



Para Biathlon Integration into IBU Regional Events

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As an IBU Event organiser you play an important role in the development of Para Biathlon. Thank you for challenging yourself and your organising committee to open your event to more members of our community.

One of the biggest challenges for para-athletes is having opportunities to compete. As an event organiser, you already have the most important skills and experience to be able to provide great competition opportunities for these athletes. The objective of this guide is to fill in a few of the gaps, so you and your OC are confident in providing the best possible experience for all competitors.

1. WHO ARE PARA ATHLETES?

The most common types of impairments in Para Biathlon are amputations, spinal cord injuries, and visual impairments. In Para Nordic Skiing, Paralympic Biathletes are divided into three classes:

- athletes who ski in a seated position (sit skiers, classified as LW10-12)
- visually impaired skiers who ski standing up and usually with a guide ("VI", classified as NS1-3), and
- standing athletes (classified as LW2-9).

In an IBU sanctioned event, athletes within each class are assigned a percentage based on their level of impairment so they can more fairly compete against one another. Depending on how you plan to integrate para into your competitions, this may or may not be something you need to address in your timing and results. This guide should help point you in the right direction and provide some helpful details to support you in whatever type of integration best fits your event.

2. GENERAL EVENT ACCESSIBILITY

Making your competition more accessible to athletes who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices will also make it a more spectator-friendly event. Most accessibility improvements do not require major infrastructure changes but simply require you to ask a few questions about the layout of your venue and flow of your event and adjust as needed. In particular, we ask you to consider the following:



- **Accessible restrooms**

Make sure people who use wheelchairs have a clean restroom/porta-potty option at your venue. It is important that these are accessible from a wheelchair and don't require access by skiing or walking.

- **Accessing competition courses**

How will sit skiers get from where they park or the lodge to groomed courses? Make sure it is possible to wheel to. If not, explore the possibility of grooming the courses a bit longer to bridge the gap. Other options may be shovelling out some snow to allow easier access to the trail or to create a snow bridge to cover some bare ground to make it sit skiable.

- **Start & Finish**

Is it possible to get to and from the start/finish area either in a wheelchair or sit ski? If your competition is point to point and you have wheelchair users or athletes with prosthetic legs they remove when they ski, make sure you or the athlete(s) have a plan for getting their wheelchair/legs to the finish. Most importantly, communication and expectations should be clear on both sides, so athletes, coaches, and race crew all know the plan.

- **Athletes' areas**

If you have a restroom or a Family Club for athletes, is it wheelchair accessible? If not, are there modifications you might be able to complete to improve the accessibility? Sometimes a simple ramp will do the trick. Handles or rails will make it more accessible for wheelchairs, those with leg prosthetics, and other mobility impairments. Consider making it permanent so wheelchair users can access your facilities and get to skiing all the time. This will be great for many members of your community, including spectators.

3. RULES

Para Biathlon on an international level is governed by the International Biathlon Union, which has rules specific to para-athletes. You can find the latest rules [at this link](#).

4. TYPES OF INTEGRATION

There are several different ways to integrate your event. Below are a few of the options with some notes on when you use each type and how it will impact your race:



- **Total integration**

This would most commonly apply to standing and VI athletes. Standing and VI athletes will usually sign up for your competition as any athlete would, and few special considerations are necessary with the exception of VI athletes competing with a guide* and the set-up of the range (see below).

[*Refer to Race Organizer Guide: Integrating Visually Impaired Skiers with Guides into Your Race](#)

- **Partial integration**

This applies to races where standing and VI athletes will compete in the main field but will later be separated out, results will be calculated according to their classification and there will be awards based on the calculated results. Athletes should still be on general results and receive race points as their raw times indicate so they are able to receive accurate seeding based on their speed in future races.

- **Separate race starts**

This would apply to any time you have sit skiers as a part of your event (with a few exceptions). This is most commonly a stand-alone competition within the same organization structure and event. It will have its own start time, a sit ski specific course, and separate results and awards. Often new standing and VI athletes will also join this field, so they have an easier, less technical course as is recommended for sit skiers.

5. REGISTRATION

It is important for para-athletes to feel welcome and included. We recommend including a part of your registration that makes it clear that para biathletes are encouraged to register. It is helpful to know when you have para biathlete(s) competing and what their experience and expectations are, so we would recommend including a sentence in your registration indicating this possibility and having a reliable contact person listed to facilitate the registration and to ask the questions about the specifics that you will learn in this document.

Draw, Start & Finish

- **Draw**

The draw for standing and visually impaired athletes should be according to their Qualifying points, if applicable. Visually impaired athletes skiing with a guide should be started as the last starter(s) of the competition *only if they don't have*



points*.

- **Start**

Sit skiers start with their torsos behind the wand. If the start gate is too low or narrow to allow for this, start them in the late start lane and manually move the wand at start or figure out what works best for your start/timing crews based on the timing system you are using. Make sure the Chief of Timing is part of this planning process. Standing athletes do not require a different start protocol. There are some exceptions for VI athletes skiing with a guide*.

- **Finish**

Sit skiers' finishes should be recorded when their torso crosses the finish line. There are some special considerations for finish crews when recording VI skiers with guides*.

[*Refer to Race Organizer Guide: Integrating Visually Impaired Skiers with Guides into Your Race](#)

Timing

In the case of “partial integration” or “separate race starts” with multiple people in the same class (i.e. you have three sit ski women with different levels of impairment), you would employ the racer compensation system. In this system, athletes have different compensation percentages that reflect their level of impairment. The system is designed to level the playing field, making it a fair competition among athletes who may have very different capabilities depending on their impairments. As an example, a sit skier with a leg amputation will not get any compensation because they have the full use of their core muscles to aid in their skiing. On the other hand, a sit skier with a spinal cord injury will get a calculated race time of only 86%-96% of their raw race time, depending on how much core function they have. The results will reflect the calculated race time according to these compensations, called “classifications” in Paralympic sports. As a race organizer, you are NOT responsible for assigning the percentages, just in calculating the results based on the athletes' already-assigned classification. You have a couple options for calculating results:

- Most timers will be comfortable with this simple calculation, and it can be done with an additional calculation field in their timing software or manually for a race with few athletes.
- If you ever use the RaceSplitter app for timing, there is a “racer compensation” feature built into the app that is very useful in calculating race results. Through



this method you won't have to calculate times when the race is complete. To use this feature, you must turn it on when you set up the race. When you add racers, you can click on "racer compensation" to assign the appropriate percentage. Once the race is set up correctly, you use the app normally.

- As always, make sure to use a back-up timing system just in case your primary option fails.

6. COURSES

Standing and visually impaired skiers can use the standard event course with no changes. Depending on the difficulty of your course, you will likely need to use an alternate course for sit skiers. We recommend new standing and VI skiers also ski on the sit ski course if they are new to racing, as this will often provide a better experience for first timers. However, it is important for other standing and VI athletes to be able to compete among peers if they choose.

- **Terrain**

Generally, terrain that is appropriate for beginner standing skiers will also work for sit skiers. This will mean shorter and more gradual climbs and descents, and avoiding highly technical elements like sharp corners, especially at higher speeds. Trails that have a more even grade (either from summer earthwork or grooming) will be easier for sit skiers to maintain balance on, as sit skis do not articulate. The most difficult thing for a sit skier to navigate is an uneven trail, not a well-prepared uphill!

- **Warm-up**

If snow is low and you are tight on trail space and plan to have standing athletes jog for a warm-up, remember that this is not an option for sit skiers. Make sure there is an appropriate warm-up option for them. This may mean making a little more time in the schedule to allow for them to warm-up on their race course. If low snow is probable for your event, plan for this eventuality on your initial schedule by building in more time or have sit skiers' race first so you are less likely to have to change your schedule at the last minute.

- **Try it out!**

If you want to get an idea if a course will work for a sit ski, try it out yourself or get a local sit skier to test it for you.



Grooming

As with any ski race, good mindful grooming is critical to safety and ensuring course and stadium elements flow well. Best grooming practices are particularly important for making a course work well for sit skiers, who may not be able to react as quickly to variable conditions or terrain as their standing counterparts. A few grooming practices that will have a big impact on your event running well:

- Avoid high speed merges
- Include tracks for sit skiers (often on the edge of the course if the sit ski course is shared with other competitors).
- Remove tracks on tight corners and when trails merge
- Make sure tracks never force skiers into dangerous situations (off the course, into v-boards, into oncoming traffic). Changing direction in a sit ski takes significantly more space than for standing skiers, so there are situations where you may have to end tracks earlier than you may normally to account for this.
- Even graded trails are preferable and much easier for sit skiers to navigate.
- Fill in the divots in trails sometimes created by large machines, especially when they occur in high speed or high traffic parts of the course
- Make sure that your classic tracks are not so far off the side of the trail that the outside pole punches through the snow. For a sit skier, this can make it nearly impossible to get up a hill. Making sure your race trails are groomed several times in anticipation of your event (rather than just the night before) will help alleviate this problem in softer conditions.

7. RANGE

Para biathletes compete on a 10-meter range with .177 air rifles (sit and stand skiers) or audio rifles (VI athletes) and shoot at a 13mm target. Here are a few other details that are helpful to understand regarding Para Biathlon/para biathletes:

- They only shoot in prone position but otherwise can be integrated into the same formats as other athletes.
- They shoot from the same firing line as athletes shooting with .22 calibre rifles.
- They do not carry their rifles while skiing. Coaches bring them their rifles when they arrive to the shooting point.
- Standing athletes who shoot with one arm or no arms are permitted to use a rifle stand on a spring that they should bring with them.



- Para athletes only shoot from the prone position but otherwise can be integrated into your existing race format.
- There are some options for how to set up the range for para-athletes:
 - Some standing athletes will prefer to shoot with .22 rifles and can be directly integrated into their age groups with no special considerations other than the fact that they do not carry their rifle and may use a stand to balance their rifle on that would be provided by the athlete/coach.
 - In some ranges, there is space to set up 10m points either before or after the 50m range. This is an ideal set up as it allows the unique flow of para races (with coaches handing off rifles) to happen in a designated location. Ideally this is a permanent solution that can be used for any race or training at any time.
 - Another option is to dedicate some lanes for 10m para targets (for example, points 1-24 for athletes shooting .22s and points 25-30 for para-athletes shooting at 10m). Many ranges that use this option will have the option for para target stands to move up or down depending on if the 50m target in that lane needs to be used at the time or not. Most ranges will have 10m options for youth competitors so not much adaptation is needed.
- VI athletes usually bring their own rifle and target system but make sure to communicate with them before your event to make a plan. Some audio rifles require power to the target or for the target to be charged in advance so make sure to plan ahead.
- In an IBU sanctioned event, sit skiers use a 100m penalty lap, whereas standing athletes will use the standard 150m. If you are not sanctioning your event or if there is not a 100m option at your venue, have all athletes use the standard penalty lap. Having the opportunity to race is much more important than perfection!

8. AWARDS

If you have advertised your competition to adaptive participants and plan to have awards for your event, you should have a plan for adaptive awards as well. If all classes are represented, they are as follows

- Standing (LW2-9)
- Visually Impaired (NS1-3)
- Sitting (LW10-12)



As it is rare for all 6 classes (3 classes, men and women) to be represented fully, we would recommend that your awards leave out dates or class details so they can be used across classes and/or at future races.

9. ASSISTANCE

In principle, para biathletes do not necessarily need additional assistance. Many athletes choose to do such a hard sport specifically *because* they are capable, independent, and love a challenge and para biathletes are no different in this regard. The more accessible and well planned your event is, the less likely it will be that para biathletes will need assistance. This can be the most important successful integration strategy and will make your event better for all competitors. There are a few general concepts to keep in mind regarding assistance of adaptive athletes:

- Occasionally, new sit skiers may want someone to ski with them during the competition. In this situation, you should allow for a skier to have a “guide”. This will ultimately make your event run more safely and may be just what that competitor needs to get comfortable with the concept of racing.
- Para athletes should be treated as any other competitor. Unless they are in danger or are putting another racer in danger, volunteers or officials should not aid them during a race. Remember, falling is part of racing!
- In a non-dangerous situation, ask if someone needs help before assuming they do. A task that may seem daunting to you may be an easy task for someone who does it all the time.
- Think of a wheelchair like one’s legs or personal space. If you wouldn’t touch someone’s legs in a situation, don’t push their wheelchair without asking either. Having said that, there are many situations in snow that are very challenging for an athlete who uses a wheelchair so don’t be afraid to offer your help and follow their suggestions for how to help. The last thing you want is to make a situation worse.
- If a sit skier goes off course, it is permissible to help them get back onto the trail at the place they left the trail.
- It is not permissible to push any athlete during a race. Sometimes on steep uphill, a sit skier may need bracing to prevent sliding backward down the trail, causing a hazard to themselves and/or other racers. In this situation, a course official may stand with their legs between the tracks and with one leg supporting the back of the sit ski so to not let it drift back on the trail.
- Course officials should be in particularly challenging uphill or technical sections where athletes will have a lot of speed in case assistance is needed.



Support and Sponsorship

Integrating para-athletes into your race may be a great way to engage more members of your community. Are there local or regional para sport organizations that may have potential participants or volunteers? Perhaps there are some local companies who have interest in sponsoring an event with a para component. Are there media outlets that may be interested in this aspect of your event? Additional exposure will help to engage more potential para-athletes and will be positive for the growth of your event and club.