

Getting Started-Working with Athletes with a Disability

First reactions

- Fear, worry about speaking inappropriately to the athletes
- Doubting your own ability to provide adequate support (I actually interpret that as lack of confidence in your own knowledge of the situation)

Making Assumptions

- Do not make assumptions as to what an athlete can or can't do
- There are no increased liability risks when working with athletes with a disability

Adapting the situation

- There are few differences from the basic skills and techniques used to coach AB athletes
- Focus on the athletes' abilities

First contact

- Focus on the athletes capabilities
- Everyone has the right to participate
- (Sport is for All)

Finding out more about the disability

- Different types of disability are grouped into broad categories such as mobility, sensory, and intellectual impairment
- Disabilities are either congenital or acquired
- Coaches should aim to develop a good understanding of the disability or disabilities of the athletes they coach
- The athlete is the best judge of what he or she can or cannot do
- Coaches should focus on the potential not the limitations
- It is important for the coach to discuss with the athlete their goals and expectations, and how such goals will be established and realized

Assessing fitness, coordination and skill

- An assessment of the physical, cognitive and social aspects of the athlete is essential in order to provide them with adequate support and sound programming
- Use a process similar to that used with AB rowers, however you may need to be creative

Communication and Interaction

- Open communication is vital
- The best questions are those that would normally be asked of an AB rower
- Honesty is key to successful communication with an athlete with a disability

Inclusion and Integration

- Rowing can open a whole new world of access for a person with a disability; they become stronger, gain more endurance, and are generally healthier and more confident as a result.
- These benefits are not limited to the participant athletes; ultimately everyone gains from the inclusion of athletes with a disability in rowing programs
- Rowing technique and equipment should be the only things being adapted, NOT the athlete
- Discuss with the athlete and your club what program would be the best fit

Classification

What is classification

The International Paralympic Committee states that classification is undertaken to ensure that an athlete's impairment is relevant to sport performance, and to ensure that the athlete competes equitably with other athletes

Classification plays two important roles

1. To set eligibility criteria to determine what types and degrees of impairment are relevant to sport
2. To group athletes for competition in order to minimize the impact of impairment and to ensure that competitive success is determined by the same criteria as in the AB athletes; that is strategy, skill and talent.

The 3 rowing classifications for competition (FISA) are

1. **AS Women**
AS Men
2. **TA Mixed 2x**
3. **LTA Mixed 4+**

For more information go to the Rowing BC Website here <http://rowingbc.ca/coaching/coach-resources/para-rowing-resources/>