

Paralympics Can Be Watershed Moment for Russia, Officials Say

By [The Moscow Times](#)

March 07, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

The Sochi Paralympics will bring about wide-ranging change to the way Russians see disabled people, International Paralympic Committee president Philip Craven said Thursday.

Accessibility for disabled people has been a guiding principle of Olympic and Paralympic construction in Sochi, a contrast to the often difficult-to-navigate architecture that confronts many disabled people in Russia.

Even though Russia is a regular at the top of Paralympic medal tables, the Games have received almost no television coverage in the past, something that is set to change with about 180 hours of coverage promised by state channels.

"I truly believe Russia's first Paralympics can have the biggest impact on the host country, helping to transform the lives of 13 million Russians with an impairment," Craven said.

"Just by staging these Games, Russia is sending a clear message to the world that it is willing and wanting to change."

Compared with London, the host of the 2012 Summer Paralympics, Russia is at a "further back starting point" on attitudes toward disabled people, IPC spokesman Craig Spence said Thursday.

But that lays the ground for "monumental change here in Russia" thanks to the Paralympics, he said. "It's the athletes who will make that change."

The Paralympics run from Saturday through March 16.

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