



Beijing Paralympics

ON SEPTEMBER 17 some 4,000 participants from 147 countries and regions headed home from 12 days of competition at the Beijing Paralympics, the world's biggest-ever sporting event for athletes with disabilities.

On the track, Japanese athletes managed to clinch first and second places in the men's 400-meter and 800-meter wheelchair races. Double gold medalist Tomoya Ito was 34 when he lost the use of his lower body after contracting multiple sclerosis, a condition that attacks the central nervous system. His track career began almost by accident when he mistakenly ordered a competition wheelchair, but focusing on the 400-meter and 800-meter events and working on muscular strength eventually led to his double Paralympic victory.

In the men's wheelchair tennis singles competition, Shingo Kunieda beat Robin Ammerlaan of the

Netherlands to bag the gold. After finishing in eighth place in the singles competition at the Athens Olympics, last year Kunieda became the first wheelchair tennis athlete to achieve a grand slam in men's competition. The rules of wheelchair tennis allow for the ball to bounce twice before being hit, but Kunieda trained for his gold medal performance in Beijing by playing in regular tennis competition to hone his skills in returning the ball after a single bounce.



ABOVE: Tomoya Ito (*right*), winner of the gold medal in the men's 800-meter wheelchair race, with silver medalist Toshihiro Takada.

LEFT: Shingo Kunieda took gold in the men's wheelchair tennis singles competition.