Mass Participation

The expansion of opportunities for sport and play
for all people, regardless of race,
geographical location, social class or sex

Main Aim: To bring positive personal and social change to the lives of an increasing number of people by incorporating the Olympic Ideals into their daily living

Specific Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate tolerance of other people's varying abilities during physical activity and sport.
- Demonstrate inclusiveness in an equal and open manner within group activities in a sporting context.
- Exhibit an understanding of the Paralympic Games and carry out specific activities relating to this topic.
- Demonstrate an ability to create/organize/host activities that extend beyond the Olympic Club to family, friends, school and community.

Mass participation, or “Sport for All” is an Olympic Ideal that embodies sport as a human right for all individuals regardless of race, social class or sex. The movement was first conceived by the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin and his colleagues. They stated that “the goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of mankind everywhere.” This concept - of bringing sport to everyone, everywhere, is still very much part of the Olympic culture today – the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) Sport for All Commission is continually working to promote sport and physical education around the globe. This unit Mass Participation explores mass participation as an Olympic Ideal, its history, and ways to include this very important Olympic Ideal in everyday life – reaching the largest number of people possible.

While most people think of the Olympics as purely a competition between the world’s best athletes every four years, Olympism is much more than that. Since the conception of the Modern Olympic Games at the end of the 19th century, it was Pierre de Coubertin’s idea that elite sport (the Olympic Games) would inspire everyone to practice sport.
“In order for a hundred people to take part in physical culture, it is necessary for fifty to take part in sport, in order for fifty to take part in sport, twenty must specialize, in order for twenty to specialize; five must be capable of astonishing feats of prowess”  

Pierre de Coubertin

The “Sport for All” philosophy does not assume that everyone ought to pole vault over a high bar or hurdle down a bobsleigh run. It does express the belief though, that a person’s sport opportunities should be determined by personal desire and should not be limited by factors of economics, sex, social class or race.

In 1919, de Coubertin wrote:

“All sports for all people. This is surely a phrase that people will consider foolishly utopian. That prospect troubles me not at all. I have pondered and studied it at length, and know that it is correct and possible”.

The future proved him right.

In recent history, the IOC has re-emphasized its commitment to Pierre de Coubertin’s vision, by setting up a Mass Sport Working Group in 1984, which evolved into the Sport for All Commission in 1986. The Commission was established to tackle how the Olympic Movement could help promote this mass participation ideal. The most important aim of the Commission is to encourage the practice of Sport for All, taking a special focus on the developing world, through International Federations, National Olympic Committees and National Sport Organizations. The Commission also encourages and supports the efforts and development of organizations such as the *National Olympic Academy of the Seychelles* which is involved in practicing mass participation and thereby furthering the dissemination of the health and social benefits to be gained by all members of the Seychellois society through regular physical exercise.

The increased participation of women is a prime case study of how discriminatory attitudes have changed since the inception of the Modern Games. In the Ancient Olympic Games, only free, Greek, men were allowed to participate. Women were prohibited from participating in the Ancient Olympic Games. They could not even enter the playing areas or the stadium as spectators. However, women held their own games at Olympia. Dedicated to the goddess Hera, the sister-wife of Zeus, these games evolved from traditional Greek fertility rites. According to some estimates, these games even pre-dated the exclusively male Ancient Olympic Games.

At the end of the 19th century when the Modern Games came into being, much debate took place on the principles of women’s participation. The founder of the Games, Pierre de Coubertin, declared he was against women’s participation expressing the opinion that if they could not play in every sport on equal terms with men, they should not be allowed to take part at all. This view was opposed by several International Olympic Committee (IOC) members who supported the position that women had the right to participate in the Games, competing in sports to suit their capabilities.
The first breakthrough in women’s participation took place at the second Olympics, the 1900 Paris Games. It was here that Charlotte Cooper became the first women’s Olympic champion by winning the gold medal in the tennis championship. The only other sport allowed at these Games for women was golf. Although swimming was added to the program in 1912, this purely symbolic gesture to women’s sport continued until 1924 when the IOC decided to open its doors for a larger participation of women in the Games. The road between the proposal and the implementation was not an easy one. Even in the Berlin Games in 1936, there were only four sports available to women. They were swimming & diving, fencing, athletics and gymnastics.

After World War II, the period between 1948 and 1968 marked a clear upward swing in the participation of women in sport around the world. Despite this, there were only five sports at London in 1948 and six sports at Mexico in 1968. In a period of twenty years only the introduction of volleyball for women was added to the Olympic program.

An example of the prevailing attitude towards women in sports appeared after the 800m track event, included in the Olympics for the first time in the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. It received negative publicity when several of the finishers lay exhausted around the track at the conclusion of the race. Consequently, medical professionals of the era labelled such endurance events for women as “unsafe”. Despite what now seems like foolish reasoning, all women’s events longer than half a lap (200m) were banned from the Olympics for a further 32 years.

The period from 1976 until 1992 marked an unprecedented worldwide advance in women’s sport. This advance was characterized by a large increase in the number of sports offered to women at the Olympics. By 1992, the number of sports open to women was twenty three adding: archery, badminton, basketball, cycling, equestrian events, field hockey, handball, hockey, judo, rowing, shooting, synchronized swimming, table tennis, tennis and yachting. Equestrian, shooting and yachting are, however, mixed events. At the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney, in 2000, women competed in twenty five of the twenty eight sports competed in and 132 events, or 44% of the total number of events. These figures are destined to rise still further in the future.
Women’s involvement in sport is increasing, not only as competitors, but in the administration and officiating elements as well.

"The IOC strongly encourages, by appropriate means, the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, particularly in the executive bodies of national and international sports organisations with a view to the strict application of the principle of equality of men and women."

Rule 2, Paragraph 5, Olympic Charter

The Olympic Movement has provided thousands of girls the opportunity to strive for parity with their brothers and to be the best they can be in the sporting arena. Countless female sporting role models now span the globe for aspiring young girls to look up to.

The history of women and the Olympic Games is just one example of how the ideal of mass participation has evolved over the years, there are many more! In another effort to increase participation and expand the Games to a larger population, the IOC also created the Paralympic Games – an international sporting event for athletes with disabilities.

"Sport is not a luxury pastime, an activity for the leisured few, nor merely a form of muscular compensation for brain work. For every man, woman or child, it offers an opportunity for self improvement quite independent of profession or position in life. It is the appendage of all, equally and to the same degree, and nothing can replace it."

Pierre de Coubertin

The history of the Paralympic movement is relatively new and goes back to 1948, when Sir Ludwig Guttmann introduced the first Stoke Mandeville Games for World War II veterans with spinal cord-related injuries. As time went by, multi-disability competitions developed, evolving into the Paralympic Games. The Paralympics quickly grew and became an important international sport event that is now recognized as an official equivalent of the Olympics for athletes with physical disabilities. This includes mobility disabilities, amputees, visual disabilities and those with Cerebral Palsy. The Paralympic Games have always been held in the same year as the Olympic Games. Since the Seoul Summer Games (1988) and the Albertville Winter Games (1992), they have also taken place at the same venues as the Olympic Games.

The Paralympic Games emphasize the lessons of mass participation, by providing for numerous levels of ability through a wide variety of sporting events and by demonstrating the commitment of the IOC to promote Sport for All. It is very important to be encouraged by this example from the IOC and promote sport for everyone at the local and national level.

As an output of racism – the belief that one ethnic group, race or religion is superior to another – other groups of people in addition to women and athletes with a disability have over the course of time, been denied the opportunity to participate in sport at the most basic levels let alone represent their country at the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games has on occasion been a venue for public
awareness about the lack of opportunities for certain groups (South Africa’s Apartheid 1964 -1992) and the Olympic Movement has made substantial efforts to protect and promote everyone’s opportunity to participate in sport at any level.

To continue Coubertin’s vision of a world built around the values of Olympism, we all need to embrace the value of accepting and welcoming others with varying levels of abilities and backgrounds into sports and games. There is a need to learn the skills that will provide a place for everyone to participate. There is a need to include people from various religious, ethnic and social backgrounds. As Pierre de Coubertin said:

“Olympism is a destroyer of dividing walls. It calls for air and light for all. It advocates a broad-based athletic education accessible to all, trimmed with athletic courage and the spirit of chivalry, blended with esthetic and literacy demonstrations, and serving as an engine for national life and as a basis for civic life. That is its ideal program.”

Mass Participation and the Olympic Movement go hand in hand. In fact, without a mass of participants, there would be no Olympic Games. Over time, the Ideal of Mass Participation or sport for all has evolved to include a growing number of people – specifically women, disadvantaged populations, and people with varying disabilities. Recognizing the vast benefits to participation in physical activity, it has become a priority to place sport in the lives of the entire world’s population by way of the International Olympic Committee, governments and other world bodies, like the United Nations. Olympic Club Facilitators and the Olympic Club programme have the unique opportunity to participate in this challenge to bring the benefits of sport, physical activity and Olympic education not only to the youth of the Seychelles, but to their friends, families, schools, communities and the nation as a whole. Every man, woman and child in the world has the right to participate in physical activity and benefit from the lessons it has to share – and the Olympic Clubs have an opportunity to help that become a reality in the Seychelles!