

OLYMPIC DILEMMA: *A Double Amputee in the Olympics?*

(by Shane Hanson, ISU 2008 PTE graduate, used with permission)



Introduction:

Oscar Pistorius, a double amputee from South Africa, attempted to qualify for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing as a track and field runner. If his arms were the limbs that were amputated, there may not have been a great deal of thought about this athlete. However, his legs were the amputated appendages, which makes the situation much more amazing. As a result, there was a great deal of controversy that swirled around Pistorius, because he fashioned his lower extremities with prosthetic blades that the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) deemed to be advantageous. This view, as well as other reasons, led the group to take the stance that Pistorius should not be allowed to compete for the Olympics regardless if his time was below the qualifying time. Needless to say, attorneys, arguing on behalf of Pistorius, soon were involved. The New York legal firm of Dewey and Leboeuf took legal action against the IAAF demanding that the decision be overturned.

The attorneys prevailed in the court hearing allowing Pistorius to legally qualify for the Olympics. The court deemed that there was not enough evidence to prove that Pistorius's flexible j-shaped blades, attached below his knees, gave him an advantage. The beauty of this case from a scientific standpoint, was that the decision was based on science and a commitment to a fair playing field rather than to emotion. There are people who still believe that Pistorius should not have been able to attempt to qualify. In the end, these critics more than likely were silenced when the athlete was unable to reach a time that opened the door to Olympic competition.

The 2012 Summer Olympics seem to be a viable opportunity for another Pistorius attempt. When this point in time arrives, the chance of another controversial case is sure to arise. The scientific experts will once again analyze and defend the evidence.

Support Group Member - Team and Individual Tasks:

As a member of the legal team that supports Oscar Pistorius being allowed to use prosthetic legs during Olympic competition, you need to do the following:

- scientifically analyze the evidence associated with the use of prosthetic and human legs in running

- examine the claims of the opponents that the prosthetic legs provide Pistorius with an advantage during competition;
- examine the issue from all sides;
- convince the court that Oscar Pistorius should be allowed to use prosthetic legs during Olympic competition.

Opponent Group Member - Team and Individual Tasks:

As a member of the legal team that opposes Oscar Pistorius being allowed to use prosthetic legs during Olympic competition, you need to do the following:

- scientifically analyze the evidence associated with the use of prosthetic and human legs in running
- examine the claims of the supporters that the prosthetic legs do not provide Pistorius with an advantage during competition;
- examine the issue from all sides;
- convince the court that Oscar Pistorius should not be allowed to use prosthetic legs during Olympic competition.

Process:

1. Review the problem statement.
2. Identify what you know and what you need to know on the basis of the problem statement.
3. Identify a variety of resources, including those outside the internet, that can be used to shed light on the problem.
4. Analyze the credibility of each source you have identified for use.
5. Research arguments for or against the proposal.
6. Analyze evidence associated with the use of prosthetic and human legs in running.
7. Discuss various arguments and evidence with others, classifying and analyzing arguments and evidence.
8. Conduct research as necessary to analyze claims; find supporting and/or refuting evidence.
9. Develop your case both for your preference and in answer to the voices of protest.
10. Carefully prepare a formal presentation to be delivered to the court.
11. The opponents will explain the situation first, and then make their case. They have 25 minutes.
12. The proponents will explain the situation second, and then make their case. They have 25 minutes.
13. Each group will have a chance to provide a 5-minute rebuttal.
14. The court may ask questions at any time.
15. Following the conclusion of arguments, the court will reach and announce their decision whether or not to support the use of prosthetic legs during Olympic competition.

Guidance:

First and foremost, your work should reflect elements of critical thinking and avoid personal bias (but not necessarily personal values). Your oral and/or written reports might include many of the following critical thinking skills outlined by Marzano (1992):

1. **Comparing:** Identifying and articulating similarities and differences between things.
2. **Classifying:** Grouping things into definable categories on the basis of their attributes.
3. **Inducing:** Inferring unknown generalizations or principles from observations or analysis.
4. **Deducing:** Inferring unstated consequences and conditions from given principles and generalizations.
5. **Analyzing errors:** Identifying and articulating errors in one's own or others' thinking.
6. **Constructing support:** Constructing a system of support or proof for an assertion.
7. **Abstraction:** Identifying and articulating the underlying theme or general pattern of information.
8. **Analyzing perspectives:** Identifying and articulating personal perspectives about issues.

Teamwork Principle and Corollaries:

EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE EQUALLY TO THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM; EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO WORK DURING THE TIME GIVEN IN CLASS; GROUPS SHOULD AVOID WORKING INDIVIDUALLY AND THEN THROWING EVERYTHING TOGETHER AT THE LAST MINUTE.



- Every student will contribute to the discussion.
- Every student will be non-judgmental of other student's opinions. Listen to others' opinions. Let others finish talking before sharing your opinion or raising a question.
- Every student will have the opportunity to express his or her ideas without their ideas being attacked. Do not laugh at or attack other people's comments.
- Every student will ask questions when an idea or fact is presented that they do not understand.
- Remember that the teacher is primarily a facilitator and not an information giver.

As you work on this project, keep in mind the following points: One of the worst possible outcomes in any community is the collapse of communication. While you may have previously formed viewpoints on issues, emotional sentiments should not be the basis of decisions. As scientifically literate citizens we are under an obligation to understand, discuss, and analyze the issues in a deliberative and objective manner. Honest disagreements between members of the community should not lead inevitably to the conclusion that the motives of some are suspect. As a legal group member who may already have strong opinions on this matter, you have the obligation to understand the issue, do everything possible to help both sides understand and appreciate the concerns of the other, and then resolve the issue to the best of your ability working within the confines of the law.