

# Blind & Low Vision Tennis

**beginners guide to coaching**



**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.

**Front cover:** close up of blind and low vision tennis player Courtney Webeck in the motion of hitting a backhand during the Mastercard "Tennis in a new light campaign"  
**Inside front:** Michael Leigh in action returning serve during the Mastercard photo shoot

# Table of Contents

## 04 Introduction

## 05 About blind and low vision tennis

07 Case study: Nicholas Bradley BLV tennis national head coach

## 08 Understanding vision impairment

## 10 Case study: Blind and low vision tennis ACT program

## 11 Guiding and safety principles

11 Communication & guiding system

14 Health and safety considerations

15 Safeguarding children & vulnerable people

## 16 Coaching education and philosophy

16 Benefits of BLV tennis

17 Coaching approaches

18 Developing programs

## 20 Case study: Courtney Webeck BLV tennis player

21 S.T.E.P.S principles

22 Planning a blind and low vision tennis session

24 Core technical skills

## 26 Competitive sport for athletes

26 Classification

28 Participation pathways

## 30 Blind and low vision tennis contact

**Image shows:** BLV tennis official walking along the court during a tournament while smiling



# Introduction

Welcome to Blind Sports Australia’s (BSA) ‘Blind and Low Vision Tennis - beginners guide to coaching’ produced in partnership with Tennis Australia (TA).

At Blind Sports Australia 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 BLV tennis 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 sport providers and tennis clubs to become VI friendly through their provision of activities, training, resources, and support.

Sporting providers include these groups:

- sports coaches
- PE 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

# About Blind and Low Vision Tennis

Tennis Australia (TA) and Blind Sports Australia are committed to embracing diversity, ensuring tennis is safe, inclusive, and welcoming for all. Competitive play is vital in player development, from grassroots to the international stage.

Together with Blind Sports Australia (BSA), TA’s mission is to provide an enjoyable and accessible tennis experience.

The information on this page supports anyone delivering BLV Tennis events. BLV Tennis events follow ITF (International Tennis Federation) rules with these modifications:

## B1 court specifications:

- dimensions: 12.8 m x 6.1 m
- service line: 1.8 m from baseline (4.6 m from net)
- net height: 83 cm
- tactile lines except for service boxes

## B2, B3 & B4 court specifications:

- dimensions: 18.28 m x 8.23 m
- service line: 2.74 m from baseline (6.4 m from net)
- net height: 90 cm

## The ball:

- BLV Tennis uses foam audible tennis balls. Two types are available in Australia:
- shoei industry co. ball (competition standard)
- handi life sport ball (social standard)
- balls are available from the [BSA online store](#).

## Racquet:

- any ITF-approved racquet, considering court size.

## Blindfold:

- B1 players must wear a standard Paralympic-approved blindfold
- may be adjusted once per game during change of ends
- players must signal the umpire if further adjustments are needed

## Bounces allowed:

- B1 & B2: Up to three bounces
- B3: Up to two bounces
- B4: Up to one bounce

## Volley:

- allowed in all categories

## Serve and receive:

- the server must call “ready?” and wait for a “yes” before serving
- the server must say “play” immediately before hitting the ball and serve within five seconds
- the server may not alter their court position
- both server and receiver can request orientation assistance from the umpire or ball people



**Image shows:** two blind and low vision tennis players shaking hands at the net after the match

### Player loses point

- B1 or B2 player loses the point if s/he does not return the ball before the fourth bounce (three bounces allowed).
- B3 player loses the point if s/he does not return the ball before the third bounce (two bounces allowed).
- B4 player loses the point if s/he does not return the ball before the second bounce (one bounce allowed).

**Note:** At all times the first bounce must be within the court or, in the case of a serve, within the appropriate service court. Any additional bounces may be inside or outside the court.

- if the ball hits the player inside the court before the first bounce, it is a point for the opponent (all categories)
- if the ball hits the player when they are outside the court before the first bounce, it is a point for the opposition player (all categories)
- if the serve hits the player inside the service box before the first bounce, it is a point for the opponent (all categories)
- if the serve hits the player when they are outside the service box before the first bounce, the serve is a fault (all categories)

### Categories

- B1: men & women
- B2: men & women
- B3: men & women
- B4: men & women
- U18 Junior (mixed classifications)

### Classification and categories

- only B1 players can play in the B1 category. B1 players can also play in the B2, B3 or B4 categories, but must follow the rules for that particular category.
- B2 player can play in a B3 or B4 category, but must follow the rules for that particular category.
- B3 player can play in a B4 category, but must observe the B4 rule of one bounce.
- B4 players may not play in a B3, B2 or B1 category

### Sight classification information

- please refer to Tennis Australia's Blind & Low Vision Classification Guidelines for further information on classification requirements.
- alternatively email [blindtennis@tennis.com.au](mailto:blindtennis@tennis.com.au) or call 1800 PLAY TENNIS (1800 752 983)

**For information on how you can purchase equipment and further resources:**

[BSA online store](#)

[BLV Tennis Australia](#)



**Image shows:** group of nine yellow BLV tennis audible training balls with black HLS symbol

## Nicholas Bradley National Head Coach BLV Tennis



Nicholas Bradley's journey into BLV tennis began in 2016 when Tennis Australia's community cares grant opened the door to a new challenge. Tasked with designing a tennis program for visually impaired students at the SA school and services for the visually impaired (SASSVI), Nicholas's work quickly grew from lunchtime clinics into a groundbreaking after-school junior blind tennis program at somerton park tennis club—the first of its kind in Australia.

As a tennis coach, Nicholas is passionate about making the sport accessible. Tennis, he believes, offers physical, social, and mental benefits everyone should experience. Working with the BLV community has been rewarding, allowing him to see firsthand the positive impact BLV tennis has on players. Nicholas thrives on exploring the similarities and unique challenges of BLV tennis, embracing the chance to develop new ideas that improve player experience.

Reflecting on his career, Nicholas is particularly proud of BLV tennis's growth in South Australia and nationally.

**"A highlight was being selected as a coach for the Australian BLV teams that traveled to Spain in 2019 and Birmingham in 2023—unforgettable experiences not just for the competition but for the camaraderie."** says Nicholas Bradley

Nicholas credits much of his inspiration to Andrew Whisson from SASSVI, whose dedication to BLV sports in South Australia has been pivotal.

To clubs aiming for inclusivity, Nicholas encourages embracing the opportunity and learning from mistakes.

**"Seeking feedback from players ensures a welcoming, accessible environment"**  
Nicholas Bradley

For individuals with vision impairments, his advice is to be brave and take that first step—BLV tennis offers one of the most supportive communities he's encountered.

**Image shows:** Nicholas Bradley on the right in a dark blue track suit instructing Courtney Webeck during a training session with her opponent in the background



# Understanding vision impairment

## What is 'vision impairment'

Vision impairment is the partial or full 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** - means a person has a corrected vision of 20/200 in their best-seeing eye. If vision aids such as glasses can correct a person's vision to 20/20, they are not considered legally blind.

**Totally blind** - refers to a complete loss of sight.

Further details can be found at: [Vision Australia](https://www.visionaustralia.org.au/)

## Understanding common conditions

It is important to remember that people are individuals with different levels of vision and varying support needs. These varying conditions affect people who are blind and partially sighted in different ways. For example, a person with a vision impairment may be totally 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** is an eye condition that affects a small part of the retina at the back of the eye called the macular. It causes a loss of vision in the centre 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 yellowy 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](https://www.visionaustralia.org.au/eye-conditions/).

# Case study - BLV tennis ACT program

Launched in late 2023 with support from Blind Sports Australia and Tennis Australia, the blind and low vision (BLV) tennis program at Tennis World Canberra has rapidly grown, offering tailored coaching in a supportive environment.

With no BLV tennis previously on offer in Canberra, the initial sessions introduced interested blind and vision-impaired people to tennis in late 2023. This sparked enthusiastic engagement by a core of players, leading to a low-cost, two-session “Come and Try” format. Accessible and welcoming, these sessions have been a hit, serving as an effective entry point for newcomers to the sport. The success of these sessions has driven momentum, paving the way for ongoing pathways in BLV tennis.

Weekly coaching sessions cater to various ability levels to maximize enjoyment, skill development and competitive play with three structured sessions on offer for B1, B2/B3 and B3/B4 levels.

While the ACT program doesn’t yet host tournaments, participants are encouraged to join Tennis Australia’s schedule of events to gain valuable competitive experience and showcase BLV players in the ACT.

Led by Head Coach Gonzalo Lopez Cervino, Tennis World Canberra supports over 400 students and boasts national development ties.

“Programs like BLV tennis create opportunities for everyone to shine,” says Lopez Cervino.

BLV tennis in the ACT shines as an example of inclusion, skill development, offering social connections and fostering an ongoing love for tennis.

Further information at:  
[BLV Tennis NSW & ACT](#)

**Image shows:** two young participants at a BLV tennis come and try session in the ACT, both are standing behind the net with raquets in hand

# Guiding and safety principles

## Communication & guiding system

It is important to understand the needs of a person with a vision impairment playing BLV tennis. Do not hesitate to ask questions to gather information that will improve coaching and delivery. To address safety concerns for younger players, consult parents, guardians, or carers in advance.

- use the person’s name to gain their attention
- provide clear, precise verbal instructions and check for understanding
- inform the participant when you’ve finished and are moving away from them
- ensure the playing area is free from obstacles and clutter
- if necessary, provide written materials in accessible formats, such as audio recordings, large print, or braille
- establish a communication method (e.g., specific words or gestures) that works mutually and review as needed
- ask if and how the person prefers to be guided. Some may opt to hold the guide’s elbow while walking half a step behind to sense direction and slope

## Correct terminology

Using appropriate terminology builds trust and encourages participation in BLV tennis. Avoid creating barriers by choosing the right language.

## Words to use

- person with a vision impairment
- person with sight loss
- person who is partially sighted
- person who is blind
- has an impairment

## Words to avoid

- the blind
- the handicapped
- the disabled
- vision impaired (when referring to an individual)
- suffers from

While using the right terminology is crucial, do not overthink every sentence. Focus on making participants feel valued and supported.

**Image shows:** four BLV tennis event volunteers in their blue uniforms facing the camera and smiling



## General guiding principles

Participants who are blind or vision impaired often rely on sighted assistance to navigate sports facilities and fully participate in activities. Without this support, they may face significant barriers, from challenges in understanding the layout of the environment to difficulties accessing equipment or engaging with others. Sighted guides play an essential role in removing these obstacles, ensuring that individuals can approach sporting activities with confidence and ease.

One way to provide this support is through services like Vision Australia, where trained volunteers act as sighted guides, ensuring safe and inclusive participation. Guides follow best practices, such as offering their elbow, walking a step ahead, describing environmental changes, and maintaining clear communication to navigate facilities comfortably and confidently all of which are expanded in the below key points.

## Key points

- identify yourself and ask if assistance is needed—never presume
- offer your elbow or shoulder for guidance
- ask which side they prefer to be guided
- when guiding a child, discuss options with their parents, guardians, or carers in advance
- walk one step ahead at a comfortable pace; check if they're happy with your pace
- communicate clearly, describing upcoming changes like steps (up or down) or handrails
- describe nearby objects and changes in ground surfaces
- show a chair by placing their hand on its back rather than seating them directly

- ensure they step behind you when passing through doorways to avoid injuries
- explain any loud noises in the environment
- keep your guiding arm steady and relaxed
- allow adequate space for them to manoeuvre around obstacles

## Guiding during sports activities

Participants with vision impairments may need assistance during sessions, especially during transitions or when equipment is involved. It is recommended that the guide is not the lead coach but serves as an assistant, sports volunteer, or support worker.

A buddy system can also provide effective guiding support.

## Creating a buddy system

A simple and very effective method of including a person with a vision impairment into a sports and physical activity session and to increase communication is to develop a “buddy” system.

This involves identifying another participant in the group to support, help and guide the vision impaired participant.

The role of a “buddy” may consist of simply telling the person with a vision impairment when to pass, or when to expect to receive the ball, explaining the next section of the session or guiding the participant to the next activity.

A buddy system ensures that a person with a vision impairment is made to feel part of the group and isn't completely reliant on the coach or leader. This enables the coach to focus on all participants.

A buddy system also encourages communication, promotes social interaction, and allows friendships to develop.

It is important, if possible, to ensure that the same individual is not always acting as a buddy to a person with a vision impairment. Another favorable outcome of the buddy system is that individuals who take on the responsibility of being a buddy can develop their leadership and communication skills.

**For more information about communication and guiding principles visit:**

[Community Coaching Resource](#)  
[Guiding Principles](#)  
[Effective Communication](#)  
[Approach, Assist, Ask](#)



**Image shows:** a blindfolded participant wearing a black jumper being guided and communicated with by a buddy, who is wearing a white jumper



**Images from bottom left clockwise:** first image - BLV tennis player Courtney Lewis hitting a backhand during a match. Second image - a close up of BLV tennis player Mark Haskett looking at their opponent smiling

# Health and safety considerations

There are some key health and safety considerations that sports coaches/leaders and parents/carers may need to consider 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](http://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.

- 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

Australian Sports Commision – [Safe and inclusive sport](#)

# 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 in the following areas:**

## 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 a safeguarding children:

[Working With Childrens Check](#)  
[Clearing House for Sport - child safety](#)  
[Sport Integrity - safe guarding children](#)  
[Play By The Rules](#)



Image shows: first aid bag and equipment



Image shows: BLV tennis player Summer Giddings hitting a forehand during a warm up session



# Coaching education and philosophy

## Benefits of BLV tennis

BLV tennis provides a powerful platform for a healthier, happier lifestyle through sport and physical activity.

“The social, physical and emotional benefits that tennis provides are endless, and there is absolutely no reason why these benefits should not be available to people who are blind or have low vision. Coaches and clubs are continuing to become more adaptive and creative in the way they modify techniques, programs and equipment as we strive to truly make tennis a sport for every body.”

Nicholas Bradley – BLV national tennis coach

Participation in BLV tennis encourages people with vision loss to lead active lifestyles, improving general health, social interaction, balance, motor skills, communication, and teamwork.

“If you can dream about it, you can go out and achieve it – there’s no such words as can’t! No matter what, all clubs can make adaptations and the BLV sporting community is a very welcoming place.”

Courtney Webeck - Australian BLV tennis player

BLV tennis fosters peer integration and social inclusion, offering benefits such as:

- building friendships and bonds
- enhancing communication, leadership, and teamwork
- boosting confidence and self-esteem for greater independence and achievement
- developing spatial awareness, muscle strength, balance, and motor skills

Participants with pre-existing medical conditions or who have not exercised regularly should consult their doctor before beginning any sport or exercise program.

Support for BLV tennis participants:

- local doctor or vision specialist
- Vision Australia and low vision services
- Blind Sports Australia
- State vision organisation



**Image shows:** four Blind and low vision tennis players facing each other while shaking hands over the tennis net after their match

# Coaching approaches

Starting in BLV tennis does not require a specialised coach. Effective coaching adapts the environment to enable success. Tennis Australia and Blind Sports Australia offer resources to support coaching BLV tennis. Contact [blindtennis@tennis.com.au](mailto:blindtennis@tennis.com.au) for specific details and program adaptations.

## 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.

- avoid generalisations, as vision impairment is a spectrum; understand each person’s specific abilities to make the best use of any sight they may have
- verbalise any body language you use, as some participants with vision impairments may not be able to interpret facial expressions or eye contact
- ensure communication is clear and descriptive by providing detailed verbal explanations of drills, skills, and rules for greater understanding
- conduct demonstrations where needed, with permission, to support understanding of specific tasks or skills
- maintain a clear activity area by removing obstacles like spare balls and cones and keeping equipment in designated areas

- give specific directions to help participants locate equipment (e.g., “the equipment is on your left side”) instead of vague cues
- encourage full inclusion by involving participants in all club activities, including social events, canteen duties, and committee roles

**Learn more regarding coaching styles and training principles and local clubs can be found:**  
[Find a club near you](#)  
[Helpful resources](#)



**Image shows:** two BLV tennis players wearing green and gold Australian uniform touching fists during a match

# Developing programs

Offering equal and consistent participation opportunities for people with a vision impairment is an important part of social inclusion. 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 programmes 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 people who are blind or vision impaired.

### 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 - [accessibility techniques](#)

**Images shows:** BLV tennis player in the motion of serving during a tennis match

## Travel

Many people with a vision impairment rely heavily on public transport it is advisable to check public transport options and 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 communication 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.

### Common adaptations used are:

- sound balls –audible foam tennis balls with bells inside
- tactile markings, such as raised tape or string on court boundaries, help vision-impaired players navigate the playing area.

These adaptations enhance spatial awareness and aid player positioning. Paired with clear verbal guidance, they ensure a players safe and confident participation in BLV tennis.

**For equipment ideas, cost and purchasing details please go visit:**

[BSA online equipment store](#)



**Images from left to right:** BLV tennis player hitting a forehand during play. Silver tennis cup trophy on a timber stand with a blue background



## Case study: Courtney Webeck BLV tennis Player

Hailing from a small sporty town in regional NSW, Courtney grew up on a beef cattle farm, riding horses before she could walk. She started playing netball at five, followed by athletics, cross-country running, swimming, basketball, and triathlons. Despite the lack of vision-impaired role models, Courtney found inspiration in other athletes' dreams.

**"Growing up, I really didn't see many people going through the same thing I was, especially in sport—it was just not broadcast. Watching Ash Barty win Wimbledon and live out her childhood dream, followed by her Australian Open victory, was something special."**

Courtney Webeck

Holding multiple Australian athletic records, Courtney sought a new challenge in blind sports. She began playing BLV tennis in April 2022, quickly rising to become the 2022/23/24 B2 Australian women's singles champion. In 2023, she claimed the women's B2 singles world title at the IBTA world championships in Poland, solidifying her status as world number one in women's singles and doubles. She made history in the 2023 Australian Open MasterCard campaign, showcasing her talent in the first BLV exhibition match alongside Alicia Molik.

**"I said to my parents, imagine playing tennis at the Australian Open, and then to get the opportunity 12 months later was a dream come true. It may not have been the same as Ash winning, but the feeling of being immersed in the world of tennis was contagious."**

Courtney Webeck

In 2022, Courtney ventured into blind cricket, joining the NSW blind cricket team and competing in the 2023 NCIC's. Selected as Vice-Captain for the inaugural Australian women's blind cricket team, she earned her baggy green and was one of two dual-sport athletes representing Australia at the 2023 IBSA world blind games in Birmingham.

A passionate advocate for inclusivity, Courtney serves as a Blind Sports Australia Ambassador and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Ambassador, championing accessibility and opportunities for people who are blind or vision-impaired.

**"If you can dream about it, you can achieve it—there's no such words as can't! All clubs can make adaptations, and the BLV sporting community is incredibly welcoming."and the BLV sporting community is a very welcoming place."** Courtney Webeck

**Image shows:** Courtney Webeck in the motion of returning the ball during a national BLV tennis event.



## S.T.E.P.S Principles

The principles of STEPS provides 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 size and height of goals, targets or playing areas
- guide a person with a vision impairment around the facility and coaching 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 audible balls
- 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 to assist with sports such as cycling, athletics, recreational activities
- 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 the ball can be held in netball to allow attackers and defenders to get into position

# Planning a session

BLV tennis is an excellent example of a sport made accessible for people with vision impairments through simple modifications. With easy adaptations like using audible balls and modified boundaries, allowing fully sighted players to participate alongside. Only two players are needed, making it a great way for family members to connect and enjoy the game together. With these changes, tennis becomes a fun, inclusive activity for everyone to improve skills and share in the sport.

## Planning a session

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

- health and safety (see page 14 - 15)
- equipment requirements
- volunteers and guides – when working with adults, ensure there are an appropriate number of volunteers/guides to support each session (usually one volunteer/guide to every three to four players taking part in the session)
- changes to the environment different equipment, new area, new participants and staff/volunteers
- time for orientation of the training area

## Structuring a training session

When constructing a BLV tennis training session, it is important to consider the following:

- welcome participants, introduce yourself and other support staff then outline the training session which should include achievable targets and goals 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 topic relevant to participants requirements and ability level
- fundamental skills drills should comprise 60% of a session
- implement a game play component to the session
- warm down and wrap up to include stretching, participant feedback and information about the following sessions

## Rule adaptations

- BLV tennis is played with an audible rattle/bell ball
- BLV tennis has modified the rule regarding the number of times the ball can bounce before reaching the player, and this number varies depending on the participants individual sight classification
- the court dimensions vary depending on the classification of the players competing (see page 05)
- the court has tactile lines on all court markings except for the service box in B1 competitions
- before starting the service motion the server must call “ready?” and wait for the receiver to reply “yes”. The server then has up to five seconds to serve the ball but when served must say ‘play’. The server may not alter their position on the court

## Venue considerations

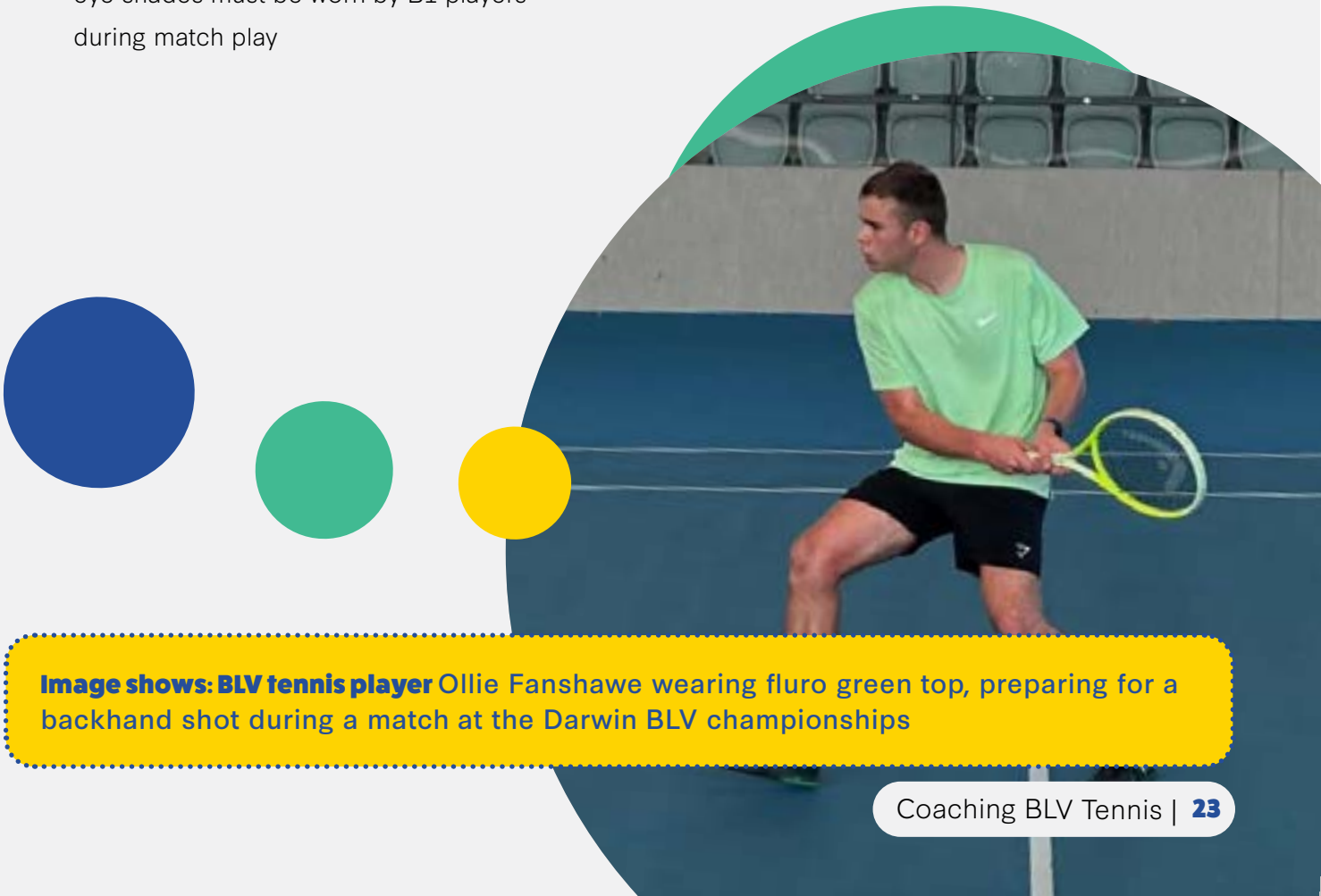
- ease of access by public transport
- either indoor or outdoor courts can be used for blv training but make sure instructions can be easily heard and consider other environmental factors such as light , shade and wind
- adequate lighting for night time or day time training/matches
- guiding a person with a vision impairment around the venue or facility to help with orientation
- contrast between ball and court surface is important especially for B2 - B4 classified players. Where possible, consider using a venue that has a darker surface/background if using yellow balls or a lighter surface/ background if using black balls

## Equipment requirements

- audible tennis balls must be used
- any racquet accepted by the ITF in accordance with court sizes
- eye shades must be worn by B1 players during match play



**Image shows:** BLV tennis participant in Tasmania holding racquet and ball while being spoken to by a coach



**Image shows:** BLV tennis player Ollie Fanshawe wearing fluoro green top, preparing for a backhand shot during a match at the Darwin BLV championships



# Core Technical Skills

## Core philosophy

BLV tennis is essentially just modified fun tennis. Coaches should reference the fundamentals of hot shots coaching, particularly in regards to games and drills developed using small court sizes. Regression/ progression is key to delivering any modified tennis lesson and being able to redefine typical definitions of “success” in order to ensure a positive experience for the participant.

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. Coaching session 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 movemnet 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 activites
- get everyone involved (no standing still)
- positive feedback and praise efforts
- get participants involved in planning a session or activity

Below are the core technical skills along with a visual demonstration of the technique that should be the focus of all BLV tennis training sessions:

## Movement and coordination

Multi-directional movement is of key importance for any tennis player, but particularly BLV tennis. Coaches should aim to develop players coordination, speed, strength and agility. Maintaining balance while moving forwards, backwards and sideways is pivotal to developing tracking and hitting skills.

All lessons and games/drills should begin with a clear identification of the court boundaries and constraints so a player is familiar with the size of the space they are working within.

Images shows: two BLV tennis players facing each other and fist bumping during a match



## Ball tracking

The requirement for good tracking skills is a major difference between BLV tennis and mainstream tennis, particularly for B1 and B2 classifications. Coaching techniques should seek to develop quick and reactive tracking skills for players in a variety of different directions (forwards, backwards, sideways) and conditions (noise, lighting, wind).

## Ground strokes (forehand, backhand)

Once a player has developed an understanding of either forehand and backhand grips, (or both), different striking activities can be conducted based on ability. This may begin with hitting stationary balls along the ground to specified target areas, progressing towards a rally over the net.

Techniques should remain basic at beginner levels, ensuring a small, limited back swing in order to maximise the chances of good contact with the ball.

## Serving

Teaching good serving habits early with the “ready” “yes” “play” sequence is encouraged for all players. Mainstream coaching progressions can be used for developing serves, again with an emphasis on simple technique (limiting backswing)

to maximise consistency. Players should try both underarm and overarm serving.

Often BLV players will have a lower ball toss in order to maximise contact by keeping the racket face closer to the ball. Some players may even feel more comfortable serving with no ball toss, by holding the ball in their fingertips and serving directly out of their hand.

## Racquet

Sporting experience for different players can vary greatly, and while some may have played racket sports previously, many may have never held a racket.

Particular attention should be taken early on to develop a players feeling and recognition of how to hold the racket in different positions (forehand grip, backhand grip etc) and their knowledge of where the strings are facing, both when preparing for a shot, and at contact points.

Ball balancing and trapping exercises are good introductions for new players who may have limited experience holding and using a racket.

Images shows: two BLV tennis participants hitting the tennis ball during a come and try session at the Australian Open 2024

# 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 corrected vision and must have an impairment in both eyes that meets the minimal disability criteria of vision acuity that is less than or equal to LogMAR = 1.00 (6/60) and/or a vision field that is less than a radius of 20 degrees.

Athletes are required to provide medical documentation from their ophthalmologist prior to seeking a classification.

### 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 certified experts, with medical or technical qualifications, trained by the Australian Paralympic Committee and national sports federations to assess athletes' impairments and assign sport classes according to international classification rules. They volunteer at state, national, and international levels. To begin training as a Classifier, individuals must meet specific prerequisites.

### Medical classifiers:

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

### Classification vs level-based play:

Factors like experience, athleticism, and the onset of impairment can impact a player's ability more than the degree of sight loss. At social and training levels, grouping players by tennis ability, rather than sight classification, can create more competitive matches and enjoyable experiences. For example, a beginner B4 player with one bounce may have a close match with a more experienced B2 player using three bounces.

## What are the classes for vision impairments?

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

Category	Examples (guide only)
B1	From no light perception in either eye to light perception, but inability to recognise the shape of a hand at any distance or in any direction. – Vision acuity is poorer than LogMAR 2.60 with best corrected vision.
B2	Ability to recognise objects up to a distance of 2 metres. – Vision acuity ranges from LogMAR 1.5 to 2.60 (below 2/60) with best corrected vision; and/or Vision field of less than ten (10) degrees diameter.
B3	Can recognise contours between 2 and 6 metres away. – Vision acuity ranges from LogMAR 1.0 – 1.40 (2/60 – 6/60) with best corrected vision; and/or – Vision field of more than ten (10) degrees and less than forty (40) degrees diameter.
B4	Visual acuity ranging from LogMAR 0.5 to 0.9 (inclusive) OR visual fields less than 40 degrees diameter and visual acuity better than 0.5.

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

- [BLV tennis classification guidelines](#)
- [Paralympics Australia - classification](#)
- [International Blind Tennis Association - classification](#)
- [IBSA - classification](#)

**Image shows:** a person receiving an eye exam with their chin resting on the ophthalmoscope while the ophthalmologist examines their eye's





## Participation pathways

BLV tennis in Australia offers structured participation pathways, enabling players to progress from introductory sessions to international competitions. As a tennis coach/leader it is important to have an understanding of the tennis landscape and the competitive opportunities that may be available to a participant with a vision impairment. Key stages include:

### Access all abilities

Access all abilities (AAA) programs support inclusive sport and recreation opportunities for people of all abilities to get active nationally. Blind Sports Australia connects participants directly to an association in their state via email: [info@blindsportsaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

### Come and try sessions

These introductory events allow individuals to experience BLV tennis in a supportive environment. No prior experience is necessary, and sessions are held throughout the year at various venues nationwide.

### BLV social tennis

As blind tennis grows across Australia, many States offer social competitive play on an ongoing basis throughout the year. For example, Blind Sports and Recreation Victoria hosts regular Friday night blv tennis at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne.

### State BLV tennis championships

State tournaments are played across the country each year at different times, hosted by Tennis Australia's state based organisations. BLV players from interstate are invited to compete.

### National competitions

The Australian blind and low vision national championships represent the next step in the player pathway. Athletes typically enter this level through state competitions or identification by individual sports organisations

**Image shows:** Junior BLV tennis player Arato Katsuda-Green in a back hand motion returning the ball during a BLV tennis event

### International competitions

Elite competition can bring life changing experiences and opportunities including; employment, sponsorship, overseas travel and the opportunity to compete on the world stage. It is important as a coach to understand the potential and possibilities available for athletes with a vision impairment. Elite players may qualify for international events, such as the International Blind Tennis Association (IBTA) World Championships, IBTA European Championships and International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) World Blind Games, offering opportunities to compete globally.

### IBSA World Blind Games

Beginning in 1998 in Madrid, Spain, The IBSA World Games, is held every four years, and is one of the world's largest sporting events for athletes with vision impairments.

The World Games are a chance for new and established athletes to compete against a strong field of their peers in both Paralympic and non-Paralympic sports. Further information about the International Blind Sports Association can be found at [ibsasport.org](http://ibsasport.org)

**For more information or to get involved in BLV tennis, consider reaching out to the following organisations:**

**Tennis Australia:** offers resources and support for BLV tennis programs. Email: [blindtennis@tennis.com.au](mailto:blindtennis@tennis.com.au)

**Blind Sports Australia:** provides national support and can connect participants to state-specific associations. Email: [admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au](mailto:admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au).

Contact information for BLV tennis member clubs can be found on page 30 of this document. Engaging with these organisations can provide guidance on local programs, upcoming events, and further development opportunities within BLV tennis.

For a glimpse into the BLV tennis community, you might find this video insightful: [BLV tennis](#)



**Image shows:** BLV tennis player in the motion of a forehand shot during tennis championships match



## Blind and low vision tennis contacts

### Tennis Australia

**Postal Address:** Olympic Boulevard,  
Melbourne Park, Melbourne, Vic 3000

**Phone:** 1800 PLAY TENNIS

**Email:** [inclusion@tennis.com.au](mailto:inclusion@tennis.com.au)

**Website:** [BLV Tennis](https://www.tennis.com.au/blv)

### Blind Sporting Clubs Association of South Australia

**Postal Address:** PO Box 7089, Hutt Street,  
Adelaide, 5000

**Email:** [info@blindsportssa.org.au](mailto:info@blindsportssa.org.au)

**Website:** [blindsportssa.org.au](https://blindsportssa.org.au)

### Blind Sports WA

**Email:** [hello@blindsportswa.com.au](mailto:hello@blindsportswa.com.au)

**Website:** [www.blindsportswa.com.au](https://www.blindsportswa.com.au)

**Facebook:** [fb.com/wablindsportsfed](https://fb.com/wablindsportsfed)

### Blind Sports & Recreation NSW/ACT

**Postal Address:** 8 Parkview Drive, Sydney  
Olympic Park - PO Box W292, Parramatta,  
NSW 2150

**Email:** [info@blindsportsnsw.com.au](mailto:info@blindsportsnsw.com.au)

**Website:** [blindsportsnsw.com.au](https://blindsportsnsw.com.au)

**Facebook:** [fb.com/blindsportsnsw](https://fb.com/blindsportsnsw)

### Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association of Queensland

**Postal Address:** 31 Dover Street, Albion Bris  
bane, QLD, Australia 4010

**Landline:** 07 3253 3333

**Email:** [mailbox@sportingwheelies.org.au](mailto:mailbox@sportingwheelies.org.au)

**Website:** [sportingwheelies.org.au](https://sportingwheelies.org.au)

**Facebook:** [fb.com/sportingwheelies](https://fb.com/sportingwheelies)

### Blind Sports & Recreation Victoria

**Postal Address:** 454 Glenferrie Road,  
Kooyong, Vic 3144

**Email:** [info@blindsports.org.au](mailto:info@blindsports.org.au)

**Website:** [blindsports.org.au](https://blindsports.org.au)

**Facebook:** [fb.com/blindsportsvictoria](https://fb.com/blindsportsvictoria)

### Blind Sports Australia (Tasmania & Northern Territory)

**Postal Address:** 454 Glenferrie Road,  
Kooyong, Vic 3144

**Website:** [blindsportsaustralia.com.au](https://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

**Facebook:** [fb.com/blindsportsaust](https://fb.com/blindsportsaust)



**Blind  
Sports  
Australia**

[blindsportsaustralia.com.au](https://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

**Image shows:** group photo of the Tennis Australia BLV tennis team before they set heading to the 2023 IBSA World Games in Birmingham. All players are wearing green and grey tracksuits, smiling at the camera holding their racquets