



Haidi Zhang: Paralympics Must Expand Across Globe

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(ATR) Expansion is key to building upon the legacy of outgoing Paralympics president Philip Craven says replacement candidate Haidi Zhang.



IPC presidential candidate Haidi

Zhang speaks to the IPC Academy in Rio de Janeiro. (Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation)

In an exclusive interview with *Around the Rings*, Zhang says the success of Craven can be expanded in three ways.

“Taking the Paralympic Movement to everyone, everywhere; finding new sources of funding to ensure sustainability of the Movement; and encouraging more and more people to enjoy para sport as part of our Paralympic Family,” she says.

As president of the National Paralympic Committee of China, China Disabled Persons' Federation and Beijing 2022 Organizing Committee, Zhang says she has the relevant experience in para sport to bring the organization to the next level.

“I am proud to lead the most successful Paralympic team in history and I am prouder still to have helped change lives through sport,” she says. “I have worked to improve the lives of the 85 million Chinese with impairments, introducing more than \$28 billion of care and support programs since 2008, developing major international cooperation projects and opening rehabilitation institutions around China.”

She adds that under her leadership, China now has more than 8 million disabled people practicing sport across the 32 national training centers. Zhang now seeks to spread her development techniques across the globe.



Mme. Zhang competed in an

international air pistol event in 1994. (Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation)

“The challenge now is to foster the growth of the Movement everywhere, particularly in developing countries and regions,” Zhang says.

A para-sport competitor herself in 10-meter air pistol, Zhang is one of four candidates seeking to replace Craven as president of the International Paralympic Committee. She says the combination of her vast experience in the Paralympic Movement and her ability to lead and communicate makes her the right candidate to lead para sport for the next four years.

“I have the values and ideas to keep the Movement fresh and relevant for new challenges,” she says. “I have integrity and strength. I enjoy innovation. I work openly and collaboratively with others. Fairness and transparency are core to my approach.”

If elected, Zhang says she would collaborate extensively with NPC leaders to solve challenges facing the Paralympic Movement, including the classification system, addition of sponsors and the creation of Youth Paralympic Games.

“For the future development of the Movement, we need a new strategic plan to be developed,” she says. “This will give us the chance to have a grand conversation with the Movement about what we do and where we go.”



Haidi Zhang with Chinese para-

athletes (Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation)

“So decisions of this kind must be the product of constructive dialogue, based on open and inclusive discussion.”

Zhang is also concerned with the lack of a Paralympic voice in the Olympic and Paralympic host city elections, particularly the Summer 2024 and 2028 editions. While the IOC has reached a tripartite agreement with Paris and Los Angeles to host the 2024 and 2028 Games respectively, Zhang says more collaboration is needed moving forward.

“I think it is right that the IPC should have a voice in the decision because this is also about the needs of our Paralympic Family,” Zhang says. “The Paralympics should stand tall as the equal partner of the Olympics.”

She adds that as president of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics she will ensure the Olympics and Paralympics are on an equal playing field.

“The Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in the same city in the past few years,” she says. “In 2008, as the host city of Olympic and Paralympic Games, Beijing proposed the goal of ‘Two Games, Equal Splendor’. We will endeavor to achieve the same goal in 2022.”

The IPC will elect its next president Sep. 8 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Zhang is competing with [Patrick Jarvis](#), [Andrew Parsons](#) and [John Petersson](#) (click each candidate to learn more). Zhang says that despite the competition, it’s important to remember the values of the movement.

“A lifetime of service has taught me that sport is about more than medals,” she tells *ATR*. “It is about rehabilitation, health, friendship and growth. The Paralympic Movement creates a more inclusive society by changing public perceptions about people with an impairment.”

Written by Kevin Nutley