



*Lyse Blanchard*

*Rachelle Halpenny a participé à des compétitions athlétiques depuis 1976. Le fait qu'elle soit handicapée est, pour elle, accessoire. Elle a concouru à deux occasions dans les Jeux de Paralysie Cérébrale et a remporté des médailles, d'or pour la plupart, dans de nombreuses épreuves. C'est en tant qu'athlète, et non en tant qu'athlète handicapée, qu'Halpenny espère être reconnue pour ses accomplissements.*

# *Rachelle Halpenny:*

A woman  
first,  
an athlete  
second,  
and  
way at  
the other  
end of  
the scale,  
disabled

This is how Rachelle Halpenny prefers to describe herself.

"In fact, in my husband's eyes or anyone who knows me, I'm not really disabled. What I can't do is not what I want to do. If I want to do something, I'll do it. If you talk to a disabled person who wants it all, that's a different philosophy. That person has something taken away from them so they are really adjusting to something. I don't know what I'm missing, so I'm not adjusting at all; I'm just being me. What I find with other people is that I have to adjust to them. I have to say, 'Yeah, I guess it is a rough life,' to make them feel better. Just as I came into this building, a gentleman was walking in and said to me, 'It's not good weather for that machine.' I thought he was talking about my car. I said, 'That thing will go anywhere.' I thought he was talking about my car, and he was talking about my crutches."

Rachelle began competing in disabled sports in 1976 and her achievements are incredible. Her special-

ties are rifle shooting, table tennis, swimming, archery, and track and field; she has won medals (mostly gold) in all of these events.

"Up to 1978 I was classified as a wheelchair paraplegic. There was no such thing as Cerebral Palsy Games, so I competed as someone with a spinal-cord injury, which in some events gave me an advantage and in other events gave me a disadvantage. Then, in 1978, they introduced CP events. That year I went to Scotland for the fourth international games, as the first and only Canadian to participate. I didn't even have a coach or a luggage carrier. I came back with five medals. Then, at the next international games four years later in Denmark, I came back with four medals. This time there were eighteen competitors from Canada, and we had more than enough coaches."

Rachelle is married, the mother of two children, aged eight and two. She contracted cerebral palsy when she was nine months old. Up to the age of nine, she was severely disabled. She returned to college at age twenty and has a diploma in recreation. She now holds a number of jobs: she developed and runs a swimming program at the YM/YWCA; she works for the Department of Veterans Affairs; and she will soon be doing some coaching at the University of Ottawa. But Rachelle is no stranger to juggling numerous activities during one day.

"For the Denmark games in the summer of 1982, I found out in March that I was going, as a fill-in. They choose a team from the year before, and the year before I did not compete because I had the baby, I was breast-feeding, and all the rest of it. However, when someone dropped out, they looked at my results from the other games and asked me to go. So from March 28 I had to cram in a year's training. I had not trained for a long time. I was still an administrator, vice-chair of Cerebral Palsy Sports, so I had to make arrangements. My husband would get home at 5:30, take care of the kids, and I would bow out to go swimming, then to table tennis at Carleton University, and then I'd just go, go, go all the time.

During the day, in order to get ready for track events, I'd put the baby on my lap and I'd wheel a mile or two. I'd swim a mile at night, too. I lost a lot of weight and I gained a lot. During the weekends, I would be going around the track, getting stroke performance, perfection. It's all in the way you push, like running. What's important is the way you start, where you hold the wheels, where you get the best momentum. You start differently on sprints than you would on a 5,000-metre race. In table tennis I played against both able-bodied and wheelchair persons."

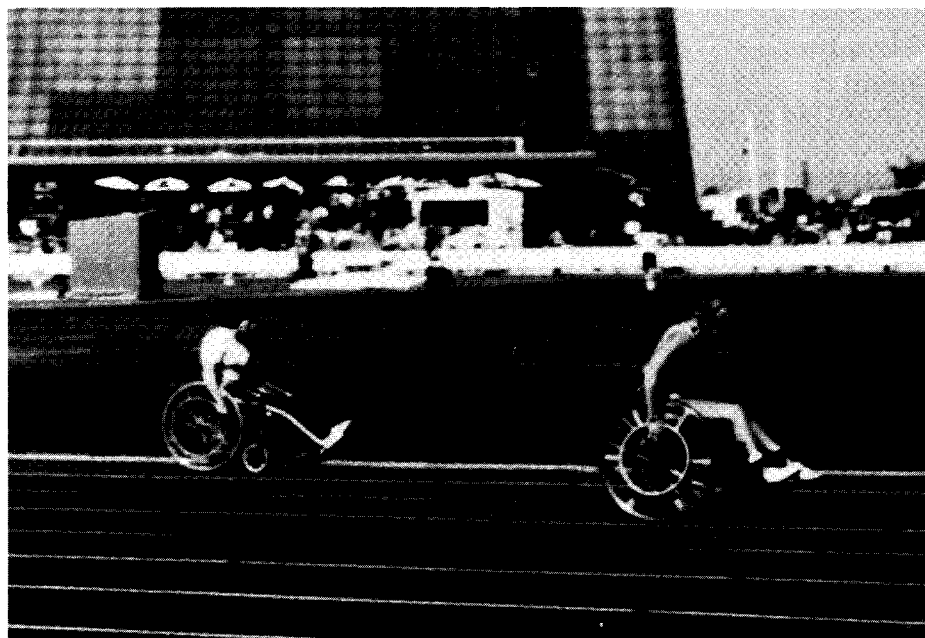
As a female athlete, Rachelle has encountered her share of bizarre and sometimes amusing situations.

"My favourite event is rifle shooting. When I was competing as a spinal-cord athlete, rifle shooting was an event. However, it was not an event when I joined the Cerebral Palsy Games. My other event is archery, and both these events are

ing for women. It was only after I had lifted — they let me lift and I won against the men in my weight bracket — that I got disqualified because I was a woman."

According to Rachelle, the media are not doing a good job of dealing with sport for the disabled, either in quality or quantity. Consequently, most people are confused, misinformed, and unaware of what goes on.

"Once we leave the host city we never see what has been written up, but what is usually written about me or about any other handicapped athlete is that we are superheroes. The attitude is that we are superheroes not because we win the medal, but because we are handicapped and we win the medal. My philosophy is totally against that attitude. I find that I am very proud of myself not because I'm handicapped and won the medals, but because I won the medals. When a local television station did a story



for men only. I was always the only woman competing. When I went overseas to the games, there were no women, so I ran against the men and won anyway. There were several protests from other countries that I should not be receiving the medal because it is not right to beat men.

"Another story that I like to tell is about weight lifting. In the first year that I was competing, I did not realize that there was no weight lift-

on me, a crew came to my house. They followed me around for about three days with their cameras, and I thought it was going to be good. It was good, but it still had that real touch of pity. Nobody who knows me should pity me, because I have everything going for me."

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*Lyse Blanchard is a state feminist, an armchair "jick" (female jock), and a founding member of CAAW&S.*

