

Born into a Jewish family in Germany in 1899, Ludwig Guttmann was the eldest of four children and the only boy. At the age of 18 he volunteered to help at a Hospital for Coal miners where he witnessed an incident.



A strong, young miner was admitted with a broken back and paralysis below the waist. Guttmann discovered the miner's outlook was so bleak that he was expected to die within weeks.

Guttmann could hardly believe it but the miner was left wrapped in a plaster cast and moved away from other patients. He developed infections and five weeks later he died.



'Although I saw many more victims suffering the same fate,' Guttmann said, 'it was the picture of that young man which remained fixed in my memory.'

In April 1918 Guttman started studying to become a doctor in Poland. He passed his exams five years later in 1923.

In 1939 Guttman, his wife Else, and two young children, Dennis and Eva moved to Britain and settled in Oxford. Here Guttman busied himself with various research projects.



During this time World War II began and a lot of injured soldiers were being sent home. Many of these soldiers were paralysed and it was decided a special spinal ward should open for them.



In September 1943 Guttman was asked if he would like to take charge of the new spinal ward. He said he would provided he was allowed to try his own methods to treat patients. There were two possible options for the new unit- Basingstoke or Stoke Mandeville.

Guttmann preferred Stoke Mandeville, Buckinghamshire and so, on February 1st 1944, he took up his new post.

The unit was called Ward X. There were just 26 beds.

Dr Guttmann realised that playing sports and games could help people to recover.



In 1948, Dr Guttmann organised an archery demonstration to coincide with the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games. 16 injured servicemen and women took part.

It may have been one event on one day with a tiny number of participants but it was from this other disabled competitions grew. This was all thanks to Guttmann.

In 1949, just a year later, more hospitals and participants took part in a summer sports festival which became known as the Stoke Mandeville Games.



It was here Guttman uttered the words for which he has forever been associated with: 'I foresaw the time when this sports event would be truly international and the Stoke Mandeville Games would achieve world fame as the disabled person's equivalent of the Olympic Games'

Today the Paralympic Games are the disabled person's equivalent of the Olympic Games.