



Understanding Classification for Para-Equestrian Sports

For Coaches & Athletes

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Disclaimer

The information in this presentation may not perfectly reflect the most updated USEF/FEI Para-Equestrian rules.

It is the responsibility of the athlete to check the USEF/FEI Para-Equestrian Rules updated annually.

Course Objectives

1. To develop a foundational understanding of National and International competition in Para-Equestrian Sports, specifically Para-Dressage & Para-Driving.
2. To raise awareness among riding schools, therapeutic riding centers, veteran service organizations and adaptive sport clubs about these exciting Paralympic and International equestrian sports as a competitive pursuit beyond equine-assisted therapy or recreation.
3. Connect emerging coaches and athletes to the USEF/USPEA *International Para-Equestrian Dressage Centers of Excellence* which provide training clinics, educational symposia, and access to international para-dressage coaching experts.
4. Encourage para-eligible veterans to participate in the Department of Veterans Affairs' *Veteran Assistance Program for Paralympic Athletes* with trained, knowledgeable coaching support.

Presenter

Kerri Sowers

PT, DPT, PhD(c)

Kerri Sowers is an Assistant Professor of Health Science at Stockton University in Galloway, New Jersey. She is a Fédération Equestre Internationale Level 2 Classifier for Para-equestrian sport, a United States Equestrian Federation National Classifier, and serves on the United States Equestrian Federation Adaptive Sports Committee. In addition to her experience as a classifier, Kerri is an accomplished dressage rider, who has competed successfully through the FEI levels.



What is Classification?

“Grouping athletes into sport classes according to how much of their impairment affects fundamental activities in each specific sport of discipline.”

(IPC, 2015)

Brief History of Classification

- Began in the 1950s, shortly after Dr. Guttman founded para sports.
- Started as an impairment-based system
 - Separate sport classes for different medical diagnoses.
- 1980s: classification transitioned to a functional-based system.
- Currently...
 - Focus is on evidence-based classification

PE Classification

Physical Impairment

- Physio
- Doctor
- Accredited to classify

Vision Impairment

- Ophthalmologist or optician who is an accredited vision classifier

Intellectual Impairment

- **Not eligible** without a classifiable physical or visual impairment

National vs. International

USEF USEF.org	FEI FEI.org
One classifier (from USEF or FEI)	Two FEI classifiers (one from another country)
Good for PE through National competition	Good for PE through FEI/International competition
FEI Profile System applied to USEF	FEI Profile System
USDF tests – USDF rules prevail* PE tests – FEI rules prevail* * - test equivalency	PE tests – FEI rules prevail
Dispensation Certificate issued with Profile/Grade/Status/Compensating Aids/Expiration Date	Listed on the Master List with Name/Country/Profile/Grade and Compensating Aids

Permitted Impairments

1. Impaired muscle power (strength)
2. Impaired passive range of movement
3. Loss of limb or limb deficiency
4. Leg-length difference
5. Short stature
6. Hypertonia
7. Ataxia
8. Athetosis
9. Visual impairment
10. Intellectual impairment**

– **Not included in PE sport, unless combined with physical or visual impairment

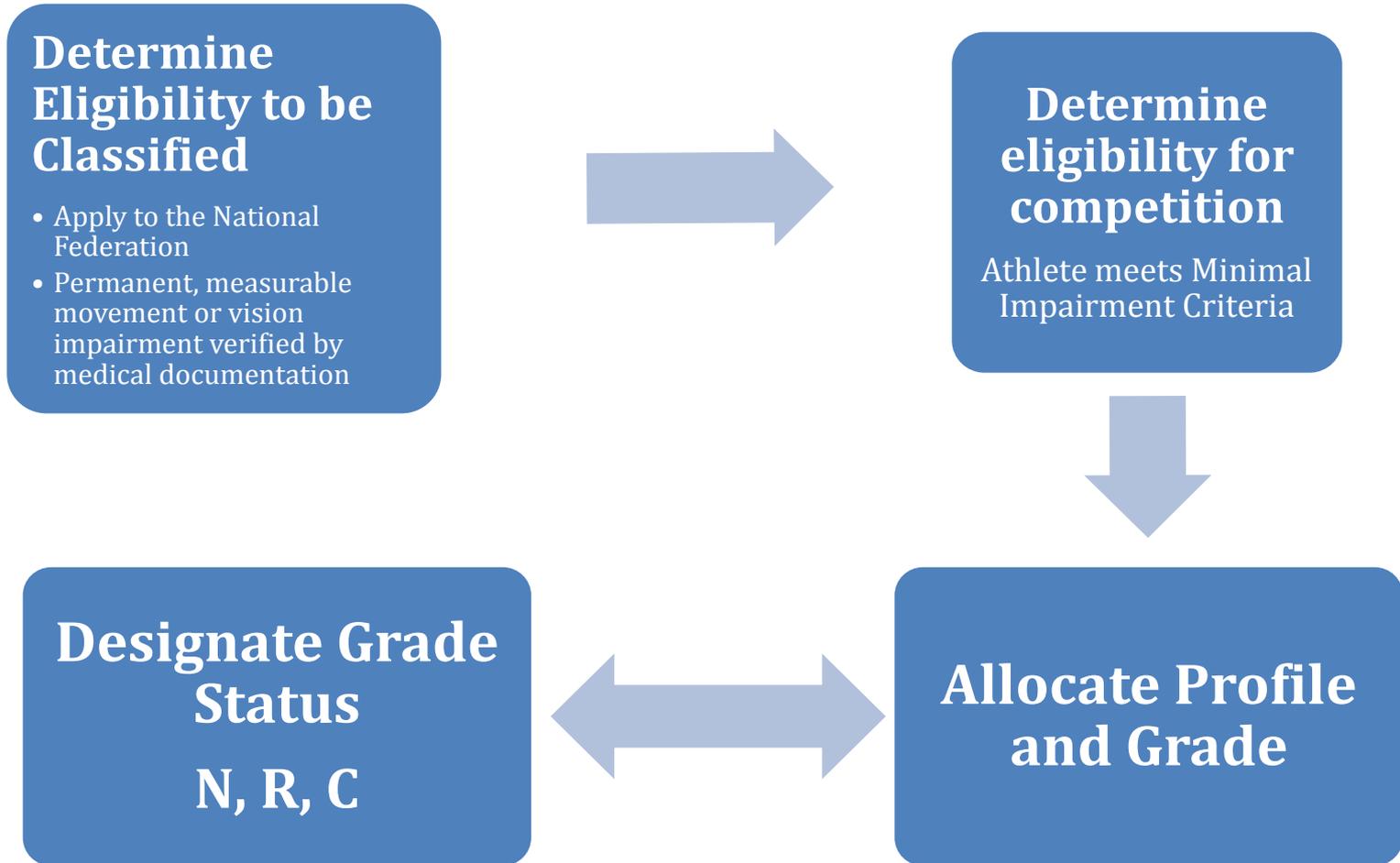


Minimal Impairment Criteria

- There must be more than 15% loss of function in an area.
- Each impairment must be able to be measured objectively.



The Classification Process



Classification Procedure

1. Athlete Interview
2. Select Assessment Scale(s)
3. Assess Athlete
4. Select Functional Profile and Grade
5. Observe on and off the horse
6. Confirm the competition grade

Classification Assessment

1. Application
2. Consent for classification
3. Certificate of Medical diagnosis – verification of diagnosis by a doctor
 - May require additional medical reports (MRI, EMG, Radiographs)
4. Athlete interview
 - Medical history, current impairments, medications, compensating aids
5. Selection of measurement tools by Classifier
 - Power/strength, range of motion, and/or coordination

Classification Assessment

1. Determination of a Profile and Grade (Sport Class)
2. Determination of Status
 - New, Review, Confirmed
3. Compensating Aids
 - Based on profile
 - Non-standard aids require further approval

Classification Assessment

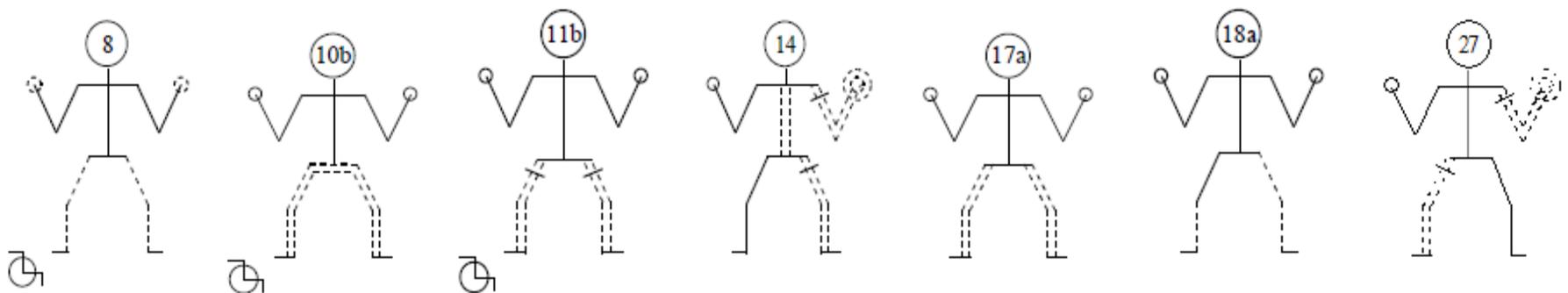
- Power/Strength
- Range of Motion
- Coordination
- Vision

AS RELATED to the SPORT

*What is **NOT** considered: endurance/fatigue, pain, hypersensitivity, hyperflexibility, hypotonia

Classification Profiles

- 37 eligible Profiles for PE sport
- Additional Profiles for non-eligible condition
- Profiles with similar functional impairments or activity limitations are grouped together into the same Grade/Sport Class



Dressage Classification Grades

- **Grade I:** Severe impairments affecting all 4 limbs and trunk. Athlete typically requires use of a wheelchair. May be able to walk with an unsteady gait. Trunk and balance are severely impaired.
- **Grade II:** Severe impairment of the trunk and minimal impairment of the upper limbs, or moderate impairment of the trunk, upper, and lower limbs. Most use a wheelchair.
- **Grade III:** Severe impairments in both lower limbs with minimal or no impairment of the trunk or moderate impairment of the upper and lower limbs, and trunk. Some may use a wheelchair.

Dressage Classification Grades

- **Grade IV:** Severe impairment or deficiency of both upper limbs or a moderate impairment of all 4 limbs or short stature. Able to walk, typically do not use a wheelchair. Includes B1 visual impairment.
- **Grade V:** Mild impairment of movement or muscle strength or deficiency of one limb or mild deficiency of 2 limbs. Includes B2 visual impairment.
- **Grade NE:** Athletes who do not meet the minimal eligibility criteria, do not have a qualifying medical diagnosis, or are not able to complete the classification testing due to pain.

Para-Driving Classification

- Uses the same Profiles as PE Dressage
 - Not all profiles are eligible for para-driving
- Only 2 Grades are available
- Classification procedure is the same, but takes into account different physical requirements of driving



Driving Classification Grades

- **Grade I:** Moderate to severe impairment in all 4 limbs and trunk who may not be able to walk; moderate to severe impairment in 3 limbs and trunk; severe impairment in two unilateral limbs and trunk; severe impairment in upper limbs and trunk; severe impairment in upper limbs with mild impairment in lower limbs; severe impairment in upper limbs. Most athlete will use a wheelchair in daily life for some or all mobility.
- **Grade II:** Includes a range of impairments, such as: mild impairment of all 4 limbs and trunk; severe to moderate impairment in 1 or 2 lower limbs; 2 limbs on the same side; moderate to mild impairment of 1 or 2 upper limbs. Less impairment compared to Grade I.
- **Not Eligible:** Profiles 20, 23, 29, 30, 36, 37a, 37b, 38, 39, 41, 48

PE Classification Status

- **NEW:** athletes in the process of completing classification; have completed the bench testing, but not the riding observation.
- **REVIEW:** athletes who have been assigned a Profile/Grade but may have recent impairments or are subject to change (for example: multiple sclerosis); will be given a review date.
- **CONFIRMED:** athletes who have been assigned a Profile/Grade and do not require further evaluation; impairments that are stable, with no expectation of change.

Re-classification

- There are protest or appeal procedures available to the athlete at a FEI competition (see FEI Classification Manual).
- USEF follows FEI rules and Classification Manual regarding classification and reclassification.
- Re-classification will be considered only for athletes who are designated Review, or with the submission of evidence of a change in medical status or the onset of a new medical condition.

Classification Issues

- Misrepresentation
 - Intentional cheating
 - Pain
 - Proof of misrepresentation
- Medications
- Fatigue or fluctuating conditions
- New injuries
- Legal concerns
 - Lawsuits
 - “Permission” to compete
- Classifier experience

Future of Classification

- IPC movement towards evidence-based, sport-specific classification process.
- FEI is beginning significant research projects relating to the classification system.
 - What is actually needed for PE sport (dressage is being researched first).
 - How will the sport requirements impact the current system?
 - Reassessment of the minimal impairment criteria.
 - Assessment of the impact of visual or intellectual impairments.
- Overall goal of keeping PE sport in the Paralympic Games.
 - Sport must be easy to understand by spectators.

How to find a Classifier in your Area?

- For a U.S. (National) or FEI (International) Classification, please contact:

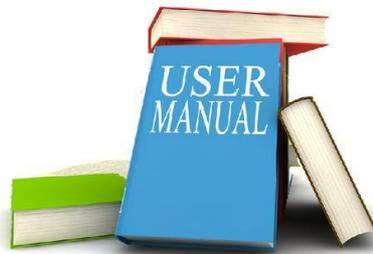
LAUREEN K. JOHNSON, USEF Director
Para-Equestrian & Vaulting;
lkjohnson@usef.org

Resources

- Federation Equestrian International
 - www.fei.org
 - International Governing Body. Oversight for International Competition, Including International Level Rules and Classification
- United States Equestrian Federation
 - www.usef.org
 - National Governing Body, Oversight for National Competition, Including National Level Rules and Classification
- United States Para-Equestrian Association
 - www.uspea.org
 - Official Para-Dressage Affiliate to USEF, Oversight for Grassroots Education & Talent Development

Links

FEI Classification Manual COPY



These presentations are part of a library of Para-Equestrian educational courses which include:

- 1. Introduction to Para-Equestrian Dressage*
- 2. Introduction to Para-Equestrian Driving*
- 3. Understanding Para-Equestrian Classification*

Attributions

Course material was produced and narrated by Sarah Armentrout
Head of School, Carlisle Academy, October 2017

with contributions from

- Joann Benjamin PT, HPCS, FEI Classifier
 - Tina Wentz, PT, FEI Classifier
- Kerri Sowers, PT, DPT, NCS, FEI Classifier

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