

Goalball

beginner's guide to coaching

Blind Sports Australia



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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 Image: Australian women's goalball paralympian Brodie Benson in the motion of throwing the goalball during a competition. **Inside Cover Image:** Aussie Storm athlete Darren Coyle in the final action after releasing the Goalball

Table of Contents

4 Introduction

5 About goalball

7 Sidney Whipp - Australian mens goalball athlete

8 Understanding vision impairment

10 Goalball in schools program

11 Guiding and safety principles

14 Health and safety considerations

15 Safeguarding children and vulnerable people

16 Coaching education and philosophy

16 Benefits of goalball

17 Coaching approaches

18 Developing programs

20 Jessica Lovett - Goalball youth coach

21 S.T.E.P.S principles

22 Planning a goalball session

24 Coaching guide and core technical skills

26 Competitive sport for athletes

26 Classification

28 Participation pathways

30 Goalball contacts



Image shows: NSW Goalball player in the motion of throwing the goalball during match play. The player is wearing a blue t-shirt with the number four on it

Introduction

Welcome to Blind Sports Australia's (BSA) 'Goalball – Beginner's Guide to Coaching,' produced in partnership with Goalball Australia.

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 goal-ballspecific 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 goalball 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



Image shows: SA junior Goalball players being instructed on the correct throwing technique on court by their coach

About Goalball

Goalball is the exciting team sport played competitively by athletes with vision impairment. The sport was created in 1946 after World War II by Austrian, Hanz Lorenzen, and German, Sepp Reindle, in an effort to rehabilitate and keep veterans with blindness and low vision active. Shortly after the sport originated in Europe, goalball was inaugurated to the world stage during the 1976 Paralympic Games in Toronto, Canada and has been showcased at the event following its inaugurated.

Goalball is played by two teams of three players with a maximum of three substitutions on each team. It is open to both male and female vision impaired athletes. Sighted players can also play at a domestic level.

The attacking team aim to score a goal by bowling the ball along the floor so that it crosses the goal line of the opposing team. The defending team prevents the ball going into their goal by using their entire body to block the ball while remaining in their team area. They must then try to control the ball and attack back by throwling the ball in attack thereby trying to score in the opposing goal.

The games are required to be kept silent as the three players on each team, who are completely blindfolded by 'blackout' eyeshades, use their entire body to block a 1.25 kg audible ball from making it into the opponent's goal.

Main features:

- all players wear 'blackout' eyeshades so that they are totally blindfolded
- goalball is played on an indoor court that is 18m long and 9m wide
- the goals are positioned at the end of both sides of the court, they are 1.3 metres in height and span the entirety of the back court
- the ball is 1.25kg in weight and contains internal bells, which help players locate it during play

Including goalball as part of a sport and recreation session requires minimal adaption, only needing an audible ball with internal bells and eyeshades or a blindfold for each player.

Further information at Goalball Australia



Image shows: Aussie Storm mens goalball team player Isaiah Muller in the motion of throwing the goalball in an attacking move

Goalball is governed nationally by Goalball Australia in partnership with state member organisations, which provide opportunities for participants of all ages and abilities to experience the sport. Its community programs, school-based initiatives, state competitions and national championships provide a clear participation pathway, while talented athletes can progress to represent their state and, ultimately, Australia at national events, including the Paralympic Games.

Goalball is played in men's, women's and junior competitions throughout Australia. While the sport is specifically designed for athletes who are blind or have low vision, sighted participants are also able to compete in many domestic competitions by wearing blackout eyeshades, ensuring all players compete under the same conditions.

To ensure fair competition at the elite level, athletes with a vision impairment are classified under the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) classification system.

Eligible athletes are assigned one of three sport classes:
B1 – athletes with very little or no functional vision.
B2 – athletes with a higher level of functional vision than B1.
B3 – athletes with the highest level of eligible vision impairment.

Unlike some other blind sports, all eligible athletes compete together under the same rules, with mandatory blackout eyeshades ensuring no player gains an advantage from residual vision. Classification is therefore used to determine eligibility for competition rather than altering the rules of play.

Athletes wishing to compete in sanctioned state, national or international competitions must complete an official vision classification assessment in accordance with IBSA regulations.

Recreational and introductory programs, including school and community sessions, generally do not require classification, making goalball accessible to anyone interested in experiencing the sport.

Purchasing equipment and further resources:

BSA online store

Goalball Australia



Image shows: Goalball equipment positioned on the court for display, which includes: goalball, eye sgades and knee pads

Sidney Whipp Australian Mens Goalball Athlete



Sidney Whipp's goalball journey began after retinal detachments significantly deteriorated his vision when he was 10 years old. Growing up in Cairns, Sidney loved playing sport, but as his vision changed, many of those opportunities became more difficult to access.

Discovering goalball provided more than just a new sport. It introduced Sidney to a community of people who understood his experiences and gave him a sense of belonging.

> "There is just something special about interacting with people who share your disability," Sidney said.
>
> "That's what I get from goalball."

Now a member of the Aussie Storm Australian Men's Goalball Team and studying arts and law at The University of Queensland, Sidney credits goalball with helping him build confidence, connection and a strong support network.

For Sidney, one of the most rewarding aspects of the sport has been the opportunities it has created both on and off the court. Through goalball, he has been able to challenge himself, compete at an elite level and represent Australia while connecting with others who share similar experiences.

Reflecting on his experience, Sidney says the goalball community has been a constant source of support throughout his life.

> "When I got involved in goalball, I knew that everyone around me understood my disability. Goalball has been like a steady rock in my life."

Through goalball, Sidney has not only earned the opportunity to represent Australia but has also become a role model for other people who are blind or vision impaired. He hopes his journey encourages others to get involved in sport, build confidence and discover the opportunities that can come from being part of an inclusive sporting community.

Image shows: Aussie Storm athlete Sidney Whipp set up and ready to dive for the ball

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

Understanding common conditions

It is important to remember that people are individuals with different levels of vision and varying support needs. These varyious 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 macula. 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.

Goalball in Schools program

For many students, their first experience of Goalball is also their first opportunity to understand what it means to navigate the world without sight.

Across Australia, Goalball Australia and its state member organisations deliver Goalball in Schools programs that introduce students to one of the world's most inclusive Paralympic sports. Wearing eyeshades, students rely on hearing, communication and teamwork, creating a level playing field where everyone participates equally, regardless of age, ability or sporting experience.

Teachers consistently report that the program encourages students to think differently about disability and inclusion. Students who may not usually excel in traditional physical education often emerge as leaders, while their classmates gain a greater appreciation for the skills, confidence and communication required to participate without vision.

The experience fosters empathy, trust and collaboration, with lessons that extend well beyond the sporting environment.

The program also introduces students to the Paralympic movement and provides an authentic example of inclusive sport in action. For students who are blind or have low vision, it offers a pathway into a sport designed specifically for them, while sighted students gain an appreciation of how accessible sport can bring people together on equal terms.

For many schools, a single session becomes the catalyst for ongoing conversations about accessibility and inclusion. Whether through repeat visits, inclusive sports days or connections with local goalball clubs, the program leaves a lasting impression, demonstrating that when barriers are removed, everyone has the opportunity to participate, contribute and succeed.



Further information at:
Goalball 4 Schools

Image shows: NSW junior goalball player seated on court in a defensive ready position

Guiding and safety principles

Communication & guiding system

It is important to understand the needs of a person with a vision impairment playing goalball. 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 goalball. 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 person
- the handicapped person
- the disabled person
- vision impaired person
- suffers from

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

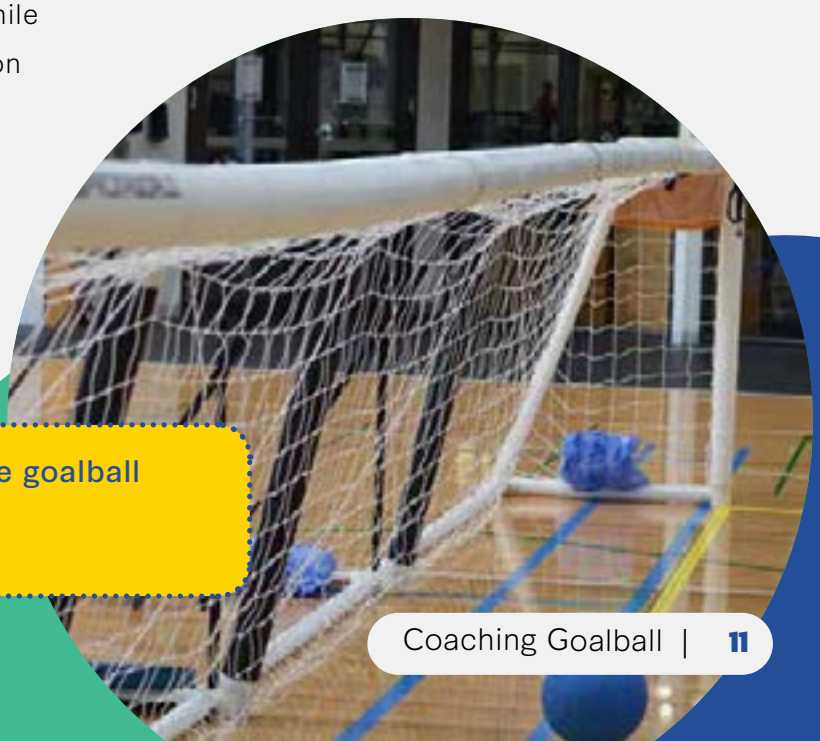

Image shows: A goalball net and a blue goalball on an indoor court

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 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 who are blind or vision impaired 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.



Image shows: a blindfolded participant standing beside an instructor in an indoor sports hall

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 a participant who is blind or vision impaired.

The role of a "buddy" may consist of simply telling the participant who is blind or vision impaired 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 participant who is blind or vision impaired is made to feel part of the group and are not 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 participant who is blind or vision impaired. Another favourable outcome of the buddy system is that individuals who take on the responsibility of being a buddy can develop their leadership and communication skills.

Follow the links below to other Blind Sports Australia resources:

Community Coaching Resource

Guiding Principles

Approach, Assist, Ask

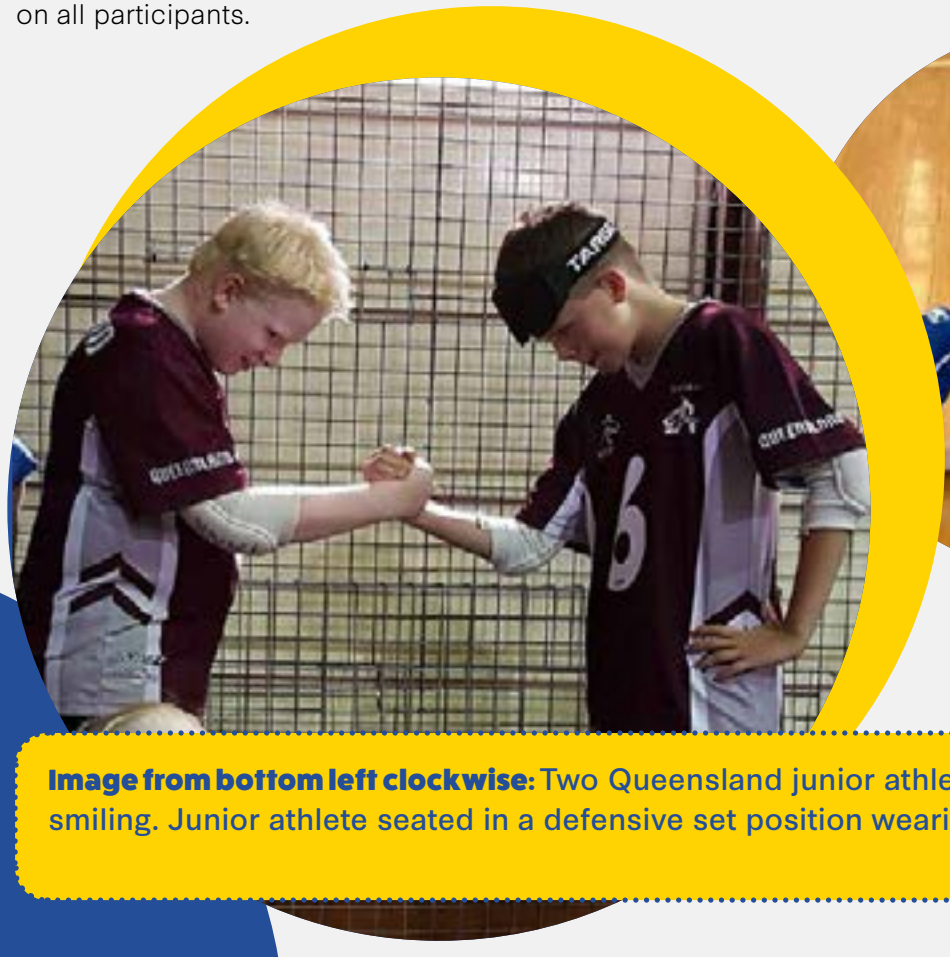



Image from bottom left clockwise: Two Queensland junior athletes shaking hands and smiling. Junior athlete seated in a defensive set position wearing yellow eye shades

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

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

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 who is blind or vision impaired 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 who is blind or vision impaired who may not see other participants or equipment

Fire evacuation: ensure procedures are in place to support a who is blind or vision impaired in the event of an emergency evacuation such as fire or security threat, and that they understand 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



Image shows: First aid bag with bandages and first aid equipment placed on the floor in front

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Every club, sport coach, leader or volunteer needs to have safeguards in place to prioritise the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, and these important resourses 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

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 favourable outcome of the buddy system is that individuals who take on the responsibility of being a buddy can develop their leadership and communication skills.

Further information about safeguarding children

Working With Children Check
Sport Integrity - safe guarding children
Play By The Rules

Coaching education and philosophy

Benefits of goalball

Goalball is a key para sport in Australia that provides people who are blind or vision impaired with a meaningful pathway into sport, physical activity and community connection.

A team sport designed specifically for athletes with vision impairment, goalball supports participation at both grassroots and elite levels across the country, including national competition and Paralympic pathways.

> "As a young girl I believed I couldn't play sport because of my vision impairment (retinitis pigmentosa). Finding a team sport specifically designed for people with a vision impairment has allowed me to develop both as an athlete and as a person."
> Brodie Benson – Australian Womens' Goalball Paralympian

Through regular participation, goalball supports improved physical health, wellbeing and social connection. Athletes develop core movement skills while also building confidence, communication and teamwork in an inclusive environment.

> "It's been amazing for my own mental health and I'm feeling better in myself — I'm probably the fittest in my mind and body that I have in a long time." Brittnee Watson - Australian National Womens' Goalball Athlete

Goalball also plays an important role in strengthening inclusion and community participation, helping athletes to:

- build strong friendships and peer networks
- develop communication, leadership and teamwork skills
- increase confidence, self-esteem and independence
- enhance spatial awareness, strength, balance and coordination

As with any sport or physical activity, participants with existing medical conditions or those returning to exercise should seek advice from a health professional before starting.

Support for goalball participants:

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



Image shows: Aussie Belles athlete Brittnee Watson smiling at the camera wearing a navy and green t-shirt with the australia logo on the left

Coaching approaches

Starting in goalball does not require a specialised coach. Effective coaching focuses on creating an environment where participants can learn, feel confident and experience success. Blind Sports Australia and state goalball organisations provide resources and support for coaches delivering goalball programs.

General coaching advice

Effective goalball coaching is built on clear communication, understanding individual needs and creating a safe, inclusive environment. By using consistent language, structured spaces and supportive interactions, coaches can help participants build confidence, develop skills and fully engage in the game.

- when approaching a person or group, always introduce yourself by name. You may need to repeat this to help participants become familiar with your voice.
- avoid generalisations, as vision impairment exists across a spectrum. Take the time to understand each individual's abilities and how they best engage with the environment.
- verbalise any body language or visual cues you use, as some participants may not be able to interpret facial expressions or gestures.
- ensure communication is clear, specific and descriptive. Provide detailed verbal explanations of skills, drills and rules to support understanding.
- Use demonstrations where appropriate and with permission. In goalball, this may include guided positioning, body orientation or movement patterns to help build spatial awareness.
- Maintain a clear and safe playing area by removing unnecessary obstacles and ensuring equipment is stored in consistent, designated locations.
- Give specific directional instructions to help participants orient themselves, for example using left, right, forward and back rather than general terms.

For more information regarding coaching styles, training principles and local clubs:

Find a club near you

Helpful resources



Image shows: Aussie Storm coach Andrew Ridlley standing at the front of the playing group with one hand in the air discussing the training plan

Developing programs

Offering equal and consistent participation opportunities for people who are blind or vision impaired is an important part of social inclusion. This section outlines key factors to consider when planning and delivering sport sessions to help ensure all participants have 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 who are blind or vision impaired 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)
- 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 people who are blind or vision impaired in your marketing material to help connect and inspire people who are blind or vision impaired 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

Image shows: NSW athlete in a set position on court

Travel

Many people who are blind or vision impaired 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 people who are blind or vision impaired, 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 who is blind or vision impaired 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 who is blind or vision impaired. Where possible and if practical, organise sessions in good light or evenly lit indoor spaces.

Equipment and facilities

To ensure a people who are blind or vision impaired can be included in your session you may need to source some accessible equipment.

Depending on which sport is being played, the modifications or adaptions 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 or rubber training balls with bells inside
- tactile markings, such as raised tape or string on goalball 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 goalball.

For equipment ideas, cost and purchasing details please go visit: BSA online equipment store



Images show from left to right: Two orange goalballs, eye shades and protective gear; and a goalball referee with athletes in the background on an indoor court

Jessica Lovett Goalball Coach

For Jessica Lovett, goalball was the sport that finally gave her a sense of belonging. Having always loved sport, she struggled to find a place where she truly felt she fitted in until she was introduced to goalball as a teenager.

"From the moment I put on the eyeshades and defended my first ball, I knew I had found my sport. There was something incredibly unique about the game, and I was instantly hooked."

Jessica's connection with the sport soon led to an opportunity to represent Australia at the 2013 IBSA Youth World Championships in Colorado Springs, USA, as part of the first Australian youth girls team. While a medical condition eventually meant Jessica could no longer play, her passion for goalball remained. Rather than stepping away from the sport, she transitioned into coaching, beginning at state level in 2023 before progressing to the national pathway as assistant coach of the Australian youth squad in 2025.

For Jessica, the most rewarding part of being involved in Goalball has always been seeing the impact the sport can have on people's lives. Whether playing, coaching or now working in high performance, she values seeing athletes grow in confidence, develop new skills and build lifelong friendships.

Her involvement in Goalball has also shaped her professional career. Jessica now supports athletes and the national programs behind the scenes, combining her passion for sport with a career in sports administration. Looking back, she says some of her proudest moments have come from both playing and coaching, from representing Australia, and seeing athletes achieve goals they once thought were out of reach.

Jessica believes goalball offers participants much more than the opportunity to compete. The sport can help people who are blind or vision impaired build confidence and independence, improve physical fitness, develop teamwork and leadership skills, and create a strong sense of community and belonging.

Her advice to coaches is to understand each athlete as an individual, communicate clearly and consistently, and create an environment where athletes feel safe to learn and grow.

For anyone considering trying goalball, Jessica has one simple message: "Just give it a go." Whether looking to make friends, stay active, build confidence or represent their country, she believes goalball has something to offer everyone.



Image shows: Jess Lovett smiling and clapping while wearing sunglasses and an Australian team shirt

S.T.E.P.S Principles

The principles of STEPS provides a framework to assist sports coaches to make adaptions 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 who are blind or vision impaired will require the same adaptions, 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 people who are blind or vision impaired 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 markers 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

Goalball is a Paralympic sport specifically designed for people who are blind or vision impaired. With simple modifications and clear communication, it can be a fun and inclusive activity for people of all ability levels. Goalball can be played by both vision impaired and fully sighted players (when wearing eye shades), making it an excellent sport for social inclusion and family involvement.

Planning Considerations

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

- **health and safety:** Ensure the court is free from hazards, and participants are aware of the playing area and emergency procedures.
- **equipment requirements:** Goalballs (audible with internal bells), eye shades (for all players), and court markings with tactile tape are required.
- **volunteers and guides:** Ensure adequate volunteer support (typically one volunteer to every three or four participants) to assist with orientation and provide guidance during the session.
- **environmental changes:** Consider new venues, equipment, or participants and how these might impact the session.
- **orientation time:** Allocate time at the beginning of each session for participants to familiarise themselves with the court layout and surroundings.

Structuring a goalball training session

A well-planned goalball session should include:

1. **Welcome & Introduction (5-10 mins)** Introduce yourself, other support staff, and the session outline. Explain session goals and safety measures (e.g., maintaining silence during play).
2. **Warm-Up (10-15 mins)** Include dynamic stretches and exercises that focus on balance, core stabilisation, and injury prevention. Use sound cues for guiding movement and spatial awareness drills.
3. **Skill Development (30-40 mins)** Fundamental skills should comprise 60% of the session (e.g., ball handling, defensive positioning, and accurate throwing). Drills should be tailored to the participants' ability levels and progressively build in complexity.
4. **Game Play (20-30 mins)** Incorporate small-sided or modified games to practise learned skills under match-like conditions. Ensure opportunities for all participants to engage in offensive and defensive roles.
5. **Warm-Down & Debrief (10 mins)** Static stretching to prevent injury and aid recovery. Provide constructive feedback and outline the next session's focus.



Image shows: Aussie Belles athlete releasing a throw down the court during a match simulation session

Rule adaptations

Goalball follows standard international rules but has specific adaptations to support participants with vision impairment:

- **audible ball:** A goalball with internal bells must be used to assist in locating the ball by sound
- **eye shades:** All players must wear blackedout eye shades to ensure an equal playing field
- **silence during play:** Spectators and players must remain quiet during play to allow participants to track the ball
- **throwing time limit:** Teams have 10 seconds to throw the ball back after gaining possession
- **court dimensions:** The court is 18m x 9m, divided into three zones (orientation lines are marked with tactile tape)
- **starting play:** Players must remain on their team's orientation lines until the referee signals

Equipment requirements

Essential goalball equipment includes:

- goalballs with audible bells (standard size and weight)
- eye shades (must fully block vision)
- tactile tape to mark court lines (e.g., goal area, landing zone)
- padded goalposts to enhance player safety

Venue considerations

When selecting a venue for goalball training, consider the following:

- **accessibility:** Ensure the venue is easy to reach by public transport and has appropriate facilities (e.g., accessible toilets, clear pathways)
- **indoor courts:** Goalball is typically played indoors to control noise and environmental factors. Ensure minimal background noise and echo
- **lighting:** Consistent, controlled lighting is ideal, though all players wear eye shades during play
- **orientation support:** Provide guides or volunteers to assist with navigation and familiarisation of the space
- **surface contrast:** Ensure the ball contrasts with the floor surface to assist players during pre-match practice and drills

These planning considerations ensure goalball sessions are inclusive, engaging, and safe while promoting skill development and social connection.

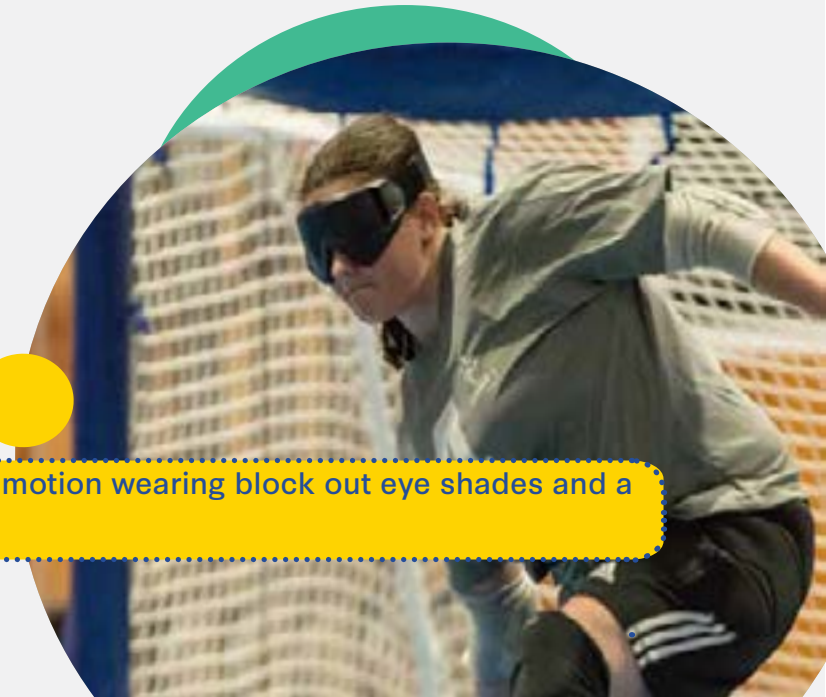

Image shows: Athlete in a throwing motion wearing block out eye shades and a grey t-shirt

Coaching Guide and Core Technical Skills



A successful goalball coaching session should begin with a clear verbal and physical demonstration of the skill being taught. Allow enough time for players to repeat the skill to understand the correct movements. Sessions should be planned to keep all players actively involved, ensuring engagement and skill development for everyone.

How to Explain a Skill

- **gain participants attention:** Ensure all players are focused before you begin
- **keep explanations short & simple:** Use clear and concise language that is easy to understand
- **use verbal and physical cues:** Describe movements clearly while demonstrating for both auditory and physical learning
- **focus on one or two key coaching points:** Avoid overloading players with information—keep instructions focused
- **invite questions:** Encourage participants to ask questions to confirm their understanding

How to Demonstrate a Skill

- **understand the skill thoroughly:** Be clear on the correct form and purpose before demonstrating
- **use accurate technique:** Ensure your demonstration uses the correct movement and positioning
- **verbalise the movement:** Explain the key steps of the skill while performing the demonstration
- **repeat demonstrations:** Show the skill multiple times from different angles if needed
- **check for understanding:** Ask participants to repeat the skill or summarise key points.
- **invite questions:** Allow participants to clarify or ask for repetition if needed

How to Keep Sessions Fun and Engaging

- **get participants active quickly:** Minimise time spent explaining, get players moving early
- **use a variety of activities:** Mix skill drills with fun challenges and game-like situations
- **involve everyone:** Avoid long waits, ensure every player is constantly participating
- **provide positive feedback:** Encourage effort and improvement with regular praise
- **let participants contribute:** Involve players in planning warm-ups or choosing drills

Image shows: NSW junior athlete in the action of throwing the goalball on court during a training session



Fundamental skills

Defensive Techniques

- **set position (ready position):** Sit on the side of your hip with feet resting flat on the ground. Hands should be placed in front of the body, ready to move in any direction
- **layout position (diving defence):** Extend your body fully along the floor on the side, forming a strong barrier. Arms should be stretched overhead, with legs outstretched to cover the maximum area. Use the top arm to shield the face for protection and safety

Throwing Techniques

- **forward throw (bowling motion):** Hold the goalball in one hand, slightly behind the body. Tuck the ball into the wrist joint crease of the throwing arm for better control. Step forward with the opposite foot while performing a smooth, downward arc motion. Release the ball close to the ground to ensure it stays within the correct height limits
- **backward throw (rotation throw):** Grip the ball firmly with both hands for stability. Take a couple of strides toward the direction of the intended throw. Rotate 180° after the last stride, planting both feet wide apart with your back facing the target. Bend at the hips and release the ball through your legs using a low, controlled arc

Orientation Skills

- **body awareness in space:** Always be aware of your position on the court
- **use tactile markings:** Feel the raised court lines with your hands or feet to identify your location
- **body positioning:** Use your hands, feet, or other body parts to sense the court layout
- **if disoriented:** Quietly ask teammates to make a soft sound to help you reorient yourself while feeling for the tactile lines

Communication in Goalball

- **use clear and concise language:** Keep instructions simple and easy to follow
- **pre-play communication:** Players must call "ready?" before serving, and the receiver must respond with "yes."
- **silent during play:** Maintain quiet during active play to allow all players to track the ball by sound
- **team communication:** Use specific verbal cues to inform teammates of position changes or incoming throws

Image shows: NSW athlete in a layout defensive position on court blocking the ball during a match

Competitive sport for athletes



Classification

Classification is the process by which athletes who are blind or vision impaired are grouped together with athletes who have a similar level of impairment into classes for competition in their sport.

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.

"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 peoplewho are blind or vision impaired 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 ability, rather than sight classification, can create more competitive matches and enjoyable experiences.

Image shows: a person undergoing a vision assessment using specialised eye-testing equipment as part of the sports classification process

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.

Paralympics Australia - classification

IBSA - classification



Participation Pathways Goalball in Australia

Goalball in Australia offers structured participation pathways, allowing players to progress from introductory sessions to international competitions. As a coach, volunteer, or participant, it's important to understand the landscape of opportunities available for people who are blind or vision impaired — and also for fully sighted players who wish to be involved socially.

Anyone can play socially without needing classification; classification is only required when competing at the state level and above.

Key stages include:

Access All Abilities (AAA) Programs

Access All Abilities (AAA) programs support inclusive sport and recreation opportunities for people of all abilities to get active nationwide. Blind Sports Australia connects participants directly to local goalball associations in their state.
Contact: info@blindsportsaustralia.com.au

Come and Try Sessions

These friendly, introductory events allow individuals of all abilities to experience goalball in a fun and supportive environment.
No prior experience is necessary, and sessions are run regularly across Australia by state goalball organisations and disability sport bodies.

School Programs

Goalball 4 Schools (G4S): A unique reverse inclusion model where all students wear blindfolds, promoting empathy and inclusivity. It's the largest in-school goalball program globally, impacting over 9,000 students across 200+ schools in NSW in 2023

Goalball Social Play

Goalball is unique — anyone can play socially, whether vision impaired or fully sighted. Social sessions and local competitions are open throughout the year in many states, offering an inclusive and accessible pathway for players of all ages and abilities.

Image shows: participant holding a goalball during a come and try session, with other participants practising defensive positions in an indoor stadium

State Goalball Championships

Each state conducts its own goalball championships annually. To compete at this level, players must undergo vision classification if they wish to be eligible for official awards or selections. Players from interstate are encouraged to travel and compete, making it a vibrant and welcoming competitive scene.

Australian National Goalball Championships

This is Australia's premier national event for goalball athletes, featuring junior, youth, women's, and men's divisions.

The national goalball championships are the main stepping stone towards state and national team selection. More info: Goalball Australia Pathways

International Competition Pathways

Elite competition in goalball offers players incredible opportunities — from personal development and travel to the possibility of representing Australia at the highest levels.

IBSA Goalball Regional Championships

Held bi-annually within the asia-pacific region, these events serve as qualifiers for the World Championships and Paralympics.

IBSA Goalball World Championships

The World Championships are the pinnacle of goalball featuring the best teams globally, held every four years.

Paralympic Games

Goalball is a core sport at the Paralympic Games, with athletes competing for gold at the highest international level.
The Aussie Belles (women's team) and Aussie Storm (men's team) represent Australia.

IBSA World Blind Games

A multi-sport event including goalball, held every four years. It features both Paralympic and non-Paralympic events for athletes who are blind or vision impaired.



Image shows: NSW athlete preparing to throw the ball, wearing purple eye shades

Goalball Contacts

Goalball Australia

Facebook: Goalball Australia
Email: Secretary@GoalballAustralia.org
Website: Goalball Australia

Goalball NSW/ACT

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Website: blindsportsnsw.com.au
Facebook: NSW Goalball

Goalball QLD - Sporting Wheelies

Postal Address: C/O Spinal Life Australia PO Box 5651, WEST END QLD 4101
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Facebook: Sporting Wheelies

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Goalball WA

Email: hello@blindsportswa.com.au
Website: www.blindsportswa.com.au
Facebook: Goalball WA

Goalball Victoria

Postal Address: 454 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong, Vic 3144
Email: info@blindsports.org.au
Website: blindsports.org.au
Facebook: Victorian Goalball Association

Blind Sports Australia (Tasmania & Northern Territory)

Postal Address: 454 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong, Vic 3144
Website: blindsportsaustralia.com.au
Facebook: Blind Sports Australia



Blind Sports Australia

blindsportsaustralia.com.au

Image shows: Group of goalball players wearing eye shades and playfully posing in front of a goal with several colourful goalballs