

## EDITORIAL

The visit of the American wheelchair athletes in June and July of this year, was the direct result and the personal efforts of Mr. Tom Knowles, himself a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair.

He visited the Rehabilitation Centre of the University of Illinois, U.S.A. in 1961 and was greatly impressed by the opportunities offered to the physically disabled and the attitude of the University towards these persons. He decided to make it possible to bring a team of athletes out to South Africa in order to let those in a similar position see what could be done and to show the general public how normal an existence could be lived by those who are wheelchair borne.

To raise funds and publicize this proposed visit, Tom Knowles wheeled himself 452 miles from Pretoria to Durban; a true feat of enterprise, ingenuity and endurance.

A team eventually arrived in this country flying direct from New York and returning via England where they were due to compete in the Stoke-Mandeville Paraplegic Games.

While in this country they demonstrated their sports and games and thrilled physiotherapists and the public alike with their skill and were certainly an inspiration to other paraplegics who, given the opportunity, will surely be able to achieve similar ability.

Here, our population being comparatively small, our groups of potential wheelchair sportsmen and women are scattered at widely distant points throughout the country, making organised competitions and games very difficult as well as specialized training almost impossible, except for a

limited few in the larger centres. There is tremendous need for centralisation of activities and organizations dealing with these sportsmen.

Great work is being done in different centres and already we have had two Gold Medallists in the recent Stoke-Mandeville Games. Mrs. Nancy Thesen and Mr. Bernard Humble, members of the first representative three-man team came back victorious in Archery and Weight-lifting respectively. This is a wonderful achievement and Cape Town must be congratulated on producing the first wheelchair Springboks and making it possible for them to participate in the Games.

This must become a national effort and in future a much larger and more representative team must be sent overseas and to make this possible there should be a central organisation to plan, publicize and gather financial support.

Seeing this happy band from the U.S.A., travelling easily and comfortably by air and coach, and mixing freely with strangers and exchanging ideas with people in different countries has opened the doors of opportunity to many.

All the visitors are adequately employed in a variety of occupations competing in the open labour market, besides striving to help other paraplegics and physically handicapped colleagues.

It is a challenge to physiotherapists in this country to inspire those under their care to reach the same goal—complete wheelchair rehabilitation.

Our best wishes go to all wheelchair athletes here and overseas.

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