

Chapter 6: Inclusive coaching

by Les Bee

Coaches at all levels need to be aware of their potential 'customer'. These customers can range from someone who is experiencing their first contact with a sport through to an elite athlete. They can also be from a range of ages, from the very young to mature age. To cater for all participants the coach is required to design and develop programs that meet individual needs.

This chapter is designed to assist practising coaches to ensure all participants experience quality activities. In simple terms, being inclusive in regard to participation in sport means that there are groups of people with differing levels of ability and access to sporting activities, and the role of the coach is to recognise, acknowledge and, wherever possible, adapt a coaching program to cater for all athletes.

Coaches are required to utilise a wide range of skills to provide quality experiences for all participants while also catering for individual needs. Skills encompass being able to plan, communicate and modify for a variety of population groups that might include (but not be limited to):

- . Indigenous
- . people with a disability
- . culturally and linguistically diverse
- . women.

What does it mean to be inclusive?

Case study

Bobbie is a bowls coach who is approached by Sam, a 25-year-old who has cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. Sam is very interested in learning to play bowls but lives two kilometres away and has no means of getting to and from the club for pennant competitions. The club already has a large membership widely spread throughout the local community, and registration fees are reasonably cheap.

If you were Bobbie:

What would your response be this request?

What would you need to consider?

Often the response to this type of scenario is to reject the opportunity because there appear to be too many barriers and the club does not need any more members. In this chapter there are a number of different approaches provided that a coach might use to be inclusive. Coaches can consider these approaches and use them to reflect on the scenarios and develop their own response.

Coaching has a much broader impact than just developing sport-specific skills; it is about developing the whole person (a holistic approach) not just their physical skills.

In terms of inclusion, holistic coaching requires the coach to find out more about each individual, their background (where they came from, what experiences they have had, what they can do), their family, their community, their interests and beliefs, and their customs. All these can impact on how each individual will respond to coaching. Often, individuals might use sport to become involved in the local community, make friends, or just feel part of a group or team. There are benefits to both the individual and community, not the least of which might be an easier assimilation into that community.

Benefits of inclusive coaching to the individual and the community include:

- . increasing social skills
- . building self-esteem
- . reducing antisocial behaviour
- . developing skills, such as sport-specific, leadership and communication skills
- . developing a more connected community.

How to be inclusive

Coaches can be inclusive by using the following skills and strategies:

Communication

- . Develop rapport
- . Use active listening
- . Acknowledge differences
- . Use questioning to gain a better insight into the individual's position and requirements

- . Be prepared to negotiate in relation to these requirements so that the integrity of competition is maintained
- . Be receptive to differing body-language approaches

Flexibility

- . Adapt to meet the needs of participants without affecting the integrity of the sport/competition
- . Use a flexible and responsive approach to thinking about all aspects of training and competition

Planning

- . Develop individualised programs through discussion and research
- . Engage individuals in the planning of their programs wherever possible (this will depend on the age and maturity of the athlete)
- . Review the program regularly to ensure appropriate changes are made to future plans

Patience

- . Allow time for current and new participants to adapt to any new approach
- . Be receptive to different thinking and approaches

Safety

- . Provide a welcoming environment that is physically safe (the welfare and health of athletes is paramount) and psychologically safe (no abuse, and it is okay for athletes to make mistakes)
- . Remember, your sport may not be a familiar activity to new participants, so there is a need to outline inherent dangers and aspects of training and competition

Case study

Chris, an experienced rugby union coach, is planning to take a team of players on a pre-season training camp in the summer to prepare for their winter competition. A series of games has been arranged with local teams to fit into an extensive training program that is physically demanding.

Chris discovers that three players are Muslim and the scheduled camp coincides with Ramadan. The fast of Ramadan lasts the entire month. Muslims are not allowed to eat or drink during the daylight hours and must pray five times during the day.

The players are crucial to the team's performance and are well respected by their team-mates. The coach is concerned that lack of nutritional recovery might impact adversely on their performance and has concerns about potential health issues in relation to rehydration.

Chris arranges to discuss this with the boys' parents, with assistance from the boys in interpreting. After discussion, the parents agree that rehydration is important and decide that this will be acceptable, and Chris will organise for the players to access a quiet room close to the training facility to allow them to pray at negotiated times so that there are no clashes with important program components.

Chris also explains to the rest of the team why the boys will be missing from training at certain times and that the others need to respect this. Chris will also monitor the players' condition and response to training to ensure there are no ill effects.

This case study demonstrates **flexibility** in accommodating religious beliefs through the organisation of rooms and allowing time for prayer. **Communication** is modified as there is a need to raise issues and enter into discussion with parents, using the players as interpreters. This might also take the form of written communication.

The coach has developed a **plan** for the camp to ensure that the players do not miss any important parts of the program. By explaining the issues to the whole group and showing support for these players, the coach also plays an **advocacy** role.

Why be inclusive?

Coaches have a moral, social and legal responsibility to be inclusive.

- . Moral — everybody in our society has the basic right to be treated fairly. It does not matter what age, race or gender they are, or what religious and political beliefs they hold. It does not matter if a person has a disability, is married or single — everyone has a fundamental right to be treated fairly.
- . Social — everyone, not only the affluent and privileged, has access to the resources and opportunities to participate fully in the cultural and social life that is considered normal in our society.
- . **Legal** — The *Equal Opportunity Act* makes it unlawful to discriminate against people on certain grounds and areas of public life (for example, religion, gender and age). This Act was established to give everyone 'a fair go' in the eyes of the law.

Referring to population groups in sport

There are a number of terms that are used to describe people from different backgrounds.

Indigenous

Australia has two Indigenous peoples — Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. Ethnically and culturally, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are two distinct peoples.

Identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may relate to:

- . being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- . self-identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- . being accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by the community in which they live.

Culturally and linguistically diverse

This term refers to where the language spoken at home or by parent/s is a language other than English, and/or where the cultural and social customs are different from Australian cultural and social customs. This term excludes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

People from overseas

These can be grouped in the following categories:

- . migrant — someone who chooses to leave their country of their own free will
- . refugee — someone who has suffered or fears suffering persecution for reasons of race, religion, social or political opinion, and as a result has fled their country
- . asylum seeker — someone seeking asylum or protection in a country that is not their country of origin or nationality
- . new arrival — someone who has arrived in the country in the last two years.

People with a disability

Some of the common disability groups include:

- . sensory or speech

- . intellectual
- . physical
- . psychological
- . head injury, stroke or other brain damage.

In Australia we use 'person first' terminology (for example, athlete with a disability, person using a wheelchair, person with vision impairment).

With all of the groups just listed, it is important to remember that there can be crossover between these groups of people (for example, culturally and linguistically diverse people with a disability).

Issues and strategies explored throughout this chapter are also relevant to low socioeconomic groups who may also be targeted as potential participants in sport.

Barriers to inclusion

Access barriers may take the form of:

- . transport — perhaps due to location or cost of travel (for example, Indigenous groups may have difficulty travelling to and from training and games)
- . time — activities are scheduled at times when potential participants cannot attend (for example, sole/primary carers may not be able to participate in the evenings due to lack of childcare options; religious events may prevent participation in regular competition)
- . facility — the facilities might not be accessible to wheelchairs, prams/pushers, etc.
- . cost — registration or equipment might be too expensive (for example, new arrivals may not have the current finances for full registration fees or be unable to afford expensive equipment required to participate).

Attitude barriers may take the form of:

- . rules — inflexible regulations (for example, dress codes may have an impact on culturally and linguistically diverse women, or women with poor self-image or low self-esteem)
- . exclusion — current participant attitudes (for example, we do not need or want these people because we are happy with the current arrangements and do not want to change)

- . individual exclusion — individuals may exclude themselves on the basis that they do not know how to play a sport and perceive that they will not be accepted or well received
- . stereotyping — where people are identified with one trait (usually a negative one) and this can establish expectations that are unfounded.

With all groups there is a need to consider a wide range of participation opportunities through flexible competition structures. Some groups will integrate fully into the current competition or with some slight modifications. However, there may also be a need for either a transition stage or, in some cases, a permanent competition structure for specific groups.

Some examples of this approach include:

- . individual/s participate in a community competition (for example, a group of new arrivals register with a local club to participate in a basketball competition)
- . individual/s participate in a community competition with slight rule/equipment adjustments and/or considerations (for example, a sailing club might allow some adapted equipment in a sailing class to include people with a disability; a netball competition may allow Muslim women to wear tracksuit pants to play)
- . individual/s participate in an event/competition for a specific population group (for example, a swimming club organises an event specifically for Muslim women)
- . individual/s participate in an open competition and their results are judged against their specific category group (for example, a marathon integrates a wheelchair race into the event).

There is a wide range of flexible options to be considered when organising inclusive events/competitions to cater for everyone in the community.

Case study

Robin, a softball coach, is approached by a young girl who is one of a number of new arrivals to Australia who has recently moved into the suburb, and she asks to have a try at the sport. Robin sees the opportunity to recruit more players from this group and perhaps strengthen the club and establish another team to play in the competition. The girl attends training and, while unfamiliar with the rules and tactics, shows a good aptitude for the game.

On match day, the girl arrives wearing baggy tracksuit pants and when asked to change out of them and into a softball uniform, is very reluctant and chooses not to play. Robin has a

discussion with the girl and her parents to identify what their concerns are and what can be done to accommodate both this girl and any other potential players. The parents are supportive of their daughter participating and explain that previous experiences in her country of birth are the cause of a body image issue and therefore her reluctance to remove her tracksuit pants.

Robin realises that there is a need to be more flexible if she wants to encourage more new players into the team. She has discussions with both the club and team members about the value of including new players. Robin chats to the new girl after the next training session and encourages her to invite her friends along next week. They decide that the best option would be to organise a fun social activity as an introduction to the team, where uniform and rules would be modified to introduce them to the basics of softball. Robin also arranges a meeting with her softball association to discuss a relaxation of uniform regulations to encourage more new arrivals to register.

Here Robin demonstrates her **flexibility** by allowing a change to dress regulations. She **negotiates** with the participants, their parents and team members. Robin also plays an **advocacy** role for change within the club and the association.

When organising team-building or sporting activities, coaches need to be aware that some current activities may not be appropriate with different groups. For example, activities where close physical contact is required may be threatening to some initially. This is where the coach needs to discuss this with players prior to the event.

Case study

Eric is a football coach and has a very talented Indigenous athlete, Joanne, in his squad. He asks Joanne to demonstrate a particular skill during one session and she is reluctant to do the demonstration. Eric decides to discuss this poor attitude with her after training. In discussions with Joanne, she indicates she is embarrassed to demonstrate in front of her peers and would prefer others to take on this role. She explains that in her culture a person can feel shame in being singled out, even when the intention is for a positive purpose. A sense of community and family is strong in Indigenous communities and there is a holistic approach to achievement. Eric recognises her reluctance and discusses with her that as a talented player, others will want to copy her skills and she may also benefit from observing others' demonstrations.

In the example above, Eric **observes** Joanne's body language and quickly recognises there is a problem that he needs to discuss with her in private. After carefully **listening** to Joanne and

acknowledging and showing **empathy** for her position, he demonstrates a **patient** approach in allowing Joanne to further consider how she might overcome this barrier.

Case study

Ali is a football coach who has targeted new arrivals from Sudan to join his club. A group of about eight young men have been attending training sessions and games over the past few weeks. His current players have complained about a number of issues and feel the newcomers are getting special treatment.

The new players enjoy themselves at training, but are consistently late to sessions. They all arrive and leave together and often take a long time by themselves in the meeting room preparing before coming out to play, appearing to lack the required levels of commitment to which the current players are accustomed. The new players also claim that they are unable to afford registration fees, but dress in the latest fashion gear, carry expensive mobile phones and a couple even drive 'flashy' cars.

Ali discusses this with the new players and realises that they have focused on some of these luxury items because of their desire to fit into the local community. They discuss how this is perceived by the current players and they agree to negotiate a flexible registration fee payment and perhaps seek some funding to start the process.

They also discuss the issue of their late arrival its effect on team cohesion, and building on their desire to fit into the community, discuss how this might occur within the team environment. Ali organises a team-building activity and has planned with one of the new players who has displayed leadership skills to conduct an activity familiar to the Sudanese that will contribute to the session.

In the example above, Ali **acknowledges** the different perceptions of all of his players and uses his **negotiation** skills to **plan** for a more cohesive team approach. He recognises the need for both groups to work together and **facilitates** this by organising the team-building activity.

Case study

Sara is a lacrosse coach who is trying to recruit more women for the local team, as numbers are declining. She has been successful in identifying a group of women who are interested in playing to keep fit. However, they raise concerns about the time of the games, as a number of them need child-minding support and they also say they would prefer to wear tracksuits to keep

warm as the games are in the late afternoon. The other clubs in the competition are reluctant to change playing times, as the current arrangements have been in place for a while.

Sara discusses this with the group and they investigate the opportunity of establishing a simple roster to look after one another's children at the club. The ratio of children to adults is within the required numbers so they arrange their roster and commence playing. There is no issue with the uniform as the competition is already quite flexible in their approach. Sara investigates the possibility of seeking funding to support the women in buying resources to support the child-minding activities.

In the example above, Sara recognises the issue of the women and **facilitates** a flexible approach to including them in the competition. She is receptive to their needs and **researches** options for them to gain funding, thus providing a welcoming and responsive environment for these new players.

Case study

Carla is a badminton coach and is taking on a coaching role with Rob, a player who uses a wheelchair. He has developed some basic skills and is keen to develop further so that he can play in the evening social competition, but is concerned about his movement around the court.

Carla and Rob develop a program that focuses on training games with a short, wide court on his side of the net allowing for his continual movement rather than stop-start, and a full court on his opponent's side of the net. Carla observes the game and sees that he is coping well with his movement, but his shot placement is poor. She provides some challenges for Rob by establishing areas where he can score double points if he lands the shuttlecock. After training, they discuss Rob's progress and he feels he can increase the size of the court on his side next training session while still retaining the double points areas to encourage better placement of his shots.

Through discussion, Carla demonstrates a **flexible** coaching approach by modifying the area Rob has to work in to meet his needs and setting challenges for him to be more precise with shot placement. They develop, review and progress the **plan** together based on Rob's feedback after the session. Carla will organise varying levels of opponents at training and Rob will decide when he feels ready to join the social competition.

Classification

Classification in disability sport is similar, in principle, to classifying age-level competitors, single-gender competitions and weight-classified competitions. Classification aims to place athletes into classes so that they compete against people who have impairments that have a similar impact on sports performance. In this way, classification provides the framework for competition and the class to which each athlete is assigned is their fundamental point of reference.

People with a disability who compete in sport but do not have a class have difficulty evaluating or extracting meaning from their performances. For example, without a class, a ten-year-old schoolgirl with cerebral palsy who throws the shot-put 4.5 metres at her school carnival cannot know whether her performance is outstanding or average and whether her prospects for participation at an interschool or zone carnival are good or poor. Without this knowledge, which is taken for granted by all people without a disability, the motivation to set goals, train and participate is greatly reduced.

This only applies to athletes wishing to compete in events for athletes with a disability. Not all athletes need to be classified if they choose to compete in mainstream competitions. A comparable example might be that a boxer who is classified in a weight range can compete against boxers of heavier weight range if they choose to.

Coaches, therefore, need to be aware of the implications of classification in their own sport to ensure athletes are placed on the correct pathway and enter into relevant and appropriate competitions.

Case study

Alex is a basketball coach and has taken on a new coaching role with a wheelchair basketball team. Sandy is a newly registered player with the team and has recently been playing tennis.

Sandy's mobility is good but her shooting is inconsistent, and after some traditional shooting coaching her performance does not improve. After spending some time observing her technique, Alex enters into a discussion with Sandy about some possible options for shooting and what feels most appropriate for her. Together they recognise that a two-handed shooting style might be more appropriate for her level of function. They develop a training plan and Sandy spends time practising this new technique.

Sandy's shooting improves and her feedback is that she feels she has more control over the shot due to a more stable base for throwing. Alex then further develops the training plan with Sandy to include a greater and more challenging range of shooting practices that will stand Sandy in good stead for the upcoming competition.

Through Alex's **communication** and **questioning**, both he and Sandy develop an approach that with **patience** will change and improve her technique. This requires a very **flexible** approach to Alex's coaching as he **adapts** his approach of current technique to a new approach based on the player's input. Alex and Sandy establish a **plan** together and are prepared to spend some time practising and developing this new approach.

Case study — Back to Bobbie

At the start of this chapter, a case study about Bobbie the bowls coach and Sam, a 25-year-old with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability, was introduced. A coach, having worked their way through this chapter, should now be equipped to answer the questions posed in that case study.

Some of the things a coach should have considered include:

- . their moral, social and legal responsibilities
- . discussing with Sam what he is able to do
- . conducting an individual session to assess his ability
- . identifying if anyone in the club can provide transport for Sam (for example, pick up/drop off)
- . planning a program for Sam that includes clear guidelines for continued development
- . considering the use of modified equipment if necessary (for example, a bowler's arm)
- . discussing any concerns with club administrators re uniform/equipment requirements and perhaps the response of current members
- . safety — initial introduction to sport and its inherent dangers (for example, driving)
- . behaviour in relation to bowls etiquette
- . approach — patience, flexibility, advocacy.

Summary

Coaches have social, moral and legal responsibilities. They need to provide inclusive opportunities and adapt to meet the needs and requirements of **all** participants.

Coaches should provide a safe and supportive environment for their athletes and be role models and advocates for inclusion through using a variety of skills that might include:

- . communication — developing rapport, being supportive and empathic, involving individuals in planning and decision-making, questioning, actively listening, acknowledging and responding to differences/concerns, advocating inclusion to others
- . planning — individualising programs, undertaking research, questioning, engaging individuals in program planning, evaluating
- . flexibility — adapting to meet individual needs without affecting the integrity of the team, the sport and its competition
- . safety — ensuring the physical and psychological wellbeing of all athletes
- . patience — recognising that inclusion may take time for both current and new participants.

References and further reading

Australian Sports Commission 2005, *What is Disability Sport?* CD-ROM, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.

Australian Sports Commission website (www.ausport.gov.au).

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues website

(www.cmyi.net.au/MulticulturalSport/MulticulturalSportHome).