



## THE INVICTUS GAMES TOURNAMENT

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Invictus games do not represent a mere tournament, being more than sheer sport. They generate a state of mind that steals our heart, challenge our thinking and change our lives. It is a project revolving around the idea of physical and psychological training and recovery through sport, which obviously has an educational part, too. Invictus games stimulate positive thinking, turn the military staff into kinder and self-assertive people, give hope to those who, overwhelmed by severe trauma, were not at all able to see the bright side of the picture. The injured servicemen managing to surpass their limits set an example for the entire society, instilling the sense of mutual humanity and team cohesion, beyond the well-known beneficial effects of sport and physical education.

**Keywords:** Invictus games; physical training; national team; Invictus serviceman; sports subjects.

Invictus Games<sup>1</sup> – an international sports event addressing all servicemen who got wounded or injured while being at disposal, retired, or simply withdrawn, irrespective of the military duty they have been assigned to. The games are focused on the changing power of sport that enables and facilitates the rehabilitation training (made up of all techniques that facilitate the injured servicemen's physical and psychological recovery), generating thereby mutual understanding, appreciation and due respect to all those people at service, defending their home country.

Using sport as a catalyst (along with joint health training), this tournament is against indifference and intolerance, preserving the sense of combat that characterizes those servicemen with "permanent medical disorders and disabilities", and featuring physical activities the latter can perform, once disabled. Sport therapy resorts to the customized principles of sport training to the serviceman's social, psychological and physical characteristics, being different from other methods already implemented in health care centres (such as therapy through movement – henceforth physiotherapy).

"Under the social aspect of the physical exercise effects, we admit that the military staff deployed in operational theatres, whose behaviour might have been affected, are likely to get integrated into society once they come back. Within the

sporting social framework, servicemen could express their personal beliefs and their belonging to social values, could interact and communicate efficiently with individuals without refraining from expressing themselves, could make the most of their behaviour and previously-developed kinetic experience without any normative (or perhaps just moral) constraints, which we label as freedom of acting through motion"<sup>2</sup>.

### Invictus Games

Starting 2010, the USA Army Defence Department runs annually *Warrior Games*, a national multisports event where war veterans take part along with the military staff (injured or wounded during active service). Until 2014, this sports tournament was hosted only by the Olympic and Paralympic Centre in Colorado Springs, the USA. Nevertheless, starting 2015, every edition has been alternatively run by a large military base/institution.

As for the edition in 2013, Harry, Duke of Sussex, the British prince, who at that time was promoted to captain in the Royal Army, in his capacity of helicopter pilot as arm of service, was invited to address the *Warrior Games* opening. This is what inspired Harry to organize and chair, one year later, the Invictus Games tournament.

The Invictus Games tournament is an international alternative to *Warrior Games*, featuring military designated people from various armies as participants. Prince Harry was determined to turn this event into an international version, once realizing the healing part of sport that helps

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"wounded combatants" recover not only physically, but also psychologically and socially.

The Invictus Games were officially launched on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014, by Prince Harry on Copper Box sports arena located in *Queen Elizabeth Olympic park* in London (also used as venue for the Olympic Games going on in the summer of 2012). Addressing his message in the opening ceremony, Prince Harry stated that "Invictus Games will prove the significant part sports play in urging and facilitating one's rehabilitation and recovery, showing thereby that life goes on beyond any disability"<sup>3</sup>, and being aimed in the long term to assure that the injured military personnel will never be ignored or neglected.

The first editions of the Invictus Games tournament hosted 400 participants from 13 nations across the world (Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Great Britain and the USA). These invited states were among the state armies that sided with Great Britain in military conflicts at that time. Except for Iraq, all the other states accepted the invitation (with the specification that no country on the African continent has ever been invited).

introduce the less popular sports disciplines to the large audience, I will try to briefly describe a few general rules applicable to these particular games.

*Wheelchair rugby*<sup>4</sup> runs on a standard basketball court, featuring two marked targetting parameters in the shape of rectangular areas, in the rear lines, inward the game surface. A team is made up of a maximum of 12 players, with 4 of them being holders, and the others, backups.

In order to score one point, the basketball holder must reach the targetting surface with a minimum of two wheels of his wheelchair, and the defence team is not allowed to have more than three players in the defence area of its targetting surface at the same time. A player that is on the ball must pass it over in a maximum of 10 seconds (or bounce it to the floor), while his team must surpass the middle line in a maximum of 12 seconds from the moment the player is on the ball (or score one point). A match is made up of two halves (rounds or rallies) of 10 minutes each, whereas attacks are restricted to 40 seconds complying, with the basketball rules. Physical contact and tackling are allowed to a certain extent.

*Wheelchair basketball*<sup>5</sup> is one of the most practiced sports discipline by kinetically-disabled

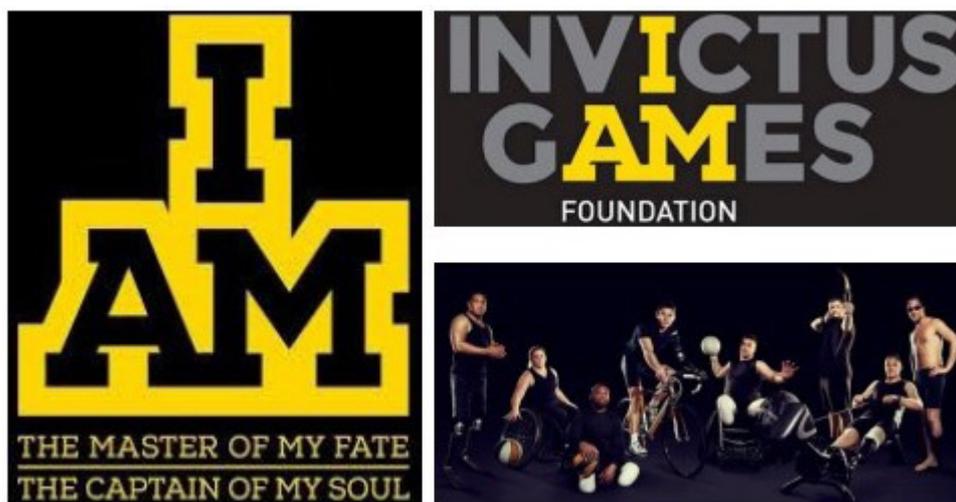


Figure 1 The *Invictus Games* logo and motto

During four days of tough tournament, the military personnel competed in nine sports disciplines (swimming, athletics, sitting volleyball, wheelchair rugby (also called *Murderball*), wheelchair basketball, archery, indoor canoeing, powerlifting, paralympic road cycling) in five distinct locations of the olympic park. In order to

people, being based on classic basketball (with the same court dimensions and basket height) with various changes and amendments to the rules, so that the wheelchair would be part of the game (and by extension, part of the player). A match is run in two halves of 15 minutes each, and a team is made up of maximum 12 players, with



5 holders. The great majority of the official rules of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) are applicable to wheelchair basketball, with the following changes:

- once on the ball, every player must push his chair wheels only twice (meanwhile he can hold the ball with his arms, never between his knees) before bouncing the ball again;
- every player is hypothetically surrounded by a cylinder, inside which no opponent is accepted, nor his hand or other means;
- as no advantage towards one's opponents is accepted, the players should stand up their wheelchair just for a while, as they are not allowed to lose full contact with the wheelchair bottom.

*Sitting volleyball*<sup>6</sup> is a combination between classic volleyball and sitzball (a German sport which is played with no net, but a lane that divides the two game surfaces while players stay seated on the floor). It was invented with the purpose of coming up with an interactive rehabilitation sport for the injured military personnel since sitzball was considered too passive. The rules of the game comply with the ones issued by The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) with the specification that players must have their bottom (at least one buttock) in tight contact with the floor each and every time they are on the ball, and service blockage is allowed. The dimensions of the game surface are 10 x 6 metres with a 2 metre attack distance, and the net height must equal 1.15 metres for men and 1.05 metres for women.

*Indoor rowing* is a relatively new sport that turned into a standalone one, which consists in the simulation of the movements performed by the rowers on a boat, by making use of a training device called ergometer. Using this particular device as a training means is the perfect method that enables rowers to keep fit when the weather forecast stops water training.

A lot of indoor races are run annually across the world, including *Indoor Canoeing World Championships* (WRIC), with the great majority of tournaments running on a 2000 m distance (1000 m for paracanoeing categories). Invictus games run two main trial matches against the clock (the distance run per time unit established) as follows: the endurance trial (4 minutes) and the sprint trial (1 minute).

*Powerlifting* is a sport which consists of one olympic bar bell lifting by resorting to three distinct

methods: sit-ups, sitting push and straightening. Servicemen are assigned three trials each for every lifting method. The competition is run in accordance with weight categories, and the designated winner is the serviceman that cumulates the maximum; only the maximal repetition for each type of lifting being on the record.

*Archery* consists of using an arch to shoot arrows on a target. This sport requires precision, endurance, and concentration from the involved servicemen that are subject to an intense effort during the competition run in two main sessions. The latter will concentrate their abilities to resist, using two types of arches (the olympic arch and the compound arch) and targeting 18 m distance marks.

The second edition of the Invictus Games took place in 2016, the runner being the city of Orlando, Florida (the USA). All the 10 sports events were hosted by the ESPN *Walt Disney* World Sports Complex (unlike the first edition, one more trial was added, namely wheelchair field tennis) with 500 participants from 15 nations across the world (all the countries from the previous edition, subsequently joined by Irak and Jordan).

*Wheelchair field tennis* is run in any standard field without bringing any changes to rackets or balls. Nevertheless, unlike classic tennis, there are two major differences: servicemen use a particularly designed wheelchair, and the ball can fall up to two times until it is returned (the second bounce with soil being accepted even outside the field). The wheelchair is considered as being part of the player's body, and the serviceman should keep one of his buttocks in close contact with his wheelchair every time he touches the ball.<sup>7</sup>

The third edition of the Invictus Games, hosted by the city of Toronto in Canada, was run the next year. Unlike the previous sports that took place in one sports complex only, the Canadian people established various venues in the vicinity of the city of Toronto to chair the 12 sports events, along with the opening and closing ceremonies (unlike the previous edition, two more disciplines were added: golf and a trial called *Driving Challenge*). All the 15 countries enrolled for the games in 2016 accepted the invitation of attendance, too. Romania and Ukraine also joined them.

Starting this edition of the Invictus Games, the first medals to be awarded within the competition were assigned by the main sponsor of the games<sup>8</sup>

**Table no. 1**  
**THE MEDALS OBTAINED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ROMANIAN BATCH TO INVICTUS GAMES (3<sup>RD</sup> EDITION) – TORONTO 2017<sup>11</sup>**

No.	First and last names	Sports discipline	Trial	Rank
1.	ADRIAN CIPRIAN IRICIUC	Indoor rowing	Four Minute Endurance	3
2.	LAURENȚIU ȘERBAN	Athletics	1500 m flat	3
3.	IONUȚ - CLAUDIU BUTOI	Archery	Compound arch	2
4.	DORIN PETRUȚ, IONUȚ CLAUDIU BUTOI, AUGUSTIN NICUȘOR PEGULESCU	Archery	Teams – compound arch	1

that challenged all the participating teams to pass the practical trial of driving a car. This challenge is a test of precision and skillfulness which urges two participants of different nations to work in teams in order to drive a vehicle on a driving range, with a given track set by the organizers<sup>9</sup>.

They managed to win 4 medals by the end of the competition, among which, a golden one, a silver one, and a bronze one. Such an honorary invitation denotes respect and appreciation on the part of the allies towards the professionalism and sacrifice sense proven by the Romanian Army's military

**Table no. 2**  
**THE MEDALS OBTAINED BY THE MEMBERS OF ROMANIA'S BATCH TO INVICTUS GAMES (4<sup>TH</sup> EDITION) – SYDNEY 2018**

No.	First and last names	Sports discipline	Trial	Rank
1.	DUMITRU NICOLAE PARASCHIVA	Indoor canoeing	Four-minute endurance	3
2.	DORIN PETRUȚ	Archery	Compound arch	3
3.	DĂNUȚ NICOLA, ION CĂTĂLIN PÂRVU, EUGEN VALENTIN PĂTRU	Archery	Teams – recurve arch	2
4.	DORIN PETRUȚ, IONUȚ CLAUDIU BUTOI, AUGUSTIN NICUȘOR PEGULESCU	Archery	Teams – compound arch	1
5.	EUGEN PĂTRU	Archery	Recurve arch	1

Joining the Invictus Games for the first time, Romania's representative team was made of an aggregate of 15 servicemen wounded in the theatres of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

personnel in the theatres of operation where they were deployed. It did not take too long for the Invictus Games to become familiar among the Romanian servicemen. Thus, anticipating the increasing

popularity of such genre of sport, the Ministry of National Defence established a centre for disabled people within the Army's *Steaua* Sports Club in 2015<sup>10</sup>.

servicemen, obtained 5 medals (among which 2 golden ones, a silver one and two bronze ones) and very good places in all disciplines they attended.



**Figure 2** The participating batches of the Romanian Army at two editions of Invictus Games (to the left – Toronto 2017, to the right – Sydney 2018)

The fourth edition of the Invictus Games took place in 2018 in the city of Sydney in Australia, along eight days full of increasingly exciting and spectacular sports competitions. All the participating 17 countries at the edition in 2017 accepted the invitation of attendance. Poland also joined them. Unlike the previous edition, one more discipline (*Navigation*) was added, the event, hosting thereby, 13 sports events.

Romania's representative batch, made up of 15

For the first time, Romania's team enrolled for *Sitting volleyball*, with the following results: 2-0 with Germany, 0-2 with Georgia (the title holder and current winner of the championship).

By the end of an Invictus Games edition, there is no overall leaderboard with the number of medals awarded to every nation since the winner of the medal is unimportant. Reaching the starting line makes participants winners, since the winning post is not worth considering.

**Table no. 3**

**THE RECEIVING CITIES OF THE INVICTUS GAMES**

Year	Running period	Country	City	Participating nations	Sports disciplines
2014	10 <sup>th</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup> September	Great Britain	London	13	9
2016	8 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> May	USA	Orlando	15	10
2017	23 <sup>rd</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> September	Canada	Toronto	17	12
2018	19 <sup>th</sup> – 27 <sup>th</sup> October	Australia	Sydney	18	13
2021	May – June	The Netherlands	The Hague	20?	?
2022	10 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup> June	Germany	Düsseldorf	?	?



As the first Invictus Games edition was successful, the Invictus Games foundation was subsequently established. The latter holds brand royalties, decides the upcoming receiving cities of the competition, makes sure that the standards regarding sports management and sports discipline rules are met. It is also the one that decides to add new sports to the already existing tournaments and accepts the participating nations. In this sense, the Invictus Games Foundation had the honour to introduce two new members of the Invictus team (Belgium and South Korea), which enroll for the upcoming editions as participating nations.

Basically, Prince Harry (the founder of the event) has recently concurred with representatives of the Israeli Army to welcome a designated team from Israel to the edition in 2022, which was considered outrageous by the British Muslim community and various unions advocating human rights. The latter even think that such an invitation is intolerable because of the investigation carried out by the International Law Court in Hague regarding potential war crimes committed by IDF (Defence Forces of Israel) in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank<sup>12</sup>.

Due to coronavirus pandemic that affects the whole world this year (and in order to limit its impact on all parties involved), the tournaments that were scheduled in Hague (the Netherlands), in May 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> 2020, have been postponed, being replanned in 2021, in a period to be subsequently decided, with the specification that the edition in 2022 will be hosted by the city of Düsseldorf in Germany.

### Conclusions

Sport is a means that enables people to embark upon the path leading to ultimate rehabilitation. To bring about joy and excitement during this journey, Invictus Games will draw international attention to those servicemen who want to achieve their goals and strive to regain self-confidence and get down to their careers, social and family lives. These games generate a memorable exciting experience for participants to go through, with beneficial effects on the rehabilitation program and recovery training. Even if once completed, a lot of servicemen turn back home without any award, all participants end up being victorious. They proved that they can overcome their fears, disease and weaknesses, which determine us to look up to them.

The poem entitled *Invictus*, written by William Ernest Henley in 1875 (to express his frustration after having his leg amputated because of severe infection), which came out in the volume called "Book of Verses" is the embodiment of the unrested human spirit Invictus Games are revolving around.

### Invictus<sup>13</sup>

by Ernest Henley

"Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears,  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll.  
I am the master of my fate  
I am the captain of my soul."

The Invictus serviceman's creed is masterly illustrated in the poem written by William Ernest Henley, whose work conveys artistic sensitivity and gravity, advocating courage and dignity when surpassing life hurdles. The lyrics embody the individual that has to cope with any life challenge and move forward, bravely, his chin up, his soul free and strong.

The poetic text is a confession addressing the subject of human condition, which is supported by the occurrence of various terms pertaining to this specific lexical field, i.e. "soul", "tears", "fate", "bludgeonings" and "punishments". The lyric discourse has confessional property being a plea the author makes use of to express his own experience. Going through a limit situation, the poetic ego experiences a wide range of feelings, from sadness, disappointment, grief, fear, indignation up to ultimate acceptance and even victory in front of the bitter fate.



The poetic message is artistically rendered through expressive language. The phrase "the night that covers me" and the comparison "black as the Pit from pole to pole" suggests the turmoiling sorrow that affected the serviceman's entire life. The lack of light denotes the absence of hope as well as the darkness overwhelming him. Nevertheless, once overcoming the traumas of "the inner Pit", *the Invictus serviceman* comes back to life out of his own ashes, similar to Phoenix, succeeding in coping with the cruel fate, and breaking free to become worthy of praise.

The metaphor "I am the captain of my soul" emphasizes that one's power comes from within and that nobody can steal one's freedom, dignity and courage. Even if he was brought to his knees by the hardships of his life, his soul is still unplugged. The bludgeonings he went through finally strengthened him, made him take full control over his life, urged him to be on his own. If at the outset of the poetic discourse, the atmosphere is bleak, it ends up turning into a bright one, full of rejoice, the lyric ego realizing that all obstacles he has gone through made him become stronger and withstand the blurred and hectic waves of life. The lines "I have not winced nor cried aloud/ Under the bludgeonings of chance/ My head is bloody, but unbowed" illustrate the determination and ambition that enabled him to surpass the utter hurdles he had to deal with.

Furthermore, the title contributes to getting an insight into the message conveyed by the poem. *The invictus serviceman* stands for a winner since he has the motivation and inner power to stand up even after overcoming the most serious hardships. In a world full of passions, tears and curses the lyric ego manages, along with God, to create a free spirit, a winner, a fate overcomer out of pain and sorrow. Strong personality, honour, ambition and dignity are all qualities to be assigned to the *invictus serviceman*.

Therefore, the "Invictus" poem written by William Ernest Henley has a moving sensitive lyric message that impresses through the intensity and depth of the feelings conveyed, coming to be compared to a praise brought to *the invictus serviceman* that overpasses his physical condition through ambition, faith, hope, courage and dignity when coping with the resisting odds.

The current poem urges to endurance and dignity, a combination of memories and feelings, a clear "No!" spoken out to fate. The present lines passed down generations on end in order to convey strength in hard times, featuring the unrested human spirit Invictus Games are revolving around.

#### NOTES:

- 1 The Latin word *Invictus* means: undefeatable, unconquerable, unbeatable, invincible.
- 2 G.C. Ciapa, *Romanian Army servicemen's physical training in modern conflict*, "Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, 2018, p. 73.
- 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im-5eyl-siY>, accessed on 24.03.2020.
- 4 <http://www.rugby.ro/cum-se-joaca-rugby-in-scaunul-16238.html>, accessed on 27.03.2020.
- 5 [https://www.paralimpicromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Regulament\\_basketball.pdf](https://www.paralimpicromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Regulament_basketball.pdf), accessed on 27.03.2020.
- 6 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitting\\_volleyball](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitting_volleyball), accessed on 27.03.2020.
- 7 <https://npc.org.ro/sporturi/regulamente-ipc>, accessed on 29.03.2020.
- 8 Sponsor principal: *Jaguar Land Rover*.
- 9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkEJu8WUPqA>, accessed on 25.03.2020.
- 10 <https://familiaregala.ro/stiri/articol/echipa-romaniei-la-invictus-games-toronto-2017>, accessed on 29.03.2020.
- 11 <http://results.invictusgames2017.com/index.cfm/en/grid/showResults/athleteCountry/ROU.html>, accessed on 28.03.2020.
- 12 <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/ByKuDCTIL>, accessed on 30.03.2020.
- 13 <http://poezii.citatepedia.ro/de.php?a=William+Ernest+Henley>, accessed on 26.03.2020.

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