



Blind & Low Vision Lawn Bowls

beginner's guide to coaching & directing



**Blind
Sports
Australia**



Australian Blind Bowls Association



**BOWLS
AUSTRALIA**



**Blind
Sports
Australia**



Blind Sports Australia




A.B.N. 68 008 621 252

Foundation member of the Australian
Paralympic Committee

P.O. Box 8030 / 454 Glenferrie Road
Kooyong Victoria 3144
03 9864 9409

admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au

www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au

-  Facebook | @BlindSportsAust
-  LinkedIn | @blind-sports
-  Instagram | @blindsportsaustralia

Acknowledgement

Blind Sports Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay respect to their cultures, Elders past, present and emerging, and we commit to working together for our shared future. We acknowledge the Commonwealth Department of Health's support through the Driving Social Inclusion through Sport and Physical Activity Grant, along with our partnership with Bowls Australia and the Australian Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA).

Front Cover: close up of world champion Jacky Hudson observing with a monocular, along side her director Robert Hudson.

Inside Front: side on image of world champion bowler Jake Fehlberg wearing a green and gold top looking through his monocular during a match.

Table of Contents

04 Introduction

05 About blind and low vision bowls

06 Understanding vision impairment

06 Understanding common eye conditions

08 Case study: Jacky Hudson

09 Guiding and safety principles

09 Communication & guiding system

12 Health and safety considerations

13 Safeguarding children & vulnerable people

14 Coaching education and philosophy

14 Benefits of sport

15 Coaching approaches

16 Developing programs

18 Case study – Greg Kennedy

19 S.T.E.P.S principles

20 Planning a blind and low vision bowls session

22 Core technical skills

26 Competitive sport for athletes

26 Classification

28 National pathway to the podium

29 Case study: Jake Fehlberg

30 Further information

Image shows: Robert Hudson (Director) wearing his green and gold uniform, standing in front of Jacky Hudson using his foot as a directional guide.



Introduction

Welcome to Blind Sports Australia's 'Beginners guide to coaching blind and low vision lawn bowls' produced in partnership with Bowls Australia and the Australian Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA). Blind Sports Australia (BSA) acknowledges the funding of the Commonwealth Department of Health through the Driving Social Inclusion through Sport and Physical Activity Grant.

At BSA we believe that every person with a vision impairment (VI) has the right to participate in sport and physical activity. We understand there are often hurdles and barriers that need to be overcome in order for someone with a vision impairment to have the same accessibility as a sighted person.

This resource has been created with the specific purpose to assist anyone who is delivering bowls specific physical activities with support, ideas and guidance on how to create an inclusive environment that welcomes people with a vision impairment.

This resource is all about helping sports providers and bowling clubs in becoming VI friendly through their provision of activities, training, resources, and support. Sporting providers include these groups:

- Sports coaches
- Physical education teachers
- Community coaches
- Multi-sport / multi-skill coaches
- Sports clubs
- Volunteers
- Fitness industry professionals
- Sport development professionals
- Parents and carers

This resource will enable coaches, leaders and parents/carers to:

- Learn about sight loss and eye conditions.
- Increase their understanding of the needs of people with a vision impairment
- Apply their knowledge to meet the needs of people with a vision impairment
- Use basic communication skills to support the needs of people with a vision impairment in sport and physical activity
- Understand where you can obtain further support to ensure your club/group is fully accessible to, and inclusive of, people with a vision impairment



Image shows: Calvin Rodgers, Bowls Australia Para Jackaroo and IBBA World Mixed Pairs Champion (B3 category) in the motion of bowling during competition.

About blind and low vision lawn bowls

Bowls, or lawn bowls is a sport in which the objective is to roll biased bowls so that they stop close to a smaller ball called a 'jack'. Lawn bowls is played for the challenge and competition, personal enjoyment and the pleasure of spending time outdoors and for social interaction. It is also a low-impact, therapeutic form of exercise. When playing lawn bowls, members with a vision impairment are accompanied by their own sighted helper who is known as the 'director'.

Lawn bowls is a sport ideal for players of all ages and abilities. Bowlers who are vision-impaired or blind often play alongside sighted players, using identical equipment and sharing the same greens. While a sighted player, or 'director,' guides players with a vision impairment by providing directional support, all standard rules apply, with a few adjustments for accessibility noted below.

Rules and Equipment

All rules from sighted bowls apply to people playing and competing in bowls with a vision Impairment. The key differences are:

- The bowler will have a sighted guide (director) to assist them in their action and communicating direction and distance
- A clearly marked Central line and/or string line showing the centre of the rink as well as distance markers may be placed alongside the rink to help directors communicate the length of the jack to players

Venue

Blind lawn bowls can be played at any bowling club in your local area, all clubs should be accessible to people with a vision impairment. You may be playing on either a lawn turf or synthetic bowling green.

Director

Each player may have a director who provides instructions about where and how to bowl. The director is not compulsory for players in social competition, however in national and international competitions and in all ABBA endorsed state competitions players must have a director present. The director uses many methods to assist the player setting up for their delivery. The most common methods are below.

What can I play?

Bowls can be a team or individual sport. There are four disciplines you can play. Normally each discipline will consist of the following:

- Singles – 4 bowls played per player (first to 21)
- Pairs – 3 or 4 bowls in total (15, 18 or 21 ends)
- Triples – 2 bowls played per player (15, 18 or 21 ends to be completed)
- Fours – 2 bowls played per player (15, 18 or 21 ends to be completed)

** An end of bowls comprises the placing of the mat, the delivery of the jack and the playing of all the required bowls of all of the players in one direction of the rink.*

Further information at [Bowls Australia](https://www.bowlsaustralia.com.au/)

Image shows: lawn bowls official kneeling down measuring the distance between a blue bowl and the white jack to ascertain whose bowl is shot (closest).



Understanding vision impairment

What is Vision Impairment?

Vision impairment refers to a partial or complete loss of sight in one or both eyes. Vision impairment may be the result of disease or injury, may progress over time, and may be permanent or corrected with vision aids (such as glasses) or with surgery.

A vision impairment can be identified by a standard vision test carried out by an ophthalmologist, optometrist, or doctor.

There are four terms used to describe different levels of vision impairment and blindness:

Partially sighted - means a person has partial vision, either in one or both eyes.

Low vision - refers to a severe vision impairment in which vision acuity is 20/70 or poorer in the better-seeing eye and cannot be improved with glasses or contacts.

Legally blind - Legal blindness is a term used to define a level of vision impairment that qualifies an individual for certain government benefits, assistance programs, or accommodations under the law. The specific criteria for legal blindness in Australia is a visual acuity measurement of 6/60 or worse in the better eye with any prescribed glasses or contact lenses, or a visual field (peripheral vision)

Understanding common conditions

It is important to remember that people who are blind or have a vision impairment are individuals with different levels of vision and varying support needs. These varying conditions affect people who are blind, and vision impaired in different ways.

For example, a person with a vision impairment may be legally blind, have tunnel vision or have blurred peripheral vision.

Here are four common conditions and corresponding images simulating what a person with those conditions may see. This provides an overview of how sight loss affects a person with a vision impairment:

Image as seen by a person with 20/20 vision





Macular degeneration affects a small part of the retina at the back of the eye called the macular. It causes a loss of vision in the center of the vision field, affecting vision when looking directly at something. People with this condition will usually have peripheral vision but may struggle to recognise the faces of their teammates.



Glaucoma causes a loss of peripheral vision due to damage to the optic nerve or increased eye pressure. This condition occurs gradually and will result in a significant reduction of peripheral vision over time. While treatment exists for glaucoma, it can't repair the existing sight loss.



Cataracts cause blurred or cloudy vision, as result of yellowish pigment on the lens of the eyes. This condition is the main cause of vision impairment across the globe. To treat cataracts, surgery can be used to remove the cloudy lens.



Diabetic retinopathy can affect anyone with diabetes. It causes floaters and blurred vision, resulting from damage to the retina due to high blood sugar levels.

Along with these four conditions, there are many other causes of sight loss. Visit the Vision Australia website for more information on specific eye condition, following this link: [Vision Australia Eye Conditions](#)

Jacky Hudson

BLV Bowls World Champion

Jacky Hudson admits she was an unlikely candidate to become a world champion.

From being the last to be picked at school sports, and only taking up lawn bowls in retirement, Jacky soon found her calling on the green.

In 2023, Hudson, along with her husband and director Rob, teamed up with Jake Fehlberg and his Director Cody to defeat South Africa in an epic mixed pair final to take home the first ever para gold in the World Championship tournament on the Gold Coast.

It's an inspiring story – from first picking up a bowl later in life to the social benefits of sport Jacky's attitude has seen her reap the rewards.

"I'd never really played sport at all apart from what was compulsory at boarding school, and I was usually the last one to get picked on a team. When we retired and moved up to Fingal Bay, I went to a Christmas lunch with the men's

and women's bowlers and the coach at the time asked if I would like to learn how to play.

I was a bit surprised because I can't see past the end of my nose, but she insisted that it was no issue and to come and give it a go, and I'm always up for a challenge.

It was for fun to start with, but I love the friendships and the fact that I was accepted by everybody." **Jacky Hudson**

Jacky would be first to say it's all about giving it a go – sport can take you on an interesting journey – everyone is capable of extraordinary things with the right opportunities.

"It's still all sinking in and being a World Champion still sounds a little bit surreal and I never thought that would be said about me for anything, but it still feels pretty darn good."

Jacky Hudson



Image shows: Jacky Hudson dressed in Australian team uniform next to a volunteer at the 2023 World Bowls Championships.

Guiding and safety principles

Communication & guiding system

It is important to understand the needs of a person with a vision impairment. Do not be afraid to ask questions to obtain as much information as you can that will aid in coaching and delivery. To overcome any safety issues with young children, discuss options with the child's parents, guardians or carers beforehand.

- Use the person's name to gain attention
- Use clear, accurate verbal instructions and check they understand them
- Make sure the participant knows when you have finished and are moving away from them
- Make sure the area in which you are working is free of obstacles and clutter
- Supply any written information (if necessary) in a suitable format such as audio recording large print or braille copy
- Agree a method of communication (for example, specific words or gestures) that works for both you and the person with the vision impairment and review it as needed
- Ask a person who is blind or with a vision impairment if and how they prefer to be guided. Some people prefer to hold the guide's elbow while walking half a step behind as this gives information about direction and slope

Correct terminology

It is important to always use the correct terminology when referring to people with a vision impairment and discussing sight loss in general. Using the wrong type of language can create a barrier, so by

using appropriate terminology it will help you build lasting relationships with your participants and grow your participation programs.

Words to use

- Person with low vision
- Person with sight loss
- Person who is partially sighted
- Person who is blind
- Has a vision impairment

Words to avoid

- The blind
- The handicapped
- The disabled
- Vision impaired (when referring to an individual)
- Suffers from

While it is important to use correct terminology, do not over think every sentence you say.



Image shows: NSW director standing in a straddle position directing to bowl between her feet.

General guiding principles

A participant who is blind or vision impaired may rely on a sighted person to assist with accessing a sports facility. Not having access to a sighted guide may cause a barrier to participation.

One method of overcoming this barrier is to utilise the services of organisations such as Vision Australia. This service matches people with vision impairment with a trained volunteer who acts as a sighted guide and enables people to do the things they want to do, which can include taking part in sport and physical activity.

Key points

- Identify yourself and ask if they would like some assistance; don't just presume that they do or don't
- Offer your elbow or shoulder to hold
- Ask which side they prefer to be guided
- When guiding a child, discuss options with the child's parents, guardians, or carers beforehand
- Aim to be one step in front, don't walk too fast or too slowly, ask if they are happy with your pace
- Always communicate by describing what is coming up, for example steps (up or down) or handrails
- Describe what objects are close by and explain any changes in ground surface
- Show the person where a chair is by placing their hand on the back of the chair. Avoid backing them directly onto the seat
- Ensure the person steps behind you when moving through doorways so they do not get struck by the door or catch their fingers
- Explain any loud noises
- Keep your guiding arm still and relaxed without waving it about or pointing
- Give the person adequate space to safely manoeuvre around obstacles



Image shows: a teaching student bending down with a blindfold on reaching for a foam ball while being assisted by a guide simulating the directors role.

Guiding during sports activities

A participant with a vision impairment may require assistance when playing bowls. This could be supporting them to set the mat and jack on the center line, helping them to find the correct aiming point as well as describing the finishing position of the bowl to help the athlete correct any movements for the next time.

In bowls, this role is known as a director, where the director directs the participant on specific elements of the game.

There are different ways of directing. Some directors stand in front of the participant, others direct from behind.

It is common for bowlers with a vision impairment to play with and alongside sighted bowlers as well as playing specifically in events for bowlers with a vision impairment.

In matches where the participant with a vision impairment is in a position where they must make decisions and calls regarding which shot to play, the director will play an important part in this. In vision impaired classified events, the director will be the person making the calls and communicating this to teammates. In open events, the participant can be the communicator if they wish.

Directors in bowls

It is important to note that in the game of bowls each player with a vision impairment may have access to a director. The director acts as the persons sighted guide by providing instructions about where and how to bowl. The director ordinarily stands just in front of the player and may use their foot as a close-range target for the player to bowl towards.

For more information about communication and guiding principles visit:

[Guiding Principles](#)

[Effective Communication](#)

[Approach, Assist, Ask](#)



Image shows: QLD blind and low vision bowler being guided by their director during a match. second image - a close up of Jacky Hudson watching the game through a monocular wearing NSW uniform.

Health and safety considerations

There are some key health and safety considerations that sports coaches/leaders and parents/carers may need to think about when a person with a vision impairment takes part in a sport and recreational activity.

Health and safety considerations should not be a barrier to including participants.

Specific risks should be considered as part of your organisations daily risk assessment for the activity. Any action taken to minimise potential risks should be provided on the form in detail.

A template risk assessment form is available at: www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au

Below is a list of some of the most common risks and how to negate these risks:

Obstacles: a participant may not see obstacles and be unable to avoid them provide detailed verbal descriptions of the activity area and explain in advance any obstacles or hazards. Below are some specific examples of obstacles of hazards:

- Multiple bowls bags near the green
- Up to 24 bowls scattered around the rink at any one time
- The bowling greens edge is approx. 30 centimetres above ground level

To mitigate some or all of these risks please follow these tips:

- Always let the person with a vision impairment know if they need to spend any period of time on their own
- Use a guide if necessary
- Make other coaches/leaders and participants using the facility aware that there is a person with a vision impairment who may not see other participants or equipment

Fire evacuation: ensure procedures are in place to support a person with a vision impairment in the event of an emergency evacuation such as fire or security threat, and that the person with the vision impairment understands that procedure. For example, assigning a buddy, or providing a guide to assist.

Insurance: ensure all sports sessions have adequate insurance cover to protect you, your participants, and your club.

Further information

Sports Australia - [Safe and Inclusive Sport](#)



Image shows: first aid bag and equipment.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

As a club, sport coach, leader or volunteer it is vitally important to have safeguards in place to prioritise the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, and these should be made available to all participants and their carers/parents.

In this resource the term 'children' refers to children and young people under the age of 18.

Anyone directly or indirectly involved with providing sport and physical activity opportunities has a responsibility to:

Consent

- Obtain participants' approval before using any images for social media or marketing, secured through a signed 'photo release' or 'consent form' by the individual and/or guardian.
- Understand and follow protocols for photography and videography of children and vulnerable adults, ensuring relevant policies are in place.

Boundaries

- Adhere to child safety policies and procedures.
- Follow the Code of Conduct/Code of Practice.
- Recognise signs of child abuse and understand its impact on children.
- Respond appropriately to children disclosing abuse and take suitable action if concerns are raised.

Privacy

- Ensure staff and volunteers have a clear process to obtain a Working with Children Check (WWCC) or, where applicable, a Working with Vulnerable People Check.
- Know where to seek further information on child safety and privacy matters.

Further information about safeguarding children:

[Working with childrens check](#)

[Clearing house for sport - child safety](#)

[Sport integrity - safe guarding children](#)

[Play by the rules](#)

[Codes of conduct template](#)



Image shows: student wearing vision simulation glasses during a come and try session, smiling at the camera and giving a thumbs up signal.

Coaching education and philosophy

Benefits of sport

Sport and physical activity can be a very effective catalyst to ensuring a healthier and happier lifestyle.

“I’d never really played sport at all apart from what was compulsory at boarding school, I wanted to play for fun to start with, but I love the friendship and the fact that I was accepted by everybody.” Jacky Hudson - Australian BLV lawn bowls

Sport and recreation are important in encouraging people with vision loss to get involved in leading an active lifestyle, which in many cases results in improving a participant’s general health, social interaction, balance, motor skill acquisition, communication and teamwork.

“I would encourage anybody, no matter your ability and no matter the sport, to always pursue their passion.” Jake Fehlberg - Australian BLV lawn bowls

Sport and recreation are invaluable for peer integration and social inclusion, some of the benefits include:

- Creating bonds and friendships
- Improving communication skills, leadership and teamwork raising confidence and self-esteem which allows for further independence and achievement
- Developing spatial awareness, muscle strength and balance acquiring motor skills

It is important that participants who have a pre-existing medical condition or haven’t exercised regularly for a long-time check with their doctor before starting any type of sport or exercise program.

Information and assistance for blind and vision Impaired participants:

- Local doctor
- Vision specialist
- Vision Australia and low vision services
Tel. 1300 84 74 66
- Blind Sports Australia
- State vision organisation



Image shows: Victorian representative Peter Campion dressed in a blue uniform in the motion of bowling with his bowling arm extended out in front.

Coaching approaches

It is important that coaches and volunteers are knowledgeable about working with participants with a vision impairment. Like any interaction between people, it is about assessing a situation and behaving appropriately.

Remember we are all different, and blindness is a spectrum, so each individual vision impairment will also differ. People's degree of sight, ability, personality and fitness levels will vary. It is important not to generalise about vision impairments across participants, but to understand how much the person can see and how to maximise the use of any sight they have.

General coaching advice

When approaching a person or group, always say who you are by name and be aware that you may need to repeat this to allow them to become familiar with the sound of your voice.

- Consider the descriptive language you use when describing an activity or action as some participants with a vision impairment may not understand certain descriptions due to knowledge gaps or having no reference for that action such as "high knees"
- Try and verbalise any body language you might be using as some participants with vision loss may not be able to read facial expressions or make eye contact
- Address a participant with a vision impairment by name or lightly touch them on the side of the arm to indicate you are talking to them but ensure you always ask before touching a participant

- Use everyday language to describe something such as "see" or "look"
- Listen to coaching sessions with your eyes closed to try and understand sight loss and whether enough information is being provided for a person with a vision impairment and that the techniques required are adequately described
- Clear communication is vital, so provide detailed verbal explanations of drill, skills and rules
- Physical demonstrations of a task or action may be necessary when working with a participant with a vision impairment and it is essential that you ask the participants permission to do this
- Some participants with a vision impairment may require additional support, such as hands-on support, guiding or assisting with skills repetition
- Remove obstacles from the activity area, such as spare bowls and bowls bags
- Keep equipment in a well-defined area and inform the participants of the location
- Give precise instructions to help participants with a vision impairment find their way by saying "the equipment is on your left side" instead of pointing and vaguely saying "it's over there"
- Involve participants in all aspects of the clubs. operations including social activities, canteen operations and committee participation

Learn more regarding coaching styles and training principles for individual sports can be found: [BSA Resource](#)

Developing programs

The Australian Blind Bowlers Association and its state affiliates can assist with implementing and promoting vision impaired and blind bowling activities, you can contact them via their website:

[Blind Bowls Australia](#)

This section outlines key factors to consider when planning and delivering sport sessions to help ensure a participant with a vision impairment has an enjoyable and welcoming experience.

Preparation

Just like any sports or activity session, preparation is paramount. The following proverbs are a good reminder to sports coaches and leaders of the importance of preparation.

- Prior planning prevents poor performance
- Fail to plan – plan to fail

Advertising

The promotion and marketing of your sports session, club or activity is important to ensure

people are aware of what your club offers, where you are located and what activities and programs are accessible.

The way in which people with a vision impairment communicate and source information may be different to sighted people, so it is important to consider:

- Providing information in an accessible format if required (e.g. braille, clear print or suitable electronic version for a screen reader)
- Promoting your sessions with the assistance of local and national vision impairment organisations such as Blind Sports Australia, Vision Australia or your local or state blind sport and recreation association
- Contacting your local council to find out a Sight Support Service that can be used to promote your programs and engage with vision impaired people. Blind Sports Australia can advise on your local contacts
- Using social media to promote your sessions, as it is very accessible and a popular medium for vision impaired people, don't forget to turn on the embedded accessibility feature on these platforms
- Using appropriate images of athletes with a vision impairment in your marketing material to help connect and inspire people with a vision impairment to take part in a program
- Including image descriptions of any pictures or photographs in your marketing content, so that they can be accurately described by screen readers

Accessibility information

Vision Australia - [Accessibility toolkit](#)

Vision Australia - [Social Media Accessibility](#)

W3C - [PDF Techniques](#)

Image shows: Australian mixed pairs B2-B3 bowlers and directors standing side on after being presented with medals at the World Bowls Championships.

Travel

Many people with a vision impairment rely heavily on public transport it is advisable to check public transport options and so include directions about the nearest train station or bus route in any promotional information.

Check if other community transport options are available, your local council's Sight Support Services can provide further information.

Some participants may rely on a sighted guide or support worker to assist them in getting to and from your club or session.

Session venue and time

It might be necessary to provide a meet and greet service for a participant with a vision impairment, especially on their first visit. This can be discussed and arranged during any prior communicating with the participant.

Ensure that staff at the venue have been briefed that a person with a vision impairment will be attending the session.

It is important to consider how sunlight, and the time of the session may affect a person's ability to participate. Indoor poorly lit spaces may be

particularly difficult for a person with a vision impairment. Where possible and if practical, organise sessions in good light or evenly lit indoor spaces.

Equipment and facilities

To ensure a person with a vision impairment can be included in your session you may need to source some accessible equipment.

Depending on which sport is being played, the modifications or adaptations can be as simple as using larger or brighter equipment, which is easier to see, making the equipment audible (able to be heard).

Common adaptations used in bowls are:

- Bright coloured Bowls are popular sports equipment for blind or vision impaired bowlers
- Director – assists by communication direction and distance to the bowler
- Distance markers – used to assist the bowler and the director in order to adjust the bowlers back swing for the pace of the bowl delivery

For equipment ideas, cost and purchasing details please go visit: [BSA online equipment store](#)



Image shows: from left - Calvin Rodgers lifting his hat above his head in celebration while being guided by Jason Scheutjens (director). Len O'Brien using a bowling arm device to help to deliver a bowl.

Greg Kennedy

BLV bowler



Greg has been actively involved in sport for many years, continuing to participate and enjoy sport even as his vision diminished due to diabetic retinopathy. He lost his vision in 2003, and is now completely blind in one eye, with 20% vision in the other eye. Always interested in sport of all types, prior to losing his vision Greg was an AFL goal umpire and cites umpiring in front of an MCG crowd of 95,000 as a highlight. He also played golf, cricket and football in his youth, and later was actively involved in the administration of the Olinda/Ferny Creek Football and Netball club.

Greg and his wife took up lawn bowls in 2015 after some time playing golf. As a sport that has a capacity to specifically cater for inclusion, bowls enables people with a disability to compete against others with minimal modifications.

Greg particularly enjoys competing in the annual ABBA National Championships which attracts blind bowlers from all around Australia for ten days of competition.

“We all get together once a year to have a Championship against each other. We are all like- minded, we all put our blindness to one side and compete like people do on any other sport field.”

In encouraging other people with a vision impairment to discover blind sports, Greg has this advice:

“Don’t be frightened of taking that step. Once you understand your role it will be less confronting, the positives are more important than the negatives. In the words of Nike; Just do it!”

Greg Kennedy

Image shows: Greg Kennedy wearing a blue uniform, kneeling down next to his guide dog smiling at the camera.

S.T.E.P.S Principles

The principles of STEPS provide a framework to assist sports coaches to make adaptations to specific elements of coaching and activity sessions. These elements are: **Space, Task, Equipment, People and Speed (STEPS)**.

Adaptions can be made to the whole group or for just an individual. It is important to remember that not all people with a vision impairment will require the same adaptations, just as not every participant will have the same abilities and needs.

Listed below are some considerations to ensure the inclusion of a participant with a vision impairment:

S

- Organise the coaching/playing area for each session in a way that assists orientation.
- Increase the target area.
- Guide a person with a vision impairment around the facility and space whilst describing important safety hazards and identifying features and sounds.
- Consider the impact of light and noise during the session.

T

- Give clear oral explanations and test them with another coach by asking them to close their eyes, describing the activity to them and asking them to tell you how much they understood
- If possible, provide details of complex skills, drills or rules to a person with a vision impairment in large print or electronically so they are able to read the written instructions to better understand the task and session
- Modify the rules to increase aspects of participation (e.g. all players must pass after three seconds in team games)

E

- Use larger, brighter equipment.
- Consider the colour of equipment used, for example avoid placing green cones on the grass.
- Wear brightly coloured clothes to ensure you are recognisable.
- Create tactile makers to determine the boundaries of playing areas which can easily be created by using tape and string.

P

- Create a buddy system with other participants who can help, support and assist any person with a vision impairment.
- Sighted guides may require specific training such as director training.
- Create activities that involve all participants.

S

- Slow down the session or game to ensure each skill is practiced and learnt effectively, for example increase the time spent on specific movements and skills, such as delivery of the bowl or feet placement during delivery.

Planning a session

Many sports are made accessible for participants with a vision impairment by making some simple changes to the rules, modifying the playing area or adapting the equipment used. The information below provides some useful hints and tips to demonstrate how blind bowls is currently played or can be adapted to improve accessibility.

Planning a session

When planning a session, it is important to consider the following:

- Safety (see page 12)
- Equipment requirements
- Volunteers and directors – when working with adults, ensure there are an appropriate number of volunteers/directors to support each session (usually one volunteer/director to every three to four players taking part in the session)
- Be aware of changes to the environment different equipment, new area, new people
- Allow time for orientation of the training area

Structuring a training session

When constructing a blind and low vision bowls training session, it is important to consider the following:

- Find out what motivated the participant to become involved in the program
- Welcome participants, introduce yourself and other support staff then outline the training session and any relevant safety features
- Ensure breaks to allow for differing ability and fitness levels of participants
- Warm-ups to include dynamic stretching and injury prevention exercises such as stabilisation and balance
- Session designed to meet participant motivations and abilities
- Implement a game play component to the session
- Set achievable targets and goals
- Warm down and wrap up to include stretching, participant feedback and information about the following sessions, as communication is vital



Image shows: Australian B2-B4 bowlers and directors holding the Australian flag in front of them, smiling at the camera. All four representatives have two medals around their necks.

Rule adaptations

- Blind and low vision lawn bowls is played with the same bowls and equipment as mainstream bowls
- Classification rules apply:
 - B1 Players may play in any category;
 - B2 Players may play in B2, B3 or B4;
 - B3 Players may play in B3 or B4;
 - B4 Players may only play in that classification
- a string line can be used in place of or in addition to a clear centre line marking. The line should be of a high contrast colour.
- Two sets of distance markers placed in the ditches on both sides of the green
- Each player may have a director who provides instructions about where and how to bowl
- The director will stand either in front, to the side or behind the participant

Equipment Requirements

- Bowling arms have been designed to assist a bowler who cannot continue to bowl without the aid of the artificial device and can be used in any competition within Australia
- Bowls are the same as in mainstream bowling
- It is advisable to guide a person with a vision impairment around the venue or facility to help with orientation

Venue Considerations

- Is the location of your venue easily accessible by public transport services?
- Undercover or outdoor training facilities may be utilised for training purposes but it is important to consider the acoustics in the facility, is it easy for instructions/explanations to be heard?
- Does the facility have adequate lighting for night time or day time training/matches?



For full information about adaptations, modification and sport specific rules please consult other Blind Sports Australia Resources or contact Blind Sports Australia for advice and guidance:
blindsportsaustralia.com.au

Above shows: Joel Jensen kneeling on the mat holding an orange bowl in the right hand and is about to deliver the bowl. The bowler has a director out in front of them using their foot to show the aiming point.

Blind and low vision lawn bowls

Core Technical Skills

A coaching session should always start with a correct verbal and physical demonstration of the skill being taught, then providing enough time for repetitions of the skill in order for the players understand the correct movement. There are two fundamental components to bowls - aim and distance control. Coaching sessions must be worked out in such a way to involve all players actively.

How to explain skill

- gain participants attention
- keep explanations short & simple
- use verbal and visual cues
- stick to 1 or 2 Key coaching points
- invite questions from participants

How to demonstrate skill

- have a clear vision and understanding of the skill you are demonstrating
- ensure correct use of movement
- verbally explain movement during demonstration
- repeat demonstration
- check for participants understanding
- invite questions from participants

How to keep it fun

- get participants active quickly
- program a variety of activities
- get everyone involved (no standing still)
- positive feedback and praise efforts

- get participants involved in planning a session or activity
- encourage trial and error

Below are the core technical skills along with a link to a visual demonstration of the techniques that should be the focus of all blind and low vision bowls training sessions:

Grip and delivery basics

Teach your players the core fundamental bowling grip and delivery techniques, which can be used in different game situations is imperative when developing a coaching session.

- bowl size choice
- how to grip a bowl
- feet position
- players stance
- shot selection and bias
- Point of aim; mechanics of movement; pendulum swing. The aim of the delivery is for it to be smooth, balanced and repeatable.



Image shows: Helen Boardman delivering a bowl at the Australian Open with her Director Peter Doherty standing behind.

Stance

For right-handed bowlers - feet together, right foot, pointing along the line on which the bowl is to travel, knees relaxed and elbows slightly bent, body leaning forward slightly from vertical, bowl held out in front of body on a line just outside the right hip to allow a clean swing down the outside of the right leg, eyes looking along the delivery line to a convenient point on the green, weight forward on the balls of the feet, not back on the heels, with most of the weight carried on the right foot

Mat placement

- Front of mat minimum of 2 meters from ditch and centered
- Vary placement for strategic purposes i.e. shorter or longer length to bowl for your advantage

Bias

- All bowls have a bias (weighted side) on one side, this means that the bowl will bend towards the bias (weighted side)
- The bias is defined by a small ring on one side of the bowls, the other side has a large ring
- Learn to identify bias & which direction the bowl will turn
- Understand how your bowl reacts on the green you are playing on

Controlling length

There are many different activities that can be used to practice and refine distance control to build up muscle memory. The weight control is the responsibility of the participant, the line, is the responsibility of the Director.

Delivery technique

- Point of aim; mechanics of movement; pendulum swing

Speed of the green

It is important to have prior knowledge of green you are playing on and understand how the speed of the affects the bowl in terms of how it draws to the jack and what shot choice may be best.

Example fundamental bowling grip and roll techniques along with a link to video description: [Learn to bowl](#)



Images from left clockwise: blind and low vision bowler looking through a monocular to see the other end of the green. A bowler standing on the mat poised to deliver a bowl.

Position description

Leads

- Places the mat and rolls the jack
- Generally only ever plays a draw shot
- Gets shots in the head for the team to work with
- As a lead, it is better for their bowls to finish past the head than short. That way, their bowls are useful and not in the way

Seconds

- Keeps the scorecard in a fours game and changes the scoreboard
- A good second draws very well
- Will often play the yard on shot to sit a bowl or trail the jack
- Some say “seconds” are the most important player in a fours team

Thirds

- Must communicate well with the skip
- Provides encouragement for the skip
- Can play all the shots: draw, yard on shot (conversion), runner, and drive
- Should read a head well and quickly respond to any questions from the skip

Skips

- Leadership is an important skill for a skip to have
- Can read a head well and call shots for the team clearly
- Has great tactical awareness
- Knows what makes each player tick, e.g., a firm pep talk or more encouraging and light-hearted
- Can play all the shots: draw, yard on shot (conversion), runner, and drive



Image shows: Michael Pullinger bowling with the assistance of his director Eric Williams at the ABBA national championships.

The role of a director

Each player may have a director who provides instructions about where and how to bowl. The director is not compulsory for players in social competition; however, in national and international competitions and in all ABBA-endorsed state competitions, players must have a director present. The director uses many methods to assist the player in setting up for their delivery. The most common methods are below.

Front Directing

The director stands in front of the bowler at an agreed distance, which has been worked out over time and through experience. The director may position themselves in various positions to assist with direction for the bowler, i.e., standing off the line and using a foot or cane to show the line to bowl, standing on the line to bowl, or standing astride the intended line of delivery. It is then by use of voice (or sometimes handclaps) that the coach gives the line to the player. It is incumbent upon the coach to learn from every delivery and make

adjustments accordingly—the purpose being to position the head (or hands) exactly on the delivery line in order that the bowler can focus on the voice (or handclap) and deliver the bowl accurately.

Back Directing

The director is positioned behind the bowler and directs the bowler to deliver along the required line. This could be by making small adjustments to the bowler's positioning on the mat or by observing 'practice swings' and indicating "left a bit" or "right a bit"—until the bowler's swing is along the delivery line—followed by "bowl!"

For more information about the role of a director and how to guide a BLV bowler follow the link to this you tube guide:

[The Vision Impaired Bowler - Coach's Guide](#)



Images from bottom left clockwise: Queensland representative in the motion of bowling down the green. NSW bowler Sharon Dunk and Wendy Cartwright (director) sitting together smiling at the camera during an interview.

Competitive sport for athletes

Classification

Classification is the process by which athletes with a vision impairment are grouped together with athletes who have a similar level of impairment into classes for competition in their sport. Each Paralympic sport has a different classification system, and classification may be based on a physical, intellectual, or vision impairment.

Athletes are classified according to their level of visual acuity and visual field. Each eye must be tested individually. Classification of the athlete will be made by the appointed Chief Classifiers after all documentation has been submitted and assessed.

Why is classification required?

By grouping similar athletes together, an athlete's impairment has less of an impact on the competitive outcome. Classification enables the fastest, strongest, or best athletes in each class to succeed in their chosen sport.

When is Classification Required?

To compete in sport as an athlete with a disability, you must undergo a sports-specific classification assessment and hold a classification class. This isn't necessary for general participation or social involvement in sport.

What is the role of a classifier?

Classifiers are trained and certified to assess an athlete's impairments and determine their sport class and sport class status, according to the international classification rules that apply to their sport. Classifiers have either medical or technical qualifications, combined with specific expertise in that sport. In Australia, they are trained and certified by the Australian Paralympic Committee and National sports federations, and work as volunteers at the state, national, and international levels.

To be eligible to commence training as a Classifier, individuals must meet the following prerequisites:

Medical classifiers:

Currently registered Ophthalmologist with a minimum of five years of clinical experience working with people who have a vision impairment and must be based in one of the major low vision centers in Australia.



Image shows: a person receiving an eye examination with their chin resting on the examination machine.

What are the classes for vision impairments?

The list below is intended as a guide only. Only authorised classifiers can provide a formal para sport classification.

Category

Examples (guide only)

B1

Unable to recognize single tumbling E 100M at 25cm (LogMAR 2.6 is out).

B2

Unable to recognize single tumbling E 25M at 1m (LogMAR 1.4 is out).

B3

Unable to recognize the LogMAR 0.9 on the chart = 32M LogMAR chart at 4meters (LogMAR 0.9 is out).

B4

Able to recognize LogMAR 0.9 on the chart up to 0.6 LogMar on the chart OR a field of vision of less than 20 deg in diameter (LogMAR 0.5 is out).

Further details in relation to classification can be found on the following websites.

[International blind bowls - Sight Classification](#)

[ABBA - Sight Classification](#)

[Blind Sports Australia - Classification](#)

Participation Pathways

Classification is required for disability specific state, national and international events



INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION

Bowls Australia para jackaroos & Australian blind bowlers association (ABBA) team.



HIGH PERFORMANCE SQUADS

Talent identification and selection.



NATIONAL

Disability specific events at Australian open; ABBA national championships.



STATE

Disability specific state championships.



DISTRICT/ZONE

Open champion of champion events; representative events; potential disability specific skills & development days.



CLUB

Open social bowls, open club championships, open club tournaments & open club pennant events.



INTRODUCTION TO BOWLS

Come and try events (could be open or disability specific).



Image shows: Calvin Rodgers and Jason Scheutjens (director) receiving medals at the world blind bowls championships.

Case study: Jake Fehlberg

Shattering the common misconception that bowls is mainly played by older folk, Jake started playing bowls at just ten years of age, when his eyesight began to deteriorate.

Encouraged by his father Grant, a bowler and local coach, Jake and his brother Cody were both introduced to the junior squad, and from there Jake took an interest in competition. Jake uses a monocular to help see the other end of the rink and for many years, his father or brother have been his director, or his 'eyes' on the jack.

Lawn bowls players rely heavily on their sight when competing, but for vision-impaired competitors, other methods of guidance are needed.

"As a player with a vision impairment, I have to make sure I've got the equipment I need, which for me, I generally use a monocular to get an idea of the other end," he said.

"A Director is a must for vision-impaired competition; you need that assistance to compete. Without having that organised, I would not be able to compete." Jake Fehlberg

For many years, Jake's father or brother have also been his director, or his 'eyes' on the jack.

Jake's achievements across the past two decades are impressive, and he continues to add more medals to his collection. At 17, he won gold in the singles and silver in the triples at the 2011 Queensland Multi-Disability Championships, where he was named best singles bowler of the tournament. In 2018, Jake took home gold at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, and in 2020, was named the Bowler with a Disability of the Year by Bowls Australia.

In 2022, Jake narrowly missed out on bronze at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, placing fourth in mixed pairs alongside Helen Boardman. He most recently won gold in the mixed pairs with Jacky Hudson at the World Bowls Championships on the Gold Coast - the first ever para gold in the event's history.

When asked what advice he would give to others who wanted to follow their sporting dreams, Jake said to go for gold.

Image shows: Jake Fehlberg wearing the Australian uniform, in the motion of releasing the bowl during a match.



Blind and low vision lawn bowls contacts

Australian Blind Bowlers Association

Email: abbaenquiry@gmail.com

Website: [abba website](#)

Facebook: [abba facebook group](#)

Blind Sporting Clubs Association of South Australia

Email: kent.dredge@blindsportssa.org.au

Website: blindsportssa.org.au

NSW Blind Bowls

Email: info@blindsportsnsw.com.au

Website: [nswactblindbowls](#)

Facebook: fb.com/blindsportsnsw

Blind Bowls Victoria

Email: secretary.bbv@gmail.com

Website: [abba website](#)

Facebook: [blind bowls victoria](#)

Queensland Blind Bowls Association

Email: qldblindbowlers@gmail.com

Website: [qldblindbowlers](#)

Bowls Australia

Email: admin@bowls.com.au

Website: www.bowls.com.au

Facebook: [bowls australia](#)

Vision Impaired and Blind Bowling WA

Email: vibbwa@gmail.com

Website: [vibwa webpage](#)

Facebook: [vibbwa facebook](#)



**Blind
Sports
Australia**



Australian Blind Bowls Association



**BOWLS
AUSTRALIA**

blindsportsaustralia.com.au

Image shows: Back cover image shows a group photo of the Australian Team at the World Blind Bowls Championships in their green and gold uniforms smiling at the camera, one player is holding up a sign with an Australian flag on it.