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At grassroots level, classification specifics should be the last thing on a coach's mind. Instead, consider different ways of working with a given disability. Shaun Alvey recalls three very different sessions working with three very different disabilities

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

"USE THE ROBOT"

'I did one session and there was a boy there who was blind and was asked to sit it out. But I said, "no, we can still get him involved". So we got a robot, asked him to listen to the clicking sound it makes when the ball is released, and through that he could develop a timing point, with the help of someone sitting to the side of the table. He was able, by the end of the session, to do 60 seconds without missing a ball. So that's someone playing a sport where there isn't even a classification allowing him to compete!'

WHEELCHAIR USERS

"INCREASE THE SERVE OPTIONS"

The serve takes on added importance when your mobility is limited, as it ultimately will be with a wheelchair athlete. With this in mind, Alvey suggests working on the speed and variety of the serve.

'To practise those vital, long, fast topspin serves – and focus on attacking the third ball – ask the player to aim for the crossover point of their playing partner, concentrating on good speed off the paddle. Then, when the ball is returned, I get the server to attempt a topspin return with an intention to win the point. On the next serve, repeat these steps with the third ball attack being to the side that wasn't attacked the previous point.'

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

"DITCH THE NET"

'When you're working with someone with a learning difficulty they also often have poor hand-to-eye coordination skills, but air hockey is fine for them. So you turn the table tennis table into an air hockey table, which allows them to develop their coordination from a lower starting point. From there you leave the net off and give them bounce feeds, asking them to keep the bat between chin and belly button, with you putting the ball to where that bat is. All of a sudden their confidence is going sky-high, you put the net back on and they can hit it back to you. You've broken down the problem of the net and a fear from the player that it is too great a barrier for them.'