



Sir Ludwig Guttman

Early interests

Ludwig Guttman was born on 3 July 1899 to an Orthodox Jewish family in North-Eastern Germany. An active child, Guttman was a keen sports player and Scout leader in his youth. He was also a bright, if not always model, student who had an interest in history but a burning ambition to be a doctor. In 1918, as Germany sought to replace staff lost from hospitals due to World War One, Guttman volunteered at a hospital for miners injured by industrial accidents and took on his first position in medicine.

At the hospital he came across a patient who had recently been paralysed in an accident. When Guttman began to make notes he was told by a senior physician 'don't bother, this one will be dead within weeks'. Sure enough, the patient's condition deteriorated rapidly and as a result of improper care, the paralysed miner passed away within five weeks of Guttman meeting him. The young Guttman never forgot this patient and the experience left a marked impression on him.

The rise of the Nazis

After World War One had finished, Guttman went on to study medicine at Freiburg University. He experienced anti-semitism on campus and worked with other Jewish students to counter it where possible. In 1924 he had qualified as a doctor and sought a position in a hospital. By chance, he found a vacancy in neurosurgery and quickly developed a reputation as an outstanding expert in this field.

In 1933 however, he was immediately affected by the Nazis' rise to power when decrees restricting the work of Jewish doctors came into effect, stripping Guttman of his position at Breslau Municipal Hospital. Like many other Jews, Guttman believed the Nazis would only remain in power for a few years at most and rather than leave Germany, he transferred to a Jewish hospital where he became director. In his capacity as director, Guttman protected Jews from deportation and imprisonment, claiming they were too ill to be moved. For his efforts he had several run-ins with the Gestapo. By 1939, the situation for German Jews had greatly deteriorated and when Guttman was offered a chance to move to the United Kingdom with his family, he took the opportunity to emigrate from Germany.

Stoke Mandeville

Guttman's emigration most likely saved his life; later in 1939 World War Two began and Nazi policy towards the Jews took increasingly radical turns. In Guttman's new home of



Britain, the devastating injuries suffered by some soldiers during the war placed doctors like him in high demand and he set about rebuilding his life and career. In 1943, the British Government approached Guttman and asked him to set up the UK's first spinal cord injury centre at Stoke Mandeville, Buckinghamshire.

Guttman became director of the new hospital and began overseeing the patients. Recalling his experiences as a young volunteer and aware of the shortcomings of care for patients with spinal cord injuries, Guttman looked into new methods of treatment at Stoke Mandeville. One of the avenues that he explored was disability sports. After trying out several sports which were so violent that they gave patients new injuries, Guttman settled on a number of sports for his patients. The results were of obvious benefit; not only did patients undertake required physical therapy but they also re-established their confidence by taking part in competition. By 1948, Guttman had decided to formalise the sports activity at the Stoke Mandeville Centre by organising a proper competition.

The Paralympics

On 28 July 1948 - the same day that the London Olympics of that year opened, the first Stoke Mandeville games took place for disabled patients. The date was no accident – Guttman believed disabled people deserved recognition within society and the chance to demonstrate their capabilities. Within four years, the annual Stoke Mandeville games had become so popular that in 1952, a team of Dutch disabled veterans competed against British patients. The event continued to grow in international recognition from there and in 1960 the games were held in Rome following on from the Olympic Games held there earlier in the year.

The games became what we now know as the Paralympics, and take place every four years after the Olympics. In 2012, the Paralympics will return to their place of origin, Great Britain. Athletes from around the world will compete in British venues, one of which will be the Guttman Stadium in Stoke Mandeville.

The Paralympics is called such as it is a competition which runs in parallel to the main Olympics.