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# UIPM PARA SPORTS ATHLETE OMAR BOUYOUCEF: 'I LIKE THE COMBINATION OF SKILL AND ENDURANCE'



He rose to the apex of one Paralympic discipline, and has tried his hand at many others since. Now Omar Bouyoucef of France is focusing on Para Laser Run, having been introduced to the sport during the UIPM 2018 Global Laser Run City Tour in Auch (FRA).

In this interview, Bouyoucef talks about why he has embraced this challenge, and UIPM Head of Classification Paul Baudet explains why the athlete can be a powerful role model for others interested in joining the UIPM Para Sports movement.

**Q: When did you first get involved in competitive sport?**

Omar Bouyoucef: In 1987 through wheelchair track and field athletics.

**Q: When did it become your goal to reach the Paralympics?**

Omar Bouyoucef: In 1990, after the exploits of the Auscitaine Martine Prieur, multiple medallists at the 1984 and 1988 Paralympics in pentathlon for the disabled (three throws and two races). I was spotted to create the first French sit cross-country ski team at the 1992 Games.



**Q: What did it mean to you to win the gold and bronze medals at the 1994 and 1998 Winter Paralympics?**

Omar Bouyoucef: It was the consecration of our sport – first gold medal in the history of biathlon. In 1998, I enjoyed the recognition of the National Order of Merit by President Jacques Chirac.

**Q: What is your physical disability, and how does it affect your daily life?**

Omar Bouyoucef: I had polio when I was one year old. I had to wear an appliance until I was 16. I use a wheelchair, accessibility is important to me.

**Q: In what ways has this adversity shaped your attitude to sport?**

Omar Bouyoucef: Disability has strengthened the mind, an asset for sport.

**Q: Why have you tried so many different sports in your career, and which one have you enjoyed most?**

Omar Bouyoucef: I grew up in a centre, I had the opportunity to try archery, rifle shooting, swimming, track and field and Nordic skiing – later I enjoyed it the most.

**Q: What do you like about Para Laser Run, and would you like to see more competitive opportunities?**

Omar Bouyoucef: It has the same qualities as biathlon: skill and endurance. I'm looking forward to a national Para Laser Run competition, I'm training for it...



**Q: You spent 12 years as President of Comite Handisport Gers ... how much has disability sport developed during your athletic career?**

Omar Bouyoucef: Since 1996 all athletes have had the same distinction: national order of merit

and the legion of honour and since 2008 the same medal bonus and media coverage too.

**Q: What are your future sporting goals, and how do you continue to motivate yourself?**

Omar Bouyoucef: I would like to develop Para Laser Run in all disabled sports committees and clubs too. The ideal would be to have an agreement between the disabled sports federations and Modern Pentathlon.



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**Paul Baudet: 'His sense of performance and wellbeing**

**commands respect'**

**Q: When did you first become aware of Omar's interest in Para Laser Run?**

Paul Baudet: When I was in charge of organising a classification system for the practice of PLR (Para Laser Run), I had the privilege to discover a video of Omar perfectly at ease with the discipline (I understood later why, with his multiple Paralympic medals!) and thus showing the field of possibilities with few means and a lot of enthusiasm.

**Q: What medical support is required to enable him to compete?**

Paul Baudet: The objective of being able to practise the PLR remains to have easy and safe access to a new discipline that is a source of pleasure and satisfaction. Also, the fraternity which binds the athletes is often enough to answer the daily problems. Nevertheless, a competent medical or paramedical supervision, especially aware of the particular problems of people with spinal cord injuries, for example, avoids any disappointment.

**Q: Have you worked closely with Omar on the project? What kind of character is he?**

Paul Baudet: Adjusting the discipline to the needs of the athlete and not the other way round is a priority! In this sense, Omar's intervention is a major asset. His sense of performance and wellbeing commands respect because his background speaks for itself!

**Q: How can the UIPM Para Sports movement supports more athletes like Omar to get involved?**

Paul Baudet: The key words in order to promote the practice of Paralympic disciplines are

accessibility, safety and satisfaction.

Thus, by showing the way, Omar reminds us how deficiencies, technology or the environment are not obstacles but rather challenges to overcome to achieve real sporting feats. I hope to see more and more competitions in the future, at the same venues as able-bodied athletes, with the prospect of another Paralympic medal around Omar's neck!