



Dr Barry Mason

Senior Research Associate

I am a sport scientist interested in exploring the relationship between impairment severity and its impact on performance in Paralympic athletes. I work with international federations to help them develop evidence-based systems for classifying athletes to make them compliant with the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) Athlete Classification Code.



Classification in Paralympic sport promotes participation and prevents the outcomes of competition being dictated by the severity of impairment. Sport-specific systems are used to categorise athletes according to the severity of their impairment. However, athletes are largely classified according to the subjective perceptions of classifiers, which could lead to a number of athletes being unfairly disadvantaged. Evidence-based systems of classification, underpinned by scientific data, are key to creating a level playing field where athletes with more severe impairments have the potential to succeed.

I have worked with a number of international federations including the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF) and the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF). Wheelchair team sports are challenging from a classification perspective as a wide range of impairment types are eligible to compete, and multiple impairment types can exist within the same classification.

Our work with the IWRF is ongoing to ensure that an evidence-based classification system exists for all the different impairment types.

Post 16 Education:

A Levels Physical Education,
Biology & Graphics

Higher Education:

BSc (Hons) in Sport & Exercise Science from the
University of Chichester

MSc (Distinction) in Sport & Exercise Biomechanics
from the University of Chichester

PhD titled 'The ergonomics of wheelchair configuration
for optimal sport performance.' Loughborough Uni

I pursued my research topic into Paralympic sport, after being first exposed to the topic during my Masters. The topic area leant itself very well to sport science since the athletes have different impairment types, lots of assistive equipment and how they interact with their equipment to compensate for their impairment is both fascinating and incredible. At the time it was also a relatively unexplored area, which made it novel and even more exciting. I was fortunate to have a number of good mentors along the way both at Chichester and at Loughborough.



WHY IT MATTERS... SPORT, EXERCISE & HEALTH



Loughborough
University

Barry's experience as a student

Sport Science turned out to be an excellent choice for me, as I was able to apply the scientific principles I'd enjoyed learning into real-life sport. I was able to get involved in a number of exciting projects like this. As a tennis player I was involved in a study exploring the effect of an audience on tennis serving performance. This meant serving a number of trials with nobody watching and the speed and accuracy of my serve monitored and then repeating the process with spectators and video cameras and crowd noise, to see how that affected performance...speed was the same with an audience but my accuracy definitely suffered!

Barry's Career

I completed my PhD at Loughborough in collaboration with UK Sport and Paralympics GB. Following this I became a post-doc in the Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport and in 2015 became a Senior Research Associate. All my academic career has centred around Paralympic sport and this has led me in to the area of classification. This research area has given me the opportunity to work with a wide number of International Federations to provide them with evidence-based data on which to inform their sport-specific classification systems. The impact of the research can help sports remain code compliant with the IPC, enabling them to maintain their status as Paralympic sports, at the Paralympic Games.

The work we are currently doing in collaboration with the IWBF seeks to define minimum eligibility criteria for participating in wheelchair basketball. It is hoped that this research can be used to help the sport become code compliant with the IPC and be reinstated on to the programme for Paris 2024. It's a real privilege to be able to work with athletes and officials from around the world, to help uphold the integrity of Paralympic sport and to enable athletes to represent their countries and perform at their best.

Barry's advice: Stay inquisitive. Never accept information on face value. Always question why or how something happens. Pose these questions to your peers, your tutors and most importantly yourself. This inquisitive approach will help you to enhance your long term learning skills and really understand the information rather than just being able to recite it.

Above all else try to make your learning experience enjoyable. It is much easier to learn if you enjoy your subject, look for fun ways of exploring it.

Loughborough University offers undergraduate degrees in

Sport Science, Coaching and Physical Education / Sport and Exercise Science / Sport Management / Sport and Exercise Psychology / Psychology / Sport Technology

Please note: Degrees and their titles change over time. Some graduates may have studied degrees that have evolved and changed in response to changes in demand from employers.