

# EliteSport



## Disability Sports in Finland

6 October 2009 – 24 January 2010

[urheilumuseo.fi](http://urheilumuseo.fi) | [siu.fi](http://siu.fi) | [paralympia.fi](http://paralympia.fi)

Exhibition created by Sports Museum Foundation of Finland, Finnish Association of Sports for the Disabled and Finnish Paralympic Committee, in co-operation with Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired and Finnish Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities / Special Olympics Finland.

Script: **Leena Kumm** and **Aija Saari**

Visual design: **Jaakko Mäkikylä**  
**Meridian X Oy**

Finnish voice: **Jouko Vuolle**

English translation: **Vesa Tikander**



## Introduction

The history of disability sports in Finland can be divided into four phases of development: the early stages (1920–1960), the period of organisational development (1960–1980), the period of stabilisation (1980–2000) and the period of plural values and the rise of Paralympic sports (since 2000).

The status of disability sports in physical culture has strengthened over the years and attitudes towards it have become more positive. The Paralympic Movement has reached worldwide dimensions and the same holds true for Special Olympics activities for people with intellectual disabilities.

Photo: **SIU** athletics competitions in the 1980's in Lahti. SIU Archives.



## 1920–1960

People with hearing impairment have been practicing sports in Finland since the 1920's. Sports activities for war invalids and the war blind started soon after the Second World War in the late 1940's. Before the 1960's disability sports was practiced on a modest scale, however, mostly under the purview of rehabilitation institutes and disability organisations.

Photos from war invalid sports in the 1960's. Sports Museum of Finland.







## Stoke Mandeville launches the Paralympic Games

In 1944 Sir Ludwig Guttmann (1899–1980) founded a rehabilitation centre for soldiers with spinal cord injuries at Stoke Mandeville in England. In 1948 he organised the first Stoke Mandeville Games, which are considered the forerunner of the Paralympic Games. The first joint world games for various disability groups, such as paraplegics, amputees and the visually impaired, was held at Stoke Mandeville in the autumn of 1974.

Photos: Veikko Puputti took part at a total of eight Paralympic Summer or Winter Games, winning five gold medals in ice sledge racing and a silver in archery. In 2009 he was awarded the Grand Cross of Merit of Finnish Physical Culture and Sport, the highest distinction in Finnish sports. SIU Archives.



The Finnish team flew to the Stoke Mandeville Games of 1971 on a military DC 3 aeroplane.

Photo: Veikko Puputti.

The Finnish wheelchair team at Stoke Mandeville in the summer of 1974. Photo: SIU Archives.





**Club throwing was on the program of the Stoke Mandeville Games in the 1970's. In the picture Eero Mäki.**  
Photo: Voitto Korhonen.

**Kunto Koskinen served as sports instructor on a summer camp of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities at Kiljava in 1969.** SIU Archives.

**Veikko Puputti instructing archers at Käpylä rehabilitation centre in 1970.** Photo: SIU Archives.







## 1960–1980

The first specific organisations for disability sports in Finland were created in the 1960's. The Finnish Federation for the Visually Impaired founded a sports committee in 1962, and the Finnish Association of Sports for the Disabled (SIU) was established in 1964. In the late 1960's disability sports followed the lead of other sports in the way of specialisation and professionalisation. People with intellectual disabilities began to compete in their own athletics and cross-country skiing competitions.

Photos: Ball throwing competition at the Summer Days of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities in the early 1960's.

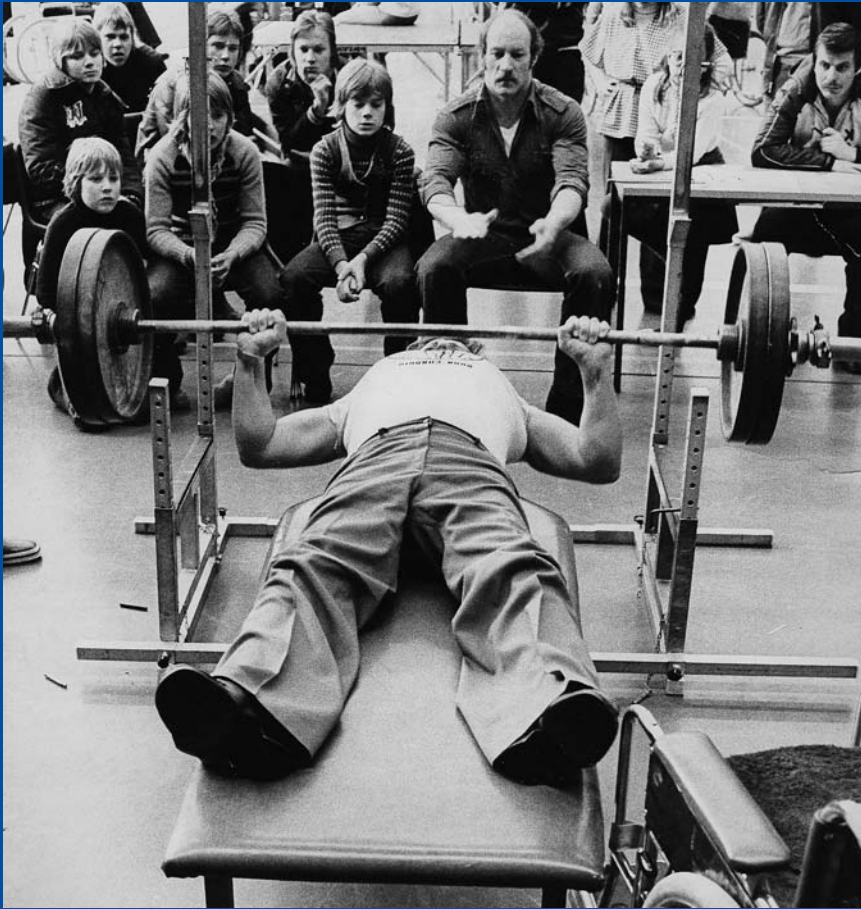


Skiing competitions at Hyvinkää in the early 1960's.



Wheelchair competitions at Eläintarha track in Helsinki in 1966.

Photos: SIU Archives.



## Sports Days

In the 1960's and 1970's there was still no clear division between competitive and recreational activities. For example, everyone competed together at the Sports Days of SIU. Attendance figures were often high. Organisation of the events was based on voluntary work, and peer support played an important part. Sweden and the other Nordic Countries provided influences and opportunities for international competition. Organised sports-specific coaching activities were begun in the mid-1970's.

Photos: Nordic bench press championships at Järvenpää in 1979.



Timo Sulisalo won gold in javelin throw in class B1 for the visually impaired at the Paralympic Games of 1980 in Arnhem. He still owns the world record of his class: 50.74 metres (1989). Photos: SIU Archives.





Photos: **Veikko Puputti** introduced wheelchair basketball to Finland. He learned the sport on his trip to the Paralympic Games of 1968 in Israel. In the picture Finland's first national team in wheelchair basketball on a trip to Austria in the 1970's.



The **Käpylä** rehabilitation centre in Helsinki has played an important part in promoting and facilitating sports for persons with spinal cord injuries. **Glen Ikonen** in the picture. Photos: SIU Archives.





## Women Enter the Fold

Women were still in minority in disability sports. The range of sports widened as people with more difficult mobility disabilities became involved in organised sports activities. This led also to changes in classifications. Wheelchair athletes started to compete in their own events. Instead of disability percentage, the others (“Les Autres”) were classified into five major categories: upper limb disabilities, lower limb disabilities, severe dorsal disabilities, mild multiple disabilities and hemiplegics.



Photos: Lahja Hämäläinen competed with success in ice sledge racing. She won three bronze medals at the Paralympic Winter Games in Geilo 1980 and four gold medals in Innsbruck 1984. In this picture Lahja racing in 1966 or 1967.

Photo: SIU Archives.

Small picture: Lahja Hämäläinen with winner's flowers in the 1980's.

Photo: Veikko Puputti.



City match Tampere vs. Lahti in women's sitting volleyball at ball sports days in Varkaus in 1983.

Photo: SIU Archives.



## The Period of Stabilisation (1980–2000)

In the 1980's a new law gave disability sports a more equal status in Finnish physical culture. Funding was increased and activities were intensified. Physical culture in general was in a state of change: doors were opened for new sports and athletes with disabilities were accepted as members of sports clubs. The importance of Nordic co-operation diminished as the participation of Finnish disability athletes in European and world level competitions increased. Disability sport acquired a more competitive character and its values were shifting closer to those of mainstream sports.

Photos: **Boccia spread to Finland from Sweden through the town of Vaasa in the late 1970's. It soon became one of the favourite sports at the SIU Summer Days. Picture from the 1980's. SIU Archives.**



**Tampere wheelchair basketball team in training in the early 1990's.**  
Photo: Antero Aaltonen.





## Increased Co-Operation Between Disability Groups

The 1990's also brought more clarity to the organisational field of disability sports in Finland. In the late 1980's the combined membership of various disability sports organisations in the country was 160,000–170,000. In 1992 Finnish Federation for the Visually Impaired (NKL), Finnish Association of Sports for the Disabled (SIU) and Finnish Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities started to hold joint championship competitions in swimming and skiing. Sports activities for people with intellectual disabilities were united under a new organisation, Finnish Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (SKLU) in 1994. The Finnish Paralympic Society was founded in the same year.

Photos: Multiple Paralympic medallist Mikael Saleva in Gothenburg in the early 1990's. Saleva designed Finland's first purpose-made wheelchair for throwing sports. His main events were javelin throw and shot put, and he also competed in discus throw.



Paralympic Games of 1980 in New York. In the picture Harri Jauhiainen.

Photos: SIU Archives.



## International Success

In spite of increased resources and improved infrastructure the level of training in Finnish disability sports was still rather primitive. The most successful Finnish disability athlete of this period was Jouko Grip, who competed in cross-country skiing, biathlon and athletics and won a total of 18 medals at the Paralympic Games, 12 of which gold. Other famous male athletes were Pekka Kujala, who excelled in throwing events, the skier Pertti Sankilampi and the runner Harri Jauhiainen. The most accomplished female disability athletes of the time were Kirsti Pennanen and Tanja Tervonen (later Kari) as well as the swimmer Eeva-Riitta Kukkonen (later Fingerroos).

Photos: The swimmer Jouko Pöyry in the late 1970's. He later served as sports leader and swimming coach.

Successful disability sports athletes have been invited to the official Independence Day reception by the President of the Republic. In the picture table tennis players Pekka Paalanko and Matti Launonen in the Presidential Palace in 1982.

Photos: SIU Archives.





Photos: **Tanja Kari (formerly Tervonen)** won a total of 12 Paralympic gold medals. She was voted the best Paralympic athlete in the world in 1998. Picture from the Paralympic Winter Games of 2002 in Salt Lake City.

Photo: Jonas Ekström.



**Kirsti Pennanen** took part at four Paralympic Games in 1980–1992 and won five gold, one silver and one bronze medal in Nordic skiing events for the visually impaired.

Photo: Hannu Laurell.



**Jouko Grip** is the most successful Finnish disability sports athlete of all time. He won a total of 27 Paralympic or World Championship medals in Nordic skiing and three in athletics. Picture from the turn of the millennium, Jouko Grip.



## The Age of plural values in Sports, 2000 to Date

Co-operation between disability sports and mainstream sports has further increased in the 21st century. Its goal is to provide athletes with disabilities the same opportunities to practice their sport as able-bodied athletes have. Classification is a necessary precondition in all competitive sports for people with disabilities. The classification of athletes with visual impairment is based on sight tests. Athletes with mobility disabilities are classified on both medical grounds and on the basis of sport-specific functional tests. Athletes with organ transplants participate in their own competitions. Athletes with intellectual disabilities are classified according to two different systems maintained by their two international organisations, Special Olympics and INAS-FID.



Photos: Wheelchair curling was started in Finland in 2007 under the joint supervision of SIU and the Finnish Curling Association. In the picture Riitta Särösalo, Tuomo Aarnikka, national team skip Vesa Hellman, Seppo Pihkala and coach Lauri Ikävalko at the World Championship qualification tournament in Prague in November 2008. Photo: Osku Kuutamo.

Jarmo Ollanketo after winning a cycling medal at the Paralympic Games of 2008 in Beijing. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.





## Espoo 2005 Games

The Espoo 2005 Athletics Open European Championships were a landmark occasion in the history of disability sports. Not only were they the largest disability sports event ever held in Finland but also the first sub-Paralympic level disability sports competition to be organised in connection with a major mainstream sports event – the World Athletics Championships in Helsinki 2005. A total of 700 athletes from 34 European and 12 non-European countries participated in the competitions. Finnish athletes won five gold medals and one bronze.

Photos: The Espoo 2005 Athletics Open European Championships in Espoo, Finland. Photos: Hannu Jukola.





## Special Olympics are All About Participation

The Special Olympics movement for athletes with intellectual disabilities was initiated in 1962 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of President Kennedy. The aim of Special Olympics is to help persons with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and respected members of society. The first International Special Olympics were held in the United States in 1968. A total of 7,291 athletes from 164 countries competed in 21 sports at the latest Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai in 2007. The Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho in 2009 featured seven sports and a total of 2,000 athletes from 95 countries.

Photos: **Amputee runners with prostheses in Athens 2004.**  
Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.



**Pertti Sankilampi being tested at UKK Institute in Tampere in the 1980's.** Photo: Pertti Sankilampi.



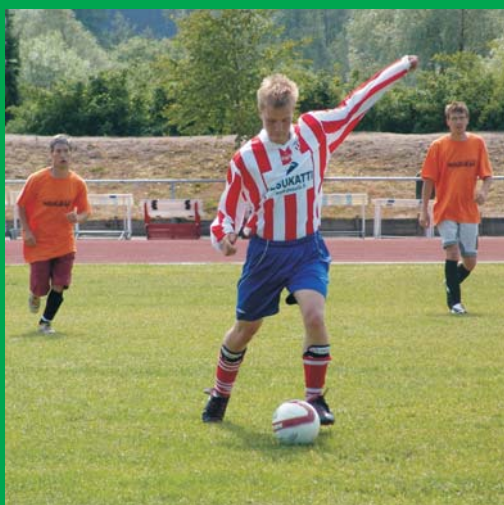
**Hannu Alaranta classifying athletes at Stoke Mandeville in 1974.**

Photo: SIU Archives.





Photos: **Alpine skier Sanna Keto at the Special Olympics in Boise 2009.**



**Football players training for Special Olympics in Huittinen in 2008.**



**Swimmers Tatu Kantonen and Seppo Vanhonen at Pajulahti in 2008.** Photos: Tove Ruuskanen.



## History of the Paralympic Games

The first Paralympic Games took place in Rome in 1960. The Games have usually been held in the same cities as the Olympic Games of the same year. Initially only athletes with spinal cord injury took part in the Paralympic Games. Visually impaired and amputee athletes entered the fray in Toronto 1976, athletes with cerebral palsy in Arnhem 1980, and athletes with intellectual disabilities in Atlanta 1996.

The Paralympic Winter Games were inaugurated in 1976. They took place in the same year as the Summer Games until 1992.

Photo: Paralympic silver medallist cyclers Jarmo Ollanketo and pilot Marko Törmänen in Beijing 2008. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.



## Paralympic Summer and Winter Games



A total of 400 athletes from 23 countries participated in the first Paralympic Summer Games in Rome. The Finnish team of three athletes won one medal. In Beijing 2008 there were altogether 146 participating countries and 3,951 athletes, including 30 Finns. The Finnish team won six medals.

In the first Paralympic Winter Games in Sweden there were 17 countries and 250 athletes, including 26 Finns. A total of 486 athletes from 39 countries participated in Turin 2006. There were seven Finns. Finland was a leading nation in the early years of the Paralympic Winter Games but has subsequently dropped to the middle ranks in the medal statistics.

The next Paralympic Winter Games will be held in Vancouver on 12–21 March 2010. The Paralympic Summer Games will take place in London on 29 August – 9 September 2012.

Photos: **Matti Launonen** was the most successful table tennis player of all time in his class. He started his career in the 1970's and took part in his last Paralympic Games in Athens 2004.

Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

**Swimmer Reeta Peltola** in Athens 2004. Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

**Paralympic shooter Erkki Pekkala** in Beijing 2008.

Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo Koivisto.





## Finnish success in the 1980's

The most successful Paralympic sports for Finland have been athletics, archery, swimming and table tennis at the Summer Games and skiing at the Winter Games. Finnish medal success at the Paralympic Games peaked in the 1980's. Since that the level of competition has risen substantially, due to worldwide increase of interest in disability sports and the entry of countries that have recently suffered from wars and crises.

Photos: **Wheelchair racing**, the semi-final of men's 100 metres in Beijing 2008. In the middle **Leo-Pekka Tähti** of Finland, the eventual winner of the gold medal. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.

**Multiple Paralympic winner Marjaana Väre** in Athens 2004. Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

**Jean-Pierre Antonios** participated in archery in Beijing 2008. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto,







Photos: **Katja Saarinen** won bronze at the **World Championships of 2004** in slalom skiing. Picture from the **Paralympic Games of Turin 2006**. Photo: Hannu Jukola.

**Ilkka Tuomisto** at the **Paralympic Winter Games, Turin 2006**. Photo: Hannu Jukola.

**Jani Kallunki** won Paralympic bronze in judo for the visually impaired in both **Athens 2004** and **Beijing 2008**. He represents the **Helsinki-based Meido-Kan club**.  
Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.





### Increased Prestige of Disability Sports

The amount of sports grants for disability sports athletes has quadrupled since 1999. In 2009 a total of 17 disability sports athletes were awarded with the state sports grant.

Photo: Markku Niinimäki in Espoo 2005. Niinimäki won a total of three Paralympic medals in javelin throw and shot put in Athens and Beijing. His best achievement was gold in javelin in Beijing. Photo: Hannu Jukola.





## Disability Sports Athlete of the Year 1989–2007

The Finnish Disability Sports Athlete of the Year award was inaugurated in 1989. The award was discontinued in 2007, when wheelchair racer Leo-Pekka Tähti won great success in the vote for the overall Finnish Athlete of Year award. Since that disability sports athletes have competed in same award categories with able-bodied athletes.

Organ transplant athletes compete in their own international event, the Transplant Games. The most famous Finnish organ transplant athlete is Tuija Helander, who won the Disability Sports Athlete of the Year award of 2005.

Photos: Alpine skier Dragan Scepánovic at the Turin Paralympic Winter Games in 2006.



Antero Karjalainen, sailing class 2.4 m R. Athens 2004.

Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

Wheelchair tennis player Taneli Tenhunen participated as a wild card entrant at the Paralympic Games of Beijing 2008. His world ranking in the summer of 2009 is 128. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.

## In The Mainstream and with Peer Support

There are many ways to take up disability sports. People with disabilities who are interested in physical activity have a wide range of choices these days. Peer groups offer a chance to practice sports together with other persons with disabilities. In mainstream sports clubs people can be involved in their favourite sports side by side with able-bodied athletes.

The Paralympic Games include many sports that are practiced only by people with disabilities, such as goalball, boccia and wheelchair rugby. Many other sports are modified for their needs, for example by the use of an assistant, guide or a specific aid appliance.

Photos: Finnish boccia players took part at the Paralympic Games for the first time in Beijing 2008. In the picture Leena Särelä. Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.

Elisa Montonen with her guide runner Elina Holopainen in Espoo 2005. Photo: Hannu Jukola.

Jarmo Ollanketo and his guide skier Marko Törmänen in Turin 2006. They mostly compete in cycling but skiing is their second sport. Photo: Hannu Jukola.







Photos: **Finnish women's sitting volleyball team finished fifth at the Paralympic Games of 2004 in Athens.** Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

**Finland's men's goalball team was disappointed at its seventh place in Beijing 2008.** Lehtikuva/Antti Aimo-Koivisto.





I.

## Leo-Pekka Tähti

Wheelchair racer Leo-Pekka Tähti is the most famous Finnish disability sports athlete today. He specialises in the sprint events, 100 and 200 metres. Tähti won two gold medals at the Athens Paralympic Games of 2004 and gold and bronze in Beijing 2008. Leo-Pekka's racing chair and four Paralympic medals are on display in this exhibition.

Leo-Pekka used this yellow racing chair when he won two Paralympic gold medals in Athens. Wheelchair racing is one of the most spectacular and prestigious events in disability sports.

Photo: Leo-Pekka Tähti, winner of two gold medals in Athens.  
Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.





2.

## Medals from Jouko Grip and Leo-Pekka Tähti

Finland's Jouko Grip was among the first three athletes inducted into the new Paralympic Hall of Fame in connection with the Winter Games in Turin in 2006. His 18 Paralympic medals and Hall of Fame plaque are on display in this exhibition.



3.

### The Statistics

Summer and Winter Paralympics

Disability sports grants 1999-2009

Disability Sports Athlete of the Year  
1989-2007



#### 4.

### Goalball



Goalball is a team sport for people with visual impairment. Its playing field has the same size as in volleyball. The objective of the game is to throw a tingling ball across the floor into the opponents' goal. All players wear eyeshades.

The size and weight of the goalball has changed over the years. The largest (brown) ball, weighing 2.5 kilograms, was used in the 1980's. The red ball was used next, followed in the 1990's by the blue one of 1.25 kg. The smallest ball weighs 0.95 kg and is used only by juniors and in training. The eyeshades are used both for protection and prevention of sight.

Sound is often an important element in sports for people with visual impairment. The balls used in goalball, showdown and football contain tingling bells. In Nordic and Alpine skiing the guide gives instructions through a voice amplifier.

Photo: Goalball players Katja Heikkinen (formerly Posio) and Päivi Tolppanen (at the back) in defensive action. The Finnish team finished fourth in Athens 2004. Lehtikuva/Tor Wennström.

5.

## Prosthetics for sports

On the left Pertti Sankilampi's skiing leg. He used this prosthetic leg to win seven Paralympic gold medals, seven World Championship titles and one European Championship title between 1976 and 1990. Sports prostheses of today are purpose-made and fit accurately and comfortably. Lower limb amputee athletes can use specific prosthetic legs for skiing, running, jumping or throwing events. These sport prostheses are manufactured by Otto Bock and Össur.

Photo: Change of skiing leg. In the picture Pertti Sankilampi.  
Photo Martti Larikka.





## 6.

### Wheelchair rugby



Wheelchair rugby is a team sport for athletes who have disabilities in at least three limbs. The attacking and defending players use different kinds of chairs. The attacker's chair must be as maneuverable as possible, while the defender's chair is fitted with a front buffer to absorb hits.

There is an attacker's chair and a defender's chair in the exhibition. You can try them out yourself.

Aid equipments people with disabilities were quite primitive in the early 1960's. Purpose-made sport wheelchairs were still unknown, and existing models were heavy to handle. Disability sports gave a stimulus to the development of lighter chairs, which were also applied for ordinary use. Modern aid appliances used in disability sports are tailor-made according to the specific needs of the user.

Photo: Finland vs. Sweden at the Nordic Championships in wheelchair rugby at Kisakallio in 2008. Finnish player Mauri Vironmäki (9).

Photo: Suvi Aho.

7.

## Showdown



Showdown is a sport developed for persons with visual impairment. Its rules resemble those of table tennis. The object of the game is to use the bat to hit a tingling ball along the side wall or under the center screen into the opponent's goal pocket. The players wear sight-preventing eyeshades and a glove or a pad to protect the hitting hand.

Put the glove on and take the bat and ball at close range. Put the eyeshades on. Hit the ball along the table towards the opposing wall. Try to prevent it from rolling back to your own goal pocket.

Photo: **World championships in Paralympic showdown at Tuusula, Finland in 2008.** NKL Archives.





## Videos.

8.

**History of the Paralympic Games.**  
Duration about 26 minutes. No text  
or commentary.

9.

**Paralympic Games Beijing 2008.**  
Presentation of the Paralympic  
Summer Games and Paralympic  
sports. Duration about 19 minutes.  
Finnish commentary.

10.

**30 years of Special Olympics  
1968-1998.** Duration 4.40 minutes.  
No text or commentary.