

Coaches Matter

ECB Coaches Association Technical Bulletin in partnership with the ECB Coach Education Office
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Meeting your players' needs: coaching disabled cricketers

Meeting player need; how can you as a coach closely match what you deliver to what your players' need to improve and develop in a fun inspiring way? **Coaches Matter** spoke to four leading coaches within Disability cricket. We asked Bobby Denning (BD) (Physical); Ron Young (RY) (Hearing Impairment); Jason Bowen (JB) (Visual Impairment) and Ian Leather (IL) (Learning Impairment) to lend their advice in this crucial area, drawing on their experience of working with disabled players.

Led by ECB National Disability Manager Ian Martin, Disability Cricket is currently going through an unprecedented time of change and new investment. The National Visually Impaired (VI) team took the Ashes during the winter and the opportunities for all disabled players are growing almost daily. What lessons can coaches learn from the disabled game which they can apply to their own work in any environment? Have you considered applying your coaching skills to disability coaching? After all every session involves catering for different levels of ability, how can differentiation allow us to coach the player based on their ability? Lets find out.

Q. What advice would you give to a coach who is interested in working with cricketers with Disabilities?

BD Give it a go. Be yourself, and be confident in the skills that you have learnt on the education courses, everything a coach does applies just as much to coaching disabled players as to mainstream players.

RY Go into it with an open mind. Find out what the special need of each cricketer is; be patient; have lots of fun and they will find it very rewarding.

IL Treat it like a normal coaching session. The participants are people who want to play cricket like anyone else. Yes there will be adaptations but always adhere to the fundamental principles of coaching.

JB Don't be afraid to take on the challenge as it is a lot easier than you would imagine and far more rewarding than you can begin to believe. Do not treat the players any differently as you may come across as patronising!

Q. Can you give us a practical example of a

training activity that works really well and could be used by a club coach?

RY I have often found that a game of Dodge Ball with a larger soft ball again adapted to suit the needs of individuals in the group works very well as a warm up. I also like to work on FUNDamental movement skills and develop routines based on them

JB Most red ball drills can be used for VI cricket using the International ball. (NB: International VI cricket is played with a white 'rattle' cricket ball) I try to be clear in my instructions and slow activities down until players have become familiar with the drills. A good drill I often use is "Hand Hockey", i.e., rolling the ball to each other and standing still with the ball in hand. You must have a sighted person at each goal to direct the players.

IL Many of the England Moderate Learning Disability squad react very positively to visual feedback. We have found video is an excellent tool for technical adjustments and delivering new skills.

Q. Can you tell me about your specific category of disability?

BD Cricketers with Physical Difficulties. I find it is very important to find out what exact problem and, subsequent range of movement an athlete has; my aim is to coach the ability and not the disability. The cricketer may well be able to perform half of the coaching points related to any skill - by working with these strengths and developing ways of working round the weaknesses the players quickly improve, just the same as any player really! Patience, humour, tons of activity and lots of encouragement works for me!

RY Cricketers with Hearing Impairments. It is important that coaches have a basic knowledge of Deaf Awareness, this however is very straight forward! I work with a wide range of impairment from Deaf without speech, to hearing impaired using hearing aids. When cricketers are using hearing aids it is important that they can see your lips and make good eye contact. Speak normally and don't shout. Make sure that the sun or light is not behind you so that you are not in silhouette. Visual demos are very important for all cricketers with hearing difficulties and I always check for understanding. For those cricketers without speech it is always important to keep

explanation simple; use body language; and be positive with lots of encouragement. Obviously communication is a major problem; learn a few basic signs or, if you can learn the BSL alphabet. If you keep it simple you can use the text on your mobile or write down basic instructions.

IL At grassroots level we tend to categorise those with learning difficulties into two groups Moderate LD and Severe LD. MLD sessions are pretty much run as mainstream sessions whereas SLD sessions would generally be just 'having a go' and simple games.

JB Visually Impaired (VI) 3 categories: B1 : Completely Blind Cricketers. These might have slight Light and Dark perception. B2 : Partially Sighted Cricketers. B3 : Partially Blind Cricketers.

Q. What sort of things should coaches be Observing & Analysing? Are they the same as for mainstream cricketers?

BD All of the coaching points for a skill should be observed and analysed - it is only through effective questioning and feedback a coach can understand which part of the skill a player can or cannot do.

RY It is important to observe what the player can physically do and through comparison with a technical model and subsequent analysis, determine how things can be adapted to suit the needs of the individual.

IL Checking for understanding is crucial and verbal reactions shouldn't necessarily be taken at face value. Repetition and body language are good indicators of whether the player is retaining skills but this is not an exact science. Get to know your player as you would with mainstream cricketers.

JB At international level we are looking for players with athletic ability, agility and coordination. Most VI players can be taught the basics provided they have some coordination and fairly good mobility. Ideally someone who can throw accurately with a strong arm, run in a balanced manner and have the ability to hit a ball.

Q. Is it the case that some player's perceived "difficult" behaviour can be as a result of other behavioural difficulties?

BD For physically disabled players, this is not the case, but a good understanding of what motivates any player is a useful

start when developing a strong coach/ player relationship.

RY There are youngsters who do suffer emotional and behavioural difficulties who find it very difficult to function in team sports. The fear of failure; peer group pressure; family problems can make them very self centred and often leads to problems in a normal coaching environment. They can constantly demand attention and they need lots of encouragement. Use discussion with open questions to try and make them understand how they function as individuals in a team environment.

IL For those with Learning Difficulties you come across two main issues regularly - low self-esteem and poor social skills. One experienced coach once told me that it is useful to try and imagine how the person thinks and this requires an understanding of that person's background/history and that they will react to cricketing situations in a similar fashion to previous life experiences. Once you understand why they react in a certain way it is often easier then to deal with that situation as a coach.

Q. Can mainstream and disabled cricketers train together?

BD Yes. Providing the able bodied players understand where the practice may need to be adapted at certain times and providing the disabled player agrees for the practice to run as it normally would and has the skill level to take part. - e.g. at senior club practice - a wheelchair user batting in the nets accepts that the bowlers will run in and bowl as normal.

RY Some disabled cricketers can practice and train together with able bodied cricketers without any major problems as long as coaches are aware of adaptations needed and can differentiate in their training so that everyone comes away from their session with a sense of achievement. However at times disabled cricketers may well want to train together as a group in preparation for their own competitions.

IL The England MLD management team actively encourage squad members to play in mainstream cricket. Club coaches have so far embraced this well.

JB I definitely believe that VI cricketers can train well with able bodied cricketers provided the International VI ball is used. VI players will improve with the exposure to playing with able bodied cricketers.



Bobby Denning



Ron Young



Jason Bowen



Ian Leather

Q. What would you say to coaches who having read this article feel ill equipped to work with disabled cricketers?

BD Have the confidence in the skills you have already learnt, be yourself, don't tread on eggshells and coach cricket! Preparation is important. If you are going to run a disability specific coaching session, advertise it thoroughly and insist on pre-registration so that you are aware of the types of disability that you will encounter. Guard against running sessions for all impairment groups - focus on one - physical, learning, deaf or blind. This is where the Regional Disability Development Forums are helpful because through communication with them you can offer sessions that fill gaps in provision in your region/locality. You are not on your own, there are disability experts in each locality that can help to support your development activity.

RY Attend any workshops that are organised by their Cricket Board or if this is not possible then attend generic courses organised by EFDS, Sports Coach UK or their local Sports Partnerships. Then perhaps work with a coach who works with disabled cricketers to gain extra knowledge based on their experience.

IL In my experience most coaches are pretty confident people therefore they just need to give it a go. Those that have a preference to participation over performance will take a great deal of satisfaction from being involved.

JB Be adaptable and flexible and don't be afraid to make mistakes and learn along the way. The players understand that someone with sight might not always understand their circumstances and might make mistakes, but they are so keen

to learn and participate that they are very accepting of any failures on our part to prepare the "perfect" session.

Enjoy the experience and be uplifted by the joy the players will get from the time and effort you have put into running a practice session for them.

Q. What gives you the most pleasure as a coach?

BD The improvement in the player's skill levels - no different to working with a mainstream player.

RY The look of joy on the faces of disabled youngsters and their teachers/carers when they first strike a ball - take their first catch and then to see them develop and start to enjoy playing cricket.

IL As with all coaches it is the environment; getting to know like minded people who love cricket and seeing them participate at the level they want to achieve.

JB I love seeing the excitement the players get from learning a new skill or achieving something they struggled with previously. Seeing these guys and girls with what we would consider a disability participate and gain enjoyment in the same way any able bodied person would, makes my day every time.

If you want to find out more about coaching cricketers with disabilities visit the ECB website <http://www.ecb.co.uk/development/disability-cricket/>

The ECB and ECB CA offer support to all coaches working with any players with a disability, for advice, more information or if you and your club would like to be involved please contact:

■ The Cricket Development Manager of your local County Cricket Board. Or
■ disabilitycricket@ecb.co.uk

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