



Coaching Guide

Contents

Section number	Section name	Page number
1	Who Can Play Boccia?	3
2	What is Coaching?	4
3	Coaching Styles and Approaches	5
4	Communication Skills	6
5	Why Words Matter	9
6	Skill Teaching and Learning	11
7	Goals	13
8	Planning Sessions	14
9	Safety and Equipment	16



Who Can Play Boccia?

Boccia is a sport open to athletes who have movement difficulties in all four limbs. This may be as a result of a number of conditions such as: cerebral palsy, acquired brain injury or stroke, spinal cord damage, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, and motor neurone disease. Most boccia athletes use a wheelchair for daily mobility, however some may walk, with some assistance and will use a standard chair to play boccia.

There are 4 classes in boccia: BC1 through to BC4.

BC1

Generally use a power wheelchair for daily use. They often require assistance to adjust their sitting position or to grasp a boccia ball. Players may use their hands or feet to propel the ball during play. BC1 players may utilise an assistant on the court to help with their grasp of the ball before their shot.

BC2

These athletes have better trunk control than a BC1 player. They may be able to grasp and throw a boccia ball, but will have difficulty with throwing a ball overhead, or generating lots of power or fast movements with their throws. Players are able to spread their fingers and thumb but not quickly. The player might be able to walk or stand with some assistance, however as they have much more functional ability than BC1 players they are not permitted to use an assistive device or an assistant.

BC3

Players in this class have the most significant movement difficulties of their limbs. These players are unable to grasp, throw or kick the ball into the playing area consistently and purposely beyond the V-line on the boccia court. They are allowed to use ramps and assistive devices to drive the ball into the playing zone. They may utilise an assistant to support the placement of the ball on the ramp.

BC4

Players in this class have significant movement difficulties in all four limbs that is a degenerative or other (non-cerebral) neurological disorder. Players have poor muscle strength and co-ordination difficulties combined with poor trunk control. They may be able to push a manual chair. Athletes often use their arms or a head thrust to bring themselves to an upright sitting position after a throw. BC4 players can grasp and throw a ball into the playing area. These players are not permitted to use an assistant or throwing chair.

What is Coaching?

Coaching is about sharing knowledge and experience, making sport fun and giving everyone the chance to participate. It is about teaching discipline, fair play and skills that will help athletes in all aspects of their lives.

Good coaches are critical to the success of athletes and teams. They help athletes to develop a love for sport through creating positive, motivating and fun learning environments. Good coaches understand the environment they are working in and how this positively impacts on their athletes' physical, psychological and social development.

The role of the coach

Coaching is not just about improving the athletes' physical performance, nor is it solely about winning. The development of the athletes as a 'whole person' is just as important as success. The physical skills you teach your athletes may only be used for a few years, but the attitudes and values they develop will last a lifetime.

Why do people participate in boccia?

People are involved in boccia for a variety of reasons. As a coach you should consider what you want to gain from coaching and why your athletes are participating. This will influence how you approach your coaching and the goals you set.

Some of the reasons people play boccia include:

- Improving fitness and skill levels
- Making new friends
- Being part of a team
- Having fun and enjoyment
- Achieving goals

Some of the reasons people coach boccia include:

- Improving their knowledge and skills
- Giving something back to the sport
- Helping others achieve their goals
- Staying involved in a sport they love
- Being too old to play

What makes an effective coach?

An effective coach:

- Has a genuine concern to help others develop – both physically and mentally.
- Understands the strengths and weaknesses of individual athletes.
- Is well organized, on time and plans ahead.
- Is a good communicator.
- Is able and willing to continually learn.
- Is motivated and enthusiastic.
- Abides by the principles of fair play.
- Is committed to playing the game well, rather than winning at all costs.

Coaching Styles and Approaches

Coaching Styles

How you coach will depend partially on your style. If you are extroverted, you'll probably be more vocal as a coach. If you are not, you might use quieter communication techniques. It's important to be true to who you are, and to adjust styles a little to suit the situation.

You can use more than one style. In fact, often you'll adopt many styles in one session, some seemingly opposite like direct (where you instruct the participants what to do) and indirect (where you use questions to allow the participants to think for themselves).

- An athlete-centred approach is empowering.
- A coach-centred approach is directive.
- There are other ways to coach in between these approaches. All approaches can be valid and a coach should vary their approach to suit the circumstance.

Coaching Approaches

As you coach, you can use a number of approaches to achieve your goals with your participants. You will probably find yourself using several within one practice session. Knowing about coaching approaches will help you determine which of them best suits your goals and objectives for the session. Always aim for your participants to be engaged, active, and having fun.

Game-centred: Uses activity-games to assist participants to understand game concepts).

Technique-centred: Isolates a skill so you can focus on it, or prioritise its development over game play or competition. There are many activities that you can use to focus on technique.

Combined approach: Manipulates rules, the environment or equipment to isolate a technique, tactic or skill and focus on it in a game or competition setting.



Communication Skills

Communication is the art of successfully sharing meaningful information with people by means of an interchange of experience. Coaches wish to motivate the athletes they work with and to provide them with information that will allow them to train effectively and improve performance. This requires the athlete to receive the information from the coach but also to understand and accept it.

Good communication is much more than just talking however. The way you deal with people, how you listen, your tone of voice and your body language all sends messages to your athletes. Many coaches tend to be good at sending messages, but need to improve their skills in receiving messages.

Coaches need to ask themselves:

- Do I have the athlete's attention?
- Am I explaining myself in an easily understood manner?
- Has the athlete understood?
- Does the athlete believe and accept what I am telling him / her?

Non-verbal messages

At first, it may appear that face-to-face communication consists of taking turns to speak. While the coach is speaking, the athlete is expected to listen and wait patiently until the coach finishes. On closer examination, it can be seen that people resort to a variety of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in order to maintain a smooth flow of communication. Such behaviour includes head-nods, smiles, frowns, body contact, eye movements, laughter, body posture, language and many other actions.



The facial expressions of athletes provide feedback to the coach. Glazed or down turned eyes indicate boredom or disinterest, as does fidgeting. Fully raised eyebrows signal disbelief and half raised indicate puzzlement. Posture of the group provides a means by which their attitude to the coach may be judged and act as pointer to their mood. Control of a group demands that a coach should be sensitive to the signals being transmitted by the athletes. Their faces usually give a good indication of how they feel, and a good working knowledge of the meaning of non-verbal signals will prove invaluable to the coach.

Communication Blocks

Difficulties in communicating with an athlete may be due a number of issues including the following:

- The athlete's perception of something is different to yours.
- The athlete may jump to a conclusion instead of working through the process of hearing, understanding and accepting.
- The athlete may lack the knowledge needed to understand what you are trying to communicate.
- The athlete may lack the motivation to listen to you or to convert the information given into action.
- The coach may have difficulty in expressing what they wish to say to the athlete.
- Emotions may interfere in the communication process.
- There may be a clash of personality between you and the athlete.

These blocks to communication work both ways and coaches need to consider the process of communication carefully.

Effective Communication

Before communicating with an athlete, coaches should consider:

- WHY they want to communicate
- WHO they wish to communicate with
- WHERE and WHEN the message could best be delivered
- WHAT is it that they want to communicate
- HOW they are going to communicate the information

Effective communication contains six elements:

- **Clear** Ensure that the information is presented clearly
- **Concise** Be simple, do not lose the message by being long winded
- **Correct** Be accurate, avoid giving misleading information
- **Complete** Give all the information and not just part of it
- **Courteous** Be polite and non-threatening, avoid conflict
- **Constructive** Be positive, avoid being critical and negative

Be Positive

When coaches provide information to the athlete that will allow them to take actions to effect change, it is important that they provide the information in a positive manner. Look for something positive to say first and then provide the information that will allow the athlete to effect a change of behaviour or action.

Managing athletes' behaviour

Good discipline is essential to running an effective coaching session. Remember that it is more effective to be proactive by taking a positive, preventative measure. This includes:

- Being well organised at training and competition – this will reduce the opportunities athletes have to misbehave.
- Trying to catch athletes being 'good' rather than 'bad' – praise any positive behaviour and try to ignore inappropriate behaviour.

Communicating effectively with your athletes

- Greet your athletes warmly by name when they arrive at practice.
- Wear appropriate dress and take a positive, enthusiastic approach – having a sense of humour helps.
- Be sure that you can see your athletes when you are speaking to them and that they can see you.
- Speak clearly using words your athletes can understand – vary the tone of your voice to keep the interest up.
- Listen carefully to their questions and comments, and respect their views – being a good listener is an essential coaching skill.
- Be positive and constructive when both giving and receiving feedback from athletes.
- Be aware of your body language, and watch your athletes' body language for clues on how they are reacting.

Communicating effectively with parents and caregivers

- Emphasise the importance of the athletes having fun, learning new skills and making new friends. Performing to their potential is more important than winning and losing.
- Discuss the role of parents and caregivers in your team. Stress the importance of supporting and encouraging the athletes.
- Discuss the principles of fair play and your expectations of supporters' behaviour on the side of the court.

You should also be aware of cultural differences in communicating with your athletes. For example, many cultures believe direct eye contact to be inappropriate. If you are unsure about how to communicate with an athlete from a different culture, ask somebody for advice.

Conclusion

Coaches should:

- Develop their verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
- Ensure that they provide positive feedback during coaching sessions.
- Give all athletes in their training group equal attention.
- Communicate as appropriate to your athlete's thinking and learning styles.
- Ensure that they not only talk to their athletes but they also listen to them as well.

Improved communication skills will enable both the athlete and coach to gain much more from their coaching relationship.

Why Words Matter

Language reflects and shapes the way we view the world. The words we use can influence community attitudes - both positively and negatively - and can impact on the lives of others.

How we write and speak about people with disabilities can have a profound effect on the way they are viewed by the community. Some words, by their very nature, degrade and diminish people with disabilities. Others perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, removing entirely a person's individuality and humanity.

Over the years, people with disabilities have had to endure a variety of labels that serve to set them apart from the rest of the community. Even today, people with disabilities are still identified by their disabling condition - all too often, we hear 'a paraplegic' for a person who has paraplegia; 'a cerebral palsy sufferer' for a person with cerebral palsy or a 'Down syndrome baby' for a baby with Down syndrome.

This labelling influences our perceptions by focusing only on one aspect of a person - their disability - and ignores their other roles and attributes. For example, they may be also a parent, a lawyer, a musician or a sportsperson.

The following guide aims to promote a fair, accurate and positive portrayal of people with disabilities. "Putting People First" is a simple rule of thumb - acknowledge the person before their disability.

General guidelines

- Avoid defining a person by their disability. We are all individuals with abilities, desires, interests and problems - some of us happen to have a disability.
- Avoid focusing unnecessarily on a person's disability. If it is not necessary to acknowledge that a person has a disability, then don't mention it.
- Portray people with disabilities positively by recognising what a person can do rather than focusing on their limitations. For example, the person walks with an aid, not that he or she has limited mobility.
- Recognise that many of the difficulties facing people with a disability are barriers created by community attitudes and the physical environment. We can all help to break down these barriers by using appropriate language - to be labelled in a derogatory way serves only to perpetuate these barriers.
- Be specific about a person's circumstances and avoid stereotypes, generalisations and assumptions based on limited information.
- Avoid any word or phrase that has a negative connotation - for example, 'confined to a wheelchair' instead of 'uses a wheelchair' - or that implies people with a disability are suffering.
- Avoid labels; say person with a disability; put the person first and be specific.

Words to avoid	Words to use
Abnormal; cripple or crippled; mentally retarded; moron	Put the person first and specify the need or disability. For example, a person who uses a wheelchair, person with cerebral palsy / a disability
Defect (as in birth defect, congenital defect)	Say the 'person with a disability since birth', 'person with a congenital disability'
Unfortunate; victim; suffer or suffering from; afflicted with; disease; illness; patient; in a vegetative state; invalid	Put the person first and be specific. For example, a person with Down Syndrome Note: patient is appropriate when referring to a doctor-patient relationship
Dwarf	Person who is little or of short stature
Mongol	Person with an intellectual disability / person with Down Syndrome
Paraplegic	Person with paraplegia
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy
Fit / attack / spell	Seizure
Spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Deaf and dumb	Deaf / hearing impaired and cannot speak / has difficulty with speech
Brain damaged	Person with an acquired brain injury
Handicapped	Handicapped is appropriate only if referring to a barrier facing people with a disability. For example, "... are handicapped by a lack of access"
Insane; lunatic; maniac; mental patient; neurotic; psycho; psychotic; schizophrenic; unsound mind; crazy; mad	Put the person first and be specific. For example, say 'a person with a psychiatric / mental illness'
Terms beginning with 'the', such as 'the disabled' or 'the blind'	Put the person first and be specific. For example, people who are blind
Cerebral palsy sufferer	Person with cerebral palsy
Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound	Is a wheelchair user, uses a wheelchair
Disabled toilets / parking	Accessible toilets / parking

Skill Teaching and Learning

As a coach, one of your main objectives is to improve the skill level of your athletes. To effectively teach skills, the coach must learn to observe and analyse an athletes' skill performance – many coaches watch their athletes without really seeing what they are doing. Knowing how to observe skills effectively will help you detect and then correct faults, and pinpoint areas where skills can be improved.

When selecting what skills to teach, you should consider:

- The age and ability of your athletes.
- The types of skills required to enable your athletes to perform successfully.

Observing performance

When observing your athletes performing skills, you should:

- Observe the whole movement first (to gain an overall impression) then focus on one part of the movement at a time. Start by focusing on the larger, slower moving parts, then work towards the outer extremities.
- Observe the movement from different angles.
- Observe the skill long enough to be able to describe what you see. Be aware that too many repetitions may tire the athlete and affect their performance.

Teaching new skills

When teaching new skills, you should:

- Provide an explanation and a demonstration of the movement before the athlete attempts it themselves.
 - o New skills should be introduced at the start of the session while the athletes are fresh and focused.
 - o Both the coach and athletes should understand why the skill is important – this will help the teaching and learning process.
- Focus on two or three teaching points and some key words or phrases to emphasise the important parts of the skill.
- Keep instructions simple, using words that everyone can understand.
- Demonstrate the whole skill first, then divide the skill into smaller parts. This can be done by an athlete who can perform the skill well.
- Make sure the athletes can see the demonstration clearly.
- Check for understanding by asking 'open' questions which require more than a yes or no answer.

Examples of open questions:

- Where do you put your wheel?
- What should you do with your non-throwing hand?
- How will you get closer than the blue balls?
- What do you think the problem is with your ramp setup?

Feedback

Giving feedback is an essential part of the coaching process. Constructive, positive feedback is important to your athletes, both for their improvement and their self-esteem.

Always tell your athletes what they are doing right:

- Be positive and encouraging.
- Give feedback as soon as possible after the performance or game has ended.
- Be specific so the athlete is clear about what you expect.
- Focus on behaviour or actions that can be changed.
- Use words the athletes can understand - keep it simple for beginners.
- Encourage your athletes to give you feedback about how their performance 'felt'.
- Feedback should tell the athletes more than they have figured out by doing it themselves.

Examples of good feedback:

- Remember to look at your target when you throw.
- Keep looking at your target when you have released the ball.
- Your ramp line was good, now do the same again, this time select a more suitable release height.



Goals

Once you have an understanding of your participants' needs, you can start to work out a few goals for them to achieve. These can be short term goals (like improving a skill) or long term goals (like bonding as a team). These goals will help you determine your objectives for each of your practice sessions. Remember, you want to help them gain confidence, improve in the sport, feel engaged and welcomed, and develop life skills.

Specific goals

Being specific means that you need to focus on what the outcome is that you after and how they will address it. Putting a specific training routine into practice can assist in achieving the goal.

Measurable goals

When goals are measurable, everyone can see what the aim is, then see whether that was achieved. And it doesn't have to be a number that is measured. Sometimes we can measure success by seeing more smiles on participants' faces, or seeing more effort or consistency at training. Setting measurable goals means you can see if you got there, and work on what to do next.

Realistic and achievable goals

Remember that at the community level you're not dealing with elite athletes, so don't create goals that are outside of their reach. It will only set them up for failure. Goals don't have to be too easy, but they shouldn't be something that is beyond the capability and developmental level of your participants.

Timely goals

Lastly, don't forget to put a target date or deadline to achieve the goals by. This helps the athletes' focus their efforts on completion of the goal before the due date.



Planning Coaching Sessions

Planning is done before your session or game. It involves gathering information, setting goals, selecting activities and general management. When planning your coaching sessions, keep it simple. Decide on a focus or goal for each session – to which all the activities are related, select one or two simple activities and develop variations and remember to allow for the different rates at which individuals will learn.

Plan in advance

- What do I want the athletes to learn today?
- What areas do we need to improve on from last weeks' practice?
- How can I best get the athletes to work on areas of weakness?
- How will I know if they understand what I am telling them?
- How do I plan for the different player abilities?
- What resources or equipment do I need during the session?

Things to consider:

- How will I keep the session safe and enjoyable?
- How and when will I use the equipment?
- How do I deliver the session for different learning styles?
- Do I need to stop every group when we change activity?
- How will I select groups and teams?
- How will I move players into groups?
- How will I use different group formations?
- How will I deal with a difference in ability levels?
- Do I need to demonstrate the skill?
- How will I give feedback and when?
- Should I ask questions to gain awareness of my athletes' learning?

Establish routines for:

- Getting equipment out and putting it away again.
- Forming groups quickly.
- Getting everyone to stop and listen.

Organising activities

Activities can be organized in a variety of ways:

- All the athletes work as one group on the same activity at the same time. This assumes you have sufficient equipment and the activity is suitable for all levels of skill.
- Small groups work on the same activity. Groups are based on skill level with activities modified to suit each group.
- Small groups in a circuit work on different activities for the same skill, or different skills and rotate around. This solves the problem of insufficient equipment.
- Different activities are set up and the athletes decide what activity to start on and when to move on. Use this once good routines have been established. Limits may need to be set on the number at each activity.

Maximising participation

The key to running an effective coaching session is keeping the athletes active and involved for as long as possible:

- Involve your athletes in planning and decision making.
- Spend minimal time on organisation.
- Keep explanations short and to the point.
- Provide plenty of activities – keep the waiting time to a minimum.
- Include a variety of games and activities that are challenging, but not beyond the skill level of the athletes.
- Avoid elimination games as athletes (usually the less skilled) get left out.
- Choose activities that give a better chance of success and provide plenty of positive feedback.
- Ensure that you have enough equipment to go around.

Reflection

Reflection is an important tool as it allows you to review what you did and how you did it so that you can keep doing things that are working and improve in ways that aren't.

- How do I know the way I coach is working?
- Do the things we do in training work in competition?
- Are players developing and improving?
- Am I meeting the needs of all my players?

The general elements of an effective coaching session

Introduction:

Greet everyone as they arrive and gather them together for a quick chat about your aims for the session. This is also a good time to give some positive feedback on the last session or tournament, and to ask athletes for ideas for improvement.

Warm up:

Warming up is important to prepare your athletes' bodies for physical activity, and get their minds on the job.

Skill learning:

The best time for practicing new skills is early in the session, when the athletes are fresh and focused. Spend a brief amount of time revising previously learned skills (may be as part of the warm up) before introducing new skills.

Game skill practice:

Give the athletes opportunities to practice the skills they have learned in competitive situations. Give feedback about skills, tactics and strategies.

Cool down and evaluation:

Discuss how the session went – both what worked well and what can be improved for next time.

Safety and Equipment

Playing sport involves some risks. As a coach, your aim should always be to make sure you keep those risks to a minimum. It doesn't mean wrapping your participants up in cotton wool, but it does mean thinking through potential risks, removing any hazards, and adapting any plans that might lead to unnecessary injuries.

Your aim is to assess, manage and prevent any injury or risk to your participants.

The key to safety is making sure you minimise risk to your participants. You can do this by:

- Using equipment that is appropriate to the age and ability of your participants.
- Making sure any playing area or equipment is up to standard and in good repair.
- Having an adequate first aid kit.
- Always warming up, stretching and cooling down.
- Having adequate pick up arrangements for children.
- Making any safety notes in your session plan.

