



Paralympics  
vs  
Special Olympics

The International Paralympic Committee

The Special Olympics

### Two Very Different Things

Both the Paralympics and Special Olympics offer sporting opportunities for people with physical or intellectual impairments.

The Special Olympics, however, is *participation* focused, while the Paralympics is *competition* focused. The Paralympics is the parallel body (“Para”) to the Olympics and, as such, the Paralympics are focused on elite performance with all Paralympians being highly competitive, elite athletes; they can be recognized by the post-nominal “PLY”.

### Some of the Differences

	Classification	Competition	Frequency	Barrier to Entry
Paralympics	Multiple sport classes for greater competitive equality	Competition format aligned with Olympic competition format	Four year cycle	Minimum standards for impairments and performance
Special Olympics	No classification	Has their own, unique, competition format	Two year cycle	None

For more information:

The Paralympics: <https://www.paralympic.org/>

The Special Olympics: <https://www.specialolympics.org/>