



Hall of Fame

Ella Cox Chafee

Oak Lawn, Illinois
Inducted in 1990

Ella Cox Chafee contracted polio in 1951, when she was 6 years old. Although the disease left her paralyzed from the waist down, she never stopped wanting to participate in sports. Ella enrolled at the University of Illinois at Champaign and found out that the school had a swimming team for male and female disabled students. Like so many Illini students, this was the beginning of a long and storied sports career that sustained over several decades and multiple sports.



Ella qualified for and competed in 25 consecutive National Wheelchair Games in the adult division, the only woman known to have accomplished this. During that span, Ella won over 100 national and international gold, silver and bronze medals as well as countless local and Regional medals. Ella was National Slalom Champion more than any other wheelchair athlete, male or female, and was selected for eight major international competitions, including three Paralympic competitions.

Ella won her first medals as a paralympian in Tokyo in 1964 where she won two silvers in swimming. In 1968, she was a member of the first USA Women's Paralympic Basketball Team in Tel Aviv, Israel. The team won a bronze medal that year. She held the national record for years in the 50-yard backstroke in swimming; the 800 meter dash and 1500 meter run in track & field and once held two World Records in swimming. Later in life, Ella took up fencing and in the 1996 Paralympic Games competed in the women's foil and epee. She was the top American woman finisher in foil, finishing 8th in the world. If that wasn't enough, Ella was one of only five women who qualified to enter the 1979 Boston Marathon, finishing 20th in a field of 30 male & female wheelchair racers.

Ella gave back much to the wheelchair sports world. A Life Member of Wheelchair Sports USA because of her years of experience, Ella was appointed to the Hall of Fame committee of Wheelchair Sports, USA. In addition, she was co-founder and vice president of the Chicagoland Area Women's Wheelchair Sports Association, a multi-sport cross-disability group. Ella was also a charter member of the Central States Wheelchair Athletic Association (CSWAA) and a member of the CSWAA Board of Directors for 7 years and President of CSWAA for 6 years.