Disabled by Medias

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Lionel Messi, Roger Federer or Tiger Woods. Their names are on the media stream every second. The biggest sports stars on the planet are winning event after event. There are many other successful sportsmen, who are crowned as sport champions on local, national or international competitions. Some of them became №1 in Europe or in the World. Their names are never typed by correspondets' fingers. The cameras are missing in the airport when blind, deaf or some other disabled champion returns with gold medal from big championships.

Vesselin Kushnerenkov throws the ball to the other part of the field. The sphere sounds with a rattle tone, which is the only reference point for the defenders. In front of adhesive tape three guys with bands on the eyes are waiting in a dog position. There isn't a wooden or metal goal. The ball's speed is rising. One of the players jumps with his body to stop the sphere, but without a success. The ball scores in the virtual net.

Vesselin Kushnerenkov throws the ball
Vesselin gives right away new instructions. He is the national coach of Bulgaria goalball team. Some of the guys are 100% blind. Others have some vision left. They all gathered for one of the two weekly training sessions in the volleyball hall of University of Sofia's Biological faculty. The net in the middle stand sometimes on the way, but the players are not allowed to put it down. Instead of the traditional goals, used in goalball, they stick an adhesive tape on the floor. Before each practice the guys say a prayer against rain, because the roof is trickling.

"During the day I am working as masseur." Says his story Vesselin Kushnerenkov. He's got just 10% of the normal vision. "Evenings we are coming here for two hours. Everything is on voluntary level. I've got family and a child.

My wife is angry at me

because instead of being home, I am practicing. But the sport is above all." Vesselin trained footabll and track and field before loosing his vision. He was studying in a normal school until 13 years old. Then was moved to a blind school, where found the passion for goalball.

"It's very important for blind people to do sports." Explained Veseelin Kushnerenkov. - They are learning coordination. Start to rely on the guy next to him. They see what is to win or lose together. Without vision not every one of us may move free, which is extremely important for us."

One of the best Bulgarian football players Daniel Dimov comes to watch the practice of Bulgarian national goalball team. He is part of the most famous club in Eastern European country - "Levski" (Sofia). The defender never expected that may see such a hard practice from the blind guys.
"I am very happy that they have such a desire." Tells Daniel Dimov his impressions. "They are doing good. Their spirit is high and never give up despite the lack of vision. It's a pity that almost no one helps them. I've got inspired, when I saw the way they train. We, the football players, must take an example from them. Everything is given to us. We've got big salaries and now I see that the newspapers are correct when sometimes described us like a bunch of mollycoddles."

Vesselin Kushnerenkov admits that the media coverage of the national goalball team and the sports for blinds is weak.

"I am angry, because they remember us just for some projects, charities, Christmas, Easter or during The white cane day" Express his opinion Vesselin Kushnerenkov. "We are not interesting, because

**The Medias are searching for some yellow and chilly news**

The Bulgarian national television is always very good toward us as well as some other TV stations. At the beginning they put a report of our event in the social part of the news. But it changed. Now we are part of the sports emissions."

The sport organization of blind peoples in Bulgaria is staging competitions in goalball, chess, archery, showdown, sports fishing, backgammon and track&field. 26 clubs are licensed and send their representatives to the events.
"I am satisfied by the media coverage at all". Confess the chairman of sports for blind organization in Bulgaria Ivan Yanev. - Bulgarian national television, Bulgarian national radio, some newspapers and internet editions are following our events. There are some serious private televisions, who are invited by us every year. They came just once or twice. We've got a case when a reply came to our invitation. It was a money offer per minute of TV time. We wish to have some funds to pay, but we have nothing."

The result of cooperation between blinds and Medias is visible.

"If you ask 12 years ago what is goalball, everybody will look strange at you." Adds Ivan Yanev. "Now, they couldn't remember right away, but some of the ordinary peoples remember the rattling ball. We are working well with the social Medias. Some of our guys made YouTube clips. There are shown our sports as goalball, showdown or archery for blinds. The rules are explained with subtitles. Others find our club and the sports we practice, because of our internet web page." Ivan Yanev knows how important is the media coverage not only for showing the sports for blinds, but also to recruit new players among blinds.

"As much as popular is one sport, there is bigger chance that some sponsor may appear" Shows his hopes Ivan Yanev. "The Medias are our force, because thanks to them we reach that level. We would like to start a campaign in mass schools for kids with vision problems. They may be forwarded to our clubs, where will have a chance to practice specialized or adapted sports. This is the way how kids with disabilities may find a way to do some physical exercises."

The legendary gymnastics champion from Bulgaria Yordan Yovchev participated in a record six Summer Olympics. He is one of the few government officials in Bulgaria, who is taking the disabled people's problems with heart.
"They are limited in some things, but this doesn't mean that we must limit them as well" Says Yovchev, who is deputy ministry of Sports and youthfulness in Bulgaria. "We, the people without disabilities, have got everything, but most of the times complain how we are missing something. There are men and women who are blind or deaf. They are stronger than us and we must learn from their spirit."

In fact, spirit is something that is not missing in any word of Jesus Santana. He is the top scorer in the First Division Men's Goalball in Spain, with 92 goals scored in 2013. With only 23 years he has managed to be an indispensable part of the Spanish national federation, which was runner-up in the most important competition in Europe for Goalball, the Championships A. He would be the equivalent of Leo Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo for our football, but with the difference that this is the first time Media called him for an interview. "Once I was shown quickly in a program of the second Spanish national channel (La 2) because the producer is my friend, but that's it, the mass media are more interested in showing the look of Sergio Ramos than telling the achievements of any professional in a minority sport" says Santana with energy and some anger.
The same feeling that shows Kim Lopez. This 25 years old Spanish sportsman has been proclaimed as the disk world champion in a paralympic competition.

**Interviews, thought, nor even smell them**

He remembers that once he received a call from a radio. He was very excited because he thought that it may be at last the start for him to be on media landscape. But it did not happen that way. "It was the first and the last call" says Kim with the disappointment of those who accept that reality is unchangeable.

After a train of 6 hours a day, he has no time for anything else. His phone rings. It’s his girlfriend. “I wish I could have more free time but if I want that I need to quite training, and for me sport is too important”, Kim admits.

Both agree that it’s the sport what has given them enough strength to overcome his blindness and feel useful and socially integrated. Jesus Santana says that it makes him feel like any other person and that he forgets about his disability while practicing.

David Casinos, the most famous Paralympic athlete in Spain, shares this view. "It's amazing how playing sports you feel that there are no borders, but then every pedestrian crossing is an obstacle," he says on a coffee accompanied by his dog Ximena.
Paralympics legend David Casinos and his dog Ximena

For Casinos, the process to become a star was not easy. Fifteen years ago he lost his sight because of a sugar raise incompatible with his diabetes. The first thing he did was joining ONCE, the National Organization for blind people in Spain which promotes lots of programs and facilities for blinds. He started practicing sport to forget what happened and now he is one of the few who can dedicate himself professionally to it. He has won four consecutive gold medals in the Paralympic Games in Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London, where he was the bearer of the Spanish Paralympic Team in 2008. His name rings a bell for almost everyone and
he appears in the pages

of the most famous sports newspapers in Spain, as you can see in this image from Marca. However, his fame did not come alone. At the beginning, though he had already won several competitions and made a huge effort to be on the first page of Spanish sport, David did not get any results. His achievements were not news and his story either. He started beating around the bush and he came up with a conclusion. "If nobody sees you, you do not exist. We're great professionals but if we do not appear on television we are not anybody," he concluded. So it was clear for him that he had to hire a communications agency. Since then, with the PR on his side, his media and sports career has not gone in one direction but up. Thanks of it he can dedicate himself one hundred percent to the sport. "When you go on media, private companies become interested in you and they want to be your sponsors. This is an indispensable aid due to the fact that without money you cannot give the maximum of you because you have to work or to study" he details. In addition, being on the news has helped him to be a part of society and to be admired rather than deplored. "I have received letters from people saying that they want to be like me, can you imagine that? Like me, that I’m blind! "

David Casinos is the perfect example of how Medias help minority groups not only to be more integrated into society but to success on their careers and personal lives. As Jesus Santana says: “I think that media should promote not only the best payers but every sport. Not looking only for medalist sportsman. They should show reality, things that happen every day, and that’s much more than a won medal. You know well that what it’s not on TV is like it does not exist, we are only on TV less than 5 minutes during the Olympics and that’s all. But is not only about Paralympics or blinds, it’s about sports that are not football and sportsman that are not the most famous ones. If any champion of athletics is not on TV… How the hell are we going to be?”- He wonders.
TV Broadcaster Sasho Yovkov: We are debtors

The sport journalist and TV broadcaster from Bulgarian national television was one of the main organizers of Deaflympics Games that was held in Sofia last year. It was the 22-nd edition of the event. The first one was in 1924.

Q: Mr. Yovkov, how tough is to organize event like Deaflympics?
A: 4600 sportsmen from 91 countries came in Bulgaria. They participated in 18 different sports. The organizing committee was just 8 persons. Only we know what it cost to us. The Games were given to Greece initially. They refused to stage them in 2011, because of the financial crisis. Then Hungary was elected for the host, but they couldn't do it as well and gave away after just two months of organization. During the Summer Olympics in London it was decided Bulgaria to be the new host. We did the entire organization in 10 months. When i went to some companies to ask for sponsorship, they told me that no money will be given for such Games. There were other peoples, who helped a lot and do not want it to make it public. This wasn't just pure help, but also a showing that in Bulgarian society the things are changing.
Q: What is the difference between ordinary sports competitions and those for deaf?
A: The sport is a competition for everybody. The most important is that deaf and the people around them feel that they do not need help, but sympathy. It's 30 years I am working with them. During my career as a volleyball player, there was a national team for deaf people. I was their coach. We beat the strong team of Soviet Union 3:0 at the finals of European volleyball championships for deaf in 1984. These peoples must demonstrate far more power, character and will to overcome all the problems, that was not in front of ordinaries. They are high-strung with strong senses. Falseness is very easy to be feel by them. At the same time they are incredible human beings when see a true attitude.

Q: How the sport helps deaf people?
A: When you don't have hearing and there is no one in the family or society to help, your brain is not stimulated. The mental development stops. It's very important that the society not only to include disabled people in special schools, children gardens or to do prophylactics on them, but also to accept them as equal.

Q: How important are the Medias for people with disabilities?
A: It's crucial. The problems of disabled peoples are very difficult to reach the society. I don't want to criticize my colleagues, but Deaflympics, for example, were covered just by Bulgarian national television. Those competitions are not commercials and do not bring money. They are giving something else - humanity, sympathy and civilization. We've made some meeting with sports ministry and in the sports commission in Parliament. Because of that now the medalists for Deaflympics will get government pension when they retired, just like it's with Paralympic Games. I know that blind people got some problem, but if they aren't shown in the medias, noting will change. We, the medias, are debtors of disabled peoples. Seems like we underestimate or ignore their pain, because it's not on our head.
Special needs for sport

The sport organization of blind people in Bulgaria don't have a specific sport center for their needs. They used another places to practice, but often the halls are not practical enough, just like the volleyball field, where national goalball team does its trainings. After 3 years of searching the organization finally finds a spot, which may be the dream one. The project for the reconstruction of the current property to become a sport center is around 250 000 euros. "We've got some meetings with deputy minister of sport and youth Yordan Yovchev, but for now it's just talks." Says the chairman of blind people sport organization in Bulgaria Ivan Yanev.

Yovchev who is very much into the project. He thinks that there is a major problem that must be solved before the approval of the funding

"We've got a person, who will give the property for free where blind people may use for a sport center for a period of 10 years." Adds Yovchev. "The problem is that the owner is a private company. It's complicated, because if we give the money and the reconstructions will be made, then the owner may throw away the blinds and to took back his property. In this case the government would make the rebuild, but we don't know how to protect the rights of those guys to stay. The possibilities are being in search so everything will be solved by the best possible way." Right now the national goalball team, which is the only representative in Bulgaria at international competitions for blind, is preparing in terrible conditions.

"We are send for two weeks in Belmeken mountain camp before European championships and for another two weeks we may train in a normal hall in Sofia with goals." Gives an example the coach of the Bulgarian national goalball team Vesselin Kushnarenkov. - The summary is that once in every two years, we've got the chance to prepare in good condition for 4 weeks."
Bulgarian goalball team has good history. The squad finished on 10th place in Seul'88 Paralympics. Bulgaria was close to qualify for "A" division of European championships, but lost in decisive playoff in 2010. Jesus Santana, the goalball national player, does not have to face these problems.

Of course, he’s got some others since he does not receive any salary for his dedication so he has to complement it with his studies in and Administration and some economical help from his family. But despite that, he trains with his team three days per week in Valencia. They meet one hour and a half on Mondays and Wednesdays and four hours on Saturdays in a goalball pitch with all the facilities that they need. Then, before the championships, the national players train all together in different sports centers of Madrid. In Spain there are 7 goalball teams in the first division, 10 in the second one and 10 in the third one. Also 11 female teams. As it happens in football, the best players of each first division teams participate on the championships representing Spain. They’ve got a professional coach and also a place for living offered by the National Blind’s Federation. As a result, the Goalball Spanish team is one of the stronger ones in Europe. It won the silver medal on the last European Championship.

In professional Athletics, things are a bit different since it’s not a team sport. Kim Lopez started training when he was 19 and it took him 4 years to become gold champion of shot put of the world. During that time

he did not receive any money

for any national or European competition that he won, but when he became a gold sportsman, things changed a little bit. He did not receive any money for the medal but the Spanish Paralympic Committee saw that he was an athlete with future so when he threatened them to leave competitive sport because he didn’t get any money and he needed to work, he was offered a scholarship of 400 Euros per month. Also, his got all the training facilities that he needs. He used to train with other blind sportsman but now he can use the standard athletic pitches and practice almost by his own every time he wants to. His official training is six hours a day.
Huge difference in the funding

There are huge differences in the sports funding of people with disability in Bulgaria and in Spain. In the Eastern European country more than 16,000 are registered as blind (~0.2% of the population) and more than 7,700 are deaf (~0.1% of the population). The main funding for all groups of disabilities is given by the Ministry of Sport and Youth. The last year budget of deaf people sport organization is approximately 270,000 Euros. Most of them were used for the staging of Deaflympics Games in Sofia. Blind's budget is just 8,000 Euros per year. There is another organization for disabled people - Bulgarian paralympic association. They are sending competitors for different paralympic events and receive a yearly budget of approximately 273,000 Euros per year.

"We've got other programs, which may benefit disabled people federations and their clubs." Explains deputy Sports Minister of Bulgaria Yordan Yovchev. "Everyone may apply for them. We are trying to raise the number of disabled who are doing sports and stays active."

The deputy Sports Minister of Valencia, Vicente Carratala, also explains the programmes that are being promoted by the government so that each time more disabled people practice sports.

Vicente Carratala explains the municipality programs for disabled peoples

14,000 Euros per year

The Valencian government - in Spain each region has its own institutions - is giving to general programmes with this objective. In addition they spend 25,000 per year in a specific programme called Hospi-Sport, where the main goal is to assist people in hospitals that have lost their vision, or a leg or any part of the body so that they are integrated. They also offer with this money free entrance to a swimming pool where the disable are the main users. Finally, they give 100,000 annual Euros for prizes of elite sportsman, with deficiencies and without them. This is only for Comunidad Valenciana, one of the 17 regions in Spain and also, it’s mainly to encourage non-professional sport.
This is something that the National Federation for blind people, ONCE, knows very well. This private organization has been developing sport programmes since early 80’s and it is its labor the one it needs to be thanked in this area. Julio Santodomingo, the sports director of the delegation of Valencia, explains that for ONCE sport has always been a priority.

Julio Santodomingo is very important part of ONCE organization

Their funding comes from the lottery that people with disabilities –mostly blind- sell on the streets and also from some companies that foundation ONCE owns. Only in Valencia province there are 70 professional blind sportsmen using their aids, 110 blinds that practice sport as a hobby regularly accompanied by 30 volunteers who help them and 64 children practicing every week. “The sport is really necessary to them because they learn how to move and coordinate and they also learn to win. Is a group that is not very use to it and when they see that they train hard and they get something back, they start thinking they can do everything”, explains Julio. He doesn’t tell the exact amount of money that the corporation spends in sport all over Spain.

However, if the example of goalball is taken the differences are very explicit. If the total amount for blinds sports in Bulgaria was 8.000 Euros per year, only the amount for goalball in Valencia is 5.000 annual Euros without counting the money spent on competitions (travel fees, accommodation, etc.). This money is only for the 3 teams of the region and is mainly spent on the salary of the coaches.

Recently in Spain paralympics sports are starting to be interesting for companies

since each time they appear more on televisions and newspapers. Moreover, taking part of its funding or activities it’s still considered as a social action by the society, so the corporations use it to give a more compromise attitude towards people. That’s the case of Plan ADOP. The Paralympic Sport Support Plan (ADOP) is an initiative of the Spanish Paralympic Committee, the Sports Council and the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, which aims to provide the Spanish Paralympic athletes the best conditions to carry out preparation and to undertake successful Spanish team participation in the Paralympic Games.

The most known Spanish companies participate in this plan, such as Iberdrola, Telefónica, El Corte Inglés, Ford or Renfe. The program lasts for four years and it always begins after a Paralympics, because it’s objective is to be prepared for the following. Now it’s the third edition which started after London 2012 and will be on until Rio 2016. The total budget will be 3.340.325,27 euros.

But still, is not gold everything that shines. The difference between a Paralympic and an Olympic medal is almost 70%. The first one is worth between 15,000 and 18,000 Euros while the second is about 90,000.