



**Open Court**  
Disability Tennis

## Visually impaired tennis advisory group

### Meeting:

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 12:30 – 15:30, Pocklington Trust Offices, Tavistock Square, WC1H 9LG

### Present:

- Chair: Kirsty Thomson
- LTA Reps: Dave Hardman, Matt Grover, Claire McCulloch
- North Rep: Rosie Pybus
- South Rep: Paul Gillett
- British Blind Sport Rep: Logan Gray
- Coaching Rep: Louise Assioun (Phone)

Apologises: Neil Bates (Midlands Rep)  
Roy Turnham (Player Rep)

### Agenda items:

1. Welcome (5 mins)
  - Group welcomed Claire McCulloch (Interim Disability Competitions Manager) and Dave Hardman to the group.
  - Dave announced he has accepted role of Disability Development Manager starting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019.
  - Claire updated the group on the difference between competition roles. Claire & her team now oversee all VI related competitions, including performance and international.
2. Approval of minutes and review outstanding actions from previous meeting(s) (10-15 mins)
  - Group approved minutes and actions from last meeting.
3. LTA Update (10 mins)
  - Competition team working with county association referees looking to run potential VI competitions or have-a-go sessions at county closed events.





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- LTA attended a visual impairment, sport and physical activity workshop, hosted by the University of Central Lancashire. Aim of this was to build connections and relationships between academic researchers and other disability sport organisations to increase opportunities for research and participation in VI sporting activities, including tennis. This will also look at opportunities around coach education, participation opportunities, equipment resources and accessibility of venues.
- Louise attended an International Symposium of visual impairment and Deafblindness, hosted by the University of Edinburgh. This was attended by international delegates from sport and academic backgrounds with an interest in VI physical activity. 40 – 50 delegates attended the tennis practical session with expression of interest around the growth and development of VI tennis. Reason for interest is due to the UK being the most developed sporting VI tennis nation.
- We have just conducted a piece of research with an external research provider, Britain Thinks to understand the impact of the Open Court Disability Tennis Programme. This research looks at three core pillars of physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing and individual development. Received a high number of completed surveys which will increase the validity and reliability of results. Results will follow in due course.

#### 4. Growing the game in the UK (1.5hrs)

- BBS update
1. BBS have secured funding for research in physical activity for children and young people with a visual impairment in comparison to sighted people. Further research will also look at impact into leisure centres, facility access & BAME communities.
  2. Held a successful see my voice young leaders camp at Royal National College for the Blind that works to improve the impact, confidence and social experiences of young people with visual impairments gaining qualifications in sport.
  3. Have a go days currently happening across the UK with links to groups more locally. BBS will link in with appropriate disability development partners at the LTA for support in coaches and delivery. This will help build a legacy programme with steering groups.
  4. BBS have now introduced an upper limit of B5 classification in line with threshold of driving. This process is designed for a more streamlined approach to all sports. Currently B5 players who are completing in regional or national tournaments are still





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able to compete until their classification needs renewing. At this stage, if players are re-classified and their results mean they are over the upper limit then unfortunately they will not be able to compete in the B5 category. This does not apply recreationally and all players, whatever their sight category, are able to play and compete recreationally. Exit routes are currently being looked at so that as many people as possible can play VI tennis.

5. Running an event at Birmingham Sight Village this year with opportunities to showcase VI sports, particularly tennis. LTA will look to support this.
  - Current player base update
1. Currently collating participation statistics for period of January – April 2019. Current active players stand at 473 within the Open Court Disability Tennis Programme. At the same period in comparison to last year, we have seen an increase in VI Tennis participation across the South West, Midlands and North England. South West activity has increased by 56%, Midlands has increased by 72% and North has increased by 10%. This has been a result of new programmes and activity starting in this area across club and park venues. We also have a 60% participation rate in favour of males to females with around 70% of participations being aged 18 and over.
  - Disability Tennis Activity
1. Held two Junior VI Festivals since our last meeting at Tennis World, Middlesbrough and the National Tennis Centre, London. Good engagement throughout with attendance across the two festivals being 33 children and young people. All attendees have now been linked in with local clubs, parks as exit routes so they can continue to play where a three month follow-up email will be sent to see how activity is going and if they are still engaged regularly; whether it's locally or nationally. Created a link with Royal Society of Blind Children who attended the London festival and will look to further engage with them about opportunities across London and Nationally.
2. Matt delivered the 2019 NATSPEC Games at United Response, Royal National College and Communication Specialist College in Torbay, Hereford and Doncaster; partnering with AOC Sport. Had the opportunity to engage with 8 different colleges at each event, of which some were VI specific. At least 3 colleges per event have expressed interest in wanting to start disability tennis activity and support visually impaired students. Introduction conversations about how to set these up have been done and links have been made to the relevant disability development partners for handover.



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- Regional feedback - North, Midlands, South

## South

- 40 players attending the VI regional event in Brighton.
- Unclear on what size standardised lines are for events. 5mm bungee cord has been agreed; though for recreational play and events any format of lines can be used.
- Umpires not counting the bounces correctly during matches. Players should first ask the umpire and then if it happens again ask for the referee. This should be done during the match. It should only be the players on court that do this, spectators should not get involved.
- A query was raised around insurance at coaching sessions and tournaments. All coaches should be LTA accredited and licensed if delivering a coaching session. If an accident happens the people who hired the coach whether that is the venue, a club, a park or a group of people should be confident in the coach's ability to run that session. Venues must be a registered venue if linked with the LTA.

## North & Scotland

- Players want clear promotion of tournaments and events as not often clear where to find these. The LTA competitions team have previously sent out competitions calendar and all competitions can now be found on the LTA website <https://www.lta.org.uk/play-compete/competing/disability-competitions-calendar/>
- Players need to be a British Citizen to compete in the National Championships.
- There has been some interest in wanting to host a VI regional in Manchester. The competitions team to liaise with Disability Development Team regarding VI activity to see if it is viable.
- Rosie potentially stepping down from her role due to work commitments.

## Midlands

- Made appropriate contact with Open Court venues in Midlands, Wales and South West area.
- Been invited to meet up with other groups over the next 2-3 months.
- Taster session was held at Royal National College for the Blind with great interest to increase VI tennis activity.
- Challenges are as follows: Lack of interest from local sight organisations, lack of indoor access, funding, struggling to find coaches. LTA to support



with helping develop knowledge, understanding and opportunities to increase VI tennis. BBS also to link in as appropriate.

#### 5. International activity (30 mins)

- Performance

1. Louise and Claire are off to Benidorm for Blind International Tournament with national camp taking place prior to flying out. We have opportunities to medal in all events part from Men's B1 competition as GB have no representation due to a player unfortunately having to withdraw due to illness. Results of the tournament will follow.
2. Just completed an independent review of the disability performance programmes (deaf, learning disability and visually impaired), run previously by the Tennis Foundation. This looked at the processes of camps, competitions and events. An action plan to how the programmes will be shaped in the future has been developed and this will be shared within the next week.
3. Currently looking to standardise the three programmes as much as possible to improve fluidity across the board and to look into development pathways for all players.
4. Currently looking into reviewing and updating the selection policy for international competitions for 2020.
5. Code of conduct and player agreements will be sent out prior to each international event for players to sign as they are representing their country.
6. LTA will be actively promoting via regional social media accounts for international updates, results, fun activities and further developments in Benidorm.

- IBTA

1. IBTA are looking to hold a general meeting at the Blind international Tournament where nominations have taken place for all roles on the executive committee. It has been agreed that we need to have some involvement to fully understand what the process currently is and what is on-going.
2. GB was asked to put forward nominations for positions though there has not been much interest.



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3. ITF will be attending the Blind International Tournament through a representative and will look to endorse the event as they have recently done with the INAS World Championships.
  
6. Any other business (10 mins)
  1. Dave has been in touch with a couple of manufacturers around ball development and will link in with Louise who was involved with the ball testing at the Blind International Tournament in Dublin last year. Currently looking at different avenues and proposals of how we can take this forward.
  2. Group discussed reopening player representative role for VI Advisory Group, which will be confirmed and communicated out shortly when appropriate.

**Actions from previous meeting in table below:**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>Status?</b>
Send out information about process of new classifications in tennis to player database.	Claire	
Matt to pick up core relationships of VI activity – Send to Logan	Matt	
Matt to link Logan in with VI College - United Response	Matt	
Look into manufacturers around VI ball development and report back to the group	Dave/Louise	
Send out BBS VI have a go dates for the group to disseminate	Logan	