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Citation:

Fitzgerald, H and Drury, S and Stride, A (2024) "Run for All": Rob Burrow (and Kevin Sinfield) as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability and sports participation. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. pp. 1-11. ISSN 2375-0472 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2024.2342253>

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Article (Published Version)

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“Run for All”: Rob Burrow (and Kevin Sinfield) as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability and sports participation

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To cite this article: Hayley Fitzgerald, Scarlett Drury & Annette Stride (15 May 2024): “Run for All”: Rob Burrow (and Kevin Sinfield) as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability and sports participation, *Managing Sport and Leisure*, DOI: [10.1080/23750472.2024.2342253](https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2024.2342253)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2024.2342253>



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Published online: 15 May 2024.



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“Run for All”: Rob Burrow (and Kevin Sinfield) as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability and sports participation

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ABSTRACT

Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield are iconic Leeds Rhinos ex-rugby league players. In recent years they have collectively engaged in charitable work for the motor neurone disease (MND), a condition Rob was diagnosed with in 2019. One of their recent challenges was to participate in the ‘Run For All’ 2022 Leeds 10K road race. Kevin pushed Rob around the course in an adapted wheelchair. This kind of ‘assisted running’ has only recently become permissible in road race events. In this paper we present a commentary on the position of Rob and, by implication, Kevin in the ‘Run For All’ Leeds 10K as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability and sports participation in society. Specifically, we consider the following questions: 1) What does it mean to be included and participate in sport? 2) How does the visibility of Rob in this event challenge the disability/ability binary? And 3) What role do non-disabled allies play in shaping perceptions of their disabled counterparts in sport? By exploring these questions, we contend that it should not matter that Rob and Kevin took on different roles, moved in different ways, and received different kinds of support. These facets of their collective participation signal the possibilities that open up when consideration is given to the ‘normality of doing things differently’. In concluding we argue that Rob and Kevin’s participation in the Leeds 10K represents the possibilities of what road races can become if some of the taken for granted conventions in sport are reconsidered.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 September 2023
Accepted 9 April 2024

KEYWORDS

‘Assisted’ road running; Rob Burrow; motor neurone disease; allyship

Introduction

In December 2020, the Leeds Beckett University’s Student Union building joined a growing number of sites in the city depicting street art commemorating prominent local sporting heroes. This particular building features a mural celebrating Rob Burrow, an iconic Leeds Rhinos ex-rugby league player, known by his

adoring fans as the “Magnificent 7”.¹ During his time at the club, Rob made nearly 500 appearances and won eight Super League championships, two Challenge Cups, three World Club Challenge trophies and three League Leader’s Shields. Rob’s reputation, however, extends beyond the Rhinos. He has represented England 15 times and Great

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¹An image of the mural can be found at: <https://www.itv.com/news/calendar/2020-12-03/mural-of-rugby-league-legend-rob-burrow-completed-in-leeds>

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Britain on five occasions. In recent years, Rob's achievements on the field have been brought to the fore by his off-the-field activities. He has touched the hearts of many across the world as he openly shares his journey with motor neurone disease (MND), having announced his diagnosis in 2019. Whilst for many, this might have heralded a retirement from public life, Rob continues to inspire others. He has remained a staunch advocate for MND research, actively engages in charitable work and continues to raise awareness of the disease.

Other Leeds Rhinos players have also supported Rob in these activities, including his close friend Kevin Sinfield. For their collective charity work supporting MND, they have been granted the Freedom of the City of Leeds, the highest civic honour the city can bestow. One of their most recent challenges was to participate in the "Run For All" 2022 Leeds 10K road race. For this event, a new wheelchair was commissioned which incorporates adaptations such that Kevin can push Rob around the course whilst running. This kind of "assisted running" has only recently become permissible in a small number of road race events.

In this paper, we present a commentary on the position of Rob Burrow and, by implication, Kevin Sinfield in the "Run For All" Leeds 10K as a symbol of contemporary discourse about disability² and sports participation in society. Specifically, we consider the following questions: (1) What does it mean to be included and participate in sport? (2) How does the visibility of Rob in this event challenge the disability/ability binary? And (3) What role do non-disabled allies play in shaping perceptions of their disabled counterparts in sport?

In focusing on Rob's (and Kevin's) involvement in the Leeds 10K race, we invoke Messner's (2000) use of the concept articulated by Hochschild (1994) of "magnified moments" to explore the heightened significance of this particular event as symbolic of the myriad of ways in which disability is discursively positioned in sport. Magnified moments, which can be described in part as "metaphorically rich . . . episodes of heightened importance" (Hochschild, 1994, p. 4), often occur as part of everyday events that when critically appraised offer "a window into the social construction of reality" (Messner, 2000, p. 766). Like Larsen (2021), we also advocate for the consideration of running events as unique spaces for the study of social relationships.

The unique context of road running events

A competitive road running event such as the Leeds 10K race presents a unique context to consider disability in sport for several reasons. Typically, they involve an "elite" wave of the fastest non-disabled participants who start earliest and set the competitive pace for the event. These road races appeal to a broad spectrum of others, from experienced club runners to those new to the sport who sign up for the race as a milestone event to instil motivation and commitment to train. Some compete for rankings and "personal best" times or for the intrinsic satisfaction of crossing the finish line. Others experience the added motivation of running to fundraise, what Palmer and Dwyer (2019) describe as "fitness philanthropy". These race events are often held in inner-city locations, where urban spaces such as roads and city squares, usually occupied by traffic and

²We acknowledge that the international audience of this paper will have different expectations regarding the way in which disability and disabled people are understood. Given that this paper has been influenced by literature from British Disability Studies, we believe it is important to adopt the understanding of disability found within this field. This includes referring to 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities'. See, for example, Barnes et al. (1999, p. 7) 'We will avoid the phrase 'people with disabilities' because it implies that the impairment defines the identity of the individual, blurs the crucial conceptual distinction between impairment and disability and avoids the question of causality'. This understanding of disability is also accepted and used by the British Council for Disabled People (BCDP) and Disabled Peoples' International (DPI).

pedestrians, are temporarily reappropriated for sport (Larsen, 2021). Race routes are usually lined with hordes of spectators who remain long after the more elite runners have passed and continue to cheer on those at the tail end of the race. In this sense, events such as these command significant visibility, which is invariably amplified by media coverage that extends the reach of the event in public consciousness (Nettleton & Hardey, 2006). Although not as prominent as the Great North Run or the London Marathon, the Leeds 10K is nonetheless a well-established event that attracts over three thousand participants and significant regional media attention.

On the surface, urban running races such as these could be viewed as an exemplar of an inclusive blueprint for mainstream sports events. Indeed, there are a few other competitive sports contexts in which elite athletes compete alongside recreational participants and those new to the sport. Many races also actively include a proportion of disabled competitors. However, it is notable that those taking part using a wheelchair are relatively small in number. For example, the “wheelchair results”³ of the 2021 Leeds 10K list fewer than 10 competitors. Despite the apparent inclusiveness of a high-profile event in which both elite and novice runners compete, there remains a relative absence of representation from disabled people. There are also very few assisted runners, where a wheelchair user participates with another runner (or runners) and is pushed around the course. For the first time, the 2022 London Marathon saw the inclusion of assisted running. This saw “Team Kerr”, Aaron and his parents, “running and rolling together”. According to their website, “Team Kerr” has the goal of seeing assisted running that becomes a common sight in road races across the country.⁴ The 2023 and

2024 London Marathon advertised that there would be a maximum of 10 assisted wheelchair participants. In part, the recent development of assisted running brings to the fore the marginalisation and under-representation of disabled people in sport, which is discussed next.

Disability, sport, representation and inclusion

The lack of participation by disabled people in the Leeds 10K, and indeed other sports, is rooted in wider historical understandings that position disabled people as inferior to non-disabled people (Shakespeare, 2012). This has resulted in the marginalisation of disabled people in society and sport more broadly. On the issue of sport, DePauw (1997) argued that the exclusion of disabled people is exemplified by the “invisibility of disability in sport”. In essence, sport was developed by non-disabled people, with no consideration for disabled people. Consequently, an ableist system prevails which does not always enable participation in sport by disabled people (Fitzgerald, 2018; Silva, 2022). The legacy of this kind of inferiority remains largely intact and there are an array of well-documented barriers and challenges to sports participation for disabled people that stubbornly remain. For instance, inaccessible facilities and information, the lack of accessible transport, negative attitudes, and the cost of adapted equipment can hinder participation (Activity Alliance, 2023; Ives et al., 2021). More recently, we note that COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis have also negatively impacted participation by disabled people (Activity Alliance, 2023; Fitzgerald et al., 2022). Furthermore, as Peers et al. (2022) note, often well-intentioned attempts to redress ableism can result in “enlightened ableism”. That is, ableism is reinforced through the very acts

³This is the terminology used by the race organisers. We note these were the ‘elite’ results and non-elite participants using wheelchairs were included in the ‘full results’.

⁴For more information: <http://www.teamkerr.net/>

that seek to remedy it. For example, whilst it is a positive development that participants who use wheelchairs are included in the 2020 Leeds 10K, the results were published as “wheelchair results”. Articulating the results in this way negates the athlete’s performance in favour of their wheelchairs. Whilst events like the Leeds 10K and other sports programmes may promote activities as “inclusive” for disabled people, there remain significant obstacles that prevent participation in sport.

When disabled people are visible in sport this can evoke comparisons with non-disabled participants. Here a dominant discourse prevails in which a heteronormative, non-disabled, heroic, male body is exemplified by strength, power, athleticism and physical competence (Hargreaves & Anderson, 2016). These are the very features of physicality that Rob and Kevin embodied when they were playing rugby together. Interestingly, Rob’s mural found on Leeds Beckett University’s Student Union building also reflects this kind of depiction. Often these ideals are counter to representations of disabled people who participate in sport. Therefore, the disabled body can be situated as lesser as it may not be able to move in normatively defined ways and as a result, occupies an inferior position. Indeed, several scholars have identified the prevalence of this kind of “miserabilist” depiction of Para-athletes in sports media, whereby disabled sportspeople are reported on only in relation to their shortcomings (Beldame et al., 2023). Conversely, another emerging discourse of Para-athletes relates to their framing within a “supercrip” narrative that encourages a reading of them as “heroic” (Rees et al., 2019). On the surface, such coverage appears to present a positive representation of disabled people that counters normative perspectives of disability as incompatible with sport. However, as Saxton (2016) notes, the “supercrip” narrative is invariably framed by the low expectations that society holds around the physical capabilities of disabled people. This narrative also appears to

be underscored by a discourse of meritocracy, which implies that all that is required for disabled sportspeople to become successful is individualised “drive and spirit” (Saxton, 2016). This perspective homogenises disabled people and diminishes the barriers that impact different disabled people’s access to sport in a variety of ways (McGillivray et al., 2021).

Further problematic rhetoric that often underpins coverage of disabled athletes is characterised by the concept of “inspiration porn” (Martin, 2022). This describes the tendency for media outlets to position disabled people as “inspirational” simply because they take part in everyday activities despite having an impairment. Like the supercrip narrative, this perspective encourages a positive reading of disabled people in sport. However, a more critical appraisal highlights that this approach is underpinned by a damaging discourse that renders disabled people objects of pity that exist to make non-disabled people feel better about themselves (Martin, 2022). We are aware that much of the media coverage of Rob’s (and Kevin’s) charity endeavours to date has the potential to perpetuate this inspiration porn rhetoric, and are mindful of this in our reading of their involvement in the Leeds 10K. However, our focus rests on exploring what Rob’s (and Kevin’s) participation represents in relation to changing perspectives on disability, inclusion and sport.

The symbolic relationship between sport and disability remains contested and events like the Leeds 10K, and Rob and Kevin’s completion of the run, offer an opportunity to consider further the relationship between sport and those who are included and participate. Like others (Fitzgerald, 2018) we acknowledge that there remains much debate about what constitutes inclusion or indeed effective inclusive practice. On the question of inclusion, Hansen and Philo (2007) argue that traditional approaches to the politics of inclusion for disabled individuals have emphasised the importance of aiding disabled people to “do things

normally". Sport is a case in point where "doing things normally" is achieved by adapting sporting activities or using modified equipment. Here the essence of the activities is left unchanged and disabled people are expected to "fit into" normative ideals of sport (Howe & Silva, 2018). Such approaches conform to archaic medical model discourses that reappropriate disabled bodies as deficient in their capabilities to engage "normally" in everyday life, and therefore in need of "correction" or "adjustment" (Shakespeare, 2012). We note that through adaptations or modifications, participation in sport is usually taken to mean a particular kind of physical engagement, that is "playing" a sport. Next in our discussion, we consider Rob and Kevin's Leeds 10K experience to explore notions of participation, (re)valuing running bodies, and "fixing sport" through soft allyship.

Participation, running bodies and fixing sport

Diversifying notions of participation

Rob's participation in the Leeds 10K could be interpreted as symbolic of the notion of "doing things normally" (Hansen & Philo, 2007). That is, Rob was able to participate in the 10K as a result of many adjustments including using a specifically adapted sports wheelchair and having Kevin as the pusher. However, on further consideration, we contend that Rob's visibility at the Leeds 10K counters this deficient perspective, and arguably encourages a reading of disability that aligns with Hansen and Philo's (2007, p. 493) alternative concept of the "normality of doing things differently". This approach centralises an appreciation of the broad spectrum of possibilities for how things can be done. In the context of sport, this represents an important point of departure that challenges normative ways of considering disability inclusion and can help re-conceptualise and diversify the

meaning of participation in sport that transcends dichotomous disabled/abled identity markers. A central question to explore here then, is what does it mean to participate in sport?

Sports participation is often assumed to involve actively "playing" or "competing" in a physical activity. In road race events, this is usually taken to mean running, or where disabled participants are envisaged as self-propelling their wheelchairs. The reward for participating in road race events, like the Leeds 10K, is usually receiving a medal at the end of the race. Interestingly, both Rob and Kevin received their medals for completing the Leeds 10K. On this matter, some may claim that Rob did not actively participate in the 10K or indeed deserve a medal for successfully completing the race. The issue here is how active participation is understood. We would argue that Rob embodied many characteristics associated with active participation. For example, like other racers, he began at the customary start line and proceeded to cross the finish line. Rob could be distinguished by his race number/name and received a finisher's medal. We have no doubt that before and during, the race Rob is likely to have been nervous and perhaps concerned with the expectations others had of him and Kevin. The TV coverage of Rob and Kevin during the race illustrates other markers of his active participation. For instance, just like other racers, his body had to withstand the toil encountered when passing through the undulations and dips in the road, when moving more steadily on hilly segments, and navigating through the twists and turns of the course. There is a physical effect on Rob's body and this is explicitly associated with the experience of participating in the 10K.

Similarly, the TV coverage offers a glimpse of how Rob and Kevin's visual senses were evoked during the race. Just like other participants, they would have been taking in and reacting to different moments of the race. For them,

their iconic status within rugby league probably heightened their visibility and the reactions they received. As they ran past friends, family, and Leeds Rhino's supporters there were shouts of "...keep going boys", "...well done mate", "...come on Rob", "...you've got this guys", "...go Kev, go Kev". Their individual and collective efforts were being acknowledged and it was clear from these spectators that this was not just Kevin's race. The cheers and encouragement were for both of them. Kevin was able to react to some of these words of encouragement, at times with a wave, or thumbs up, and on other occasions broke his breathing pattern to acknowledge the support with a "...cheers" or "...thanks mate". In contrast, the TV coverage of the 10K revealed that the effects of MND ensure that Rob's material body is not able to respond to the spectators in the same way as Kevin.

These physical and sensory markers of participating, embodied by Rob and Kevin, provide examples of how they both actively participated in the race. Of course, whilst Rob's participation in the race was unusual by conventional urban race standards, there is no singular way of participating even as a conventional runner. As we have outlined at the beginning of the paper, the race was entered by a broad spectrum of participants of differing abilities. Participants no doubt relied on differing levels of support before and during the race too. For elite runners, the support of coaches, physios, sports psychologists, nutritionists, and specialist sports equipment, is considered essential to success at the highest levels of the sport, and is generally not readily available to novice runners. Indeed, Rob's race wheelchair is no different from other specialist equipment, including advances in running shoe technology that enable greater energy efficiency, stable midsoles to "correct" overpronation, or added cushioning to absorb the impact of each strike of the foot. These, like Rob's race wheelchair, are just other forms of adaptation that facilitate

participation in the 10K event to meet the needs of different people in various ways. Of course, like any specialist equipment, there is a cost associated with accessing these kinds of resources and this means they are not available to everyone. In essence, participation in sport is multifaceted and should not be limited to a more restricted view of race participation as "doing things normally" (Hansen & Philo, 2007). To this end, it should not matter that Rob and Kevin took on different roles, moved in different ways, and received different kinds of support. These facets of their collective participation signal the possibilities that open up when consideration is given to the "normality of doing things differently" (Hansen & Philo, 2007).

(Re)valuing running bodies

Another feature evident with Rob's visibility at the Leeds 10K concerns the (re)valuing of participants' sporting bodies. This (re)valuing is represented through Rob and Kevin's sporting embodiment and also that of the other runners in the event. Bodies do change over the life course; they get older, become frail and may develop an impairment. These changes can be gradual or more dramatic, perhaps as a result of a life-changing illness and accident. It is this more dramatic kind of change that Rob has experienced following his MND diagnosis. For Rob there have been significant, and visible, changes to his physicality. This is perhaps most evident when consideration is given to Rob's hegemonic masculinity as a rugby player and the depiction of him on the mural at Leeds Beckett University's Student Union building. Rob's more recent embodiment is markedly different from this hegemonic ideal. In this regard, onlookers may make comparisons between "what he was" and "what he is becoming". It is likely that some may take pity on Rob's disabled embodiment, viewing it as undesirable and akin to a medical model orientation towards

disability (Shakespeare, 2012). That said, we are also conscious that there is likely to be some degree of continued recognition for Rob's past rugby achievements and celebrity status, and this may serve as a mechanism for legitimising his position and acceptance as a participant in the 10K. Of course, this privilege may not be afforded to all and we do wonder how other assisted road racers, who do not have Rob's credentials, would be viewed and accepted in similar road races.

The position and value of Rob in the Leeds 10K are inextricably linked to Kevin's participation. Indeed, Kevin's "super-abled" body, or as Standal (2015) puts it "severely able body", stands in an uneasy juxtaposition with Rob's disabled body. For instance, the ageing body is normatively seen as deficient, yet Kevin's ageing body (confirmed by his retired status from playing professional rugby) defies this kind of representation. We would argue that Kevin's "super-abled" embodiment is actually "supercharged" by the presence of Rob. That is, Kevin was not only running the 10K, like all other participants, but he was doing this with the added challenge of pushing Rob as well. The physical exertion needed to do this could be read as an accentuated marker of Kevin's physicality. Although he is an ex-professional rugby player, Kevin continues to perform extraordinary feats including completing the "Ultra 7 in 7" and "MND24". In this regard, his body may become even more acclaimed. As we discuss later, Kevin could be described as an MND ally, however, his efforts need to be cast against normative and ableist ideals associated with the sport that Kevin embodies. In comparison, Rob is the "deficient other" and their partnership reinforces compulsory ableism rather than disrupts the ability/disability binary.

To a large extent, Rob's changing body is a marker of an uncomfortable truth for those running the Leeds 10K. That is, their running bodies may not always be able to perform in this way and this may impact an individual's continued participation in sport, decision to

retire, or engagement in new sports (Gairdner, 2019). Rob's participation then becomes a stark reminder that this may be the destiny for some; our bodies are fallible. Some bodies become disabled and as Sparkes (2020) notes, this kind of "interrupted body project" yields significant material, social and psychological changes. Rob's body tells this story and it is difficult to ignore his reconstituted body. Observing this reality may destabilise the other runners' non-disabled and sporting sense of self. We would argue that the visibility of Rob's evolved body participating in the Leeds 10K provides the potential for race spectators and runners to reconsider what kinds of bodies are, and should be, valued in the race and sport more broadly. For instance, his presence in the race challenges the idea that it is essentially non-disabled people who undertake and can complete road races. Relatedly, the "normality of doing things differently" (Hansen & Philo, 2007) is brought to the fore through the re-articulation of how movement is considered for participants in a road race. In Rob's case, he is not running, or pushing himself, like other wheelchair users. Instead, progression is facilitated through a partnership between Kevin and Rob and this transcends traditional expectations around who participates and how to participate. Together, Rob and Kevin's experiences highlight the relationality between evolving sporting bodies, privilege and disability visibility.

Fixing sport through soft allyship

Whilst the concept of allyship has received relatively little attention in academic scholarship on sport, a small number of studies have explored the importance of privileged allies in promoting social justice in sport for marginalised groups (Jolly et al., 2021). Taylor (2015), for instance, recounts the significant role of non-LGBTQ athlete allies in challenging homophobia and transphobia in sport. Similarly, both Heffernan (2018) and LaVoi et al. (2019) espouse the role

of men in positions of power in sports organisations in advocating for the progression of women in sports leadership roles. The status of disabled people in sport is no different; issues of access, inclusion, and representation have long been a focus for disability rights groups, and eradicating these inequalities is often contingent upon those who benefit from the ableist system of sport critically reflecting on and challenging structures that deny disabled people access. As Silva (2022, p. 167) highlights, this requires us to reflect on our role as “agents of ableism” in sport. In her view “our goal must be *fixing* sport, not to *help* or *fix* the individuals oppressed by it”. In *fixing* sport we need to mobilise allies who can envision and action Hansen and Philo’s (2007) notion of the “normality of doing things differently” in sport.

Allyship can take numerous forms and result in varied outcomes (Morby et al., 2023). Jolly et al. (2021) offer a typological approach that categorises allyship into three distinct forms: agency, advocacy, or activism. Each of these encompasses deliberate acts or statements of intent and reflects an explicit political imperative. However, we suggest that this represents a somewhat narrow view of what allyship might entail. We note that Kevin Sinfield has never publicly and outwardly identified himself as an activist, nor has he specifically spoken out against the structural and societal barriers that face disabled people in society or sport. Instead, Kevin describes Rob as a close friend and this is most vividly portrayed in their recent book *With you every step: A celebration of Friendship* (Burrow & Sinfield, 2023). To this end, Kevin’s actions do not align with one of Jolly et al. (2021) tropes. Yet we argue that through his endeavours with Rob, Kevin embodies what we would call a form of “soft allyship” that subtly but powerfully challenges ableist features of sport associated with who and how people “participate”. Kevin’s support for Rob has been evident ever since the news of Rob’s MND diagnosis was made public. Before

and following the Leeds 10K, Kevin has shown his support by completing numerous physically demanding challenges that have received considerable public attention and raised significant sums of money for MND charities. We are, of course, mindful that this could reinforce a reading of Rob as a “charitable body”. Indeed, Nettleton and Hardey (2006) offer a compelling critique of how media narratives encourage urban runners to take part in races to “make a difference” to those with “sick” or “ill” bodies. However, we believe the Leeds 10K marked the first event in which Kevin Sinfield moved from charity fundraiser to MND ally. Unlike Kevin’s previous charitable endeavours, Rob was visibly positioned at the centre of this event as a participant and this was made possible by the soft allyship embodied by Kevin. Indeed, through their collective efforts Rob and Kevin become “agents of ableism” (Silva, 2022) by troubling, in different ways, normative understandings of participation and inclusion in sport.

Concluding remarks

To conclude we offer many reflections about Rob and Kevin’s involvement in the “Run For All” Leeds 10K as a “magnified moment” for understanding how disability is positioned within sport. First, Rob’s participation and representation in the Leeds 10K provides an alternative to elite Para-sport portrayals of disability within sport. Indeed, typically at road race events, it is elite wheelchair racers who remain prominent when issues of disability are considered. In this regard, Rob challenges this elite Para-sport discourse and associated “supercrip” narrative. As McGillivray et al. (2021) highlight, disabled people are not all the same and experience in different ways the challenges, opportunities and enjoyment that sport offers. Rob’s presence in the 10K signals then the possibility that different (disabled) bodies can occupy a largely non-disabled running space. Second, and related to this

initial point, Rob and Kevin's engagement in the 10K offers an opportunity to reconsider what it means to participate in a road race. On this issue, we would ask if it matters that participation is underpinned by a collective endeavour which, for Rob, includes receiving assistance. We note that Rob technically finishes the race before Kevin and, according to race conventions, should be credited with finishing before Kevin. We wonder if retaining the individual finishing positions in the "official" results may go some way to legitimising the participation of Rob and other assisted road racers?

Interestingly, following the recent 2023 Leeds Marathon, it was widely publicised that Kevin carried Rob over the finishing line (McKenna, 2023). In our view, this act exemplifies the solidarity between the two racers. Perhaps then there is value in recognising both as finishing at the same time. This should not be seen as diminishing their achievements but rather could serve to amplify their collective accomplishment. Third, whilst Rob (and Kevin) are undoubtedly a positive symbol of progress, and disrupt notions of who can participate in a road race, we must recognise that not all disabled people can successfully integrate into mainstream sports events, which are often dependent on utilising other forms of existing capital. Indeed, Rob's presence in the 10K was dependent on his established credibility within mainstream sport and the privilege and power that he continues to be afforded. That is, Rob and Kevin's rugby success and celebrity status provide the means for brokering a place in the race. Other resources were also leveraged such as sponsorship and significant media exposure. As part of this, Leeds Beckett University sourced and purchased an adapted race chair and provided "back up" support during the race.

The point to highlight here is that it is unlikely that other disabled people would be able to secure this kind of interest and support. Indeed, it is widely recognised that the lived

experiences of disabled people are diverse, contingent upon other identity markers, and associated capital (Edwards & Imrie, 2003). Rob's athletic identity and ability to accumulate valued capital directly impacted his material experiences of sport before, and following his MND diagnosis. Yet, perhaps Rob's status and position have gone some way to opening up future possibilities for other disabled people to participate in this and similar events? Here Rob is a catalyst for mobilising change for those who have previously been denied the opportunity to participate in road race events. Like Kevin, Rob could also be considered an ally for others experiencing MND and disabilities because of the way he is challenging and changing a normative outlook about who is considered able to participate in sport. In essence, Rob and Kevin's participation in the Leeds 10K represents the possibilities of what road races can become if some of the taken-for-granted conventions in sport are reconsidered. Together they demonstrate how prominent allies can be a conduit for beginning to support modest, yet important, changes in sport.

Acknowledgments

The friendship of Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield has been at the heart of this paper. Their collective efforts have helped to raise the profile of those living with MND. Like Rob, many people are battling with MND and we dedicate this paper to one of Hayley's school friends, Lisa Marie Britton and her family, who are currently coming to terms with an MND diagnosis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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