

Practical Considerations when Working with Athletes with Disabilities

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What is your Purpose?

- ★ What are you trying to achieve when you work with athletes?
- ★ What are you trying to achieve when you work with athletes who are short?
- ★ What are you trying to achieve when you work with athletes with disabilities?



Focus on Ability

- ★ Don't ignore the disability if it influences what you are doing, but it should not be the main focus
- ★ Use athletes as a source of information
- ★ Don't be a protector from failure



Amputees



★ Challenge



Amputees

- ★ Muscle imbalances
- ★ Overstressing of single limbs
- ★ Possible rule differences



Blind



Blind

- ★ Identify yourself
- ★ Never leave a conversation without saying so
- ★ Provide accurate and specific instructions and directions
- ★ Avoid background noise
- ★ Speak directly to the person, maintain eye contact



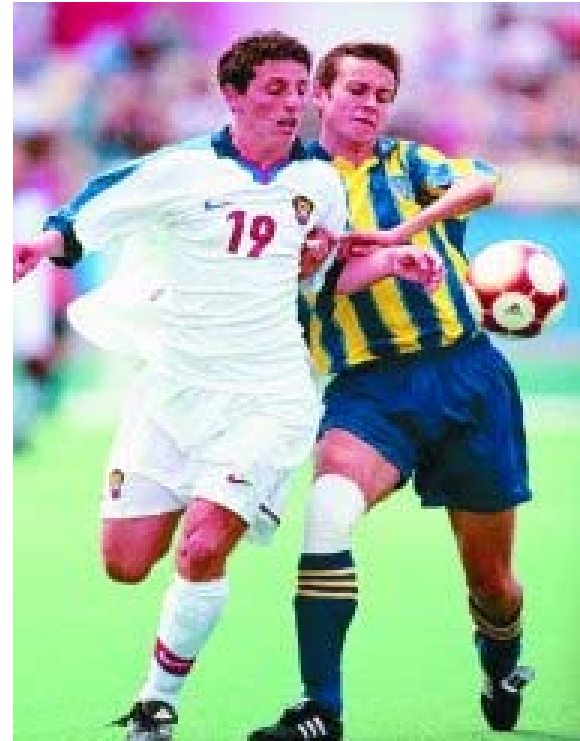
Blind

- ★ Provide verbal feedback to make up for lack of visual feedback
- ★ Avoid rearranging furniture
- ★ Consider Braille or large font handouts, or CDs/cassettes



Cerebral Palsy

- ★ A variety of neuromuscular conditions caused by damage to the part of the brain that controls and coordinates muscle tone, reflexes, and action
- ★ Range of classifications
- ★ Challenge



Cerebral Palsy

- ★ If speech is affected, don't assume intellectual disability
- ★ Speak directly to the athlete
- ★ Exercise may increase spasticity



Intellectual Disabilities

- ★ Inability to think in abstract terms
- ★ Poor decision making ability
- ★ Poor short term memory
- ★ Learning difficulties
- ★ Limited literacy/numeracy skills
- ★ Inconsistent concentration spans



Intellectual Disabilities

- ★ Keep sessions fun and enjoyable
- ★ Keep practice time on specific activities short
- ★ Keep instructions simple – break down skills
- ★ Seek understanding
- ★ Be specific in praise, criticism, and encouragement



Intellectual Disabilities



- ★ Be aware of needing to teach things we may take for granted



Wheelchair Athletes



Challenge



Wheelchair Athletes

- ★ Accessibility issues
- ★ Get on their level
- ★ Wheelchair is part of personal space
- ★ Dealing with heat and cold
- ★ Unique rules
- ★ Harness all even partially usable muscles



Abdominal Breathing/Centering

- ★ Self-talk (blind)
- ★ Quadriplegics



Physical Relaxation

- ★ Tension phase of PMR (CP)
- ★ PMR – entire body or just parts?



Controlling Arousal/Activation

- ★ Loss of sympathetic drive to the heart limits increases in heart rate for quadriplegics



Goal Setting

- ★ ID – able but takes time
- ★ Recording instead of writing (CP, blind, ID)



Body Awareness

- ★ Prostheses, chairs, crutches – part of the athlete's body?
- ★ Which muscles can/cannot be controlled (CP/WC)
- ★ Phantom limb experiences – where does the limb end?



Imagery

- ★ Visual images are possible for the blind (congenital or acquired)
- ★ To wear or not to wear a prosthesis
- ★ Importance of scripts (ID and others)



Attention/Concentration

- ★ Balance
- ★ Broadening attention – visual or aural



Self-Confidence

- ★ Individuals with disabilities may not be taught a competitive orientation to life and therefore may not develop the personal dispositions and skills, such as competitiveness and coping strategies, to maintain self-confidence in competitive situations
- ★ A skill!



Pre-Competition Preparation

- ★ Music (blind)
- ★ Familiarization with venue (blind)
- ★ **CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLE**



Conclusion

- ★ Rule alterations and communication issues may need to be taken into account
- ★ Chances are good that working with athletes with disabilities will enhance your professional effectiveness, no matter with whom you end up working

