

Mr. Paul Johnson

Adaptive Track and Field Referee and Coach

*Interview Conducted by
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in 2016 in Arlington, Texas*

*Disability Studies Minor
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Biography

Paul Johnson grew up in New Jersey. He went into the Marine Corps when he was eighteen, and he served a twenty-one-year career. Paul retired in 1996 from the Marines and was stationed in Dallas, Texas. He stayed here after retirement

He has two children. He became involved in wheelchair racing and wheelchair sports because his daughter was born with spina bifida. Paul started out by falling into a job as a coach of adaptive track and field at his daughter's school. He took his school kids to junior nationals.

Later, Paul became an official with the American Paralympic Organizing Committee (APOC). He went to the Atlanta Paralympics in 1996 as a volunteer referee while working for Buchanan Technologies, a sub-contractor for Bell Helicopters Inc.

Topics Discussed

- Biography
- Adaptive Track and Field
- Adaptive Sports
- Coaching Adaptive Sports
- Refereeing Adaptive Sports
- Experience of going to the Paralympics
- Other sporting events
- Recruiting
- Sport classifications
- Integration of sport/disabled/non-disabled

- The Advancement of the Sport
-

McCrea

This is Kevin McCrea interviewing Mr. Paul Johnson for UTA Disability Oral History Project. Today's date is April 21st 2016 and I'm at University Hall. I'm here to talk today with Paul Johnson about adaptive sports, his interaction within I guess within the disabled community and refereeing and coaching and things of that nature.

First of all, thank you for participating in the Texas Disability Oral History Project.

Johnson

Thank you.

McCrea

I guess to start off, if you could just give a brief biography of yourself from childhood until now.

Johnson

<topic>Biography</topic>

Sure. My name's Paul Johnson. I grew up in New Jersey. Went in the Marine Corps when I was eighteen. And I served a twenty-one-year career. I retired in '96. I was stationed here in Texas in Dallas, and uh stayed here, during that time. I have two kids. My daughter, Erin, was born with spina bifida and that's how I got involved in wheelchair racing and wheelchair sports in general. When I retired and came here to Texas, well I came here to Texas in '91. I was stationed over in Grand Prairie. And the way I got started was the coach from the school who was working with the physically challenged kids took a job with Special Olympics, so they didn't have a coach, so being a marine and doing a lot of physical fitness stuff I stepped in, and you know knew a little bit about track so I could coach those three kids and we went to junior nationals in '89, which were in San Jose, [CA.]

We then went the next year to Colorado with the same three kids and, um, some of the issues I guess, that we found was things in track and field for a relay team they had the rules in place were that we only had three members on our team. Well when you only have three members you can't put together a team to run a relay. So, one of my arguments to changes that they made was that kids that were entered in the event could be a replacement on another team. So, um, and that was just something that they really hadn't thought about. I mean you have someone advocate for it. We came here and there was a fairly well sized team of mainly kids with spina bifida that were going to junior nationals. So I connected with them through Erin and started coaching them.

I made many trips up to the University of Illinois to work with Marty Morris and Brad Hedrick and learning about their track program. They used to run a sports clinic along with track and field clinic, along with their Illini Classic Track Meet. So, in '92 I think I went through officials training down in Houston, Texas through Southwest Wheelchair Athletics Association. They would invite me up there to help officiate at their meet.

And, then eventually I became a referee, um, and so you'd go-- it was a three-day event. Two days of classes, practical application, that kind of stuff. So, that's really where I picked up a lot of my coaching experience. And, then officiating was just a need that I saw and stepped into that.

So we probably had ten to sixteen kids at that time that were going to the junior national championships and traveling all over the country to do that. Um, met Randy Snow at one of the first junior nationals that we went to. He being from Texas when we moved here we reconnected with him. Right away we would attend some of his tennis clinics. He was always helpful with that. And of course in LA in the Olympics [1984] he won a silver medal in track as well. So he was a multi-sport athlete that we connected with. And then since I retired from the Marine Corps, I've worked for Buchanan Technologies now. I actually work at Bell Helicopters that's my account. And, I have been with them for twenty years. The whole time I have been retired [from the Marine Corps]. They are very supportive of what I do with disabled sports. In fact, when I signed on with them I was at the same time trying to get a job with APOC, the Atlanta Paralympic Committee to work for them.

I took the job (laughs) with Buchanan and then like the next day they [APOC] called and said okay we'll meet your needs to come work for us. I, uh, decided to stay with Buchanan, and just go as a volunteer and worked with Cody during the Paralympics, which was very, very interesting. And then, you know I've just continued on officiating. My daughter went to the Paralympics in 2004 [Athens, Greece] as a racer. I've continued my officiating and organizing. I organize one of the biggest regional competitions in the U.S. right now and that is the Texas Regional Games in San Antonio. Which are next week. So, we're right in the middle of trying to get that organized and executed. And then to settle down the pace. I have officiated at several of the Paralympics, national championships in track and field. So there we are. I don't know what more I could add about that.

McCrea

So, okay I guess just the officiating process, I mean what does that entail?

Johnson

<topic>Refereeing Adaptive Sports</topic>

Well, so years ago, when I started the National Wheelchair Athletics Association [controlled it]. So back in the '90s the National Wheelchair Athletics Association, uh, trained their own officials, so that you could actually train them to do an actual disability meet. And back then, you know now it's combined, and back then it was just wheelchairs, so they just taught you about wheelchair officiating. Things have progressed now. And during that process, so you know I went through training.

The first junior nationals that I went to after that my daughter's competing. We're in Florida, they had a bunch of college students that were, that were at it acting as officials, but they weren't really officials. And, so some of the other parents who had known I had just gone through the training that I was an official insisted that I took over and ran that. And I was hesitant about that at first, because I said, "well my daughters here," and everybody said nope we trust ya. And actually I'm probably harder on my daughter than anybody else. So, we, uh, that was kind of my initiation to the national level. And then, in Oklahoma you know we had the junior games and I was the starter for all the track stuff and a field official. So, it just, and it just progressed since then.

Now you have to be a USA track and field official to start with. So, you have to know the basics just about track and field before they are going to let you in the door. And then we have an online Paralympic test that covers all the disabilities, from visually impaired, CP, to of course amputees, wheelchair. And so, you have to pass this course with a 20 out of 25 and they will add that to your officials' card. So that you can do athletics with the disabled. So, the U.S. Paralympics is a help. I also track the officials that take that test. And if you don't pass it then you get a retest that you have to send back to me and I'll grade it and put you on the list.

And Doug says sure if you want to go over there?

Pause [Change of venue from University Hall to the PE Building]

McCrea

So where were we?

Johnson

<topic>Refereeing Adaptive Sports</topic>

We were talking about officiating and how the USA track... So now you have to be a USA track official first before you can do the Paralympics or track and field testing. So, there's different levels, you start as an apprentice, you go to association and then national, then master's. So, right now I'm a national level Para-official. And, so, next step for me is going to be the international training to be a technical official. For like the Paralympics or World Championships and that kind of stuff. So, uh, that's, you know we have quite a few trained, I don't know how many are that active. For me I did a high school meet last night [April 20, 2016], When I was the high jump official. So, I know I work regular track and field meets, it's not just disabled meets. I mean we do have several officials that just do disabled meets, and I think that kind of limits what you know. How you deal with situations?

McCrea

So, are there any specific experiences that are your favorite when you went to the Olympics?

Johnson

<topic>Experience of going to the Olympics</topic>

So, in '96 so I told ya I was almost in a job with the Atlanta Paralympic Committee, and so I did go as a volunteer. And that's when I went to meet the boss at Buchanan, I was like hey you've hired me full-time, but I committed to be a volunteer in Atlanta for two weeks. So, they let me, I mean I worked for them for three months and they let me take two weeks off.

So, my job for the opening ceremonies. I was the guy who let the teams on the track after they were announced. So, that was a very great experience. I mean because when the U.S. team came out the crowd, which was eighty or ninety thousand people, just went crazy. So, that was pretty good. And then I helped Anthony Cody with the basketball facility during the '96 games. So, you know we saw all those games, after I would go to the track and catch

whatever track [event] I could. I mean I made the volunteers in the security room keep at least one of the TVs on with closed captions, the cable feed from the track. So, that was an interesting experience. I also went for their swimming event to help out with their test event for swimming.

Then I went, my daughter was classified for most of her life in the highest class T-54 in track. And then they lowered her class to T-52. And then in 2000 she went to the trials and in her anticipation of her making the team I didn't go. So, I had my sister there as her coach, and they tried to bump her up a class. So, I told her protest it. And their protest process, you have to have three classifiers look at you. So, they didn't have three classifiers, they just had one international guy. So, we ended up flying to Sydney, [Australia] the day before the Paralympics started to get classified, and they overturned the guy and made her a T-52, but it was too late to get on the team. So, that was kind of a devastating thing to her.

So, we hung around Sydney for a week. Went to all these different sports, you know, Paralympic sports and got to see some friends like Ross Davis from San Antonio win his Gold Medal in T-34 category, receive his medal. We went to watch her class race; you know she [his daughter] would have probably beaten all of them or at least of done better than the girls that were there so. So, that was kind of disappointing.

And, then, uh, we went to the 2004 games where she competed. And, um, so those were the only games that we actually attended, but then I've been working on the national championships for track and field, since 2012. So for the last three plus this year I'm going to go work the trials as a referee. So, it's, it has changed quite a bit from when the NWAA was running it to now the U.S. Paralympics runs the trials and championships. So, it's become a much bigger event. Plus, you have all the disabilities competing.

McCrea

Could you clarify what NWAA is?

Johnson

<topic>Refereeing Adaptive Sports</topic>

The NWAA is the National Wheelchair Athletics Association. We had mentioned it before. When I went through their officials training, so National Wheelchair Athletic Association, they have since changed their name, uh, three times. So, they were originally the National Wheelchair Athletic Association back in 1956. I think when they were founded. Then in the '80s or '90s maybe around 2000 they changed their names to Wheelchair Sports USA. Then in probably around 2010 they switched their name...maybe 2009? To Wheelchair and Ambulatory Sports USA, because they started including amputee sports and CP sports. Because, one the amputees never really had a summer sports organization I think, but they did for the winter through DSUSA, which is Disabled Sports USA. So, they do mainly winter sports. Now they've changed their name again to Adaptive Sports USA.

So, Adaptive Sports USA is a summer sport organization. And they do archery, track and field, power lifting, swimming, archery, so summer sports. And, so the amputees weren't to be named____? And the CPs used to be under CP Sports USA I think was their name. But they went defunct, and they closed down, so now the CPs had no place to go to compete. And, CP athletes, you can either be a runner or a standing athlete or a sitting athlete.

So, you can either be in a wheelchair or you can be a runner. And, Daniel Velazquez here at UTA is a CP runner, whereas Rachel Quarner is a CP thrower and she's a seated thrower. So, there's that class difference. They have eight classifications, so the first four, 31 through 34, are seated athletes. 35 through 38 are standing athletes. So, now they're all under one umbrella so to speak which makes it crazy when you think about records and standards and just everything. Because, I think there are like thirty classes and ten age groups, the math is like four thousand records or more. So, it's kind of difficult when you're running a meet, now, to keep track of all that stuff. Cause we don't want to cheat you out of not having a record. And you need those records so, that athletes will improve. Because they'll be like "I can go faster than that" or "I can throw farther than that."

McCrea

And when you're talking about the Olympics there's Olympic Records and there's World Records as well.

Johnson

<topic>Refereeing Adaptive Sports</topic>

Right. I mean just on that level, there's national records, then there's America's regional records and then there's World records. So, even in the Paralympics at the international level you have three records that you're looking at for everything. So, it's interesting. And now U.S. Paralympics, you know, runs all the teams, you know qualifies them for competition. Whereas, before it wasn't quite as well defined with like the National Wheelchair Athletics Association. And the amputees that was all different. So it's changed quite a bit.

McCrea

You mentioned the T-54 and the T-52, what exactly does that stand for?

Johnson

<topic>Sports Classifications</topic>

So, back to classifications. So, we have three visually impaired classes. So the T signifies track, F is for field. So, 11, 12, 13s are visually impaired, the 20s are intellectually impaired and there's only one class, 20. 31 through 38 is the cerebral palsy classes. So if you were, then in the wheelchairs its 51 through 54 for racing and then 51 through 57 for field throwers. What that does is it puts you on an even playing field with people with like disabilities or I should say it's not really disabilities but more like ability. So, the lower the number, the less function you have. The higher the number the more function you have.

McCrea

So, we've covered refereeing, but from a coaching perspective, I mean how do you coach track and field?

Johnson

<topic>Coaching Adaptive Sports</topic>

So, that's why I went to the University of Illinois. So, right now the U.S. Paralympics has a training facility for wheelchair racers at the University of Illinois. The ambulatory racers, the amputees and the runners they train at Chula Vista in California. So, years ago the University of Illinois was really the only place to do wheelchair racing. Now there's several universities that offer athletic programs, not just for basketball, but basketball and track and field, uh, different sports.

So, coaching track is really, pretty close to training an able bodied runner. You do the same types of drills. You want to practice starts, endurance, you want to build speed, and you know have a finishing kick. And, so you just learn so you go to people like Marty Morris, who is probably the top wheelchair coach in the world, ever. And, you go, like I used to go out there at least once a year, if not twice a year, cause then I would spend a week out there with him just, you know learning from him, the different stroke technique and the drills they used.

When I was back in the mid-'90s I was on a coach's education committee with the people from the University of Illinois, and so, we adapted an able bodied training program or coach's program that was written by Kinetics? It's a place out of Illinois. If you need it, I can find that out?

So any way, they had a coaching program for track and field. And what we did was we took their course with their permission, and we adapted it, we included some adaptive pieces to it. So like when they were talking about first aid, we'd include safety and we'd talk about you know how to transfer into a racing wheelchair and we'd include that safety piece, and how to properly fit the stroke technique. So, we adapted, we put in all the adaptive pieces to this course. And, then we certified some instructors, um, probably ten of us I guess were certified by going through the course first, and then we wrote all the materials.

Then we would travel around the country to different parts and teach coaches how to teach to a bunch of wheelchair racers.

McCrea

So, basically teach-ins.

Johnson

So, that was, it was like in the mid-'90s, late-'90s thing that we did then. And of course as any program is as long as there is a driving force behind it, it will continue. So, that kind of went to the wayside I think a little bit. So now, U.S. Paralympics is trying to do the same thing with USA Track and Field.

So, to be a USA Track and Field coach you have to go to a three-day course. They feed you with a firehose, you know, information and then, you know, you take an online test. And then they certify you as a coach. And now they are in the process of making renewables for all of that, so. They're going to make it like officials every four years you'll have to renew your education. And U.S. Paralympics now has a course online that has adaptations to all that. But you can take that course without taking the USA Track and Field course.

So, it's evolved to where you know everything's on line now. Except for maybe finding me, right? (laughter) So, everybody does everything else online. I don't know if that's good or

bad. But, in a, in our interactives sports like track and field, I guess, you can learn online. But you really need to go practice. And really that's the key to getting the athletes to go out and practice you know with your teacher. The more time you're in your chair the better you'll be. So, that was my philosophy with my daughter and she turned out okay I think.

McCrea

So, adaptive track, so it's not only wheelchairs, but it's like amputees?

Johnson

Amputees, amputees with wooden legs.

McCrea

So, when you see someone like Pistorius,

Johnson

Yes.

McCrea

Ignoring all his [murdering and personal stuff] ...

Johnson

Yeah forget all his personal problems.

McCrea

Him trying to compete in the actual quote, unquote Olympics. How do you see that? I mean is that good for the sport.

Johnson

<topic>Integration of sport disables/non-disabled</topic>

Well, I think for inclusion purposes it's great. Can an athlete get as fast as somebody who has no impairment? It's close. Our amputee runners are running in the low 10s right, so. Really they're pretty close. I watched, uh in 2012 the final four of the amputee men, the fastest runner was 10.85 and the slowest runner was 11.15. So, it was so close it's a good thing we use electronic timing. It was kind of hard for me, and I was right at the finish line to kind of judge that.

Now I've sat through a USA Track and Field level 2 class on sprinting over at SMU. So, their commitment is the performance lab over there. They did some high speed filming of runners. They film everything running, right, animals, humans, sprinters, long distance

people, and then they evaluate you know like the foot stride, right; how fast you're running, or what recovery is to the next foot strike. And they've found that with prosthetic legs that it's actually, there is an advantage, because their time was shorter, because of the weight. You know, because the carbon fiber is light weight. And so, their recommendation to the science lab at the IOC, was there was an advantage.

So where there was some material, they came out and said oh it's not, there's no advantage. So they let them run. I think with people with disabilities that the start is always the key. So, they're always slower and I think it's because they don't have all the muscle there, but once they get up to speed. It's the same thing with a wheelchair. The wheelchair like we were talking about the tank [conversation off the recorder], it's getting that initial inertia moving that gets the chair moving that is the slow part of the race. The start is slow; the finish is fast.

McCrea

It's getting that extra muscle to push off.

Johnson

Yeah, it takes that time. Once you get the stroke going. Once you get efficient part of your stroke going than it's so much better. So, and that, you all that has advanced. You know people are working on that all the time. Um, runners are trying to get faster, because they feel...they want to be as fast, you know, they want to go to the Olympics, and prove that they are just as fast, as competitive, so it's really come a long way. From the days when Sharon Hendrick and Randy Snow ran at the Olympics, the actual Olympics, in LA. [Los Angeles]. And then, you know we lucked out. For several years we had some wheelchair exhibition events. So, they'd run a men's 1500m and a women's 800m at the Olympics. And they've stopped doing that now.

But it's probably good that we're in the same facilities as the Olympics. The Olympics have two weeks, then they change all the signage and then the Paralympics comes in.

McCrea

And it's actually gotten a lot better as far as marketing goes. In the last few years I find that.

Johnson

Yes! It has. I mean compared to Sydney [2000] where there was barely anyone at the track. Some of the sports: tennis, even basketball. Basketball tends to be one of those when you get to the finals its packed. I went one morning to watch a girl's game in Athens [2004] and there was just a handful of people there. Probably parents (laughs), but now, so when you look with what London [2012] did. The track team said that every session, morning and evening, was packed. There were eighty thousand people in the stands. And, like in Athens, probably most nights the bottom bowl would fill up and then towards the very end as things progressed they were starting to open up sections in the upper level.

McCrea

I also heard that Athens had a huge viewership problem just in general.

Johnson

Right. I think they did (semi-laugh). But it was interesting to hear the Greek's say that. They were more in tune with the Paralympics. Because they thought the Paralympics were true athletes, amateur athletes compared to the Olympics where they're all professional racers.

So, I think, here's something to add. I think people in wheelchair sports are more willing to engage other people and try to get them involved. Like when my daughter was five years old Jim Kinob, who at the time was the top wheelchair racer in the country, was in Honolulu, HI doing a Honolulu marathon, and he took some time, talked with her and gave her a pair of sunglasses. And there was a kid Jacob Heivel who grew up in Hawaii. I mean that is how my daughter got started, because Jacob was involved, Jacob gave her this big chair that was way too big for her, but Jacob was doing it and she wanted to do it so.

So, it's good that we have so many mentors out there that are willing to spend some time and engage the new person. But like that's what the Texas Regional Games will be about. Because we have it's probably about fifty-fifty. There's probably a hundred disabled veterans that have signed up. And then the other half is probably community based people.

McCrea

I heard, it's a new game's I just heard today [4/21/2016] it's the Invictus Games?

Johnson

<topic>Other sporting events</topic>

The Invictus Games, they're going to be in Orlando, FL this year, the first time, and this is only the second time they've run them. The first time they did them in England. They are well supported by Prince Harry. So, he's kind of the driving force behind it. He's very supportive of disabled veterans. So, and that's what that's about. That's a veteran's games.

McCrea

I just had never heard of it so. So, I was curious.

Johnson

Yeah, so now we have the Invictus Game's, we have the Warrior Games, that the USA puts on.

All the service branches put together a team and go and compete. Last year they were in Quantico, Virginia and this year they're going to be at West Point. I think they've been. They used to do them always in Colorado Springs, and they've moved them to you know I think... U.S. Paralympics got it started and then they handed it back to the service branches.

So now the service branches take that [Warrior Games] on the road. Well they'll be at the academies. Like the marines do their training at Quantico, OCS [Officer's Command School?] is at Quantico, Virginia. And the Air Force Academy, they'll be at the Naval Academy [at Annapolis], they'll be at West Point, and wherever the Coast Guard trains.

McCrea

The Coast Guard Academy.

Johnson

Right. So, I'm sure that they're on the list. So, there's those. Adaptive Sports USA puts on regional competition and then their big focus is on juniors. So, they do junior nationals. This year they'll be in Wisconsin. Last year they were in New Jersey. And they move those all around, and that's how I got started.

I mean that's how I got hooked really, was taking my daughter to those, meeting some really great people, you know, networking. Connecting with, you know, before I even moved to Texas I was connected with the Texas team. Um, and I tried you know when someone calls me, I'll try to connect them with an established program already, whether that's here or in Boston, you know.

So, that's, I mean that's how it should work, right. We have a network of chapters, universities, hospitals, that we can say you need to get involved in sports and go to this place and see this person, you know. Like if you come, when people come to Texas, if they're in the Dallas-Fort Worth area I fully expect that they should call me or Darlene Hunter to find out what's available and where they can go. But, that's because we're here. Um, and we partner...so we're part of Southwest Wheelchair Athletic Association, we partner with Texas Regional Paralympic Sport to do a good many of our events, trainings and things like that.

So, we've been down to the Alamo City Run Fest for three years now. We put on a wheelchair racing clinic that weekend and then we sign them all up, and they have to do one of the races, there's the 5k the 10k and the half marathon. So, there's that. There's a half marathon here next weekend on Sunday [April 24, 2016], so I took that race director down with me this year. Said, this is what you need, you need wheelchair racers at your race... well this is what we need to do to get that.

So, we'll, so I'm hoping this year she has a few wheelchair racers, so Sunday will be the start of that. And then hopefully next year, maybe with Doug's [Garner] help or uh, UTA's help, we can find some space and actually put on a clinic.

And we bring extra equipment, so if you were injured and never competed before, we'd find a racing chair that you could fit in, we'd give you some instruction and then we would send somebody with ya so you didn't get hurt. And then, uh, actually complete a race, so.

McCrea

So, I actually interviewed, for my first interview Cezar Olivas, and he works for Per4Max

Johnson

Yes. Right.

McCrea

They specialize in sports wheelchairs and racing wheelchairs that would be pretty cool to see.

So, we talked about the Olympics in 2000, 2004, 2012 (laughs). So, I guess where do you see it going in the future? Or is there much that you can expand.

Johnson

<topic> The advancement of the sport</topic>

Oh, yeah, there's always room for improvement, right? So, here in Texas, perfect example is three years ago they included wheelchair racing in the state meet. So, the first year we had five girls race and we probably had six boys race. Last year the boys were nine, nine boys and I think six girls? There were five girls. So, we're low on girl numbers, but, um, but we're looking at trying through the school's now. You know, and not, not say well you've got to come see Paul Johnson the coach. You know we put out there, we go to coaches meetings, annual coaches meetings. We try to educate their coaches.

So we provide a racing chair. Here's the racing chair, and here's some instructions, here's some workouts you can do, now let him or her compete on your high school track team. And, that helps, one that helps the person with disabilities be more normal, normalized by being part of their able bodied track team. And there's more acceptance by their teammates because now it's just not a kid rolling down the hall, but it's one of my teammates. So, and I've seen it at some of the high school meets that I've gone to where I've seen wheelchair kids race, yeah, their teammates really embrace them.

So those are all positive steps. And, the more high schools we can get to do it the better. So, this year we have more than nine boys competing, so, only nine get to go. So, the top nine are going to make the state meet. And then the same with the girls. We don't have as many girls, so that probably won't be a big problem for them, but, yeah, the boys. So, and the more we get doing it the more competitive it gets. Now they're not just seeing poor little Johnny rolling down the track, you know looking cute, they're seeing athletes. So, if you can erase the image of the poor little kid in a wheelchair and say man look at those kids fly, they're really athletes, that's what they want.

McCrea

So, probably starting at a younger age would probably even be better.

Johnson

Yes. So, personal experience. You know, and I always like talking to parents because "oh they could get hurt," I don't want to hear it. I'm a parent, I'm a parent of a girl with spina bifida, and she competed from when she was eight until she was in her 20s. So, you know I

don't want to hear it. They need to be independent, and it breeds independence. I mean when you're going with a bunch of able bodied kids somewhere, you know, you're going to learn how to transfer yourself in and out of vehicles, in and out of your chair. It just grows that independence which I think is important.

So nationally there's twenty, probably only twenty-one or twenty-two states, that are including wheelchairs. So, obviously the goal is you want fifty, right. You want all fifty states to have high school inclusion in wheelchair racing, and then the ones who are already doing it. I think Louisiana right now is the only one, that includes a Para-ambulatory division, so like amputees and CPs that compete standing. So, there it is. There's plenty of room for improvement. Fifty states, fifty wheelchair divisions, fifty Para-ambulatory divisions that need to be worked on.

McCrea

Especially, I mean when the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] has been passed. I mean it shouldn't, they shouldn't be barred from anything.

Johnson

<topic>Integration of sport disabled/non-disabled</topic>

Right, so, you know it took this I guess it was three years ago? Two years ago the DOE [Department of Education] sends out a letter, a dear colleague letter, that says "We want to remind you that wheelchair athletes aren't being included in your sports program. No offense, it was a very long time, how come they weren't doing it. They just need to do it. And I think you have to break that, uh, stigma of fear of I don't know anything about a wheelchair and I don't know anything about coaching a kid in a wheelchair. Well there's resources, you probably didn't know anything about running either before you were coaching high jump and long jump, right.

I mean some of that is a learned process, so it's what they have to do.

McCrea

And with the internet, you know you can teach yourself anything now.

Johnson

<topic>Coaching Adaptive Sports</topic>

Yeah. Well right. So, by including in my vision would be USA Track and Field needs to include that in their in class instruction, right. So, they make you go to a two-and a half-day in classroom instruction on track and field coaching. Well they should include that wheelchair piece, you know, actually there. I mean the one that I went to, every time that they would teach something I would chime in "and for wheelchairs you have to do this." "Or for your seated throwers you have to do this." So, that class obviously got extra instructions there, but that should be just normal in my opinion.

McCrea

All right, um, if they were to start it I guess in middle school as well or elementary it would probably help.

Johnson

Right. So, I mean my goal for Southwest Wheelchair Association is okay, Texas Regional Paralympic Sport, you know we have a UIL program that really focuses on the high schools, but we really need to drive it down you know to the six-year-old, the seven-year-old that's in elementary school and get them, you know obviously not.

They don't do organized track and field in elementary school, but they can get a racing chair and they could come to a club program like ours and learn how to use it and then in middle school where they start doing those organized events, well they already have the skills in the racing chair. You know, maybe they're not refined, maybe they're not good, but they have the skills. And now they're in middle school and they can say, "yeah, you know, all my buddies are on the track team, why can't I?"

McCrea

Because around sixth grade they start actual track meets.

Johnson

Yeah. They actually do track meets, right. In sixth, seventh, eighth grade they have middle school meets and then by the time they get to high school. And that's why they do it so the high school coaches don't have to start from ground zero, right. So, it should be the same [with] wheelchairs.

McCrea

They should already know how to train or how to train by that point.

Johnson

Right. So, that's really...and the universities aren't, you know, when you think about it I mean there's probably less than a dozen, we'd have to check the stats with Doug. You know as far as just sports programs in general I mean it's a limited number when you compare it to the number of universities to the number that have disabled sports programs, it's pretty small.

McCrea

Even the number of universities that are fully accessible...is not that high.

Johnson

<topic>Advancement of the Sport</topic>

Right. Oh, yeah, yeah we won't even go there. I mean we're just talking sports here. But, yeah, for sports I think it's important that if you don't teach them in school, when, how are they going to learn. When are they going to learn? And I think you can take that at state level schools, right, Okay if you're a private university then okay I understand. But if you're a state run school, you know, if you're state funded, hey come on.

McCrea

Especially with Title IX and all that.

Johnson

Right. And as much money as football teams bring in these days, come on spend a mere \$500,000 on a disabled sports program.

McCrea

There are some places that do away with sports teams, because there are more teams that make more money for them. I mean like look at UTA. UTA here did away with their football program because it was actually costing them money. (laughs)

Johnson

Right, right. And I get it, there is economics involved. But with the money that people spend to go to school though I mean just if it's a public education, if it's a public school, they should offer those chances, because I mean it's just a growing opportunity.

McCrea

Like UNT they built a \$64 million football stadium when they hadn't won a bowl game in a decade.

Johnson

Right.

McCrea

You could have used that money for something else. You could have built ten buildings for that amount of money. Built an entire, like you said, sports program, for that amount of money.

Johnson

Right. Yeah, yeah.

McCrea

So, is there anything else, subject you want to cover?

Johnson

There's so many good athletes that have managed to come through, you know, from years past that I can think of Jim Knaub, Jim Martinson, who was a Vietnam vet, double amputee. So he [Jim Martinson] not only raced himself but he had a company that made racing chairs and he really supported that now I think he golf's is what his big focus is.

McCrea

Could you spell Knaub?

Johnson

K-N-A-U-B

McCrea

Okay.

Johnson

And Jim Martinson, and you know the University of Illinois had produced so many excellent athletes, Scott Hollenbeck and Cody Jean Driskel. Their current athletes include Josh George and Tatiana McFadden. So, there they are really rich in racing history, just like UTA is rich in basketball history. And Illinois had a basketball program from way back in, you know in the '50s. So, uh, so it can be done, you know, it's just a matter of somebody focusing on doing it, I think that's our big thing. Yeah there are some really great names.

You know, if you go out and look up just history of wheelchair racing there used to be big fields of wheelchair racers that competed like in Boston in the kind of crazy days. We've gone from four-wheel racing chairs that were really the everyday chairs with oversized front tires or wheels and then they went to a tricycle style, you know three-wheeler which is now been refined to what you see today.

When my daughter started we were still racing in four-wheelers, so. So, it's been quite the, technology has really moved it forward.

McCrea

It's like everything, they find a new way of doing things.

Johnson

<topic>Advancement of the Sport</topic>

They used to just tape up gloves, you know, to protect their hands, and then they went to harness gloves, which were made out of the University of Illinois, and a local company there they got them to make their own harness gloves and they're still in business today. They're in Florida now. So, they make excellent gloves. And now there's people that make their homemade gloves, called god gloves. Where you get this meltable plastic and you form it to your hand and you design it the way you want. Where you want your thumbs and so, they're very hi-tech and I understand the University of Illinois now is actually using 3-D printers to make gloves.

McCrea

That's awesome.

Johnson

Yeah.

McCrea

Okay, it's the final question (laughs). So, I guess you're not going to the Olympics in Rio [2016] for the Paralympics?

Johnson

<topic>Recruiting</topic>

No, I was, they submitted me to be an ITO [International Technical Official] for ITO training last summer, but the International Paralympic Committee said the U.S. currently had too many ITOs so they rejected that, so. Would I of liked to go? Hell yeah. I'd have loved to go. But, I can sit home too.

And the other things, so about officials too is that we scout. So, now I've become a regular scout for U.S. Paralympics. So, Tobi Fawehinmi? [Paul Johnson didn't know how to spell his last name]. So, in 2012 he was actually still in high school and I found him at a high school meet. And he had no idea what the Paralympics were. We live in the U.S. and he had no idea.

So, when I gave him a card and I told him to call me, he thought I wanted to talk to him about Special Olympics. So, I contacted Kathy Sellers, uh who is the high performance coach at U.S. Paralympics and I said "Kathy here's this kid, I looked at his high school jumps and he would have medaled in the long jump at Beijing [2008] so I'm thinking he's not one who you should just let go by."

So since then we've found her several athletes that way.

McCrea

Do you mind spelling his name?

Johnson

I have no idea how to spell his name. I can look him up Fawehinmi. He graduated from Mansfield Summit and he's a current student here at UTA, on the track team.

Yeah, so we, so that's the other thing we try to get officials to do is if you're at a regular track meet and you see somebody, especially ambulatory runners and like there's a kid at Timber Creek in Keller, [TX] his name is Maxwell Murphy who I saw high jump at a grassroots meet two years ago. He was kind of young he was probably twelve, thirteen maybe, anyways he's a sophomore now and one of the officials saw him and contacted me and said "hey Paul I saw this arm amputee," so I put Kathy Sellers on to him about him possibly competing. You know he's young, his times are fairly good and he's a distance runner. And then there was a kicker for Crowley High, we were at the Arlington Games, they had them at Cowboy Stadium back in November [2015] and one of the wheelchair girls that's on the basketball team comes up and says "hey did you know the kicker on Crowley's team only has one arm." And where we were sitting we couldn't tell that, so. So, we put him in touch with the U.S. Paralympics.

So, I mean that's what it's about, you've got to see them, you got to educate them because Paralympics is really in the United States is in the..., still a behind the scenes thing.

McCrea

Alright, I want to thank you for coming in and sitting down today.

Johnson

My pleasure.