

Davis Remarks on National Junior Disability Championships

SPEECH OF

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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* Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Madam Speaker, today I would like to recognize the participants and sponsors of the National Junior Disability Championships. This annual competition, founded by Wheelchair Sports USA, has helped teach the value of sports to young athletes since 1984. It began as a small competition for wheelchair athletes ages 7 to 21. Since that time, it has continued to grow both in nature and number. The competition expanded in scope to include athletes with many different types of disabilities, not just those in wheelchairs. Athletes with spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, blindness, and many other disabilities now participate in the competition. Reflecting this expansion in mission, the sponsoring organization changed its name to Wheelchair & Ambulatory Sports USA. The diversity of sports offered also increased. Although only three sports were initially offered, athletes now participate in seven areas of competition. Over 300 athletes from around the country participate each year.

* For some of these young athletes, the National Junior Disability Championships competition provides a pathway to qualify for the U.S. Paralympics team. More importantly, however, it provides these young people the opportunity to develop the values of teamwork, sportsmanship, hard work, and perseverance offered by sports. Participants also benefit in other ways. For example, research shows the importance of physical activity in both the physical and mental development of children. This event removes the barriers that so often prevent these young people with disabilities from participating in sports, allowing them to reap the benefits of athletic competition.

* In closing, I would also like to congratulate the athletes participating in the National Junior Disability Championships. It takes great perseverance, commitment, and strength of spirit to participate in this type of competition. I wish you the best of luck as you prepare for your respective athletic events.