



“ I won’t let blindness stop me ”

Rachel Hanks gains her Archery GB Instructor licence

AUTHOR: Jane Percival

Jane Percival is the editor of Archery UK. She was one of the UK’s first female sports editors, was deputy chief sub-editor on an evening newspaper and co-authored the best-selling Archery for Beginners’ Guidebook.



When Rachel Hanks decides to do something, nothing gets in her way. The 20-year-old recently gained an Archery GB Instructor licence. That’s impressive – but when you realise she is blind, impressive becomes remarkable.

Rachel shoots and teaches at the Mixenden Activity Centre in Halifax, where she volunteers most days of the week. And if you met her on home turf, you would find it hard to believe she faces any challenges at all. In fact, many of her students do not realise and have to be convinced.

Rachel, of Brighouse, was born with cataracts and a genetic condition – a mutation of gene GJA8 – which meant that her optical nerve kept deteriorating. She had to have one eye removed when she was 17 and her other eye failed soon after. But she is determined that it is not going to get in her way.

“Every day I find something that I can do,” she said. “I intend to live my life to the full, I won’t let blindness stop me.”

Photos from the author.

Rachel completed a sports leader course at Calderdale College and is now studying an outdoor activities course. She is a black belt in taekwondo, takes part in water activities at the centre's reservoir, was the first in Britain to ride a 30-mile bike trail on her own following an unconnected guide – youth worker Marcus Irving – and leads rock climbing activities on the centre's indoor walls.

So why archery – and how does she do it?

“Well I like it – a lot,” she said. “I love shooting. I know my way around the centre and the range really well, so I count my steps. There are 13 steps from the boss to the line and 16 to the waiting line. And reaching the arrows... well, I’m not sure how I do it but I just do it. I just know. I can sense it.”

“I first had a go at archery here and I wanted to learn more. I was volunteering at the outdoor centre and wanted to have a go at becoming an instructor, so I asked. I like teaching and helping people, so it just seemed like a good opportunity. I wanted to learn a new skill – and I would love to take it further.”

The instructor course was set up by Grahame Cotterill. He said: *“Marcus approached me and, after discussions with Archery GB, we agreed to give it a go. Rachel coped with the course extremely well and impressed her assessor so much that he thought we were fibbing about her impairment.”*

“*By working closely with British Blind Sport, we made sure we had thought of everything we could to give Rachel and other participants a fantastic learning experience. As part of this we provided Rachel with one-to-one support throughout the course.”*

Archery GB has given Rachel a restricted instructor's licence – she has to have another instructor present – on the basis of this and she is now working with young people at the centre. ■

As a sector let's ask ourselves whether there are enough opportunities for leaders with visual impairment. Turn the page to read more.



Visit <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/> for education, training and research resources which help build knowledge about creating an inclusive and accessible environment for people with sight loss.



Leaders with visual impairment

Are there enough opportunities?

Dr Jess Macbeth shares her thoughts:

Individuals with visual impairment (VI) are one of the most inactive groups in the UK and key stakeholders work hard to make sport and outdoor education accessible and inclusive to people with visual impairment (1, 2).

Though there are a few examples of coaching and leadership opportunities specifically for individuals with VI, it appears there is still work to be done to have more role models like Rachel Hanks and Rosie Pybus.

Rosie Pybus began playing tennis in 2009 and now it plays a leading role in her life. Alongside her job as a Sports Development Officer, Rosie has gained her level two LTA coaching qualification and works as a self-employed coach and consultant.

Read more here: <http://bit.ly/Rosies-story>

Existing coaching and leadership courses or programmes specifically connected to visual impairment include:

- The **British Blind Sport** sports leadership programme, See My Voice (<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/see-my-voice/>), provides 10 to 20 year olds with the opportunity to become Young Leaders and apply their skills in a range of contexts.
- **UK Coaching's** online e-learning course, 'Coaching People with a Visual Impairment', has been produced in conjunction with BBS and is screen reader-friendly for VI users.
- **Goalball UK**, governing body for the only sport designed specifically for people with VI, runs both a Club Leaders and School Leaders Award (<http://goalballuk.com/the-sport/coaching/>) which are likely to attract interest from those with VI.

This doesn't mean, as with GB Archery, that there aren't other opportunities available, just that perhaps we could promote these opportunities more effectively.

As part of this we can ask ourselves some key questions:

- Are current coaching / leadership awards accessible to people with VI?
- Is the advertising of coaching / leadership awards reaching people with VI?
- Are there preconceptions about the ability of people with VI becoming coaches / leaders in sport and the outdoors?
- What barriers might people with VI face along coaching / leadership pathways?

Exploring what is already available and asking ourselves pertinent questions is a great but limited start. Whilst any sports coaching / leadership courses should be accessible to people with VI, there is currently no research investigating the reality of this or potential barriers faced for people with VI along coaching / leadership pathways – so this is also something we should look in to.

Overall, as opportunities in disability sport and outdoor education develop, I hope we will see more individuals with visual impairment pursuing coaching or leadership qualifications. ■



We can ask ourselves questions about accessibility and inclusivity as part of the Sector Strategic Forum, which looks to shape the future of our Outdoor Learning sector. Go to page 23 to find out more.

AUTHOR:

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Dr Jess Macbeth is a Senior Lecturer in Sports Studies at the University of Central Lancashire. Her teaching and research focuses on equality and equity issues in sport, with a particular focus on visual impairment, disability and gender.



References

- (1) <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VIfriendlySport-1-1-1.pdf>
- (2) BBS have guides for specific sports including archery, shooting, equestrian, football, judo, swimming, tennis and walking, available here: <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/educationandresearch/education/>