

Sporting icons inspire Shafallah students

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First with the news and what's behind it

The three-day Annual International Shafallah Forum, which concluded on Wednesday, proved to be another milestone for Qatar as it brought together over 200 experts from more than 40 countries to highlight the importance of personal and physical development in the life of physically challenged people. They felt that proper education and providing economic and social opportunities were the key to growth of such people. They hailed Qatar for its efforts to ensure that people with disabilities are not marginalised in the society.



TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK - DOHA Disability knows no boundary. This was the message conveyed by the Olympic and Paralympic gold medallists from across the globe who joined some Shafallah's student athletes at a special sports clinic held at the Shafallah Center here on Wednesday.

The event, which brought together sport world's top players, including track and field Olympic gold medallist Carl Lewis, world champion skier Chris Waddell, Paralympic gold medallist high jumper Hou Bin and Qatar's very own weightlifting paralympian Ali Abdullah, was held as part of the 4th Annual International Shafallah forum which highlighted the theme 'Achieving Independence'.

"What these children want and need in life is not special treatment, rather they want level playing field where they can achieve as per their abilities. No where is this more possible than in athletics," Shafallah Chairman Hassan Ali bin Ali said on the occasion.

One of the halls of Shafallah was transformed into a mini sports field featuring track and field, bowling, basketball and high jump. The sportsmen, all donning their trademark sportswear, did not only demonstrate their top skills but also challenged the children in friendly competitions. Even the First Lady of Iceland Dorrit Moussaieff joined in the fun. Sir Philip Craven, president of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and an accomplished paralympian in the field of wheelchair basketball and swimming, was also present to share his story of personal triumph.

Talking to Qatar Tribune, Chris Waddell expressed his admiration for the facilities at Shafallah and its programme for physically challenged. Regarding the importance of sports in developing the confidence of people with disabilities, he said that sports breaks down a lot of barriers for people. Waddell was named in the US Disabled Ski Team three years after his accident which broke his back while ski racing. He competed in four winter Paralympics and three summer Paralympics and was also honoured by the Dalai Lama as an 'Unsung Hero of Compassion'. During the forum, not only did he mingle with the young athletes but also led a discussion on 'Entrepreneurial Opportunities and Innovative Supports for Person with Disabilities'.

High-jump gold medallist Hou Bin was thrilled on his first visit in Qatar and expressed his admiration at the efforts of Shafallah to communicate to the world the tremendous contribution of people with disabilities in different sections of the society. "I am very happy to see the forum delegates from different countries coming together to let the world know about the rights and talents of people with disabilities. When I pulled myself up to reach the 40 meter high kindling point to light the paralympic torch during the opening of the Beijing Paralympic Games last year, I demonstrated to the world what I can do. It was a show of the capability and talents of people with disabilities," the first Paralympian Ambassador of IPC said.

Carl Lewis who has bagged nine Olympic gold medals hailed the opportunity of working with people with disabilities. "Working with Best Buddies made me a better person. And I realised that it is important to let the world know that the people with disabilities are very much part of the society. In my case, I am fortunate to enjoy a wonderful life through the guidance of my parents as my role models. Sharing my time and what I have is one of the ways by which I give back to the society," he said. The philanthropist and one of the greatest Olympians of all time also said that he