To the Editor

Sir,

At a recent meeting of the C.C.P.R., the Minister of State with special responsibility for the Disabled is quoted as saying “All attempts to treat the disabled as a race apart must be suppressed — disabled sportsmen were sportsmen first and disabled second. His aim would be to ensure that total integration came about as speedily as possible”.

This quotation to my mind embodies both the highest ideals of a certain point of view and at the same time seems to me to epitomize the ultimate in unreality.

The disabled are the disabled. Rehabilitation begins with reality. To those active in the field of Medical Rehabilitation, the fundamental concept of the “more normal than normal” attitude towards disability has always seemed unrealistic. To those of us familiar with the consequences of failure in highly competitive non-handicapped sport, there appears to be no reason why “normal” competitive attitudes in the disabled should not lead to a similar problem of failure and thus provide for the majority of competitive disabled sportsmen the bitterness of sporting failure as well as of the underlying handicap.

It seems to me more profoundly sympathetic to do everything possible to encourage disabled people to find events suitable for their particular disabilities. As one observes the element of coach satisfaction over pupil achievement in fit sport, so one wonders if one is observing a similar phenomenon in the sporting manipulation of some disabled people.

Surely the most fundamental help for any person is based on the most profound understanding of his needs. What happens to the handicapped sports failure? Has anybody yet studied the psychological benefit, or otherwise, of the athetoid child led frothing from a “normal” athletics arena?

What, in all honesty, does Ministerial “total integration” mean in relation to the facts of life?

I am sir, your obedient servant,

Pheidippides

We are sure other readers will have views on this topic supporting or against, that we would like to hear.  Editor