

Reach for the

# Racquet



The Sky's  
the Limit

Meva Singh Dhesi

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SPORT

Reach for the Racquet

*To Para-badminton*

*This book is also dedicated to those who despite encountering difficult situations, make the most of life and empower others.*

**Meva Singh Dhesi**

**Reach for the**

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The stories in this book reflect the author's recollection of events. Dialogue has been recreated from memory.

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# FOREWORD



It is both a privilege and a pleasure to have been invited by Meva to write a foreword to his book. We have known each other for many years and have a shared joy in seeing disability badminton morph into a full-fledged Paralympic sport. However, it has not been without its hiccups and challenges along the way and there remain further opportunities for additional classifications and events to be embraced into future Paralympic Games. As Meva has illustrated throughout his book, one must have aspirations!

In addition to the sterling work and advocacy that Meva and many of his colleagues have put into spreading the word for the acceptance of badminton as being a sport in which many with disabilities can participate; much has also been done in parallel to aid inclusive badminton through the governance of the sport.

Throughout the period of my involvement with badminton for those with disabilities the governance of para-badminton has transited through being represented internationally by IBAD (the International Badminton Association for the Disabled) to become the PBWF (Para-Badminton World Federation), which eventually merged with the BWF (Badminton World Federation). It is with the backing of the BWF (the established and internationally recognised world governing body for the Olympic sport) that para-badminton finally gained acceptance as a Paralympic sport and was included in the Tokyo Paralympic Games in 2021.

The merger between the PBWF and the BWF was a happy coming together of knowledge, experience, commitment, and resources. It was this combination, plus greater knowledge and acceptance of badminton as being a sport in which those with disabilities could compete at a high level, which encouraged Member Associations of the BWF to embrace this aspect of badminton within their governance structures. This is now reflected in the fact that the membership of the Executive Board of the BWF includes a Vice-President for Para-Badminton, and the BWF Council now includes the Chair of the Para-Badminton Athletes' Commission in its membership. Whilst in some Member Associations, disability / para-badminton continues to have a National Disability Organisation as its governing body (often for very good reasons), I am pleased that in England, and many other nations, it is now embedded in the National Governing Body (NGB) for Badminton.

This embracing of disability / para-badminton has not been without its teething problems – often arising from a mixture of fears of the unknown and concerns about expectations. Even now I never tire of saying “see the ability, not the disability”!

Although para-badminton was not in the 2012 Paralympics in London, nevertheless that event did much to raise the profile and awareness of what could be achieved by those who had disabilities of one sort or another. Fortunately, the graphics which accompanied the televised events did much to explain the various classifications and events within them. This, I think, helped so much in embodying disability / para sports in the minds of so many across the world.

The first experience that my wife and I had working with athletes with disabilities stretches back some forty years at a multi-sports event, and we came away from that with feelings of both exhaustion and elation! This event was not intended for talented athletes but to give disabled young people the experience of the joy of sport and the social benefits that it could engender.

Many involved with able-bodied sport tend to think that, with rare exceptions, success at national / international level comes from young people following a “performance pathway”, and largely that is true. However, one cannot approach disability / para sport with the same mind-set. True, some disabilities are present at birth or in early years, but so many others come to disability / para sport as a result of illness, accident or injury experienced much later in life – as in Meva's case. Often, prior to that life changing event, they have already experienced the joy of participation and success in sport as an able-bodied participant. The fact that life (and successful participation in sport) does not cease comes as a surprise and a challenge to many – as it did

with Meva. However, he is not alone in having this experience and if this book does nothing else let us hope that it inspires others to engage or re-engage with sport (in our case, badminton!).

Only a very few years ago, nobody would have dreamt that a well-funded squad of four, internationally ranked, para-badminton players would be training full time with the goal of representing Great Britain at the Tokyo 2021 Paralympic Games. From years of dreams and aspirations it is so good to see how far we have advanced – nevertheless we must continue to “DREAM BIG! And aspire to even greater successes.”

I wish Meva every success with his book and if it inspires you, do not delay, get involved NOW!

–Derek Batchelor

*Vice President, Badminton England*



# A Message of Support From Paul Kurzo

It is a great honour to be able to contribute to Meva's book. We have known each other for a long time dating back to 1995 when I played my first international tournament in Stoke Mandeville, England. I remember seeing this man with a turban chase the shuttlecock across the court. It was the first European Para-Badminton Championships and the birthplace of the International Badminton Association for the Disabled (IBAD). The 6 player countries that made up IBAD at the time were England, Germany, Israel, Switzerland, The Netherlands and Wales. Italy, the 7th country, initially took part in an observational capacity in an effort to learn how it worked.

My doubles partner that year was Jim Mackay and we finished third. You will read more about Jim later in the book. Unfortunately, Meva and I never played against each other as he was in the standing class, and I was in the wheelchair class. However, until my retirement at the World Championships 2005, we continued to see each other regularly at events. I have fond memories of many of the stories Meva recalls in this book. It was quite chaotic in the early days of para-badminton and we both saw the sport evolve with more players joining each year. We also saw it transform from a leisure activity to what it is today, a professional sport.

One thing that is special about the para-badminton community is the social interaction between the players. I remember we would have lengthy discussions as to how we could develop para-badminton and that one day we would hope to see it become a Paralympic sport.

Amazingly, some 20 years later, para-badminton will debut at the Tokyo 2021 Paralympic Games. While it is fantastic to see our vision come true, there is also a hint of regret that we were never able to participate at the Paralympics as players.

Meva, thank you for always being a good friend and companion. Your contribution to developing our beloved sport of para-badminton will always be treasured. I hope readers of this book enjoy your memories from the court.

–Paul Kurzo

*BWF Vice President for Para-Badminton and former player*



# A Message of Support From Richard Perot

I first met Meva, during the Spanish Para-Badminton International back in 2011. He was part of the English squad, a determined player and an obvious character!

As a new athlete in the para-badminton community, what amazed me was the cross-nation connection between players, and Meva was one of the first to welcome our newly founded French team into the “para-badminton family.” Over the years and at different championships around the world I had the opportunity to have time with Meva where I discovered his charity activities and tireless strength to promote sport for the disabled. He has been really inspirational for me. He changed the way I see myself, being an international athlete, and the values I could carry.

Back in my country, it clearly pushed me and some of my team-mates to commit in a similar way. We decided to form FRAP (France Para-Badminton) of which I was, until today, the president. Later, following Meva’s path, I was elected Chair of the newly created BWF Athletes’ Commission.

We need people like Meva. I am so glad to have met him and I am sure there is a full generation of disabled young athletes he can inspire. Keep up the good job mate!

–Richard Perot

*BWF Chair, Para-Badminton Athletes' Commission*

*BWF Council Member*

*BWF Integrity Ambassador*

*IPC Agitos Foundation Proud Paralympian Educator*

*FRAP France Para-Badminton President*

*France National Paralympic Committee Ambassador*



# A Message of Support From Mike Robinson

Meva is a larger-than-life character. This book tells his amazing story from experiencing a horrific car accident to international success on the badminton court. Faced with a life changing event, this book tells how tenacity and a real determination to succeed can bring achievement, fulfilment, and great happiness.

Wishing you every success with the book.

–Mike Robinson

*Chair, Badminton England*