

COACH & LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE FOR GOOD PRACTICE: IAN JOHNS

PARALYMPIC HEAD COACH, IAN JOHNS, GIVES US HIS TOP TIPS FOR WELCOMING VISUALLY IMPAIRED ATHLETES TO HIS CLUB

Upon meeting a new Visually Impaired person- I would introduce myself and give them a short background into who I am and what judo is. This gives the new Judoka a point of contact- someone who can be trusted and someone who will keep them as safe as possible. This would probably mean introducing them to several of the students on the class as well- again to make them feel at ease about being in our environment.

ORIENTATION

I would then give them a tour of the building- or where they are needed to go when within the facility. Describing in as much detail what/where things are and potentially anything that could cause harm to them. They need to know where the toilets are- so big deals don't need to be made if they need the loo.

Once orientated around the building I would also do the same on the tatami- is there a drop kerb? Is there a loose panel? Are one of the floorboards squeaky? I usually describe the length/width of the dojo (the mats are usually 2x1 metres long or 1x1 meters so very easy. I like to put music on a session- so I would put the speaker in the middle area of the mat, and I would tell them that is the central point. I move around a lot as a coach- some coaches/ fighters might find it easier to stay in one place!

It is really important to be very clear what they should be wearing and where they should change- and where they should put their stuff (if there is a specific place for water bottles, I always make sure that the fighters bottle is the one nearest the side so they can find it- or give them a different place to put it).



**ENJOY IT- IF YOU ENJOY THE
PROCESS OF COACHING
SOMEONE WITH AN EXTRA NEED,
THEY WILL FEEL THAT AND WILL
ALSO ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE OF
A ROUGH AND TUMBLE SPORT
THAT IS ULTRA-COMPETITIVE.**



DEMONSTRATING TECHNIQUE

I would begin by teaching them exactly how I would teach a beginner- how to fall safely, a simple throw and whatever newaza I deem appropriate. When demonstrating to the rest of the class a technique, you have two options - demonstrate on the individual or after you have demonstrated the technique, go to them and go over the technique again - being more descriptive in your coaching points. It is fine to make mistakes when describing the techniques (put this here or do this) - it is just important to be mindful that more info could be needed. If someone else is demonstrating, then I usually run through the technique at the same time whilst talking softly to them about what is being demonstrated.



SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Having enough space when practicing techniques or indeed during randori is really important- One of the scariest things for a visually impaired fighter is hearing someone getting whacked quite close to you... it scares them to death! So, give them enough space to practice- it doesn't need to be coned off or anything maybe just less fighters on at the same time.



FEEDBACK

I always ask the fighters if they are okay after randoris- as some of my team can get dizzy spells especially if we do lots of throwing or are tired- this is very common for visually impaired people, along with cognitive fatigue (a decline in task performance that entails sustained mental activity. So having some understanding that they may need more recovery time is very important.

IAN'S STORY

5 TOP TIPS FOR WHEN A VISUALLY IMPAIRED JUDOKA ATTENDS YOUR CLUB

**BY BEN QUILTER
2012 PARALYMPIC MEDALLIST**

1. Treat each VI person as an individual, people's needs will be specific to them so don't make assumptions based on previous experience. Ensure you don't patronise or over support to the point you are separating the individual from wider activity.

2. Communicate instructions as clearly as possible, when teaching describe as best you can what you are doing. This is an art so don't expect it to be easy straight away. For example my left hand is doing x and my right leg is doing x

3. Be confident enough to ask about the persons condition and degree of sight loss. Ask how they prefer to be supported, guided, positioned at a specific point whilst demonstrating, learn through doing etc.

4. Most of the barriers are likely to be around confidence and feeling included, think about all forms of communication such as digital, website or social media posts, communication around finding and traveling to the venue.

5. Ask for feedback and if there are any aspects of the club or you're coaching that the individual thinks could be improved from a VI perspective.



GOOD PRACTICE IN COACHING V.I JUDO

Coaching athletes who are visually impaired (VI) is not much different from coaching sighted athletes. Same principles apply; however, emphasis must be placed on the following:

- Know your athlete – learn about their health status. Visual impairment can be associated with number of other health issues.
- What is the level of visual perception the athlete has; the visually impaired who have certain level of visual perception will often blend into the integrated environment with very little need for special consideration. Very significant vision impaired or blind athletes will require a one-on-one intervention at all times while in the dojo and often in other aspects of their life associated with sport.
- Patience is a key! Visually impaired athletes may not progress at the same pace as sighted judoka. Keep your mind and heart open.
- Educate yourself.

JUDO TEACHING TIPS

- Just as you would assess any newcomer to the dojo- watch the individuals movement patterns and general capacity to learn new movements, adapt your judo content to the visually impaired judokas needs and capability.
- Emphasise safety first. Ensure that the Visually Impaired judoka has no "fear of space" before progressing to Tachi Waza techniques.
- Maintain contact through grips at all times and adapt grip building.
- Kinesthetic and tactile learning are options available to visually impaired judoka. If possible, use the visually impaired judoka as uke when demonstrating techniques to sighted judoka in an integrated environment.
- Use as few verbal or visual prompts as possible. These become distractions rather than teaching tools.
- Mobility of visually impaired judoka is often limited when compared to sighted judoka. Adjust your goals and expectations to the goals of your student.
- Look for natural tendencies of the visually impaired judoka. i.e. good ability to turn around – teach rotational techniques; limited ability to turn around – teach straight forward or backward techniques that do not involve rotation.
- Do not teach techniques that require a high level of eye hand/ eye leg coordination – i.e De-ashi barai, especially to fully blind judoka.

DOJO MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Assist the new VI judoka in familiarization of the dojo.
- Lead them all around and ensure that they touch and "feel" the space.
- Pay attention to potential obstacles that are obviously visible to a sighted person but may be dangerous to the visually impaired.
- If possible, ensure that the level of lighting in the dojo is always the same – this is particularly important to visually impaired judoka who have some level of light perception.
- If possible, place a sound device and a specific location in the dojo.
- Blind judoka will use this sound to orienteer themselves. Preferred device is i.e. Metronome which will always offer the same signal to the participants.
- If possible, use tatami with two highly contrasting colours or/ plus different structure on the surface.
- Blind judoka will orienteer themselves based on the familiarity of where these different mats are in the dojo.
- Do not use training format during warm up or drills when judoka move simultaneously in opposing direction.
- Sooner or later the Paralympic judoka will collide with someone.

- During warm up use a precise language to describe next exercise or format of the exercise – i.e. "rolling forward ukemi left and right with two steps in between".
- VI judo can be very static so encouraging open movement and teaching correct posture is a good addition to coaching anyone with a VI. These are often picked up quickly without much teaching, through seeing others. Posture is often stooped, or head position is un-natural in someone with a VI. Encouraging good posture will benefit both learning judo and more generally.
- Other club members could benefit from experiencing what it is like to have no vision, in a safe environment encourage others to attempt to learn basic skills blindfolded or perform basic warm up activity.

