extremely uncomfortable (this was a consensus among all the women on the team).

In that competition, we had convinced the management to allow women to wear leggings, since they are much more comfortable and don't embarrass us every time we need to bend over or sit down. And there I was, wearing regular leggings that covered my entire leg. While I was standing, engrossed in the final presentation of the event and with the side of my body pressed against the pillar, a member of the Russian National Team simply ran his hand over my buttocks.

At that moment, I really froze and started trembling. I looked at one of the athletes next to me, still not believing what had happened, thinking it might have just been a bump, and asked: "Did he touch me?" The athlete was looking at me with wide, shocked eyes and replied: "Yes!" A feeling of anger mixed with shame overwhelmed me at that kind of exposure. I went to the table where the Brazilian National Team athletes were, tears already streaming down my face, and told one of the athletes, with whom I had a conjugal relationship: "A guy touched me inappropriately."

From then on, my biggest fear was that the worst would happen. He went to the direction of the man, while other athletes went in the opposite direction to try and surround the man, and the team mechanic, a great friend, went towards that man to settle the score. Meanwhile, the technical coordinator, who was my best friend at the time, came to me, picked me up, and took me to another place.

I broke down crying, I was trembling so much I couldn't even speak. It was a mixture of anger, fear, shame, and guilt. Anger because that man felt entitled to physically harass me, but even greater anger at myself for not being able to react in time, even though I had trained in Jiu-Jitsu for self-defense for over two years; I just froze. Fear that something would happen and someone from the national team would be punished in another country, with laws different from ours. Shame, because I had been exposed to that: a situation that exposes me as a woman and not as a professional, that exposes a weakness of mine. Guilt, because the first thing that comes to mind is the idea that we could have avoided it, and that feeling, for sure, is the most disturbing.

If I had been wearing the loose-fitting clothes of the conventional uniform, would he have done that? Was it my fault for wanting a little more comfort (and mobility) at work and for requesting to wear leggings among so many men? This led me to a long period of reflection and the deconstruction of that guilt. I needed to convince my emotional subconscious that the fault lay entirely with that man, that there was nothing I could have done to prevent him from behaving that way.

After calming down and returning to the salon, the Russian coach apologized. The man was expelled from the event by the organizers, and everything went back to "normal." Except for my memory, except for all the thoughts that kept echoing in my head, and which I had to work to clear out of the guilt. The problem is that it now occupies the place of "I need to be careful," meaning, once again, I will need to be constantly alert when wearing tight clothes in places with many men. It's extremely tiring; it feels like I'm in a jungle with predatory animals.

But I stayed there, holding the shield to protect myself from what was coming from outside. The problem was that I lowered the shield to those who were part of the Brazilian National Team, and a woman doesn't have that choice. Towards the end of the Paralympic Cycle, at the 2019 Parapan American Games, we didn't win the bronze medal against the Colombian National Team. And while we were all still picking up the pieces from the floor, came the competition for a spot at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in Canada, which we also failed to achieve. Sport has the beauty of the unpredictability of the result, and a coach needs to prepare for any outcome without it impacting their mental health.



Of course, at this level of work, in competitive sports, I wanted to win, but when you enter this world, you prepare yourself for both possibilities.

It's natural. The big problem is that right there, at that moment, I already felt a strange energy in the air. Loose comments, hallway conversations I overheard, and glances. The eyes are the window to the soul, and they say everything the mouth hides. The averted glances, the body language, were already trying to tell me something. I was psychologically exhausted. Pressure from management, observing strange movements, all of that was driving me to a kind of personal hell.

Some athletes communicated directly with ABRC professionals who had the power to make decisions, with an admirable, albeit not subtle, silent efficiency. I had wanted to leave the project for a few months, but my mother taught me about the importance of words and partnership, and I would never abandon Manél alone. So I decided to end that cycle and focus on my academic career, as I had just finished my master's degree and was thinking about starting my doctorate. I don't want to dwell on this part of my journey, because the same thing can happen to male coaches, but the way my departure occurred showed me how much lowering our shields can make us vulnerable. Yet another burden that women have to manage.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAM AND I RETURN TO THE NATIONAL TEAM

Among the few athletes who didn't let go of my hand, Alexandre Giuriato, Rafael Hoffmann, and José Higino played an essential role in helping me not give up on wheelchair rugby. Shortly after my departure, José Higino took over the presidency of ABRC, working alongside Ricardo Tanhoffer in high-performance training, and with Manél in promoting the sport. And that's when Brazilian wheelchair rugby began a new chapter, practically a new book.

Several initiatives and numerous projects were launched to raise the level of the sport in the country and worldwide. Among these initiatives, Benoit's appointment as head coach of the National Team and the request for me to assist in promoting the sport, working only with newly introduced athletes, showed me that wheelchair rugby was entering a new phase.

However, in the first week of training with the National Team and the Development Team, the project was readjusted, unifying the two fronts to form the National Program, which would have 24 athletes and a single technical team. After some long meetings, we arrived at a model to begin actions that could benefit the different levels of athletes in that group. But what bothered me was having to be part of the National Team, where I promised never to "set foot" again. My wounds were still so open, and I was so tired of carrying that heavy shield. But Benoit gave his word that he would always defend me, and, without him realizing it, he began to stitch up the still-open wounds.



Hearing him say, "I told Higino that you know as much about wheelchair rugby as I do, the difference being that I have many more years of experience than you," made my first reaction: to laugh sarcastically, because I didn't agree (and still don't agree) with that statement. But talking openly about wheelchair rugby with him, and seeing that we really do share the same opinion on many things, or would have the same attitude, made me feel something I had forgotten: "maybe I wasn't so stupid after all. Maybe being held completely responsible for the loss of the medal at the 2019 Parapan American Games was just another way for the people involved to avoid taking responsibility for their half-blames."

But I still didn't have the mental health to take on any game. I climbed out of the bottom, but I was still tired of the climb. So I accepted Benoit's proposal to be the team's second coach, which would mean that during the games I would stay off the court, analyzing what it would be like if I were there, on the sidelines, while I conduct statistical analyses and communicate with the on-court coaching staff via radio.

ABRC'S INVESTMENT IN WOMEN AT WHEELCHAIR RUGBY



Higino played an essential role in my journey as a coach. Many times when I felt pressured and wanted to give up, it was his and Manél's messages and calls that made me continue.

After he took over the president chair, in addition to programs to promote and encourage the sport, he began investing in actions aimed at increasing the number of women involved with wheelchair rugby.

Today's Ana has a philosophy of never directly competing with another woman. The system already induces so many senseless female competitions, because, from a young age, we are familiarized with the discomfort when two women wear identical clothes at the same event, with comparisons and self-comparisons between our bodies and aesthetic characteristics. Regarding competition for leadership positions, social researchers have developed the concept of "Queen Bee Syndrome," which conceptualizes the constant competitive behavior among women in leadership positions in relation to other women close to them.

But this philosophy might confuse those who read or hear me speak, after all, my role as a coach is to prepare athletes to compete, being immersed daily in a competitive environment. The first point is that I don't compete for a place or position with another woman; instead, I try to extend a hand to help her climb another step. And if she really wants to compete, she will compete alone. Recently, I had the experience of participating in a national championship with my club (*Gigantes*), against another club that has a woman as coach, and with whom we had discussed a few days before about the few tools I developed to understand wheelchair rugby, think about how to develop strategies, and evaluate athletes.

The result? She managed to take all the information I had given her and improve. This brought me an incredible feeling of pride, not because I think it was my tools that made her perform well, but because she seemed more aware of what she was doing, of the instructions she was giving, and as a consequence, I saw the respect the athletes had for her.

Recently, Brazil held its first Women's wheelchair rugby Championship, and although I had requested not to participate, as I needed to finish my doctoral thesis, Higino, Ricardo, and Beatriz convinced me of the importance of my participation. Athletes from all over Brazil had registered, and the division of the teams was done online by the three coaches who would participate in the competition.

I agreed to participate, but I confess that I had a preconceived fear that I might not adapt to working with women, a feeling that turned out to be a real "slap in the face." It had been a long time since I had enjoyed wheelchair rugby so much, since I had seen the transformation that this modality makes in someone.

Women who are generally not the first choices for their clubs in crucial games, or who enter the court as part of a strategy to allow two men with higher functional rankings to play together, since the point system is adjusted when a woman is on the court, and not based on their athletic characteristics and abilities. There, they were athletes, with responsibilities and performance demands, not as second options, but as integral parts of a team.

In the first lecture, my focus was on building a sense of sisterhood. It wouldn't matter what mistakes they made; after all, most of them had never played together before, but they would concentrate on supporting each other. No one but me could demand performance; they would support each other regardless of what happened. And there I felt that the strength a group of women has when they come together and support each other is greater than any construct of female competition that we were (and are) taught to develop.



CURRENT STRATEGIES

With almost 15 years in wheelchair rugby, I currently possess some strategies for dealing with the challenges I face as a woman working in a predominantly male environment, especially in leadership positions. In addition, of course, there's the strategy of not caring about what people say about me behind my back, detaching myself from the result, and always focusing on performance. This gives me the "permission" to continue yelling, but now as a way to connect with the athletes, to constantly push them towards peak performance, to correct them when necessary (which happens frequently), and as a way to have fun instead of stressing myself out.

Today I understand better how to communicate with athletes and adapt to the best ways for us to reach our final goal together. But, if any athlete doesn't like hearing my yelling because I'm a woman, I suggest they seek psychological treatment to address those feelings of fragile ego, insecurity, and spite.

One of the main lessons I've learned from almost 15 years of experience is that being a woman in a leadership position, especially leading men, is like swimming against the tide. But since one of the principles of training is adapting to increased workload, the more I swim against the tide, the stronger my arms become. However, adaptation isn't just about training; so the main lesson (and suggestion) is: go to therapy, because it will give you more tools to deal with challenges and frustrations without giving up your identity.



PIONEERS IN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

The inclusion of women in wheelchair rugby in Brazil occurred gradually and, in its early years, was limited to a few athletes.



In a predominantly male sporting environment, the presence of women represented an important milestone not only for the expansion of the sport, but also for the promotion of inclusion and visibility of women with disabilities in high-performance sports.

In this context, the trajectories of Valéria Schmidt and Fabiula da Silva Pinto stand out, recognized as pioneers in the country. Their participation dates back to the beginning of the sport in Brasília, in 2010, when the first clubs were structured, but still without adequate resources for practicing the sport.

VALERIA SCHMIDT

I learned about wheelchair rugby through a friend, Luiz Cláudio, who brought the sport to Brasília. He dreamed of holding the National Championship in the capital and, to do so, needed to form a team. This happened in 2010, when two clubs emerged: ADGE, which I was part of, and MOCIPED. At the time, we only had three months of training and very few women involved – in my team, it was me and Fabiula; in the other team, there were two or three other athletes.



I've always been an athlete, and after my accident, besides swimming, I hadn't found any activity that truly motivated me. When I discovered wheelchair rugby, I was struck by the intensity of the sport, the physical contact, and the adrenaline. It really moved me. It also deeply affected me to see so many quadriplegics together, active and with potential not only on the field but in life. For the first time since the accident, I had contact with people like me, and the exchanges I experienced at that moment made me see new possibilities for my daily life.

Back then, we didn't even have specific rugby wheelchairs – we played with basketball chairs and without really knowing the rules. It was all very improvised, but full of determination. To raise funds, we sold raffle tickets, made chicken soups... anything to buy our first rugby wheelchairs.

Over time, we realized the need to create a new club, and that's how BSB Quad Rugby was born. We continued training twice a week and participating in various championships. Even so, Fabiula and I remained the only women playing. In 2013, I took a break, and Fabiula continued. Later, I returned to playing, but she was no longer on the team. That's when we created another club – CETEFE/Lobos – since we were playing separately from the main BSB Quad Rugby team.

After another break, I returned to training in 2019 with the encouragement of Professor Rodrigo, who knew I had given up table tennis. I returned with a new purpose: to dedicate myself exclusively to forming a women's team. We started playing against men, training hard, always aiming to attract and encourage more women to wheelchair rugby.

In 2024, I was called up to join the first Brazilian Women's National Team, which participated in the Women's Cup in Paris. It was a grand and exciting championship, with a very high level of play among women from various countries. I returned with a different perspective, more convinced of my role in the sport and how much we are on the right track. ABRC has begun to see women in the sport with more attention and respect, a sport that until then was exclusively male. We already have a confirmed women's championship and even training weeks exclusively for female athletes in 2025.

I am immensely grateful for everything wheelchair rugby has given me – it deeply moves me and makes me feel alive. And I continue playing, training, and believing in the transformative power of this sport.

FABIULA DA SILVA PINTO

I learned about wheelchair rugby through a friend who is also a wheelchair user. He invited me to join the first wheelchair rugby team in Brasília, and it was love at first sight... or rather, love at first hit. When I could walk, I always loved adventures, adrenaline, and challenges. Before the accident, I played soccer, and my passion for the sport was undeniable, but after the accident, I thought I would never play sports again.



wheelchair rugby presented an opportunity to continue this passion, and another reason that made me want to play wheelchair rugby was meeting athletes with so much autonomy and independence. I wanted that for my life. The independence I gained playing and training is something I didn't feel in 5 years of physiotherapy.

The biggest challenge I faced was the issue of resources for training and participating in championships. Without adequate investment, it's difficult to grow and compete in a sport that, at the time, was still finding its place.

The positive aspects, besides the interaction with other quadriplegic people and the building of strong bonds, were that physical activity gave me autonomy and independence. I got to know incredible places, and the presentations we did of the sport in schools were wonderful experiences – promoting inclusion and showing that we, wheelchair users, are not pitiful but competitors ready to shine.

Valeria and I were among the first women to play wheelchair rugby in Brazil. We trained and competed with the boys, and our dream was that one day there would be a women's team and competitions exclusively for women. And today I am extremely happy to see this dream coming true. I believe that all people with quadriplegia should play wheelchair rugby at least once in their lives. The experience transforms, empowers, and shows that we can overcome barriers.

TININHA: A NAME THAT MARKED THE SPORT

Tainá Santos, born in 1991, joined wheelchair rugby in 2012 and, with her passion and dedication, profoundly marked the history of the sport. In 2013, she won the national title with her team, the Gladiators, demonstrating the talent and determination that would accompany her throughout her career. In 2017, Taina wrote another inspiring chapter by traveling alone to France, where she competed in the Women's Cup, becoming the first representative of Brazil in the competition.



Sadly, she passed away in 2021, but her legacy lives on. Her love for the sport, her courage, and her determination have become a benchmark for us all. In her honor, our main annual championship awards the Taina Santos Trophy, given to athletes with great sporting potential, thus perpetuating her story and inspiration for future generations.

Taina will always be remembered as one of the women who helped build and shape the history of wheelchair rugby in Brazil, paving the way for new athletes and strengthening the female presence in the sport.

WORLD'S FIRST WOMEN'S TEAM IN A CHAMPIONSHIP: TEAM SARAH

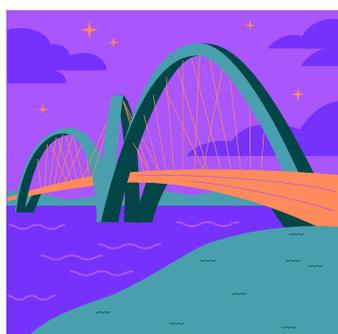


The development of women's wheelchair rugby in Brazil occurred gradually, marked by pioneering initiatives in different regions and the adaptation of practices already established in the men's scene. In this process, the Lago Norte unit of the SARAH Network of Rehabilitation Hospitals, also called SARAH Lago Norte, played an important role in consolidating the sport.

In July 2018, services began to be organized separately for men and women, which contributed to significant advances in the technical and tactical development of the female group, without disregarding the progress also observed in the male group.

The first group consisted of 20 women who met weekly for 2-hour classes, led by Professor Rodrigo Rodrigues Gomes Costa, head of the Spinal Cord Injury Neurorehabilitation Program. Simultaneously, the acquisition of specific sports wheelchairs for wheelchair rugby at the unit, also that year, represented an additional milestone, decisively contributing to the progress achieved.

With the progressive development of wheelchair rugby at SARAH Lago Norte, maintaining classes divided by gender, in 2019 the hospital received an invitation to participate in the 7th Brasília wheelchair rugby Open. This was a traditional event on the national calendar for the sport, organized by the BSB Quad Rugby team, based in Gama, a city of Brasília/DF.



Because it was an "Open" type tournament, participating teams did not need to be affiliated with ABRC. This aspect was crucial, as at that time, the SARAH Team was not affiliated with ABRC, a link that would be established later. The tournament was held at the Gama Olympic and Paralympic Center, the training location for the BSB Quad Rugby team.

WORLD'S FIRST WOMEN'S TEAM IN A CHAMPIONSHIP: TEAM SARAH

Team SARAH participated in the Open with one women's team and one men's team, totaling nine women and nine men. Institutional transport was necessary to carry the rugby wheelchairs, along with gloves, belts, uniforms, and balls.

The Open featured the participation of 7 teams, in addition to the two teams from the SARAH Network. One of them was the Paraguayan national team, called "Yakaruedas", as well as the following Brazilian teams: Gigantes (Campinas/SP) with teams A and B, CETEFE Lobos (Brasília/DF) and the host BSB Quad Rugby (Brasília/DF).

The Open began with the technical congress, which took place in person on the evening of November 13, 2019. Representatives from the teams, referees, organizers, and ABRC were present at this meeting.



Initially, some members clearly found it strange that an exclusively female team was participating. The question arose: "Why weren't two mixed teams formed?" It was clarified that the teams were formed and trained separately and that participation in the tournament would indeed involve both female and male teams.

During the competition, the women's team played six games and lost them all. However, or despite this, they left their mark on wheelchair rugby history, being the first exclusively female team in the world to participate in a mixed-gender competition.



The final moment of the Open was the closing ceremony. Although the women's team did not receive an award, an unexpected invitation came from the then president of ABRC, Luís Cláudio Alves Pereira. The president expressed satisfaction with the initiative of an exclusively female team and invited the team to participate in the 2020 edition of the Brazilian Championship of the modality. However, due to the pandemic, it was not possible to proceed with this proposal.



Beyond the memories of this female participation in Team SARAH, this invitation was also a milestone in recognizing all the dedication of the women, both in the period leading up to it, in the creation of the separate group exclusively for women, and in their participation in the tournament.

PICTURES FROM THE 7TH BRASÍLIA OPEN WHEELCHAIR RUGBY TOURNAMENT



DEBUT OF A WOMEN'S TEAM IN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Continuing the work begun with the SARAH team, some of the women who showed interest in dedicating themselves more intensely to wheelchair rugby – making a gradual transition from a sport focused on rehabilitation to a practice focused on leisure, social integration, and competition – were invited to join the CETEFE Lobos team, a traditional team from Brasília, and began training regularly with the team.



With the maturation of this group and the strengthening of the bond with the team, in 2023 the collective desire arose to participate in the Brazilian wheelchair rugby Championship – Second Division. Thus, in the 2023 edition, CETEFE Lobos registered two teams: one of them composed exclusively of female athletes and with a female coach, becoming the first all-female team to compete in the National Championship.



DEBUT OF A WOMEN'S TEAM IN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

This historic achievement received special mention from Kathy Newman, Director of Competitions and Development at World Wheelchair Rugby, who wrote:



“I would like to congratulate you on participating with an all-female team in the Brazilian wheelchair rugby Championship. This is excellent news, and you should be commended for this initiative. World Wheelchair Rugby is committed to increasing female participation, and your example of providing an opportunity for an all-female team to compete in a national championship is wonderful. Once again, congratulations and keep up the great work.”

Although the women's team did not achieve any victories on the court, their performance was widely celebrated. The team received the Rugby Brazil Trophy, awarded in recognition of their exceptional work and impactful actions for the growth of the sport.

Currently, Brasília stands out as the Brazilian city with the highest number of women practicing wheelchair rugby, a direct result of the pioneering spirit and continuity of this process initiated at SARAH Lago Norte and strengthened by the partnership with CETEFE Lobos.



FIRST WOMEN IN THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEAM



The presence of women in the Brazilian National wheelchair rugby Team is a recent and highly significant milestone for the sport in the country. For years, the main team was composed exclusively of men, reflecting both the male predominance in the sport and the challenges faced by women in gaining space in high-performance teams.

It was only in 2024/25 that two athletes broke this pattern, becoming the first women to join the main national team. Their trajectories, although distinct in terms of sporting background and life experiences, converge in the leading role of opening paths for other athletes, consolidating the female presence in a sport that, until recently in the country, was exclusively male.

What follows are their stories, which reveal not only the transformative impact of sport on their lives, but also the significance of being pioneers in a field with such high visibility and representation.

CLEONETE DE NAZARÉ SANTOS REIS

My name is Cleonete and I've been playing wheelchair basketball for 30 years. Today, I'm also part of the main wheelchair rugby national team. And like every athlete, I have a story to tell.

It all started when I was six years old, with a bacterium: leprosy. When they discovered it, it was already advanced, and by the time I was 12, when I received the diagnosis, I already had loss of sensation and sequelae in my hands and feet.



Because of the illness, I ended up isolating myself from the world. I didn't leave the house and only had two friends, whom I've known since childhood.

FIRST WOMEN IN THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEAM

One day, I went to physiotherapy and a friend, Giovana, invited me to play basketball. At first, I refused. A week later, the physiotherapist couldn't see me and Giovana called me again. I talked to my mother and went with her. When I got there, I was enchanted by everything. I felt good, I saw other people with disabilities, each one different, and for the first time I felt at home. I no longer felt alone, excluded or abandoned.

Coach Caju came up to me and asked if I wanted to be part of the team. I said no, because I didn't have both hands. But he replied that I couldn't say I couldn't do it without first trying. Trying once, twice, three times, as many times as necessary.

At 19, I decided to give it a try. I started training and dedicating myself. In less than a year, I was called up to the Brazilian national wheelchair basketball team, in class 1.0. My mother was very happy because I stopped isolating myself, stopped living only in function of the pain. I had already gone through depression, anxiety, and even attempted suicide. I thought I was hindering my mother's life, that she was giving up everything for me. But she always said that I was her daughter, that everything she did was out of love. And it took me a while to understand this immense love.

Sports changed the way I act and think. Before, I wouldn't let anyone get close, I wouldn't talk to anyone. After basketball, I started traveling, seeing the world, and realizing that there are people with even more severe disabilities than mine. Sports lifted me up in an incredible way, by the grace of God, who is above all.

Today, at 49, a little old already, I remain active, striving and dedicating myself. Through basketball, I met many people, like Mari, who also played wheelchair rugby. She always invited me to try the sport, but I didn't see myself there. I thought it was just contact, only for men. I never accepted.

But in 2024, I received an invitation from coach Benoit to participate in a week of training with the wheelchair rugby team. That's where I fell in love. I identified with it immediately. It's like a bug that bites you and makes your heart race. That's wheelchair rugby.

FIRST WOMEN IN THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEAM

That same year, I was called up to join the first Brazilian women's wheelchair rugby team. We went to Paris to compete in a grand championship. I hadn't even experienced anything like it with basketball. We met many girls who were already part of their countries' main national teams. Mari and I tried to talk to them, even with the language barrier. It was amazing. A huge learning experience. I looked at each of them as role models. I wanted to learn from them, as they had learned one day. Having such references is very important.

Today, wheelchair rugby is my priority. I always watch the games to study. With the help of Bia, our coach in Paris, who was amazing, we received feedback, guidance, and strength. She made us believe in ourselves. Having Hanna and Mari on the court with me was everything. They gave me a new direction and showed me the way.

Now, Hanna and I have been called up to the national team. It's been a challenge, especially since we're women and new to the sport. Sometimes we hear unnecessary comments. But we also have people who support us. I try to do my best and believe in the coach, who has faith in me.

I know that everything depends on me: on my will, effort, and dedication. I know my worth. Today I am part of the wheelchair rugby team. It's a dream, an achievement. I feel good, light, and comfortable when I'm on the court.

Sport is for everyone, regardless of age or gender. Never give up on your dreams. Always go after what you want.

HAWANNA CRUZ RIBEIRO

My name is Hawanna, better known as Hanna in the sports world. I'm 27 years old and I'm from Rio de Janeiro. Since I was a child, I've always been involved with sports. I started playing soccer in my community and was one of the only girls among the boys. There, I felt alive and happy. My mother even had to pick me up at night because I didn't want to stop playing.

At age 12, I started playing more professionally, went through clubs, and even made it to the Brazilian national team, playing in a tournament in Italy.



FIRST WOMEN IN THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEAM

But, unfortunately, football left my life early due to foot injuries and, shortly after, I suffered a serious accident: I fell from the third floor and became a quadriplegic. And then you can imagine what it was like for someone who literally used their legs for everything and whose favorite sport was football. I thought my life was over, and it really was for quite a while. I spent about four years without motivation, stagnant, feeling aimless.

Right at the beginning of my rehabilitation at the Sarah Network of Rehabilitation Hospitals, they introduced me to wheelchair rugby, but I refused. I had prejudiced—I thought it wasn't for me, I wasn't paraplegic, and if I wanted something similar I'd go to a bumper car at an amusement park (small electric cars where you bump into others for fun). But, after 6 years, I decided to give it a chance. When I sat in the rugby wheelchair for the first time, it was love at first sight. I felt free again when I sat in the sports wheelchair. I usually say that wheelchair rugby isn't just a sport, but a life-changing experience, because for someone like me, who spent all day, every day, lying in bed, not even touching my daily wheelchair, I started to see life differently. I started going out alone, to the mall, and it changed my life, dude. wheelchair rugby literally changed my life.

From the beginning, I approached wheelchair rugby as a profession. I wanted to give my best, to make the national team. I knew the path would be difficult, being a mixed-gender sport and, until then, always an all-male national team. But I'm intense, I went all in. I did my first tryout even knowing I had little training time and a borrowed wheelchair. I didn't make it, but I knew it was just the beginning.

In 2024, I was called up to play in Paris, in an all-women's championship. We had never trained together, but I understood that we were there to make history and represent our country: it was the first time Brazil was going to participate in such a tournament. The following year, coach Benoit Labrecque trusted me, even though I was still developing. And that's where a new phase in my story began.

Nete and I are the first women on the national team, and we are paving the way for many others. The goal now is to go to the Paralympics and be one of the best 0.5 players in the world. I love being an athlete, I love challenges, and I like making history. And that's what I'm doing. I want to see more women on the national team, I want to see women's wheelchair rugby grow. wheelchair rugby changed my life and I want to help change the lives of other women too.

FIRST WOMEN'S NATIONALS



In 2024, the **1st Women's wheelchair rugby Tournament** was held with athletes residing in Brasília. Following the success of this tournament, ABRC further advanced its commitment to promoting the development of women's in the country, officially inaugurating the Women's Nationals.

Between **October 22nd and 24th, 2025**, Brasília hosted another historic moment for women in wheelchair rugby: the **1st Brazilian Women's Nationals**, held at the Sarah Rehabilitation Network – Lago Norte. The event brought together **22 athletes from different regions of the country**, consolidating a decisive step in strengthening and increasing the visibility of women in the sport.



The competition featured **three teams** made up entirely of female athletes, in addition to the crucial presence of **three coaches** (Ana Paula, Ana Luiza and Beatriz), and a group of **female referees**, reinforcing the importance of female involvement in all roles.

The championship was born from the **mobilization of the athletes themselves**, who, throughout 2024 and 2025, organized themselves to dialogue with the president of ABRC, José Higinio, about ways to expand female participation in the sport. Based on this dialogue, ABRC embraced the demands and became a pioneer by officially establishing the Brazilian Women's Championship, strengthening its mission to guarantee more opportunities and visibility for women in wheelchair rugby.



FIRST WOMEN'S NATIONALS

The event was only possible thanks to a **network of strategic partnerships**. The championship had the support of the Sarah Network of Rehabilitation Hospitals, the Network of Researchers on Women in Paralympic Sport, the Brazilian Paralympic Committee, and sponsorship from Caixa Lotteries, Caixa Econômica Federal, and the Federal Government. This collaboration reinforces the collective commitment to inclusion, equity, and the development of Paralympic sport throughout the country.

All games were **streamed live** on ABRC's official YouTube channel (@ABwheelchair rugbyugby), allowing family members, fans, athletes, and sports professionals to follow this historic milestone. The matches remain available on the channel's official YouTube playlist, while **photographic records** of the event can be accessed in ABRC's institutional archive, available on the Flickr platform.

 YouTube



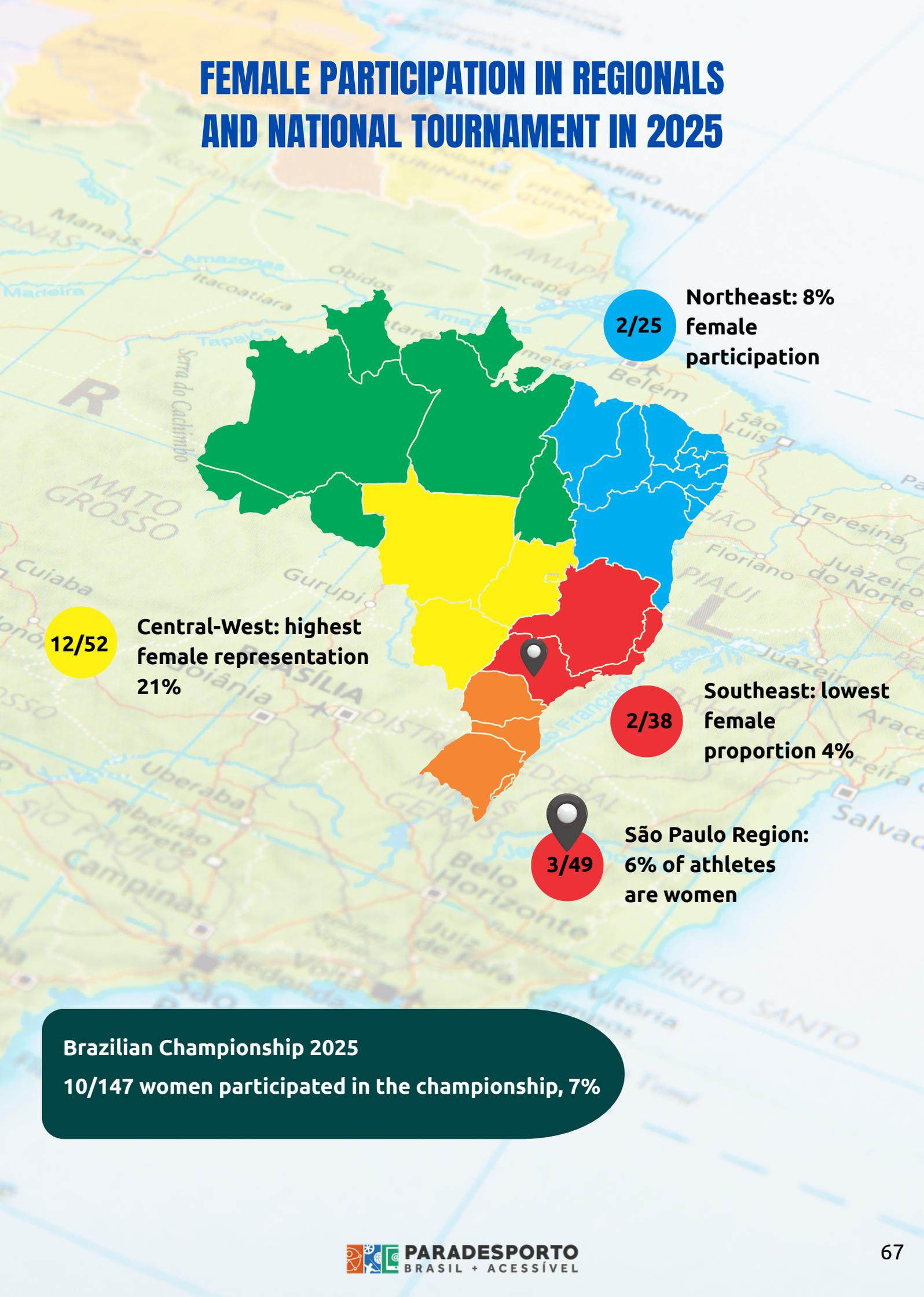
 flickr



The 1st Women's Nationals represented much more than just a championship; it **symbolized resistance, collective organization, the conquest of space, and the affirmation of women's presence in Brazilian Paralympic sport**. It was the beginning of a new stage, built by many hands and voices.



FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN REGIONALS AND NATIONAL TOURNAMENT IN 2025



2/25 Northeast: 8% female participation

12/52 Central-West: highest female representation 21%

2/38 Southeast: lowest female proportion 4%

3/49 São Paulo Region: 6% of athletes are women

Brazilian Championship 2025

10/147 women participated in the championship, 7%

Chapter 6

Beatriz Lucena Ramos
Rodrigo Rodrigues Gomes Costa
Luisa Cançado Cavaliere
Edilene Maria do Nascimento
Andrea Jacusiel Miranda
José Higino Oliveira Souza
Ciro Winckler

First Brazilian Women's National Team

INTRODUCTION

The story of the **first women's national team in Brazil** was built step by step, with a lot of collective effort and determination. It all started with introducing the sport to women, sparking the interest and passion of new athletes.



In this process, the **SARAH Rehabilitation Hospital** played a fundamental role by using wheelchair rugby as a rehabilitation tool, contributing not only to physical health but also to the social inclusion and empowerment of many women.



From there, the first training sessions exclusively for female athletes emerged, who soon began competing in **games, regional championships and, later, the Brazilian Championship.**

It is important to highlight the ongoing work that the teams have been doing with women in their formations, investing in training and encouraging female participation in wheelchair rugby. This joint effort was essential for the development of the athletes and for consolidating the female presence in the sport.

These advancements paved the way for **invitations to training weeks with the national team**, strengthening the technical level and confidence of these players. The first women's tournament in 2024 was a symbolic milestone: the consolidation of a trajectory that, until then, seemed distant.



All this work culminated in the formation of the **first women's national team**, which made history by participating in the **4th edition of the Women's Cup** in France, placing Brazil on the international stage of the sport. This achievement was not only in the sport, but also social and cultural, representing the result of years of dedication from athletes, coaches and supporters who believed in the strength and talent of women in sports.



These pioneers worked tirelessly to turn a dream into reality, giving women the opportunity to represent the country in a **still-developing environment.**

HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE WOMEN'S CUP WHEELCHAIR RUGBY



The opportunity to participate in the **Women's Cup** arose in March 2024, when a call for entries was published for the competition, which would take place in December of that year. The interest came from the Brazilian wheelchair rugby athletes themselves, who expressed a desire to represent the country. From then on, an intense mobilization began to secure resources from ABRC.

One of the athletes managed to get in touch with Professor Ruth Cidade, who facilitated a connection with representatives from the **Ministry of Sport**, specifically the **National Secretariat for Paralympic Sport**. In May, the team submitted a project with the aim of raising funds to enable participation in the tournament, where we only received final confirmation, between September and October, shortly before the tournament in December, that we would receive the funding.

Before confirmation from the Secretariat, the support we received from **CAP Sport Art Adventure Friendship (CAP SAAA)** was crucial; without it, our participation would not have been possible. The association sponsored the international flights for four Brazilian athletes. **ABRC** covered the remaining costs with its own resources, guaranteeing the domestic flights.



With funding secured, the next challenge was **forming the team**. The selection criteria prioritized athletes who participated in the 2024 Nationals Championship, held in September. However, one of the athletes was not in the tournament, but was fundamental in this process, mobilizing contacts, sponsors, and teammates.

In the end, eight Brazilian women and one Chilean (that covered her own expenses) athlete were selected. Since Chile would not be participating in the championship, she was invited to join the Brazilian team.



From the beginning, there was a commitment to **valuing female leadership** not only among the athletes, but also within the coaching staff. The team included experienced professionals committed to the cause, namely:



Thelma Vidales, an employee of ABRC, assumed the position of **head of the technical staff**. In addition to officially representing the association, she played a strategic role in logistical and organizational coordination.



Beatriz Ramos, a club coach involved throughout the entire process from initial encouragement to project writing, was chosen as the **head coach**. Her experience with the national team and her close relationship with the athletes were fundamental in integrating her into the team.



Luisa Cavalieri (physiotherapist) and Edilene Nascimento (nurse) are professionals with extensive experience in the Brazilian National Team and play essential roles in high-performance sports. With vast experience in international competitions, they have become a benchmark in athlete care, working in prevention and physical recovery. Their knowledge of the sport makes them fundamental pillars for the team's success and safety in competition.



Andrea Jacusiel (doctor), on her first trip with the wheelchair rugby team, brought the experience gained working in high-performance Paralympic sports since 2007, having been part of the Brazilian delegation in 5 Paralympic Games and having already served as chief physician for the Brazilian teams in wheelchair fencing, athletics, swimming and Paralympic cycling, adding knowledge to the group.

This composition reinforced ABRC's commitment to giving visibility and opportunities to **women in technical leadership positions** as well, creating a network of competent, inspiring professionals aligned with the development of the sport.

Despite the planning, there was no time for **in-person training before the competition**. The athletes only met at the tournament, also facing logistical difficulties such as missed flights and connections. Even so, Brazil was represented at the event.



EXPECTATIONS AND IMPACT

The main goal was to **guarantee Brazilian participation**, consolidating the country as a reference in the development of women's wheelchair rugby. Results on the court were not a priority – Brazil didn't win any games – but the athletes' performance improved with each match, bringing learning and motivation to train more and evolve.

The experience was a **historic milestone**: it increased other women's interest in practicing the sport and strengthened the women's movement in the discipline. In 2025, ABRC secured funding for:



To hold the **first Brazilian Women's Nationals**, in an individual registration format, bringing together around 20 athletes from all over Brazil;



To promote a **week of training** specifically for women and young people, encouraging the development of the sport's foundation.

Participation in the Women's Cup also connects to the plans of World Wheelchair Rugby, which aims to hold separate competitions for women's and men's teams by the 2032 Paralympic Games.

EXPECTATIONS AND IMPACT

The **athletes' leadership** was essential for participation in the Women's Cup to happen. Their mobilization inspired new athletes, brought recognition to women's wheelchair rugby, and opened doors to new funding. ABRC remains committed to **increasing the number of participants** and strengthening sport as a tool for social inclusion, empowerment, and quality of life for girls and women with disabilities.



The goal now is to dream big: to see **Brazil represented at the 2032 Paralympic Games with women's and men's wheelchair rugby teams** — a historic milestone for national sport.

José Higino, president of ABRC

REPORTS FROM THE TECHNICAL COMMISSION



The following is a report prepared by the delegation that participated in the championship, with the **aim of sharing** the experiences, lessons learned, and relevant observations about the development of the first women's wheelchair rugby team.

The delegation's technical staff consisted of **five women** — mission leader (Thelma), coach (Beatriz), physiotherapist (Luísa), nurse (Edilene), and doctor (Andrea); **nine athletes**, eight of whom were Brazilian (Hanna, Kamila, Luana, Márcia, Mariana, Nete, Ruth, and Valéria) and one Chilean (Jeny).

Luisa Caçado Cavalieri

Being invited to participate in the Women's Cup in Paris was, without a doubt, a milestone in my history, both professionally and personally, and in the history of Brazilian wheelchair rugby, especially for women. It was the first time in the history of wheelchair rugby that an all-female delegation traveled to a competition. And I'm not just talking about the female athletes, but also the entire coaching staff, the health team, and the support team. I believe the feeling that best describes what I felt from the moment I was called up until the end of our mission is: flattered!



This milestone for the history of wheelchair rugby and, I believe, also for Paralympic sport in general, represents an achievement in all aspects of sport and will certainly serve as an inspiration for other women athletes, professionals and admirers of sport.

But, like any mission in sports, this one presented challenges from the very beginning, even before we arrived in Paris. Our team had never trained together. The coaching staff hadn't had the opportunity to train them before the games. We, from the health team, had never been on missions composed only of women, or rather, we had never had female athletes on trips. With a reduced delegation, we all knew that we wouldn't, and couldn't, limit ourselves to just our professional roles. We would have to work together, from the sidelines to the hotel duties.

Indeed, it was a challenging and complex experience, and I dare say it was the most exhausting of them all. But, on the other hand, I can say with certainty that it was the most rewarding for me. The fear and anxiety of being pioneers in this context existed, but they were not greater than the support, the cheering, the positive energy, and the certainty that, regardless of the results, we would be there making HISTORY! And bringing great pride to the entire nation passionate about wheelchair rugby.

Every moment, every game, every day was very memorable for all of us, but, among them all, the chant that led our team before every game, led by me, was certainly the most memorable and emotional moment. It was impossible not to get emotional, to vibrate with excitement and feel all that energy present in our team... "Rugby... BRAZIL!"

From this mission, I take away many lessons, many reflections, and a great deal of growth, not only as a person and a professional, but also as a woman. Those were days when it was just us, women, with our infinite differences, different ways of thinking and acting, but we knew we were there for a single purpose, for a common goal. And that, without a doubt, united us as women, as people, and we understood that without the support of each one of us, nothing would move forward!

Throughout the entire process, I felt that we were greatly encouraged not only by the fans and sports enthusiasts, but also by the Brazilian and international press, our professional colleagues, the athletes of the national team, and especially by our families, who were undoubtedly our biggest supporters and cheerleaders.

After living through this unique experience and mission, and being a professional who works directly with the wheelchair rugby team and within Paralympic sports, if I could give one piece of advice to all professionals and athletes who are thinking about competing and working at a high level in Paralympic sports, it would be: fear is part of it and it will exist, but if the love for the sport and your profession truly exists, just go for it! You will gain experience, you will also gain competence if you dedicate yourself, but none of that matters if it's not done with LOVE! Everything done with love bears good fruit. Just go!

Our routine started around 4:00 am. Edilene and I, the team nurse, would begin our routine: catheterizing the athletes, changing clothes, transferring them to their wheelchairs, packing each athlete's bag, separating the catheters, diapers, and uniforms, and then going down for breakfast.

When we arrived at the court, the routine revolved around getting the athletes ready, checking their stats, transferring them to their playing wheelchairs, and warming them up. During the games, we took on a new role: mechanics!. Thanks to the mechanics and the support from the main team, who taught us the basics of meeting the demands on the court, we were able to resolve the most urgent and simple issues. The more complex ones, like changing a burst inner tube, were handled by the championship mechanic, who was undoubtedly an angel to our team, providing support in everything we needed.

After the games, we would return to the hotel and begin the routine of baths, medical appointments, physiotherapy, and nursing care. The nighttime period was undoubtedly the most challenging. There were many baths, catheterizations, changes of clothes and diapers, as well as other treatments.

We had to form a task force, unite, and, for a while, set aside each person's specialty. I couldn't limit myself to physiotherapy services. We were a multidisciplinary team, where no one let go of anyone's hand. Without this spirit of unity, camaraderie, and teamwork, no one would have been able to handle it. And I am immensely grateful to have professionals on our team with the same mindset, willingness, and unity. Our motto throughout the trip was: No one lets go of anyone's hand. And I believe that this is the spirit of the work of a technical and health commission in any mission, but in this specific one, it was paramount. I leave here my gratitude to these incredible women. Thank you, ladies!

Edilene Maria do Nascimento

Participating in the Women's Cup, a tournament with great international visibility for the wheelchair rugby discipline, and being part of an exclusively female team was a sensational experience. I always wanted to visit Paris, but I never imagined I would do so as a member of the Brazilian women's national team.



When I received the invitation from the high-performance coordinator, Ricardo Tanhoffer, I was flattered by the professional recognition, but I also felt a pang of worry and butterflies in my stomach. After all, I would be responsible for caring for nine women, three of whom had a high degree of dependency. My biggest concern was performing intermittent catheterization on the plane, where the bathrooms are extremely small.

My routine as a nurse for the women's team was intense and challenging. My day started before dawn, when everyone was still asleep. I would get up to perform a bladder catheterization for relief on one of the athletes, go back to sleep for a short period, and then get up at 5 am to start my daily tasks.

My routine included performing bladder catheterizations, dressing skin lesions, assisting with personal hygiene and dressing the athletes, as well as pushing the wheelchairs when necessary. In addition, I took on other responsibilities, such as mechanic, staff, and photographer, capturing unique moments that will forever remain in our collection of memories.

It is important to highlight that, as a sports nurse, I play a fundamental role in developing nursing actions that seek to prevent, promote, and rehabilitate athletes. In this specific mission, we had to adapt to the needs of athletes with disabilities, which required a personalized and flexible approach.

The experience was challenging, but also extremely rewarding. I had the opportunity to work with a team of incredible women who demonstrated determination, courage, and resilience at all times. This experience taught me a lot about the importance of adaptation, flexibility, and creativity in sports nursing work.

Joining the women's team was an important milestone in my professional career and a great recognition. Knowing that I was the first nurse to work with the first women's national team, providing comfort and well-being, and offering health assistance, seeking actions to make them comfortable and prepared for the games, was a unique feeling.

I believe that other women will be encouraged and inspired by our athletes, by the determination and courage they have shown to the world of Paralympic sport. Certainly, our team made history, paving the way for other women to reach the national team and also make history.

However, we did face challenges. One was performing intermittent catheterization in the tiny airplane bathroom, and another was changing the tires on the gaming chairs during the tournament. I had never done that task before, and it was a fun and unforgettable experience!

Having a delegation composed exclusively of women is magnificent. I feel proud. We have built a legacy, being a pioneering team and leaving a mission to be followed by other women, whether they are team coaches, athletes, nurses, physiotherapists, doctors, or heads of mission.

During the competition, we had some memorable moments. One was our entrance into the stadium arena, and another was when the national anthem started playing. I cried, my heart raced, it was a real adrenaline rush! Our battle cry was also very impactful, bringing emotion to the moment with its phrase: "Today no Brazilian gives up." And we didn't give up!

Even though we didn't win the games, it didn't affect or intimidate us. Our athletes gave their best in every match and went for it in every play. It was beautiful to see the emotion and determination with which they played. We played the tournament with our heads held high, because we knew that the most important thing was the representation of the sport and the visibility of women's wheelchair rugby, which fostered the expansion of women's wheelchair rugby in Brazil.

I am grateful for the support of ABRC, CAP, SAAA Paris, the National Paralympic Sports Secretariat, linked to the Ministry of Sport, and the Paralympic Committee. Without these supporters, we would not have been able to achieve this. I want to express my gratitude for their support and help.

Working with wheelchair rugby is very enriching, both personally and professionally. The atmosphere among the team is friendly. Those who come for the first time always want to return. We say we've been "bitten" by the rugby "bug"... haha. I've been working with wheelchair rugby for 12 years, and I always want to be there.

Beatriz Lucena Ramos

In 2022, during my internship at the SARAH Hospital in Brasília, I had the privilege of working alongside Professor Rodrigo, who was a true guide in my development process. It was with him that I learned that rehabilitation and sport, when combined, have the power to transform lives. Rodrigo has a special affection for wheelchair rugby, and it was through him that this affection also became part of my journey.



It was there that I had my first experiences in the sport: I joined the SARAH women's team and, later, had the honor of leading the first women's team in the Brazilian Nationals. All of this was possible thanks to the guidance and constant support of Rodrigo, a great supporter of the cause. I also can't fail to mention Paulo, one of the founders of CETEFE Lobos, who opened the doors for the development of women's wheelchair rugby, contributing significantly to this progress.

Being part of the first women's national team was an immeasurable honor for me. It was a remarkable experience, full of challenges, achievements, and great joy. Being chosen by ABRC to lead this team represented a commitment to strengthening the sport and building a future with more opportunities for women in sports. It was an action that opened new paths, will inspire generations, and showed the world the strength of women in wheelchair rugby.

It was thrilling to see so many women involved in the tournament – from the organization to the athletes' performance on the court. I especially want to highlight the organizing team, who conducted the event impeccably, demonstrating competence and sensitivity. I sincerely hope that this championship will be repeated many times, always with our participation, hope one day in Brazil.

We all did everything: helping with showers and getting dressed, supporting on the court, changing tires, assisting in the airplane bathroom, which is much more complicated for women than for men, and even translating conversations. Many of these tasks I had never done in my life, but it was one of the most rewarding experiences for me as a person. I grew a lot.

Among the most memorable moments, I highlight the emotion of seeing the athletes playing, earning court time – something they often lack at their clubs. Together with the coaching staff, we sought to offer opportunities and share small pieces of guidance that went beyond the game: from issues of autonomy in dressing and bathing, to conversations about health and independence, such as learning to lift a wheelchair or dealing with everyday situations.

This championship provided experiences that transformed my life and, I believe, the lives of the girls as well. These were days of learning, humility, accomplishment, and important achievements. We planted seeds that, in due time, will bear fruit – and that made every hour of sleep lost, the doubled work, the learning of new skills, and all the dedication involved worthwhile.

Perhaps this isn't the traditional story of a national team, but it was our story. And, as our motto says: no one lets go of anyone's hand.

Andrea Jacusiel Miranda

When I received the invitation to join the first Brazilian women's national team from the high-performance coordinator Ricardo Tanhoffer, I was perplexed and somewhat incredulous: he was proposing a 100% female team, including a 100% female technical staff.



In almost 20 years of working with high-performance Paralympic sport in Brazil, I have been part of numerous national teams and international missions, in World Cups, World Championships, Parapan American Games, Paralympic Games, among others, and I had never, absolutely never, been part of, witnessed, or even been aware of a 100% female technical team. I had been part of female health teams, female technical support teams, female coaches, and, on one occasion, a female mission leader. But 100% female? Never. On the contrary, we have always been a minority in all the missions I have been part of.

I accepted, of course, as it was an absolutely irresistible invitation: the invitation itself was historic in its content. However, until the moment we were all gathered at Guarulhos airport, preparing for boarding, I expected some male "boss" to arrive: the president of the federation, someone with political weight, or anyone else who would arrive to fulfill some non-technical function in the delegation.

In fact, the understanding that we were an all-female team only came upon our arrival at the hotel in Paris. I dare say we were the first all-female team to represent the country in an international competition.

For me, it quickly became clear that we were on a mission of "firsts": the first time I, as a doctor, was part of a wheelchair rugby team. The first time the mission leader acted as such. It was the first time the coach led a team in international competition. It was the first time some athletes traveled without their parents. The first time an athlete crossed the ocean. The first time the healthcare team (doctor, nurse, and physiotherapist) acted as mechanics on the court. Perhaps that's exactly what strengthened us as a team and as a group.

After the first few days, I became aware of a new feeling that I had never experienced in all these years, during which everyone participated in competitions around the world. So unfamiliar that it took me some time to identify what it was: a lightness, a feeling of peace, a sensation of being there, completely at ease to perform my role as a doctor and contribute in any other necessary function. Then I realized: I wasn't carrying my armor of protection against harassment. Once again: the first time I realized the extra weight I automatically carry whenever I'm involved in high-performance sports, to protect myself from the inevitable harassment. Moral harassment, sexual harassment, and this simply for being a woman. Harassment that I have experienced from members of technical teams, as well as athletes, organizers, presidents of confederations, among others.

At that moment, the president of the Brazilian Wheelchair Rugby Association, José Higino, and the high-performance coordinator, Ricardo Tanhoffer, became the most admirable figures in my eyes. They gave up a trip to Paris, taking on a position that usually allows visits to the City of Lights, in pursuit of a mission, a vision, and a clear objective. And thus, they gave me the privilege of experiencing and participating in something unique, unprecedented, breaking paradigms and stigmas of high-performance sport as old as the sport itself.

In my eyes, we were all winners. Each member of the technical team worked beyond their scope, each athlete overcame personal challenges, the team conquered technical challenges, our team forged bonds day by day, and became a cohesive, united, collaborative team with exemplary performance.

The mission officially concluded with the return of the participants to their home cities, but its effects are far from over. What was experienced in Paris is not limited to an international competition: it is a concrete experience of reorganizing power, work, and care in high-performance sport. This mission showed what we already knew: we have female professionals in number, technical competence, experience, and with the quality of training to fully conduct international sporting missions, without depending on male supervision.

The impact of this experience begins now, in the way each participant returns to their respective fields, and it serves as a benchmark for future national teams, federations, and sports policies. It wasn't just a successful mission; it set a precedent that should no longer be the exception.

ATHLETES' ACCOUNT

The athletes from the first Brazilian women's national team **share their experiences and insights about the championship**, highlighting the significance of representing Brazil and the importance of an exclusively female tournament for the sport.

Expectations and Changes

Before the tournament, expectations varied. Mariana hoped to get to know the team and the structure, as well as focus on the overall ranking. During the championship, mutual trust and good games against strong teams led Mariana to expect them to be competitive and even win some matches. Valéria initially only expected to participate, but after observing the other teams' training sessions, her expectations increased, anticipating tough and exciting games. Luana aimed for 3rd place, but the lack of training among the athletes to get to know each other on the court was an obstacle. Jeny wanted to participate, play well, and perhaps win, but she realized the high level of the opponents and the inexperience of some teammates, which changed her expectations, although without discouraging her. Ruth arrived excited, but was frustrated by not being able to give her best.

Hanna, for her part, had hoped to stand out individually, but during the championship, her expectations shifted to a collective perspective, focusing on contributing to the team. Kamila had high expectations for a good placement, but underestimated her opponents and realized the need for team growth, feeling proud of the collective effort. Márcia was anxious, as everything was very new to her, and she was surprised by the structure of the championship and the number of women participating.



Impact on the Increase of Women in the Sport

There is consensus among the athletes that the tournament will have a positive impact on increasing female participation. Mariana emphasizes that this event offers a safe and fair environment, encouraging more women to participate in the sport on a national level. Valéria highlights the evolution of the championship, which began with few athletes and countries in 2015, but grew significantly until 2023 and the current year, anticipating greater visibility and support with the participation of the Brazilian team.

Luana emphasizes that, despite the physical strength of the men, the tournament shows that women can compete on equal footing and grow in the sport. Nete, Ruth, and Márcia also believe that this is just the beginning for women in the sport. Jeny affirms that the demonstration of a small group of women achieving so much with determination and boldness will certainly be influential. Hanna and Kamila agree that the visibility and proof that women can play wheelchair rugby, taking the sport seriously and having fun, will encourage more participants.



Representing Brazil and being part of the first women's national team

Representing Brazil is a source of great pride and emotion for the athletes. Mariana feels honored to represent a nation and seeks her place and voice. For Valéria, the call-up was thrilling, and representing the country in a championship is the greatest achievement for an athlete. Luana describes it as a dream come true and a great responsibility. Nete considers it a dream come true and an honor to be part of the first national team. Jeny feels proud, recognizing Brazil's reputation in sports in South America. Ruth describes the experience as "surreal" and expresses gratitude for being part of the first national team, hoping to continue the legacy.

Hanna emphasizes that this is what every athlete aspires to: a place to evolve and an honor to wear the Brazilian jersey. Kamila sees it as a gift from God, feeling pride and responsibility in representing the country. Being on the first women's national wheelchair rugby team is significant for all the athletes, representing the validation of years of effort and paving the way for future generations. Mariana sees it as the certainty of having made the best choice after 10 years of struggle. Márcia feels proud and affirms that it is a dream to be able to wear the jersey and say that she is part of the Brazilian women's wheelchair rugby team.



Differences in an Exclusively Women's Tournament

The athletes noticed some differences in an exclusively female tournament. Mariana observed a tactically strong tournament, where many women excel in the mixed-gender setting, naturally facing physical and strength disadvantages. Valéria pointed out differences in game time (4 periods of 6 minutes for women versus 4 periods of 8 minutes for men) and in the team entrance ceremonies. Luana observed that everyone competes on equal footing, with their own limitations and roles, and that they don't need to depend on the men on the court.

Jeny, however, believes there is no significant difference, as there are high-performing women at the same level in mixed teams. Ruth values the women's tournament as a great motivation in a sexist society and a sport with few opportunities for women. Kamila highlights more opportunities on the court and greater comfort in hygiene matters. Márcia emphasizes greater equity, empathy, and receptiveness, stating that she feels at home.



Key Features of the Game

Grit, communication, teamwork, and resilience are defining characteristics of the athletes. Mariana points to the team's determination and the growing process of tactical learning and synergy. For Valéria, hearing the national anthem, the team's cheer, and seeing the underdogs scoring goals were the most memorable moments.



Luana emphasizes teamwork, on-court communication, and maintaining composure. Jeny highlights communication, cohesion, and good team transitions. Ruth feels that simply being on the court is already significant, even if she can't give her best. Hanna mentions playing against "wheelchair rugby giants," the communication between the bench and the court, the will to make things happen, and the ability to cause problems even as a lower-ranked player. Kamila sees wheelchair rugby as a sport of quick decisions, with a high demand for deductions on the court, making it challenging and dynamic. Márcia emphasizes competitiveness.



Positive aspects of the Championship

Positive aspects include team unity, learning, and international experience. Mariana highlights the mutual trust, the sharing of struggles, laughter, and lessons learned, as well as knowing the team's place and time. Valéria praises the reception and organization, especially the support for wheelchairs and tires. Luana emphasizes the effort of each member, the unity, and the support of the team and the support staff.

Nete values the learning, the rules, and the knowledge of her teammates. Jeny points to the camaraderie and team cohesion, the learning about on-court communication, and the motivation to train harder. Ruth highlights the team's incredible performance. Hanna values playing against experienced athletes, the competitive energy, the knowledge gained, the ease with which the team handled the results, and the exchange of ideas with world-class players. Kamila mentions meeting new people, practicing independence, gaining on-court experience, and creating bonds.



Negative Points of the Championship

The negative points mainly revolve around the lack of time for training and adaptation. Mariana and Luana cite the lack of training. Valéria mentions the short training time for court familiarization, in contrast to other teams. Nete refers to the lack of knowledge of the rules and how to pass the ball. Jeny felt frustration and anxiety. Hanna points to the cold and the results, in addition to injuries. Kamila agrees about the short training time, the lack of warm-up, and transportation problems. Márcia highlights the lack of accessibility of the hotel bathroom.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT

The Women's Cup was created in 2015 by the CAP Sport Art Adventure Friendship (CAP SAAA) association, an initiative of Sophia Azzi, following the participation of several of its members in the Ladies Cup in Germany in 2014. **The next chapter will detail how this initiative came about.**

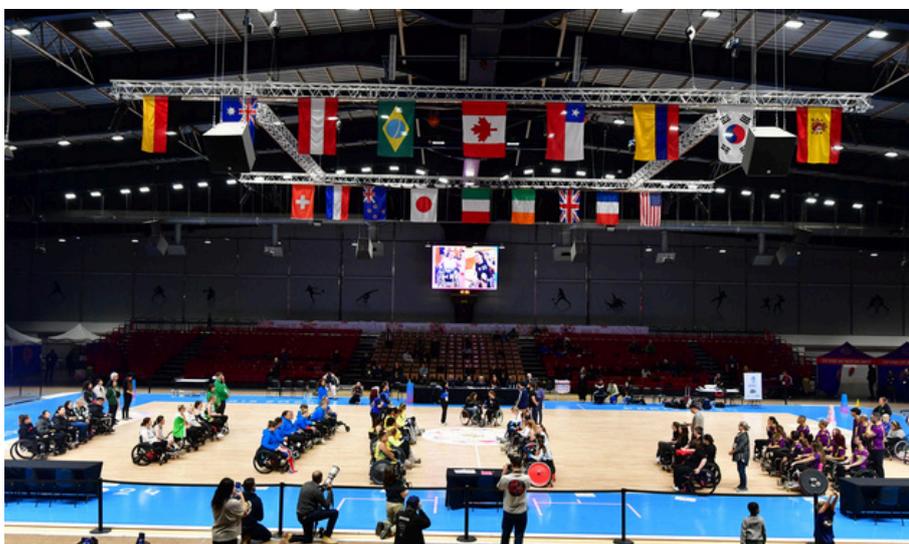


The Women's Cup's main objectives are to encourage the participation of women with disabilities in sports, providing a competitive environment where athletes can express their potential and inspire other women.



The tournament also contributes to the classification of athletes and the training of classifiers, promoting the development of the sport. Furthermore, it seeks to integrate women with disabilities into the job market, inviting companies to the event and combating stereotypes, while also aiming to increase the visibility of women's wheelchair rugby, attracting media and new partners.

In the 2024 edition, in which Brazil participated, the games were broadcast live on the official Wheelchair Rugby France YouTube channel ([@wheelchairrugbyfrance](https://www.youtube.com/@wheelchairrugbyfrance)). The event organizers expressed satisfaction with the public's response.

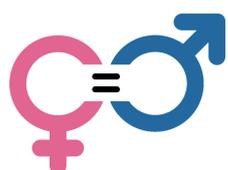


“We are delighted to share that the matches were watched with great enthusiasm, accumulating over 12,000 online views! This highlights the growing interest in and admiration for women's wheelchair rugby, and you were at the heart of this achievement.”

WORKING GROUP FORMED TO PROMOTE GLOBAL FEMALE PARTICIPATION

World Wheelchair Rugby has launched a pioneering initiative to promote gender equality in wheelchair rugby. A working group has been created dedicated to increasing female participation in the sport globally, aiming to break down barriers, expand opportunities, and encourage the presence of women at all stages of the sport's development.

World Wheelchair Rugby President Richard Allcroft highlighted the importance of ensuring positive and welcoming environments, reinforcing the organization's commitment to inclusion. Kathy Newman, WWR's Director of Competitions and Development, celebrated the creation of the group and emphasized that the timing is ideal to boost female participation and meet the growing demand and opportunity in the sport.



This initiative reinforces WWR's commitment to diversity and serves as a reminder of the fundamental role of gender equality in Paralympic sport.

For more information about the working group and its initiatives, please contact: Kathy Newman, Kathy.newman@worldwheelchair.rugby.



TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS



TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS



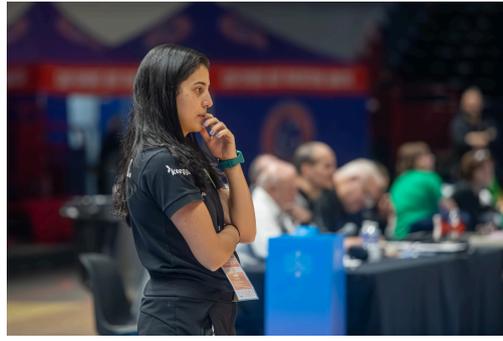
TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS



TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS



TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Todas as fotografias utilizadas nesta obra foram gentilmente cedidas por **Thelma Vidales e Laurent Bagnis**, que acompanharam e registraram diferentes momentos da trajetória do Brasil na quarta edição do campeonato Women's Cup.



Encontre as fotos na **Galeria Flickr:**

- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/abwheelchairrugbyugby/albums/72177720323504234/>
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/197721637@N04/albums/72177720322454188/>
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- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/197721637@N04/albums/72177720322404449/with/54185718342>
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/197721637@N04/albums/72177720322396924/>



Assista aos jogos completos no **YouTube:**



- <https://www.youtube.com/live/dT0rOk1HT9U>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53I9tbEezLM>

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Chapter 7

Sophia Azzi
Ryadh Sallem

Women's Cup: From Dream to Reality

Women's Cup - From Dream to Reality

The Women's Cup was born from a simple idea and a deep conviction: giving women their rightful place in a demanding, spectacular, and still largely male-dominated sport — wheelchair rugby.

Created in Paris in 2015 by the association **CAP SAAA** (CAP Sport Art Aventure Amitié), the Women's Cup has established itself, in less than ten years, as the leading international event dedicated to women's wheelchair rugby.

The Women's Cup brings together the joy of the game, performance, sharing, and sisterhood. It embodies the CAP SAAA philosophy: **"The right to difference against indifference."**

Since its first edition, the Women's Cup has revealed athletes, inspired nations, and contributed to the growth of women's wheelchair rugby worldwide.

CAP SAAA

Founded in 1995 by **Ryadh Sallem**, a Paralympic athlete and advocate for a more inclusive society, CAP SAAA is a non-profit organization of public interest that has been working for thirty years to transform the perception of disability through sport, education, and culture.



The name CAP sums up the spirit of the association:



CAP as a goal, a direction to follow;
HandiCAP, reminding us that disability is not a limitation;
CAPacity, the ability to act, create and progress;
CAP or not CAP?, the courage to try, to dare and to go further;
CAPital, because it all began in Paris.

Guided by the motto, "For the right to difference against indifference", CAP SAAA uses sport as a tool for empowerment and citizenship, highlighting the skills and talents of every individual.

CAP SAAA

The association was also a pioneer in reverse inclusion, allowing people without disabilities to participate in wheelchair sports. This approach breaks with traditional models of integration, placing everyone on equal footing and fostering meaningful shared experiences in which all participants learn from one another.

His work is organized into five main areas:

- 1 CAP Sport: a major parasport club in Île-de-France (wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, boccia, and adapted sports), from recreational to high-performance levels;
- 2 CAP Sensi: awareness and prevention programs in schools, universities, and companies;
- 3 EDUCAP CITY: a national citizenship education program for children aged 8 to 14, combining sport, culture, and civic engagement;
- 4 CAP Event: organization of major international events such as the European Wheelchair Rugby Championship (2022), the Women's Cup, and active involvement in the Rugby World Cup 2023 and the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games;
- 5 CAP Culture: a space promoting artists with disabilities and supporting reflection and creation through the "Civilization Challenges" series, exploring vulnerability and disability throughout human history.

Through its diverse projects, CAP SAAA promotes a positive and universal vision of disability — a world where difference becomes the norm.

Genesis - From Ladies Cup to Women's Cup

The story begins in 2014. Some French players participated in the Ladies Cup in Cologne, Germany. At the time, it was the only women's wheelchair rugby tournament in the world. The experience was powerful, revealing how essential it was to create dedicated spaces for women to meet, play, and progress together.

When Germany decided not to renew the event the following year, several players and leaders of CAP SAAA decided to keep the momentum alive. Thus, in 2015, in Paris, the first Women's Cup was created. CAP SAAA envisioned an international tournament open to players from all backgrounds, with the possibility of forming mixed teams when necessary.



But, weeks before the event, Paris was struck by the terrorist attacks of November 2015. While many events were canceled, twelve players from six countries maintained their commitment to attend. Their presence became an act of resilience, resistance, and solidarity for a city in mourning.

“Coming to Paris was a way of saying that fear would not win. We were there to play, to live.”

Canadian player, 2015



That edition took on a deep symbolic meaning. More than a tournament, it became a message of unity, courage, and hope. From the beginning, the Women's Cup became a symbol, a sport that stands strong and breaks down barriers.



Because?

A mission aligned with CAP SAAA's values

Encouraging women's participation in wheelchair rugby is not just a goal for CAP SAAA – it's a mission. From the outset, the association challenged conventions: it created the first 100% women's wheelchair basketball team to compete in a men's league. This boldness paved the way for pioneering initiatives like the Women's Cup.

The event serves three main functions:

- **Sporting:** structuring women's wheelchair rugby and supporting the creation of national teams;
- **Social:** promoting equal opportunities and increasing the visibility of women in parasport;
- **Societal:** raising awareness among the public, businesses, and institutions about the value of women athletes and their key role in changing mentalities and behaviours.

For Whom?

For women, but also for the entire community

The Women's Cup is primarily dedicated to female wheelchair rugby players, from beginners to international athletes. Over time, it has become a driver of collective transformation.

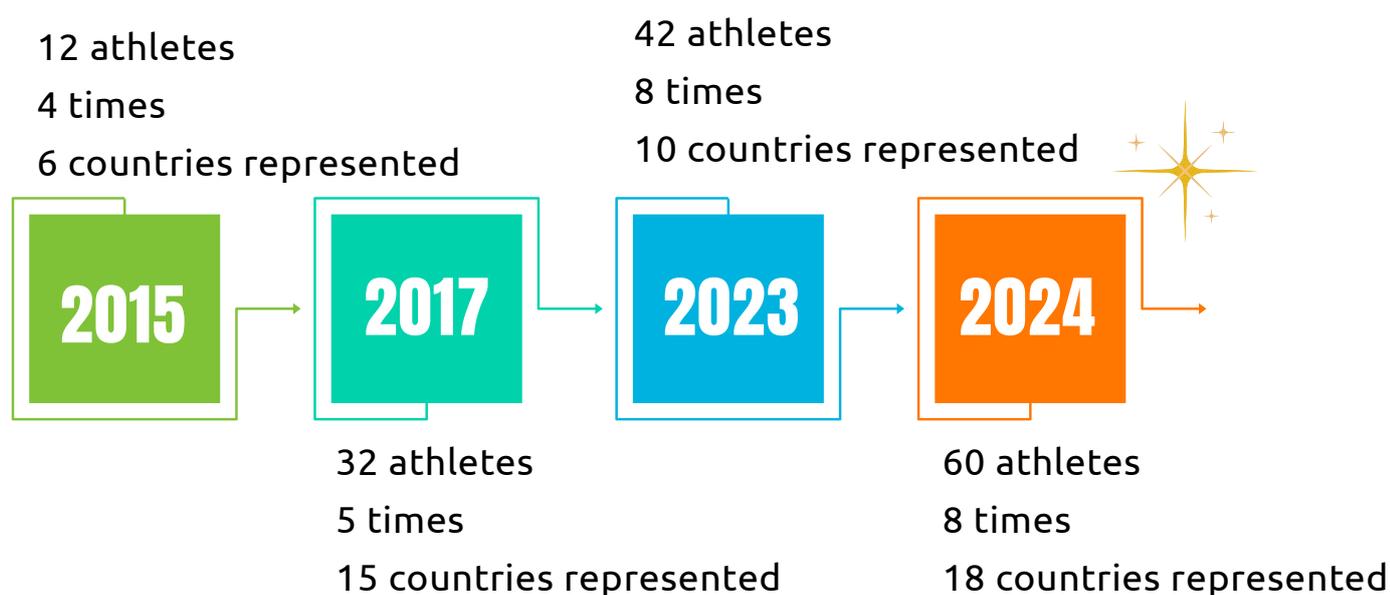
During the 2024 tournament, World Wheelchair Rugby and the Île-de-France Regional Handiport Committee, both event partners, organized a symposium and workshops bringing together athletes and leaders. The discussions highlighted aspirations and challenges:

- More competitive opportunities and training dedicated to women;
- Stronger national federation support for female players and teams;
- Inclusive club environments, with fair playing time, recognition, and pathways for progression;
- Better Paralympic representation, including the ambition of an official women's division, while preserving mixed-gender play at national-team level.

These voices embody the strength of the project. The Women's Cup is not just a tournament, but a platform for expression, development, and recognition. Some statements:

"We don't want privileges – just the same chances." "Playing with women has helped me understand my role and gain confidence." "Every year we are more numerous, stronger, more visible."

Important milestones (2015 - 2024) - 10 years of construction



★ **The 2024 edition marked a decisive turning point** ★

Organized just three months after the Paris Paralympic Games, it successfully extended the Paralympic legacy while giving the event the standards of a major international competition. In record time, CAP SAAA and its partners brought together 60 athletes from 18 countries. Over four days, 24 matches were played in an atmosphere of commitment, emotion and fair play, in front of school groups, families and fans of inclusive sport.

Beyond the games, the Women's Cup reinforced its educational and institutional role: an international symposium on women's place in wheelchair rugby, a conference on gender equity and inclusion in sport, and an international ranking panel overseen by World Wheelchair Rugby.

These initiatives have consolidated the institutional, educational, and social importance of the 2024 edition, making it a true legacy of the Paris 2024 Games.

Beyond sport – A dynamic and a collective awakening

Over the years, the Women's Cup has driven a global shift in awareness. The women in the wheelchair rugby have proven that they are not bystanders - they are full-fledged athletes, capable of excelling and inspiring at every level.

“I loved playing with women of such experience and energy. This tournament made me grow.” “It's an honor to represent my country and learn from other teams.”

This visibility inspires other nations and encourages the creation of women's teams on every continent. It also supports the evolution of rules and rankings towards a fairer sport.

At the same time, CAP SAAA's solidarity ticketing and educational programs make the Women's Cup a powerful platform for civic awareness, introducing the wider public to parasport and its athletes.

Perspectives and ambitions – Sustaining momentum and building the future

In 2026, the Women's Cup will take a historic step. At the invitation of World Wheelchair Rugby, CAP SAAA seeks to host the first official Women's Wheelchair Rugby World Cup in Paris.

The edition will have two complementary formats:

- 1 Official competition regulated by World Wheelchair Rugby rules;
- 2 The “Women's Cup” format, true to its original spirit, is open to players without international rankings and allows mixed teams when necessary.

This dual structure will combine high-level sport with accessibility, preserving the DNA of the Women's Cup: an open and unifying event that drives the development of women's wheelchair rugby.

“We need to believe it's possible. Six teams, and we'll finally have our World Cup. Let's make it happen!” American player, 2024

Conclusion - From vision to legacy

Ten years after its creation, the Women's Cup has ceased to be just a tournament. It is a movement, a voice, and a shared legacy for equality in sport.

Through it, CAP SAAA and its partners demonstrate that:

Change is born from action



**Gender equality
progresses through play**

**Universal values can
bring people together**



Each edition proves that difference is a force that challenges and pushes us further. And in this collective strength, the wheelchair rugby women of have found more than a court; they found their place.



Chapter 8

Beatriz Lucena Ramos

Marinés Cortázar

Faye West

Jieun Park

Jeny Barraza

Ciro Winckler

Voices that Move the Game

The Spanish Awakening: Project Felinas QuadRugby

The development of women's wheelchair rugby in Brazil is part of a **global movement**. In different countries, women have been organizing themselves to gain more competitive space, strengthen support networks, and create their own practice environments – valuing the sharing of experiences and increasing court time.

This chapter brings together accounts from athletes and pioneering initiatives around the world, highlighting achievements, challenges, and paths taken on different continents.

Within this global context, the story of the **Felinas QuadRugby** Project in Spain stands out as an initiative that symbolizes the passion, unity, and strength of women who have decided to pave the way for women's wheelchair rugby in Spain.



The project was born from the drive of Cristina García, Rebeca León, Mamen Movellán, and Marinés Cortázar, four women with a long history of promoting adapted sports and organizing various rounds of the National Wheelchair Rugby League, held between 2019 and 2023. Their shared vision was clear from the start: to **create a dedicated space** where women with disabilities could fully develop as athletes, role models, and companions.

In 2024, this dream became a reality with the creation of the **first wheelchair rugby women's team in Spain**. A team that symbolizes a before and after: the transition from idea to action, from desire to history.



Initially formed by players from mixed teams from different autonomous communities, the group was born with a shared purpose: to demonstrate that adapted sport can also be a space where **equality, visibility, and sisterhood** become engines of change.

To go further, the project launched a **national recruitment campaign**, inviting new women to discover wheelchair rugby. Many of them approached out of curiosity and stayed because of the emotion, the strength, and the sense of belonging that only a team like Felinas can generate.

That same year, the team **represented Spain** in international competitions, carrying its message of overcoming challenges and pride to every match, both on and off the court.

The origin of this story dates back to 2021, when the first women's wheelchair rugby team technification day was organized at the Sant Cugat High Performance Center. That day, full of energy and emotion, brought together, for the first time, all the women's rugby team players in the country. What began as a sporting event transformed into an inspiring experience that ignited the flame of a shared dream: **to create the first women's team in Spain.**

Currently, the roster includes **players** such as Marinés Cortázar, Mamen Movellán, Rebeca León, Lydia Ramos, Cristina Reyes, Marta Llauradó, Cristina García, Yuly Marcela Quiceno, and Erika González. The **coaching staff** is led by Berto Dacosta, coach of Quijote Wheelchair Rugby from Toledo, whose commitment and sensitivity have been key to the growth and consolidation of the project.

They all also compete in mixed teams in the RSR National League, contributing their experience and keeping the spirit of the Felines alive: unity, dedication, and shared passion.

**More than just sporting results,
Felinas QuadRugby aims to inspire.**

The project promotes outreach activities, exhibitions, lectures, and meetings in different parts of the country, aiming to bring wheelchair rugby closer to more women, give visibility to adapted sports, and foster a more egalitarian and inclusive society.

Voices of the World



In Great Britain, player **Faye West** witnessed the steady **increase** in the number of women participating in club tournaments, British leagues, and on the international stage.

She highlights that GBWR (Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby) offers great support to female players, citing the recent **talent program for women and girls**, designed to help athletes stay in the sport and reach the highest level. She also emphasized that a moment that fills her with pride was when **Great Britain won the Women's Cup in 2023 as a national team**.

She shared that she has seen women's participation in sports change enormously since she started. In her early days, she was often the **only woman** on the court and, at times, was called "the girl." Since then, she has seen more and more female players participating in her club's tournaments, and today many women are playing in leagues in Great Britain.

To encourage more women with disabilities to discover the sport, West emphasizes the importance of **continuing to value female participation**, highlighting female players in promotional materials, and ensuring that the environments of clubs and international teams are **welcoming and supportive**.

For West, the sport brought about a profound transformation: it did so much for me, not just for my health, but also for my **confidence and the life skills** I developed. I started in the sport at 16, as a shy teenager who wouldn't raise her hand in class or do anything to stand out. By playing with like-minded people and being part of a community, I developed my self-confidence, became captain at the club level, led numerous training sessions, and played on the world stage.

My advice is the same for anyone thinking about trying the sport for the first time: **give it a try**.

I didn't think the sport was for me, but after trying it once, I **fell in love** with it and was hooked. If you want to play at an elite level, it's difficult, but it's possible.



Voices of the World



In Korea, player **Jieun Park** also witnessed the steady **increase in the number of women** participating in club tournaments and on the international stage.

She points out that when she started, there were often **only one or no female players on each national team**. But since the creation of the Women's Cup, many more female athletes have become actively involved in the sport. Furthermore, the classification system has provided more opportunities for women to play in matches.

When she started playing in 2012 through her university club, there were only about three active female players in the entire Korean wheelchair rugby community, and she was the only one who competed regularly. There was almost no awareness that women could play, and when she approached other women with disabilities and invited them to try it, many said they were afraid. She comments that she felt the fact that the sport was mixed-gender made it seem intimidating, and because the sport was still dominated by men, there was little consideration for female players, which was unfortunate.

Park believes that to increase female participation, it is essential to **reach people** through hospitals (showing videos and allowing direct experimentation) and to promote the sport on popular TV programs, as many simply do not know about it.

Personally, wheelchair rugby transformed Park, who has muscular dystrophy and thought she couldn't play sports. When she tried it, she **felt the wind on her face and it made her very happy**. Through wheelchair rugby, she became more active and social, finding a more **confident version of herself**.

Wheelchair rugby demands mental and physical strength and is "like a math problem"—there's always something new to figure out, which makes it fun. Park's message to future generations is that despite moments of pain and joy, **the sport is beautiful**. She encourages new athletes not to be afraid, as there is now a growing global community of players with whom they can share and overcome difficulties, whether emotional, physical, or technical.



Voices of the World



In Chile, player Jeny Barraza highlights the steady growth in women's participation, who have managed to **break down barriers and challenge historical stereotypes**.

Access to and recognition of wheelchair rugby was much more limited for women, but this reality has changed significantly, reflecting an important step towards equality in sports.

She mentions that she still feels there is a long way to go before women's performance in wheelchair rugby is fully recognized. However, little by little she has been making her mark and demonstrating that **it is possible**, that we women have the **level, discipline and strength to excel in this sport**.

Jeny states that she feels very proud to have participated in the Women's Cup in France with Brazil. The experience was very **significant** for her, as it allowed her to **grow** as an athlete and advance on the path towards greater recognition in her country.

For Jeny, it's still necessary to further promote wheelchair rugby and show what this sport is really like. It's fundamental to create more outreach initiatives that **highlight women's participation**, as well as conducting workshops and practical activities that allow more women with disabilities to learn about the sport, try it, and feel motivated to participate. Furthermore, it's important to show that, although it's a very intense sport, it's also a **beautiful sport, with benefits in terms of feeling good both emotionally and physically, strengthening confidence, self-esteem, and overall well-being, affirming that this was the case for her**.

Jeny's message to all women with disabilities who dream of competing and building their place in Paralympic sport: you just need to **dare**. Believe in yourselves, don't be afraid to challenge your limits and pursue your dreams. Every step, every training session, and every competition is an opportunity to show that nothing is impossible. Your passion, effort, and courage can pave the way and inspire many others.



Voices of the World



Chapter 9

Beatriz Lucena Ramos
Ciro Winckler

Beyond a Record: Pathways to Equity in Wheelchair Rugby

CONCLUSION

This book was born from the desire to share the journey of women who, through wheelchair rugby, have built new stories. Stories that are often unseen, but deserve to be told, recognized, and celebrated.

The path of these women is intertwined with the challenges of the sport itself, as the diversity inherent to a discipline like rugby must overcome the barriers that limit female participation. Documenting this process not only sheds light on these individuals, but also reveals how paths can be changed and inclusion can be strengthened.

Thus, more than a record, we hope this book represents a step toward transformation. That everyone may understand we are here to strengthen the sport, to help it grow, become more accessible and visible, without losing its essence.

May women feel represented, may girls see themselves in these pages and imagine new futures with rugby as a space for physical activity or as inspiration to overcome barriers. May it inspire countries, clubs, administrators, men and women to believe that equity in sport depends on the actions of all of us, and that each person, in their own sphere, can and must contribute to making it a reality. It should also inspire more girls and women to reach positions of prominence in the sport, both on and off the court.

May wheelchair rugby be seen not only as a high-performance parasport, but also as a powerful tool for rehabilitation, a safe environment for socialization, a way to promote health, and to build meaningful connections. A space that fosters autonomy, self-esteem, and, above all, joy - for those who play and for those who watch.

May this journey of **women** in wheelchair rugby in Brazil be only the beginning of many other stories in the pursuit of equity.





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