

# Coaching Athletes with a Vision Impairment

## Questions and Answers

### **What is vision impairment?**

A person who has vision impairment has the partial or total loss of vision.

### **What causes vision loss?**

Vision loss can be caused by a number of different ways. A person may be born with vision loss or gradually lose their vision due to other conditions during their life. Some of the more common eye conditions include glaucoma, cataracts, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy.

### **How will vision loss affect the athlete's ability to participate in sport?**

It won't, a person with vision loss can still participate in sport, but the activity will require modifications to the rules and equipment used. For example, balls will contain bells or other audible sounds that will assist the athlete. The athlete may also have a guide that will assist them to compete.

### **If a person has a vision impairment, what benefit is it for them to play?**

A person with vision impairment will have a lower level of physical fitness. This is a result of people with a vision impairment finding it difficult to move around comfortably forcing them to have a sedentary lifestyle. Therefore, participation in sport will increase the athlete's level of fitness, coordination and balance as well as providing a reduction in social isolation and feeling welcomed and included in their local community and sporting club.

### **What coaching strategies can I use to include a person who has vision impairment?**

- Make sure the athlete is aware of their surroundings by verbally describing the surroundings.
- Familiarise the athlete with the activity. Allow them to touch and feel the equipment and surrounding surfaces.
- Don't be afraid to ask the athlete if they need help with the activity.
- Provide the athlete with clear and concise instructions about participating in the activity.
- Be patient as an athlete with vision impairment will take longer to master an activity.
- Make sure that you are continually communicating with the athlete. This means addressing them as you approach and let them know that you are departing.



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## Coaching Athletes with a Vision Impairment General Tips

Key Characteristics	Implications for sport participation	Benefits of sport and physical activity	Safety considerations	Special considerations	Recommendations to coaches
<p>Loss of sight may be total or partial.</p> <p>Vision loss may be congenital or acquired.</p> <p>Use of aids such as canes is very common.</p> <p>People with vision loss have a high level to feel and touch to gain an understanding of their environment.</p> <p>May have an elevated head position to alert other senses.</p>	<p>Being blind does stop an athlete from participating in an activity.</p> <p>Athletes who are blind may require the support of a guide or pilot. This may mean that the number of people on the field of play is more than usual.</p> <p>More difficult for the athlete to learn the sport through verbal instructions than physical demonstrations.</p>	<p>People with vision loss have lower levels of fitness than their able-bodied peers. Therefore the benefits of participation for people with loss are many. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased physical fitness</li> <li>• Improved balance and coordination</li> <li>• Decrease feelings of depression due to social isolation</li> <li>• Increased self-esteem due to improved levels of fitness and social connection</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure the athlete is aware of their surrounding environment. Be prepared to verbally describe the environment in details to allow the athlete to gain this understanding.</p> <p>Make sure surrounding environments are free of obstacles that may hinder the athlete's participation.</p>	<p>Vision impaired athletes will do things slower than sighted athletes.</p> <p>Modified audible equipment may be needed to assist the athlete to participate in the activity.</p> <p>Alternative communications strategies need to be developed by a coach to a vision impaired athlete participate. This can be combined with physically guiding the athlete through the movements required.</p> <p>Athletes who are blind from birth or an early age have a greater difficulty in visualising the activity than those who have lost their sight later in life after a sport skill have be acquired.</p>	<p>Develop an awareness of the equipment to be used as it may be different than what is used in able-bodied sport.</p> <p>Be patient as it will take longer to teach a visually impaired athlete the sport.</p> <p>Make sure an athlete can use all their available senses to their best advantage.</p> <p>Make noise when approaching a blind athlete and use their name when speaking to them so they are aware of where you are positioned.</p> <p>When leaving the athlete let them know you are leaving.</p>



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