

SPORT BEYOND HANDICAP

by **Nora SARGA** (Hungary) / **Jean-Paul VITRY** (Belgium)

Summary

During the Paralympics Games the attention turns to physically challenged people. This is the time when they get more media attention as well. In written journalism besides articles pictures have an important role in introducing disabled sportspeople to the society, which usually depicts them in a very sensation mongering way, focusing on

their disabilities in the first place. There is a young sport photographer Melanie Challe who reversed this methodology. Our article is based on Melanie's photography of the Paralympics Games. We aimed to introduce her work philosophy to discover if her work has the impact on people that she intends to have. For this we interviewed people on the streets and tried to see if they understand Melanie's approach and if photography can be a tool in fighting against discrimination.



Article

Melanie has been working as a freelance sport photographer for 5 years. She aims to portray disabled sportspeople in an artistic way, looking beyond their disabilities. "My work is to talk about the sport but much more about the person but not talk about disability. People think that when you are blind it's impossible to play soccer. When I first discovered about blind soccer it really touched me that the impossible was possible. And I like that there is no limit. I wanted to show the beauty of this sport."

Newspaper editors usually have the opposite standpoint. They like to show the moment of winning, when the soccer ball is landing in the goal. When it comes to parasports the disability comes in the center of the picture compared to the achievement. According to their philosophy, if the reader understands the context, discussion about disability can be started. But does something really need to be striking in order to generate discussion? According to Melanie there is a different way to start conversation. "Disability doesn't have to be in the center of my photography. Actually in the beginning you just see a gesture, and then in the next moment you see that actually there is a disability. Sometimes when you talk about disability, people want to show sensation but I want to show the beauty, see the grace of the gesture and the humanity that we all have."

Although on the side of newspapers there has been no willingness so far to put disability on the "periphery", Melanie hopes that there will be. "You always find people who are connected to your work. If you don't find those people you just keep on going until you find them. It's a point of view", she says.

We were curious if Melanie's pictures have the impact that she aims. Therefore we talked to people on the streets of Bordeaux. Without explaining the aim of our project we showed four pictures for a few seconds and asked our interviewees to describe their first impressions with three words. After this we had a more in depth conversation with them. We were frankly surprised that most of the people we talked to, used the same expressions that Melanie did during our interview.

"The set up reminds me of the grace of dance and the perfection of a choreography" - said Joëlle, a 44 years old marketing manager. Dominique, a 72 years old pensioner, noticed the handicap only in the second place. "This is not the handicap that comes at first, it's the vivid colors and the power of the movement"- she explained her feelings looking at the pictures. "Yes, I noticed that he had a handicap but first I noticed the eagerness and the strength" – said Jessica (28, Musician). "The handicap was not first thing that caught my attention." Most of the people we met did notice the disability on the pictures. "If you don't see the handicap for the first glance it means that your attitude has already changed" - thinks Melanie. Could photo journalism be a useful tool in fighting against discrimination? Seemingly there are people out there who are sensitive to Melanie's approach.

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