

Last week, handicapped athletes from around the world began competing in the Paralympics in Atlanta, Georgia. They represent 127 countries and, by the time the meet ends on August 25, will have participated in seventeen sports. By overcoming limitations that in the past would have closed the door on their participation, they are contributing both to the Olympic ideal and to the continuing recognition that we are much more than physical structure. Each of us is, in fact, the spiritual idea of God.

Individuality and competition

Lynn G. Jackson

A MEMBER of my family used to skate for the Ice Capades. And although I never saw her skate, somehow I grew up with a love for the sport. Its grace, beauty, originality, skill, and form appeal to me. Through the moves, flow, outline, I see individuality, which reminds me of true, infinite individuality.

What is infinite individuality and what makes it so appealing? Mary Baker Eddy answers this question in *Science and Health* when she writes, "The one Ego, the one Mind or Spirit called God, is infinite individuality, which supplies all form and comeliness and which reflects reality and divinity in individual spiritual man and things" (p. 281).

God is the source of man's individuality. And because God is illimitable, infinite, He must be expressed in many different ways. This is what makes each one of His children unique. It's what makes you different from me and me from you.

True individuality isn't something that one can purchase or humanly cultivate. It's not something that one person has more of than another—or that only a few possess. It is reflected from God by

man, and each of us naturally expresses and possesses it as God's reflection. These truths are illustrated in many ways. No two children are fully alike, even if they are in the same family. No two businessmen run their businesses just like each other. No two athletes run, jump, skate, or swim exactly the same. Each reflects and expresses God-given individuality through his or her own distinctive qualities.

Agility, strength, focus, ability, and endurance are among the qualities that man reflects. They do not emanate from the muscles or the human mind. They are reflected, God-given. And, what's more, if we feel we need more of a certain quality, or that we need to express it better in our experience, it's possible to do so. How? By spiritually understanding that all the qualities needed are, in reality, already present in infinite supply because of the relation of God and man.

Man's true individuality emanates from God without separation or interruption. Man has all that God has; man expresses all that God is. On this basis, we can express our unlimited potential, our God-given worth. Christ Jesus understood this when he taught, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19).

Athletes, musicians, and performers often compete against each other in technique, style, expression, form. Yet when we compete, should the goal be to prove how well we can crunch the other fellow or how well we can express our God-given uniqueness?

There is a thought that has been extremely contagious throughout history. It is the false belief that it is more natural to be competitive than to be cooperative. Recently I was watching one of my favorite ice skaters in competition when the announcer said, "I wonder how it feels to go out on the ice and skate when you know your toughest competitor is in the wings waiting to follow you." This made me think how strange it should seem to gauge our performance by who is sitting in the wings! When one is going out to express God-given ability, the spiritual understanding

of true individuality comes to his or her rescue. It mentally awakens one to the *already* proved and established worth and potential of God's child. The competition or performance is simply the *opportunity* to glorify God and prove what He has already done.

Having this motive helps us get beyond concern over who is waiting in the wings or the mental aggressiveness that, too often, athletes, musicians, and other performers feel they must have to win or succeed. It gets us beyond all this to the standpoint of reflecting true individuality. We then learn that it's not muscles and physical skill that enable us to prove our worthiness and potential; it's the willingness to lean upon God, to glorify Him in all we do.

Turning to God for a deeper sense of our own unique individuality, we'll find that our purpose is not actually to overcome others. We are really overcoming a false view of self, a mistaken acceptance of limitation and inability. This drives out fear and reveals our God-given dominion over material laws and limitations. Man is not powered by bones, muscles, lungs, and brains. Rather, he is the exact likeness of God, and we prove this by expressing the infinite individuality of God in our thoughts and actions.

Our abilities aren't limited by age, time, circumstances. The recognition of man's limitless being is illustrated at least in part by what has been accomplished by many Olympic athletes. For instance, in 1896 the longest jump in the long jump competition was 6.36 meters. In 1992 it was 8.67. In 1896 the farthest discus throw was 29.15 meters. In 1992, 65.12 meters. And in 1896 the fastest time in the 100 meter freestyle was 1 minute 22 seconds. In 1992 it was 49.02 seconds. (At the time this goes to press, it remains to be seen how many more records will be broken in the 1996 Games.)

Longer. Farther. Faster. Through a deeper sense of God, good, limitations will continue to be dissolved. It begins within thought. It's expressed in experience. It has nothing to do with a killer mentality directed against one's competitor. It has everything to do with spiritually understanding man's God-given qualities, illimitability, worth, potential. In short, true, infinite individuality. ■

No steel rims, just unencumbered being

Faith Walsh Heidtbrink



They were there, in their wheelchairs:
three adults, labeled "handicapped."

I was doing my daily walking and
was praying, acknowledging and affirming
God's power, His government, His goodness.

They were sitting there, each one
patiently awaiting his caregiver's attention.

In my enthusiasm to bless the world,
I eagerly affirmed
that God's love surely reaches out to these!

But wait. I thought:
God reaches out? . . . Out to *where?* . . . Out from *where?*

Why would God need to reach out
when He already holds each one *within*—

within His love, needed . . .
within the unlimited opportunity of Life . . .
within the unfettered capability of Mind—
with valued, purpose-filled worth
within . . . perfection.

As I opened my heart, I saw these three,
each as God's own image and likeness—
not confined by steel rims of mortality,
but simply . . . as man, unencumbered.