



INTERNATIONAL RAFTING FEDERATION PARA RAFTING OVERVIEW & RACE RULES

From March 2021

1. Introduction

1. The aim of the IRF's Para Rafting will be in two streams. The first is aimed at general competitions to include as wide diversity of abilities as possible (Stream 1). The second will fit in with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) for World Championships, National team represented events and to work towards inclusion in the Paralympics (Stream 2)
2. Being a team sport also sets it apart from many other para sports. Therefore the IRF is using a functional classification system more common in para team sports (like wheelchair rugby) where greater participation of Competitors can be encouraged by providing opportunities for teams with different abilities to compete against each other in a reasonably fair way.
3. It is noted that other organisations such as the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) are fairly prescriptive about which impairments qualify an individual for 'para' status. The IRF considers the approach adopted by IPC to be too restrictive for all rafting events and hence we offer the two Streams.
4. The IRF recognises that every impairment is different and will affect the individual to a greater or lesser extent. For example, someone who has lost three limbs will be fundamentally disadvantaged compared to someone who has a visual impairment. The mix of impairments potentially within one team could be significantly different to that of another team and to race such teams against each other could be inherently unfair.
5. The IRF therefore assesses the impact of a range of impairment on an individual's functional abilities to participate in the sport of rafting. A point system focused on the Competitors functional abilities is enforced to ensure fair competition.
6. As a new Para sport all IRF para rafting rules, policies and procedures are open to evolution, review and change at any point in time. The changes must go through the IRF Para Rafting Committee before changes are implemented.

2. Documentation

1. IRF Para Rafting is run according to the rules, regulations, policies and requirements set out in the following documents:
 - a. IRF Race Rules
 - b. IRF Para-Raft Racing Introduction and Rules (this document)
 - c. IRF Para Rafting Classification Code (Classification Code)
 - d. IRF Para Rafting Classification Procedure
 - e. IRF Para Rafting Competitors Physical Diagnosis Form
 - f. IRF Para Rafting Classification Form and Points Allocation
 - g. IRF Para Rafting Classification Card
 - h. IRF Para Rafting Team Safety Form
 - i. IRF Para Rafting Safety Guidelines

3. Race Categories and Streams

1. Categories

- a. RULE: IRF Para Rafting has only one open category. The point classification system provides an equal playing field for age, gender and functional ability.
- b. Proposed future categories:
 - i. Low pointer category aimed at lower functional ability Competitor (professionally guided for safety purposes)
 - ii. Youth category 15 to 19 years old.
- c. Para Rafter. The Para Rafter race category (PR) allows teams to comprise a mix of Para Rafter and unimpaired Competitors or be fully Para Rafter. The Para Rafter need not have the same or similar impairments but must, together, satisfy the 'scoring' requirement described in the Classification Code
- d. RULE: Para Rafting races will be run according to the IRF Race Rules with the additions of this document and the following:
 - i. Para-Raft races cannot be run on higher than Class III sections.
 - ii. Para-Raft races will be R6.
 - iii. Disciplines may be shorter than stipulated in the IRF Race Rules, for example, less gates in the Slalom, shorter Downriver, H2H or Sprint.

2. Event Streams

- a. RULE: There are two streams of racing in IRF Para Rafting:
 - i. Stream 1: comprises of teams that do not fit into the Paralympic requirements. Including able bodied, those with a psychological impairment, hearing impairment, and neurological impairment (affecting cognitive).
 - ii. Stream 2: comprises of teams with paddlers that fit into the Paralympic requirements.
- b. RULE: Competition Level
 - i. Stream 1: All events up to international festival level.
 - ii. Stream 2: Continental & World Championships & Paralympic level... including events where teams must be selected to represent their country.

4. Factors affecting performance

1. Regardless of any impairment, human performance in competitive sporting activities is affected by a range of factors, particularly:
 - a. **Age:**
 - i. In general, the human body attains peak physical performance between the ages of 20 to 30. Younger people become stronger and fitter as they approach this 'peak' age while performance will fall thereafter with increasing age.
 - ii. Raft races are normally conducted around age categories. However, due to the relatively low numbers of para Competitors in the sport few competitions would be able to run similar age-based competitions. Therefore age itself will be considered in the framework rules and only an 'open' category be offered initially. As the sport develops a youth category may be included.

- iii. Age requirement: Competitors may participate in an IRF Raft Race Event in the calendar year in which they turn 15 years old, but not earlier.
- iv. Any Competitor falls into Masters' division from the beginning of the calendar year when they turn 40, therefore 0.5 point is deducted.
- v. Any Competitor falls into the Youth division up until the year they turn 19, therefore 0.5 point is deducted.

b. Gender

- i. In general, males are capable of greater physical strength and exertion than females.
- ii. Para Rafting races should all be 'Open' but with a positive recognition for females.
- iii. Female Competitors 0.5 point is deducted.
- iv. It is mandatory to have a minimum of two female Competitors in a team.

c. Impairments and rafting

- i. Impairments can affect athletic performance, but to very different degrees depending on the activity being undertaken. In rafting we focus on functional abilities.
- ii. The most effective rafters use their legs, their arms and shoulders, and their core (torso).
- iii. A range of actions a Competitor may achieve has been identified. The classification process classifies the functional performances of the Competitor. There will always be exceptional para Competitors who will seem to defy the general classification developed. However, this is also the case anyway for unimpaired Competitors.
- iv. The effect of multiple impairment has an impact on the range of actions a Competitor may achieve therefore the point system ensures fair competition.
- v. It is mandatory to have minimum of four impaired Competitors per team in Stream 1 Events.

2. Approach to dealing with a range of functional abilities within a team

- a. As a point of reference, a 20-40 year old male without any impairment (i.e. the age span for the majority of Competitors in the IRF Open category) is the benchmark against which all others will be measured. This Competitor is accorded 6 points.
- b. A 20-40 year old Competitor who is missing an upper limb is considered severely disadvantaged and would be accorded 3 points (i.e. Competitor is considered capable of delivering only about 50% of the contribution of an unimpaired Competitor of the same age and gender).
- c. Between the extremes of functional ability, a table of the points has been developed attributable to particular Competitor's function to performance, as well as to the effects of age and gender.
- d. RULE: The assessments of a Competitor's functional ability will be done according to the IRF's Para Rafting Competitor Classification Code and related documents.

3. Adaptive equipment

- a. For some impairments, adaptive equipment may be necessary for the Competitor to be able to compete at all. For example, if the Competitor has a lower limb deficiency with no stump, or has a significant lower spinal injury, they may not be able to remain stable on the seat and/or 'recover' to the upright position after each stroke; in such cases, adapted support seat may be required.
- b. Those with a missing or damaged upper and/or lower limb may require a prosthesis or equipment that will allow the Competitor to hold the paddle and then be able to produce force through the paddle into the water.
- c. The Competitor's Classification is with Competitor's adaptations and/or prosthetics that are

used on race events. If Competitors impairment affects performance to preferred side, the classification must be done on strongest side (left or right position of Competitor in raft).

- d. Para Rafting adaptive equipment such as a support seat must be provided by the Competitor. All equipment must pass safety requirements & needs approval by the Para Rafting Safety Committee. Having many different systems gives the opportunity for progression and innovation in the Para Rafting sport.
- e. Safety in equipment is of utmost importance e.g. releasable systems.
- f. Performance is important; adaption should never assist performance e.g. no added movement like elastic support

5. Classification Process

1. Rafting is not about paddling in a straight line. In rafting we are reading water, staying in the fastest flow, avoiding hazards, catching eddies etc. We move our bodies in a direction we need to go reaching for different speeds of moving water. Therefore this needs to be taken into consideration. To bring the level to the highest degree possible we need a basic practical, simple classification process that will be acceptable and understandable to outside authorities.
2. Classification overview: we concentrate on what Competitor can do due to their body function, not to be confused with physical strength or athletic ability. The classification is with Competitor's adaptations and/or prosthetics that are used on race events. Refer to Classification Code and related documents.

6. Team Total Classification Points

1. Classification point system has a maximum of:
 - a. 22 points total in R6 raft where a 6 point Competitor can participate - Stream 1
 - b. 20 points total in R6 raft where a 6 point Competitor is not allowed - Stream 2
2. A team may compete with a lower point total.
3. An able bodied paddler gets 6 points, the highest. A female paddler gets minus 0.5 point; 40 or over, and under 19 get minus 0.5 point.
4. International teams would be selected to represent their country at Paralympic level.

7. Safety

1. RULE: Safety is to be run according to the IRF's Para Rafting Safety Guidelines.
2. A Para Rafting Safety Committee formed by the IRF will oversee all safety requirements and regulations.
3. Safety is paramount and Para Rafting races will create hazards and risks not normally present with unimpaired racing.
4. Para Rafting races will be under the same high safety standards as IRF Race Rules demand.
5. Enhanced risk assessments will be required for:

- a. The venue / facilities / first aid response on site.
 - b. Racing (extra safety boats may be needed).
 - c. Conditions (water levels, water temperature).
 - d. Course (chance of flips and consequences, hazards that impaired persons may not be able to identify, for example visually impaired person).
 - e. Boat safety (is the Safety Committee satisfied that the team can paddle safely).
 - f. Adaptive equipment; if used – is it ‘safe’. All adaptive equipment must pass safety requirements from Safety Committee.
 - g. High and Extreme risk Competitors who may be required to wear red helmets or similar.
6. Consideration may need to be given, in exceptional circumstances, requiring fully unimpaired and experienced Competitors to be part of a PR team. In such circumstances, the organisers are to ensure that each participating team is treated equally.

8. Support and assistance

1. RULE: Coaches and officials must provide the same level of support to a person with an impairment that they would to any other person.
2. RULE: Any outside support needed or assistance required to Competitors is the responsibility of the participant or their team.
3. RULE: If a participant needs assistance accessing a race venue including access to the river it is the responsibility of the participant and their team.

9. Impairments, definitions and Streams

Impairment	Definition / Safety	Competition
Able bodied	Support person, Safety, Lifting the level of competition. Competitor Able to assist at International/Paralympic level but not compete. At national and social levels can compete however not to guide and/or be in front.	Stream 1
Psychological	Support person, Safety, Lifting the level of competition. Competitor Able to assist at International/Paralympic level but not compete. At national and social levels can compete however not to guide and/or be in front.	Stream 1
Hearing impairment	Support person, Safety, Lifting the level of competition. Competitor Able to assist at International/Paralympic level but not compete. At national and social levels can compete however not to guide and/or be in front.	Stream 1
Neurological impairment - affecting cognitive	Depending on the neurological disorder and how it may affect the physical compound of paddling and safety on the water. Special Olympic level may apply in the future.	Stream 1
Visual	Competitor to highest level	Stream 2

impairment	Challenges include team rhythm, reading water, seeing hazards, difficulty in team rescue, and difficulty in self rescue. Competitor must have minimum impairment of one or more of the following: Structure or Receptor / Optic nerve or Optic pathways / Visual cortex Impairment must be in both eyes and measured in the best eye Less or equal to 6/60 vision and/or visual field of 40 degrees	
Neurological impairment - affecting physical	Competitor to highest level Depending on function, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue. Competitor's impairment to be classified on complete/incomplete lesion level of spinal and/or function.	Stream 2
Cerebral Palsy	Competitor to highest level Challenges may include communication; paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue. Competitor's impairment to be classified on the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association the CP-ISRA Classification.	Stream 2
Amputee	Competitor to highest level Depending on limbs affected, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Polio	Competitor to highest level Depending on limbs affected, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Spina Bifida	Competitor to highest level Depending on level, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Hereditary Motor Sensory Neuropathy (HMSN)	Competitor to highest level Depending on level, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Spinal cord injury	Competitor to highest level Depending on level, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue. Depending on level and/or ASIA. See Appendix for more information	Stream 2
Muscular Dystrophy	Competitor to highest level Depending on progression, challenges may include difficulty in strength of movement; supporting body in raft; temperature regulation; in team rescue; self-rescue.	Stream 2
Other	Competitor to highest level Depending on the impairment.	Stream 2

Spinal Cord Injury

Level	Definition / Safety	Competition
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Lumbar Spine	Competitor to highest level Depending on the level challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Thoracic Spine	Competitor to highest level Depending on the level challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Cervical Spine	Competitor to highest level Depending on the level, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; temperature regulation; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2
Incomplete ASIA B to E	Competitor to highest level Depending on the level, challenges may include paddling efficiency; supporting the body in raft; temperature regulation; in team rescue; in self rescue.	Stream 2

(See spinal cord images in the Appendix of this document)

10. Eligibility for Paralympic level

1. The Paralympic Movement offers sport opportunities for Competitors with physical, visual and intellectual impairments and these can be divided into 10 eligible impairment types which must be permanent.
2. **Eligible Impairments** - the following are the Eligible Impairments in the Paralympic Movement, together with examples of Health Conditions:
 - a. Impaired muscle power:
Reduced force generated by muscles or muscle groups, may occur in one limb or the lower half of the body. Examples include spinal cord injury (complete or incomplete, tetra-or paraplegia), muscular dystrophy, post-polio syndrome and Spina bifida.
 - b. Impaired passive range of movement:
Competitors with impaired range of movement have a restriction or a lack of passive movement in one or more joints. Examples include arthrogyrosis and contracture resulting from chronic joint immobilization or trauma affecting a joint.
 - c. Loss of limb or limb deficiency:
Competitors with limb deficiency have total or partial absence of bones or joints as a consequence of trauma (for example traumatic amputation), illness (for example amputation due to bone cancer) or congenital limb deficiency (for example dysmelia).
 - d. Leg-length difference:
Competitors that have a difference in the length of their legs as a result of a disturbance of limb growth, or as a result of trauma.
 - e. Short stature:
Competitors with short stature have a reduced length in the bones of the lower limbs and/or trunk. Examples include achondroplasia, growth hormone dysfunction, and osteogenesis imperfecta.
 - f. Hypertonia:
Competitors with hypertonia have an increase in muscle tension and a reduced ability of a muscle to stretch caused by damage to the central nervous system. Examples include cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and stroke.

- g. Ataxia:
Competitors with ataxia have uncoordinated movements caused by damage to the central nervous system. Examples include cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, stroke and multiple sclerosis.
- h. Athetosis:
Competitors with athetosis have continual slow involuntary movements. Examples include cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and stroke
- i. Visual impairment:
Competitors with impaired vision have reduced or no vision caused by damage to the eye structure, optical nerves or optical pathways, or visual cortex of the brain. Examples include retinitis pigmentosa and diabetic retinopathy.

3. Non-Eligible Impairments

- a. Any Impairment not listed in above is referred to as a non-eligible Impairment. Competitors with the following can compete at Social and National level. Exceptions can be made at International level at the discretion of mutual agreement from Para-Rafting Committee, Safety Committee and Classifiers
- b. Examples include:
 - i. Pain
 - ii. Hearing impairment
 - iii. Low muscle tone
 - iv. Hypermobility of joints
 - v. Joint instability, such as unstable shoulder joint, recurrent dislocation of a joint
 - vi. Impaired muscle endurance
 - vii. Impaired motor reflex functions
 - viii. Impaired cardiovascular function
 - ix. Impaired respiratory functions
 - x. Impairment metabolic functions
 - xi. Tics and mannerisms, stereotypes and motor perseveration

11. Politically correct phrases and definitions:

1. **Politically correct phrases** - wording is powerful, focus on the Competitor not their disability. Empowering para-rafting as a sport is very important at this early stage. If any marketing or promotion we talk about people abilities not their disabilities.

Inappropriate	Appropriate
Handicapped / Invalid / special needs	Person with a disability or impairment
Suffering from a disability	Has a disability (Nobody suffers from a disability)
Wheelchair bound / confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user
Mentally handicapped	Person with a learning disability / cognitive impairment

2. Definitions: 'Para', 'Impaired', and 'Para Rafters'

- a. 'Para' and 'Impaired' are deemed interchangeable within the IRF

- b. Para Rafter - Competitors with impairments in some form of physical, psychological, neurological, sensory or intellectual impairment that affects the way in which they participate in the sport of rafting
- c. Para Rafting - A race category where a proportion of the participants are Para Rafter

Appendix: Spinal Cord Injury Information Images:

