**SUMMARY**

**‘Challenges of the Champs: How minority athletes rise from adversity to victory’** by Çelen Oben and Sheila Riikonen

In Finland where finance and politics are no longer barriers to achieve star status in sports, what challenges do minorities such as women, persons with disabilities, or those coming from immigrant backgrounds face?

Meanwhile, in spite the politics that asks winning athletes of the Republic of North Cyprus to sing the national anthem of another flag, what are their hopes and dreams to represent TRNC? Will their valiant spirit continue to sustain them to reap rewards, in the process building their self- identity?

This story is written as part of a project report for the EU and Council of Europe´s programme for [Diversity and Social Integration of Minorities in Europe](http://mars12mm.wordpress.com/).

The authors Celen Oben (South Cyprus, North Cyprus, and Turkey) and Sheila Riikonen (Finland and Philippines) interviewed sports figures in a span of 10 days in December 2012 (see picture slideshow “Love from Finland” - <http://misshelsinki.tumblr.com/tagged/mars2012>)

In North Cyprus, they interviewed athletes, coaches, and mentors from the fields of Football tennis, Wheelchair basketball, Running, Taekwondo, and Billiards as well as policy makers and advocates of sports. The journalists were also invited to social events where Çelen is VP of the Sports Press Association.

They interviewed 12 people including: Football tennis amateur federation president **Şevket Songur**, Wheelchair basketball coach **Orçun Kamali**, Wheelchair basketball player **Aliye Kocasoy**, Runner **Meliz Redif**, Coach/Trainer **Levent Ilgin**, Taekwondo medalist and World Champion **Pinar Akarpinar** and her teammate **Songül Yildirim,** President of the National Olympic Committee **Eyüp Zafer Gökbilen,** Runner **İlkay Yorganci**, and **Tuncer Tuncergil** – VP of EMU (Eastern Mediterranean University).

In Finland, they spoke to athletes and coaches from the fields of Wheelchair racing, Running, and Handball.

The interviewees are **Toni Piispanen**, Paralympics wheelchair racing champion (read news <http://www.starkibris.net/index.asp?haberID=139083>), Runner **Nooralotta Neziri**, as well as four local athletes in Siuntio, 100 kms from Helsinki. Here, the authors learned how a sparsely populated community sustained a spirit of camaraderie and friendship in the name of sports.

The journalists also watched the Ice Hockey season games in Helsinki played by **HIJK vs. Jokerit**.

The **Media Work Exchanges** organized by two journalists who have never previously met was a risk but was well worth it. The authors expect that there will be a long-term view and effects of these projects from the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as the journalists who joined the programmed.

Undoubtedly, while there are challenges in everyday life and seemingly insurmountable odds in international competitions, the athletes from minority backgrounds persevered.

Families and relationships are big factors in their success. The role of mentors, clubs, and society in the athletes' success cannot also be undermined. A passion for sports and a healthy lifestyle are enabling factors to survive – whether it´s political, economic, social, psychological, and others.