

How to play... Goalball

An introduction to the basics

13 July 2002; 21 August 2002; 03, 05, 18, 19 September 2002; 29 September 2002.

This introductory reader seeks to help the person who is starting out in this great game, from the young player or the primary school teacher introducing the sport to a class. It may also be used by parents to develop the skills of a new player. The aim in part is to assist the player or motivator who is unable to see or attend a game due to the tyranny of distance and time (it's a bit hard to fly to Brisbane from Mt Isa just for a Saturday morning competition). It is not a comprehensive tome on goalball, just an introduction. As a result, not every rule or ruling is indicated.

Goalball may be played by sighted and visually impaired persons alike. Sighted players may represent the State at national level, while visually impaired players can go onto represent Australia and become paralympians in the only team sport for visually impaired persons at the Paralympics.

This is not a book on *How to referee goalball* – that's part of the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) training manuals for referees. This is not a book on *How to coach goalball* – coaches learn how to coach, then add their specific sports component on top (although training techniques specific to goalball could be advantageous). The ISBA goalball rules unfortunately only provide a partial story on how to play the game – it does not indicate how to mount a defensive strategy, or how to work as a team.

While the guide refers to optimal conditions such as good court surfaces, sufficient playing area and enough officials to keep the game running, anything can be modified for training purposes. Even the corridor of a house can be used to practise techniques.

As Wayne Bennett, Broncos football coach, in an August 2002 St Lucia Locker Room lecture series emphasised – get the job done and you will get the rewards. Players who concentrate on winning or the accolades are going in the wrong direction. Skill, ability, technique: These must be attained first and the rest will look after itself. New players should concentrate on the enjoyment and the experience of playing. However it is also important to set the goals? Where do you want to get to? Is it just a social activity or do you want to get to the Paras?

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Nutshell

In a nutshell, goalball is a **team** effort requiring **ear-hand** coordination. It can also be characterised as three-a-side soccer on a volleyball court, where the three players all play the position of goal keeper. The goals are nine metres wide! Each player wears eyeshades. Court outlines are marked with string and tape, forming a tactile method of orientation. The ball, 1.25 kilograms in weight, is about the same size and colour as a basketball but holds its own shape, having eight holes and four audible bells within it. A goal is scored when the ball goes through the defences of the opposing team. Defending the goal area is usually done by the three defenders laying across the court in front of the goal trying to block the on-coming ball.



There are two halves of ten minutes each. Three principal rules are followed:

- the ball is to be thrown underarm (you are not trying to maim the other team by throwing the ball on the full);
- if you have thrown the ball twice, you must pass it next time (it is a team sport after all); and
- the ball is a 'hot potato' – from receiving the ball the team has ten seconds to send it back towards the other team's goal.

Referees use whistle blows and verbal calls in English (throughout the world) to indicate the state of play.

There is no able-bodied equivalent to goalball, unlike swimming, blind golf, wheelchair basketball. Rules of the game are decided by a subcommittee of the International Blind Sports Federation (formerly an Association, but still known by that acronym, IBSA).

Visually impaired players of goalball have the opportunity to represent their state at national competitions, and possibly going all the way to the Paralympics.

Playing a game

Goalball can be played on grass, pebble-texture driveways, concrete, and carpet – but a sprung wooden floor is usually preferred. A quiet hall away from cars, ambulance sirens, train tracks and aircraft is great, but socially, goalball has even been played on concrete as part of a school's undercover area near its playground!

The ball is purpose-built and this is the only piece of equipment that is basically 'required' equipment. However basic goalball techniques can be practised without a ball, so if someone forgets the ball for practice one day, improvise.

Goals are optimal, but when starting out they are optional.

Floor markings can be done using crimped masking tape, sticky-sided velcro, silver duct tape – string overlaid with five centimetre wide gaff tape is best.

Safety rules

Some basic safety rules apply at all times, whether in serious competition or part of a social activity:

- **do not run** about the court – whether on or off the court, running may result in a collision with another player. As one player may be crouching down, the knee of the moving player is likely to make contact first with the head of the other player. Sweat upon the court surface can often result in a slippery area too;

- **do not throw** the ball about – 'chucking' a ball into the area, usually done in jest or when 'mucking around' has the potential to hit another person or object. Throwing the ball up has the chance to connect with a light fitting or glass louvre within a room or hall. It may also hit another person on its way down. The ball is 1.25 kilograms in weight of hard rubber; and
- **do not kick** the ball. Apart from sending the ball careening at great speed towards some valuable object or large floor level glass window pane, the seam of the ball may split – each ball is worth about \$140 and has to be imported from Germany which means it is expensive and takes a long time to replace a ball.

Personal equipment

As with any sport, some equipment is required to play the game. For goalball this includes:

- **clothing** – a t-shirt or jersey will suffice for the upper body, with track pants and joggers for the lower body. The track pants assist when scrumming on the floor;
- **eyeshades** (mandatory equipment) – regardless of a player's degree of sight, all players are blind-folded. Ski goggles or motocross motorcycle goggles should be used, and the lens can be blacked out by using black plastic book-covering contact or painting them. Black silicon sealer or similar product will also be required around the vents above and below the eyes. The eyeshades must be completely black inside the goggles, and should not show any pin holes of light.

Eyeshades will get sweaty after a good game. They should be firm, fully sealing to the face and comfortable. For young groups, 'sleeping eye covers' (black-out masks) as provided on international air flights or a long strip of cloth can be placed across the eyes like a blind-fold.

The official term used throughout the world for this piece of equipment is 'eyeshades', not 'goggles', 'shades', 'mask', etc. This term should always be used by players;

- **padding** (optional). There are several types of padding:
 - elbows – volleyball elbow pads are effective when diving or defending across the team area. Skateboard/roller blade plastic covered pads may also be used although they may become noisy against the court floor or cushion the elbow significantly;
 - knees – as per elbow pads;
 - hips – unfortunately unlike the buttocks to the rear, the sides of the hips have very little cushioning. Squares of foam (larger than an A4 page) can be tucked down the inside of the track pants. With a little protruding above the track pants tie-lace, the padding will be held in place. This will prevent looking black-and-blue, as well as being more comfortable.

Some specially designed track pants have built-in padding, or pockets for the insertion of pads. A bit of home sewing can do the same job; and

 - body – as a matter of personal comfort, players may wish to place some padding along the front of the legs or across the chest. Some players use shin guards;
- **gloves** (optional). Some players may use fingerless gloves to aid grip of the ball, to keep the fingers warm on a cold morning and as a little reinforcement to the fingers should they be hit by a quick ball. Gloves can be found at motorcycle accessory stores and bicycle shops;
- **mouth guard** (optional). The dental requirements of a sport should not be overlooked. Consult your dentist. Various guards are available;
- **groin protector** (optional). For male players, the cricket box provides a little protection to the pelvic organ area, thereby reducing immense pain. Boxes can be located at any sporting store, especially those with cricket equipment. Select the appropriate size; and
- **chest protectors** (optional). For female players, the hard upper body-shaped plastic breast protectors may be a little uncomfortable to begin with, but reduces possible pain from a chest hit by a ball. The protectors are used for fencing and may be sourced from fencing supply places or sports stores (fencing as in foil, epee and sabre; not three strand or barbed).

Another item additional to or in lieu of the protector is the baseball catcher's bib, which may better dissipate the energy of a received ball. These can be found at sports stores.

Some players also use shin pads, either on the side to aid sliding, or to the front for protection against the ball.

Remember equipment is designed for playing the game, and protecting the player from injury. The comfort of the player is also important. Young players may be concerned about pain from being hit by a ball, so appropriate alternation to equipment may be made to allay this fear.

The court

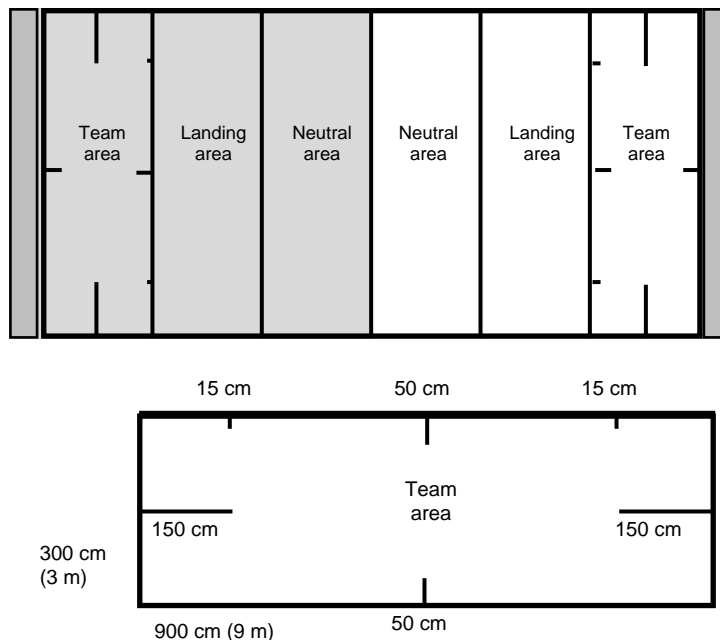
Floor dimensions

The playing area is the same dimension as a volleyball court – sixteen metres long and nine metres wide. It is divided into six three-metre lengths, each marked out by tactile markings. Behind each nine-metre wide end is a nine-metre wide goal. Several metres free either side of the length is also required to allow for referees to move back and forth.

The six areas, three metres long and nine metres wide, are comprised in each half of the court of a:

- **team** area – players must defend the court within this area. Further markings are present within the team area, for player orientation;
- **landing** area – the ball when thrown, must land at least once in this area; and
- **neutral** area. This area may be walked upon. When attacking, the ball should have already been released prior to this area. When defending, the ball should have bounced off a player or object in the team area before a player enters this area.

The line between a landing and neutral area is referred to as the 'high ball line'.



Tactile markings are done by placing string underneath five centimetre wide sticky tape (such as gaff tape or duct tape). As it is walked on and scuffed, it needs to be adhesive. Whatever tape is used however, ensure that it can be easily removed, without taking the varnish off the floor. Fishing line or string can be measured out before being taped down. At the end of the practice session, it can be separated from the tape and wound onto a spindle.

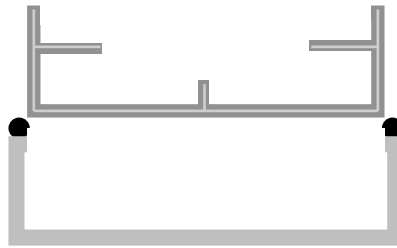
Surfaces

Ideally, a sprung wooden floor would be used. Concrete is a little hard for sliding and defending upon. At the Paralympics a taraflex floor is used – orange rubber, similar in texture to the goalball ball itself. Players learn the dynamics of each floor type for sliding and moving.

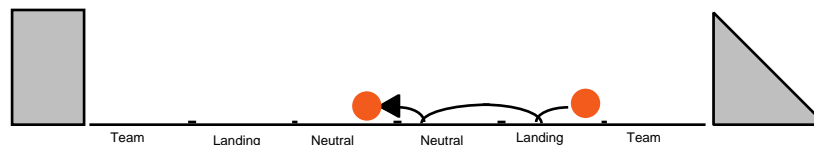
Goal dimensions

A specialised piece of equipment, the goals must have inside measurements of a width of nine metres and height of 1.3 metres. These are usually padded to minimise possible injuries – remember players are blindfolded and could accidentally stand-up underneath the goal cross bar.

Goals are placed behind the outer edge of the court markings.



What do the goals look like? Every locality tends to manufacture their own goals. Usually in steel, these can be triangular or rectangular, with thin steel such as camping tent poles, or aluminium scaffolding poles. Netting like tennis nets or soccer goals is then wrapped around the outside of the frame. The goal frames can be held by bolts, taut netting and clamps.



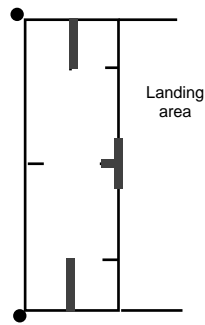
Weights may also be placed behind the goals. This minimises backward goal movement. Sand bags, water-filled sturdy containers and gym weights have been used in the past.

Before constructing your own goals, examine goals of other groups. Obtain photographs and close-ups. The width of padding should also be considered in determining inside measurements of nine metres and 1.3 metres high. Goals should also be capable of being broken into smaller units for storage or transport to other venues.

Beside each side of a goal is a minor official, the 'goal judge'. They assist in returning the ball to play after it goes into the goals or outside of the playing area.

Markings for training purposes

Goals may take some time to assemble and it can be expensive to map out 104 metres of floor markings with tape and string for each practice. To this end, several techniques are used to conserve costs and time. The absence of goals provides an opportunity to orientate quickly by floor markings alone. Taping of the team area alone meets orientation needs as well as defining the court areas. A real economy of scale can be achieved in just marking the 'tee-pieces', for example the fifty centimetre centre forward orientation marker with a segment of the front line, and the two 1.5 metre side orientation lines:



To quickly lay a taped area, standard marking tape can be used. As one edge is being put onto the floor, the centre of the tape is being crimped. This creates a ruffled ridge.

Basic on-court orientation

Goalball may be played by sighted and visually impaired players alike. Teachers/coaches should be aware of the different classes of visual impairment. These are generalisations only, and players should be assessed individually for their skills and ability:

B1: Degree of blindness, from no light perception at all in either eye, up to light perception, but an inability to recognise objects or contours in any direction and at any distance – may be able to see shadows. The player also may have no spatial concepts if blind from birth, i.e. what is a road? It is a bit hard to cross a road if you don't know what a kerb is, foot paths, bitumen, two-way flowing traffic, and so on. A player's movement may also be impaired;

B2: Degree of blindness, from an ability to recognise objects or contours up to a distance of two metres, at what a person with normal vision can see at sixty metres. Their field of vision is also limited to five degrees; and

B3: Degree of blindness, can recognise objects or contours between two and six metres away, at what a person with normal vision can see at sixty metres. Their field of vision may be between five and twenty degrees.

The first step on court is to **put the eyeshades on**. Regardless of a player's degree of vision, the eyeshades are the equaliser – everyone plays in the dark!

Under the guidance of a sighted person, the blindfolded player should now:

- squat down behind an orientation marker in the team area (the wide rectangle closest to either goal). Feel the tape under the fingers. Practise sweeping the arms to the front and the sides. This facilitates rapid re-orientation;
- move around the court, by following the tape with the fingers, and then with the toes. When walking, the foot can be dragged or swept back and forth across the tape every few paces;
- from the goal line, count the number of paces to an orientation line as the player walks forward. The player should know how many paces to the 1.5 metre line and the front line of the team area. Repeat this drill at speed. After practice, the player should be able to walk forward of the goal at any time, bend down and place a hand upon an orientation marker. The drill should be practised regardless of the player's experience;
- from the side line, count the number of paces from one side to the other. This drill gives an idea of the size of the court (by the width of the team area). From the centre orientation marker, the player should now count the paces to move to a side. This part is helpful when the player later has to defend the goals alone during a penalty situation; and
- practise walking from various locations within the team area back into the goals. The player should note where the goals square-off against the shoulders. Again, this facilitates rapid re-orientation prior to delivery of the ball back towards the opposing team.

Players should also know the paces between the goal post and the high ball line. The high ball line is the tactile line separating the team–landing areas from the neutral area. The ball must bounce at least once before the line when the ball is thrown by a player – a personal penalty may otherwise result.

Each team or coach may use a variety of terms, but generally, the player on the left side of the team area is called the 'left winger', the player in the centre is the 'centre', and the 'right winger' on the right marker.

Basic rules

Every ball should be thrown to score a goal.

Playing the game

Referees who walk onto the court did not write the rules. Their job is not to control the game, but to ensure the rules are followed so that one team does not get an unfair advantage over the other team. They don't always get it right but faults can only be called as the referee sees them.

For some, it is easier to blame someone else for their own mistakes. As a player, remember why you took up goalball – for the fair play, social occasions, developing skills. It is therefore important to keep emotions in check when the play is fast and furious. Be a good sports representative.

At the end of a game, remember to line up and shake the hands of the players of the other team, as well as officials.

Whistles

Given that all players are wearing eyeshades, whistles followed by an English word(s) are used by a referee to indicate a state in play. Whistles are blown in quick succession:

- **one** whistle is the most common, stopping and starting play and the clock. These are used for penalties, infractions, time-outs and substitutions. A single whistle is generally followed again by other single whistle and the word 'Play';
- **two** whistles indicate a goal, followed by the call 'Goal, Score, Team, Number Number'. The first number indicates the goal of that team, e.g. 'Goal, Score, Queensland, three–five'. Once the ball is retrieved from the goals, it will be dropped in, and play will be recommenced with one whistle followed by 'Play';
- **three** whistles indicates the start of a half.

AND also its finish??

Penalties

Penalties are breaches of the rules, as with any other sport. Common penalties result in the player committing the penalty to defend the whole goal area without any other players to assist. Where it is a group effort that the penalty is committed, the last thrower for that team has to defend the goal area.

Penalties can also be incurred for noise, delay of game and unsportsmanlike conduct – a player should refer to the official rules for an explanation.

Personal penalties

The player committing the penalty is to defend the goal. It will be called by a whistle followed by 'Penalty name, player number, team', such as 'High ball, Number Three, Queensland'. Common personal penalties are:

- **eyeshades** (Rule 6.1.4) – to remove, adjust, or accidentally move the eyeshades may afford a player an advantage over the others. Never touch your eyeshades without first seeking the permission of the referee;
- **third time throw** (Rule 6.1.5) – a player may throw a ball only twice towards the opposing team. If the player receives the ball, it is to be passed onto another player – hence why this is a team game;

- **high ball** (Rule 6.1.2) – the more times a ball is in contact with the ground, the easier it is to hear the ball. When a player throws the ball, it must bounce on or before the high ball line (the line between the landing and neutral areas);
- **long ball** (Rule 6.1.3) – to keep the ball close to the ground, not only must it bounce on or before the high ball line, it must also bounce in the neutral area (both the offensive and defensive team neutral areas). If it bounces on or before the high ball line but skips the neutral area, then a long ball personal penalty has been committed;
- **short ball** (Rule 6.1.1) – the aim of the game is to get the ball into the opposing goal. If a player throws a ball without sufficient force it may stop short of the opposing team's team area, thereby denying them the opportunity to make an attempt on the other goals. This is a short ball; and
- **illegal defence** (Rule 6.1.6) – players of the defending team must have part of their body at all times within the team area until they have control of the ball. This rule stops players from moving too far forward.

Team penalties

Team penalties are taken by the last thrower of that team who has to defend the goal area. It will be called by a whistle followed by 'Team penalty, penalty name, team', such as 'Team penalty, Ten seconds, Queensland'. Common team penalties are:

- **ten seconds** (Rule 6.2.1) – once the ball contacts with a player of the defensive team, the team has ten seconds in which to throw the ball. To prevent this penalty, players should scramble after the ball before it is thrown back. To let the ball aimlessly roll uses up the ten seconds.

Should a time-out or other stoppage in play be called, the clock is stopped, then continued once 'play' is called. If the team uses six seconds before a substitution is called, then there is less than four seconds left once play recommences; and

- **illegal coaching** (Rule 6.2.4) – a player, escort or coach in the team's bench area may only coaches in a team time-out or at the end of a half.

Infractions

Infractions are lesser penalties, and the ball is turned over to the other team. Common infractions are:

- **premature throw** (Rule 5.1) – after the game has stopped (perhaps due to a goal, or being blocked off the court), a player must wait until the word 'play' is called by the referee. Where play was stopped by the whistle, then there will be a whistle, followed by the word 'play'. Should a player deliver the ball prior to the call, this is a premature throw;
- **pass out** (Rule 5.3) – through poor ball control, the ball is passed from one player towards another and is passed outside of the playing area;
- **step out** (Rule 5.2) – when throwing the ball, both the player's feet are outside the court side line; and
- **ball over** (Rule 5.4) – the defending team blocks a ball, and before they can hold the ball, it rolls back towards the opposing team. As soon as the ball crosses the centre line, this is a 'ball over'.

Breaks in play

Other than at half time, the three ways a player may get a breather on court:

- **official time-out** (Rule 4.6.2) – these time-outs are whistled by the referee for any reason, including allowing a player to re-fit the eyeshades after they've been knocked off, allowing the ball to be reshaped after being landed on, or repositioning goal balls and fixing line markings. Players will not usually move about as 'play' could be called any time and could get caught out;
- **team time-out** (Rule 4.6.1) – once the team has 'possession' (i.e. control of the ball), a player or the coach may call a team time-out. Once acknowledged, then the team has forty-five seconds to discuss whatever playing strategies they wish. Usually the players meet in the centre of their team area and the coach will come onto court with water bottles and sweat towels. Eyeshades must not be removed. Each team is allowed to take three team time-outs within a game; and

- **substitutions** (Rule 4.7) – again the team must have possession of the ball before seeking a substitution. It may be requested by a hand signal but cannot be done until acknowledged by the referee. Each team is allowed three substitutions during the game.

Returning a ball to play

After an official time-out, a goal or where the ball went past the edge of the court, the ball is retrieved by one of the officials (a goal judge). It will then be given to the player nearest the side of the goal, by dropping the ball at the feet of that player.

Scoring a goal

A goal is scored where the ball goes into the goals – where all the shadow of the ball has passed the furthest edge of the tape nearest the goal. It does not matter whether this was done through the efforts of the opposing team, or accidentally by the defending team (an 'own goal'). It is also possible when about to throw the ball at the other team to swing the arm with the ball far enough back that the ball is completely within goals, thereby scoring an 'own goal'. A goal is signified by two whistles, followed by 'Goal. Score. Queensland Three Two'.

Communication

Goalball is a team game, not an individual effort. Further, all the visual signs and body language that humans use to exchange thoughts and emotions are absent. Communication is therefore an essential part of a team.

Principally, each player should display the qualities of good sportsmanship – fair play, respect for the efforts of others (players, coaches, parents, officials, referees, and all other persons), honesty, etc.

There should be a strong emphasis on communication between players so that everyone on the team knows what is going on, including:

- when a player receives a ball from the offensive team, otherwise the other team members will be searching for the ball;
- when the ball is loose, this needs to be called so the other players can search for it but taking care not to knock it into the goal;
- counting the number of throws of each player, to prevent a player from throwing three throws in a row (a penalty for not sharing the workload of a team);
- indicating whereabouts the ball is at the other end of the court. This helps focusing the team's energy as well as setting up defensive plays;
- re-orienting a player who is not properly positioned, by tapping the floor, etc.; and
- moving the ball between team members, such as passing from ball from the left winger to the right winger via centre.

However, if a team is making too much noise when:

- throwing, they may commit a personal or team penalty; and
- defending, they may not hear the ball coming towards them.

Where the spectators are making too much noise, the referee should pick this up and call an official time-out for 'quiet'.

A coach has an important rôle on a team, including:

- considering the welfare concerns of the players;
- analysing offensive and defensive playing strategies;
- signalling team time-outs. Once acknowledged, the coach can go onto the court with water and sweat towels, as well as playing strategies. Team time-outs may also be used by a coach to prevent a penalty being incurred, e.g. the player was about to throw the ball a third time;

- signalling substitutions. Substitutions helps rest players and allows the coach to get playing strategies to the other players without using up a time-out; and
- clarifying a call of a referee.

Position names

A court position may be known as the left wing or the left side. Commonly, the letters **A**, **B** and **C** or numbers 1, 2 and 3 are used as well. As players face the opposing team, position A would be on their left (the opposing team's right winger), position B in the centre, and position C to the right side.

Should the opposing team's right winger stand against that corner of the goal post with the ball, it will be said that the 'ball is in A'. A player may also be told to throw the ball towards A, in other words towards the opposing team's right winger.

As a result the ball could be in C (the player in the left wing on the other team has possession of the ball), or the ball should be thrown to A-B (because there should be a weakness by the players in A and B not covering the gap properly).

The team captain or the centre player usually calls the ball position so the two wingers may hear it. If the player holding the ball moves along the goals from A to AB or B, the centre player should mention its next position for the others to hear ('the ball's now in AB').

Beginner players should use these terms as these terms are used by coaches to explain strategies. When moving into the more competitive arena, teams will use various terms to describe either the ball position or a playing strategy, e.g. "vice" may mean for a player to throw a ball at A slowly, then the next thrower will also throw the ball at the A position slowly as well, but the third thrower is to throw quickly towards A in the hope that the player in A is expecting the ball to go towards B or C and is slowly returning to the defensive position. A goal may be scored!

Offensive play techniques

Every ball should be thrown with a determination to score a goal.

The basics

When setting up a throw, to face the defensive team:

- walk backwards onto the goal bar, so the bar is felt equally across the back; or
- use the court orientation lines (see earlier section). With a little practice it is possible to identify the forward direction prior to throwing.

Gripping the ball, if not held by two hands, may be helped by placing part of a finger in one of the eight holes. Older players may also have sufficient strength in the hand to squeeze the ball a little to aid grip.

A variety of styles may be used to throw the ball, including but not limited to:

- **rolling** forward. The simplest delivery is to face the other team, stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Place the ball just forward of the feet, then bend down, and push it forward to roll towards the other end. It can also be done when sitting on the court;
- **between the legs**. Instead of facing forward, turn around to face the goals and throw the ball between the legs towards the other team. Care must be taken to push it along the ground, rather than throwing it up the area which may result in a high ball penalty. While simple, it allows the ball to be quickly and accurately got rid of, possibly to prevent a ten-second penalty;
- **ten-pin bowling**. A graceful style, it is common among the more sighted players and/or those who have down ten-pin bowling. The ball is initially held in both hands (one on top, one below). While turning slightly to one side, the top hand is released and the ball is swept through with the other hand. One of the feet is usually swept up as a counter-balance. Care should be taken not to collide with another player as the loss of balance will usually cause the player to fall over. Usually done from the goal post, or walking forward of the goal post;

- **under-arm.** The ball is thrown downwards and forward, and may or may not involve a slight turn of the body. It differs from the ten-pin bowling style as there is no leg sweep. Usually done from the goal post, or walking forward of the goal post. Variants include a softball/vigoro/cricket/baseball under-arm throw;
- **side.** This can be done while standing on the side line or with one foot on a player orientation line. The body is turned at right angles to the other team, feet placed shoulder-width apart. With the ball held either side, the arms are swung back and forth. On the forward swing, the forward hand is released and the rear hand pushes the ball onwards;
- **discus.** The discus throw follows that done by a discus thrower on a sports field – like a tight spring unwinding. With the ball held firmly, the body is bunched, and then spun on the feet, flinging the ball forward. Without a lot of practice, the ball may go not bounce before the high ball line (landing-neutral area line), or will go past the end of the court. It can be a quick ball; and
- **silent ball.** Rarely used, it may allow game time to be used up or to confuse the defending team. While the ball has four bells inside, centrifugal forces causes the bells to hold to the walls of the ball. With no sound, the ball is harder to detect as it moves down the court. A player must be certain of the forward direction. Standing bent over with feet shoulder-width apart, the ball is on the ground. Hands are placed either side of the ball, and arms twisted. The arms are then twisted quickly in the opposite direction, causing the ball to spin on its axis. It may be spun again, and when at a set spinning velocity, is clipped by a hand on one side, causing the ball to spin forwards towards the defending team. Again, this style requires practice. As the ball slows, the bells may start to tumble, or as the ball rolls over a tactile line, thereby giving away its position and defeating the purpose of this throwing style.

Through practice, players may also throw 'curve balls', where a certain degree of spin on the ball stops it from travelling in a completely straight line. Further, a spinning ball upon contacting a defensive play may also act erratically, making it harder to control.

Balls should be thrown straight down the court, at an angle, and diagonally across the court towards the other goal.

When throwing, ensure the position of the team mates is known. Where a player is about to run into another player while in the act of throwing the ball, the referee will not interfere unless it is a dangerous situation. A mere standing on the fingers or having a knee contact with a crouching player's ribs does not generally constitute a dangerous situation. The lesson is: communication.

Rules

As the ball is released from the hand, the player should ensure the ball will bounce before the high ball line (otherwise a 'high ball' personal penalty). It should also be thrown in such a manner for the ball to bounce at least once in the neutral area (otherwise a 'long ball' personal penalty).

If the ball is not thrown with sufficient force to reach the other goal and stops short of the team area, a 'short ball' personal penalty may result.

At least one foot has to be in contact with the court when the ball is released (so no jumping into the area and throwing at the same time!). To gain speed, some players step off court from the edge of the goal and take measured steps backwards. Running onto court, the ball has to be released without committing a high ball or long ball penalty. However when running on, the player may not have one part of the shoe in contact with the court or court markings when the ball is thrown. This results in a 'step over' infraction – the throw is counted, any goal is disallowed, and the ball given to the other team. Running in from off-court is a legitimate technique but should be practised to ensure the player does not collide with the goals, is able to deliver the ball before the goal line, and the ball goes in the right direction. The player also has to get backing the ball quickly, otherwise it will be passed to another player, or a 'third throw' personal penalty is incurred. Remember this is a team game and the ball should be shared. While one player may be a stronger thrower, 'hogging' the ball will not develop the skills in another player. Remember to count the balls – why commit a penalty and give the other team an advantage? The team captain on court or the centre player usually counts the number of throws by a player to prevent this penalty from occurring.

Other strategies

After an official time-out, a goal or where the ball went past the edge of the court, the ball is retrieved by a goal judge. It will then be given to the player nearest the side of the goal, by dropping the ball at the feet of that player. A player must be in the team area to receive the ball. Since passing a ball uses up part of the ten second period, to avoid committing a third throw penalty, players will move outside the court or into the goal area. The goal judge will then throw to the next closest person, which may be the centre player. If the closest

winger and the centre player move out of the team area, it ball will be thrown to the winger on the other side of the court!

Also...

The most common throwing faults are:

- high balls – keep the ball close to the ground when throwing; and
- throwing out of bounds – know where the forward direction is.

One strategy is to keep throwing the ball at the same player, in the hope of getting a goal by causing the player to wear down by having to get back to the defensive position. By returning the ball, that player may also forget how many balls they have thrown and therefore possibly committing a third throw penalty.

Practice makes perfect, but make sure someone assesses the technique, otherwise practice will make perfect errors as well.

Defensive play techniques

All defensive techniques rely on a player's ability to orientate on court. Good knowledge of player orientation lines, and good use of communication is required.

Body position

With nine metres of goal and three members on a team, each member needs to lay down and stretch out to cover three metres each to make an impregnable line – a great theory! It is important to know how to lay down in a way to protect the body and prevent injury:

- ensure protective equipment is being worn (see earlier list);
- lie down onto one side, into a straight line. The knees may need to be bowed a little to stop rolling forward or backwards;
- stretch the feet out, pointing the toes. Place the ankle of the upper leg slightly forward of the lower ankle. Should the ball hit the legs, it should stop rather than using the feet as a ramp into the goals;
- stretch the arms out, maintaining the straight line from the toes past the body to the finger tips. The fingers should be straight out with fingers together – this will prevent the fingers being bent back if struck by the ball. Further, the fingers of one hand should be placed behind the fingers of the other hand. Thumbs should be out to the side of the hand and locked across towards the other hand. Keep the hands stretched out and not bowed out at the elbows; and
- keep the head tilted back behind the upper arms. Should the elbows be bowed out, the head may move forward and/or let the ball come through – either way a blooded nose or concussion could result. Note this is exceptional, but correct body positioning stops or minimises any personal injury.

Movements

To cover their portion of the team area quickly, players should practise a variety of defensive movements. Generally a player places their fingers upon a player orientation marker, and squats down – shoulders square to the front, with the knee of one leg on the floor and the other leg stretched outright towards the side of the court. This stance allows quick movement to either lie down or move further around the court.

By having the fingers on the orientation marker, the player can quickly return to the squatting position after lying down. One player may also need to stand up to deliver the ball before quickly returning to the squat and the orientation marker.

The first three movements can be practised by the player anywhere. Start by squatting with fingers on the player orientation marker. On the call:

- 'left', leave the finger tips on the marker, and throw the feet out to the left, staying parallel to the front line and lie down. Check the top leg is forward of the bottom leg, keep the head back, and keep the arms straight out. After holding the position, return to the squatting position;
- 'right', go to the right instead of *left*; and
- 'centre' or 'drop', throw the feet one way and the arms the other way so that the belly button is about the same position as the marker. Check the position is parallel to the front line.

A player should also practise with other players, and in such a way to prevent the collision of heads and feet. Confidence in quickly going into each position will be achieved when working as a team.

Player positioning

Each player marks off a nominated player orientation marker within the team area. Each player can adopt many positions on the court – one of the three T markers on the front line of the team area; the start, centre or end of the 1.5 metre side marker; the rear centre T marker; or any other position within the team area. Although with danger, a player may also defend part of the landing area provided some part of the player's body remains in the team area (usually by dragging the foot on the front line). Any holes in the defensive line should be eliminated when everyone works together as a team.

Beginner players should remember to identify whether a ball is in position A, B, or C. Experienced players should remember to identify whether a ball is in position A, B, or C also! Communication is important between team members regardless of the length of experience. This has been the recipe of many successful Paralympic goalball teams.

The three players can line across the court in a variety of ways, including:

- **standard V.** The wingers mark off with the side orientation markers, and the centre player marks off the forward centre marker. This is a standard configuration. Should a ball connect with the centre player (position B), it may ricochet towards the wingers (A or C) and if not grabbed by a winger, should go off court rather than into the goals – in other words, a good defence!

It can be attacked by throwing a ball cross court, in the hope that it will bounce off A or C, hit the back of the player in B and go into goals. Lessening the gap across the court between players A and B or B and C will help, or closing the distance of the overlap between the winger and the centre, will help. But it may increase the distance of the winger from the side of the court, and a goal could be scored by a ball being thrown 'straight down the line'.

This is a good position for beginners, particularly as the head and feet of each player should not contact with another player;

- **reverse V.** In this instance, the centre player marks off the centre rear line marker, with the wingers playing forward of the centre player. An incoming ball may then be channelled towards the centre player.

The playing position is susceptible to cross court balls and does not leave much room for error because it is quite close to the goals;

- **straight across.** Players can play across the front line, across the back line, or in a line across the court anywhere in between.

A team must practise this move as poor positioning will result in feet and heads coming together. The Sydney 2000 Paralympics Lithuanian team executed this precisely, but was assisted as the brothers were also quite tall; and

- **overlap.** In this move, one winger goes forward of the centre player while the other winger goes back. This move requires coordination between all members to be effective.



Remember, goalball is a team sport, and communication must be practised between all members to find the right goal defence strategy that works for them.

Retrieving the ball

Once the ball has made contact with a player who has one part of the body in the team area, players may then go forward to chase the ball. The ball should be chased for two reasons:

- if the ball continues over the centre line, a 'ball over' infraction will be called by the referee, and the ball will be returned to the opposing team; and
- once the ball has contacted a player, the team has ten seconds to throw the ball back towards the other goal or face a team penalty.

Passing the ball

A ball may be passed to another player to prevent committing a third throw penalty, because the player is not in a position to quickly throw the ball, or to set up an offensive play strategy.

To move the ball about the team, the ball should **not** be thrown indiscriminately to a team member as:

- the ball may go past the side line, and a 'pass out' infraction occurs because of poor ball handling – the ball is given to the other team;
- an 'own goal' could be committed, i.e. the ball goes past the player or the player fumbles looking for it, and the ball goes into that player's goal – don't become the opposing team's 'most valuable player!'; and
- it wastes the valuable ten seconds the team has ten seconds to throw the ball back towards the other goal.

Prior to passing the ball to a team member, call that player's name, wait until they acknowledge the call, then roll the ball towards them. The player receiving the ball can help by calling the person's name or tapping the floor.

To go from one winger to the other winger, pass the ball by the centre player. In this case if prepared, the centre player can swivel around to face the goals if on the centre line.

Also...

What do I do if the ball hits me and goes up into the air? Firstly call to your team mates, 'up' or 'loose'. After that, it is partly luck. By rolling backwards towards the goal, the player may stop the ball from going in the goal... or helping it!

Playing a game

To have a game, you just need a hall, some floor markings, three people a team (or if you're in a small hall, perhaps two people a team!), and a referee.

Remember, if this is a training situation, vary the rules as required – seven minute halves, throwing can only be done with the left hand, the high ball line is twenty centimetres closer to each goal, the ball must be passed to the next player if received, and so on. Build strength through technique and flexibility.

With halves of ten minutes duration, a coin toss decides which team starts with the ball. The winner of the toss can either seek the ball, or nominate an end to defend. The other teams gets the second choice.

Teams line up beside their goal where the referee will check their eyeshades. Players will then move onto court with their eyeshades on and find their player orientation marks. So line up across the goals and let's get started.

Opening the game

With new players, the first five minutes may be played without eyeshades, but thereafter, eyeshades should be worn. It may be appropriate due to the experience or the sex of a player to ease up on throwing hard and fast balls towards that player. This can be done by saying 'not so hard when throwing towards A', etc. Remember, goalball is a game, not a way of injuring people.

The referee, after checking with the table officials who do the scoring and timing, will call 'Centre' followed by throwing the ball towards the person in the centre of the team taking possession of the ball for the first throw. As soon as the player touches the ball, the whistle is blown three times, followed by the call 'Play'. The team now has ten seconds in which to throw the ball towards the other goal, and the game is under way!

If the ball goes over the edge, it will be called 'out', dropped back to the nearest player, called 'play' and off it goes again. A whistle will indicate if the ball goes out more than 1.5 metres from the side, and a goal judge will retrieve the ball. Usually following the standard phrase of 'Quiet Please', there will be a whistle, and called 'play' and the game continues.

There may also be goals, official time-outs, team time-outs, substitutions, medical substitutions, etc. Remember that eyeshades cannot be removed unless permitted by the referee. Where an official time-out is called the ball will be taken from a player, and then dropped back in from the side line.

Half time

After ten minutes of play time, the referee will whistle the end of the half, followed by 'Half time'. Once a player walks off the edge of court, eyeshades may be removed.

Within the three minute half time, the team will swap ends and team bench areas, get some water, substitute some players, and be ready to go back on court.

The referee will recheck the eyeshades, players enter the court and get ready for the second half. The referee will call 'Centre', whistle three times, and call 'Play' and the game is back on!

Finishing the game

After the second half of ten minutes has expired, the referee will whistle and call 'Game' (If the score is tied, there will be a three minute break and then overtime of two three-minute halves).

At the conclusion of the game, players may remove their eyeshades and then walk to the centre of the court or towards the score table. The teams then shake the hands of the opposing team in a show of good sportsmanship and fellowship. Competition exists on the court, and friendship off the court.

Advanced areas

Attributes of a player

Each player is an individual and will have particular skills and attributes that can contribute to the team. There is also no specific characteristic of a player.

New and prospective players have concerns of bruising and pain from contact with the ball. These can be alleviated through proper initial training in defensive positions, proper technique, and the use of protective equipment (see earlier sections).

Stereotypes can be inaccurate and coaches should follow their experience. However when establishing initial playing positions, characteristics suggest:

- centre – as well as being the first player most likely to receive the brunt of the opposing team's throw, the centre is generally the lowest-throw player. Where wingers may throw fifteen to twenty balls in a half, the centre may throw only four – this again is dependent upon playing strategies, but this is a common set-up.

Where the ball has collided with a player and rolled forward, the centre goes forward to retrieve it. This allows the wingers to prepare for the throw by knowing their exact position. When the centre takes the

ball, the winger can tap the floor or indicate their position by other means. While the winger is delivering the ball towards the opposing goals, the centre scurries back to their position.

A centre generally keeps a count of how many throws a player has taken, ensuring that a 'third throw' penalty is not incurred, e.g. the left winger just threw the ball a second time, so I'll get the winger to either pass it to me or the other winger if s/he gets it again.

Because the centre is not setting up a throw, the centre also keeps track of the time... the right winger just received the ball, now going back to the goals... no problems, only four seconds down out of the allowable ten seconds. However if there has been some passing of the ball or the ball had to be retrieved after going forward, then the centre has to keep track of the time carefully; and

- winger – wingers do most of the throw work in comparison to the counting and timings of the centre. Wingers may also move from one goal side to the other before delivering a ball. If the opposing teams always expect a strong ball from position A rather than C, then when the player in C receives the ball, the right winger (the player in A) will come across and let the ball fly, hopefully catching the other team off guard!

There is nothing to say that players cannot swap the positions around if this is effective.

Where there is an offensive opportunity because of the opposing team's defensive weakness, this needs to be communicated among the team regardless of which player identified the situation. On the other hand, care needs to be taken before changing the team's defensive strategies – the strategy may be effective, but failing because players are not in the correct position due to late timing.

Regardless of their duties, all players must work as a team to be successful. The team captain can be any player and as with any other sport, may be a motivator rather than a high-goal scorer.

Becoming a better player is the same as any other sport – mental preparedness, and active training and practice. Practice makes perfect – but practising errors makes errors perfect too.

Setting a good example is also a principal pre-requisite of a good goalball player. This is a team sport and everyone should be working together for the team.

Being a professional athlete

A professional sports attitude and ability requires proper nutrition and dietary needs, having the right mental preparation, and maintaining a training diary. An athlete has the right preparation, which is independent of any sports-specific training. A goalball player who wants to excel should therefore prepare the mind and body as an athlete. Think, don't just play. Think of defensive strategies, offensive tactics, team communication and bonding, training systems. See your local sports psychologist and trainers for more information.

Eyeshades

Touching or moving the eyeshades without the permission of the referee results in a personal penalty. To adjust eyeshades, the ball should be controlled by a player (i.e. not being thrown). The player raises one arm and calls 'eyeshades'. If the referee does not acknowledge the request, the player should be prepared to keep playing. If the referee acknowledges the request, the whistle will be blown once, called 'Official time-out, eyeshades', and the player should turn around and face their own goal. The eyeshades may now be removed, readjusted, the sweat wiped from the eyes, etc. The referee will recheck any eye patches and the eyeshades. Usually the player will be tapped on the shoulder, and can then turn around ready to play again.

Injury prevention

Goalball preparation is similar to any other sport. Injury can be prevented by proper health (nutrition and exercise), training and warm-ups. Prior to any game or training session, each player should stretch and prepare the body mentally and physically for exercise. Most teams engage in group warm-up sessions before players do routines to meet their specific needs.

If an injury is sustained, it should be reported. All sports have risks, and being aware of injuries may indicate a poor position that can then be corrected to prevent further injury.

Goalball players suffer very few injuries over a weekend of competition, but there are some common ailments:

- bent fingers – in the defensive position if one hand is not overlapping the other, when hit by the ball, a finger may be forced backwards. The solution is to review the defensive positioning of the player. ;

- stood-on fingers – when adopting an offensive position, because of lack of communication, one player may move past another whose fingers are splayed across the floor. Communication and the way hands are placed on the floor should be reinforced; and
- mild facial impact – this occurs when adopting the defensive position the arms are not stretched out with the head tilted back. The ball then can collide with the chin, nose or eyeshades of a player. As a result there may be a blooded nose or shock from the impact. Prevention is to review the defensive positioning of the player.

Medical time-outs or the blood rule may be called by a referee to check the needs of the player. Additional to the IBSA rules, Goalball Australia has decreed the 'blood rule':

A bleeding player must be immediately replaced. The player can only return to the court when they are no longer bleeding. They must replace the person who replaced them. This does not count as a team substitution. Maximum of two blood bin replacements per game upon the third occurrence, the player in question shall not be permitted to return to the court.

For preventative or post-injury strapping, see a physiotherapist or qualified person. A masseur may also used to improve blood circulation of the legs.

Sighted players

There is no reason why sighted players cannot play goalball. Limitations only exist in the mind.

At the annual Australian National Goalball Championships, a team with a sighted player(s) may represent their state and are eligible for medals. Only a team of visually impaired players is eligible for the trophies.

At a competition

See also *Playing a game*.

In a social setting, mixed teams of male and female players may occur. Similarly, age groups may be broken into primary, junior, sub-senior and senior. Once teams have been established, players should become familiar with the court markings, especially the goals. Goals should be checked for their heights, degree of padding, the weight when running back into them, and how to quickly find positions along the goal.

Some players test the floor for 'sliding ability' – how 'quick' is the floor? This helps when going into a defensive play. With the coach, members practise throwing and defending on the court as part of team warm-ups.

Prior to the game, players assemble in their team bench area, with water bottles and sweat towels. Eye patches are used in addition to eyeshades at national competitions. About ninety seconds prior to the commencement of a half, players assemble beside the edge of the goals. The referee will then check the inside of the eyeshades for any pin holes of light. Once okay the player may then place the eyeshades on, where the referee will check the eyeshades in situ on the player. Once checked the second time, the player may then move onto court.

During the game when the team has possession of the ball, the coach or a player may request a:

- team time-out. Three time-outs are available to each team during a game. When one team calls the time-out, the time can be utilised by both teams.

To call a team time-out, the one flat hand should meet the other flat hand to form a 'T'. However a time-out cannot be done until the signal is acknowledged by the referee. Once acknowledged, the wingers and the coach (with water bottles) meet the centre player in the centre of the goal post. Players should not touch their eyeshades at any time.

After thirty seconds of the forty-five second time-out period, the referee will call 'Fifteen seconds remain, coaches off the court'. At the end of the forty-five seconds, players should be immediately ready to continue playing; or

- substitution. Each team may make only three substitutions in a game, other than at half-time. These can be used to replace an injured or tired player, or to get coaching information onto the court without using up a time-out. The player being substituted should be ready to go straight on, with eyeshades

ready for checking. Remember that the player coming off the court cannot remove the eyeshades until off the court area.

To call a substitution, the hands should be 'rotated' several times. However a substitution cannot be done until the signal is acknowledged by the referee.

Where a player or coach disagrees with a referee's call, an official time-out should be requested to clarify the ruling. This does not extend to debating the call – that's the role of the protest fee etc. at the conclusion of the game.

At the conclusion of each game, in a demonstration of good fellowship and camaraderie, the players of one team shake hands with the players of the other team.

Running a clock

Both a game clock and a ten-second clock are run at a game.

The ten-second clock basically starts from zero when the ball thrown by the offensive team first makes contact with a defensive team member. It stops when the ball goes out and recommences when 'play' is called. The ball must be thrown towards the other team within ten seconds or a team penalty occurs. Officials running the ten-second clock are trained for this position and can explain the intricacies.

The game clock has a series of calls:

- prior to the start of the first half, a five minute warning call;
- at the blowing of three whistles, starts at zero. The first ten minute half commences;
- stops and restarts on every whistle, except during time-outs;
- at the end of ten minutes on the clock, a sound will be made and the referee will call 'half time';
- a half time of three minutes, with a one-minute remaining call;
- at the blowing of three whistles, starts at zero, for the second half. The second ten minute half commences;
- stops and restarts on every whistle, except during time-outs; and
- at the end of ten minutes on the clock, a sound will be made and the referee will call 'game'.

A third stop watch times forty-five seconds for the team and medical time-outs.

Other issues

Coaches and players should be aware of various issues including drugs in sport, and sports psychology.

Risk management

Not only to be done, risk management should be seen to be done. This includes checking the hall for obstructions about the hall (loosely arranged or stacked chairs), uneven or poor quality floor boards, and steps and door lips that may cause falls. Can people be easily evacuated in an emergency? Are there readily identifiable fire extinguishers? Do people know how to exit the building?

The game should be stopped when the floor becomes slippery (sweat dripping from a player) or the goals are starting to disassemble.

Organisers should also be aware of where water bottles and sweat towels are placed beside the goals. A player stepping off-court as part of a throwing run-on could get tripped up.

The attire of the player should also be checked – long laces should be tied up to prevent standing and being tripped up.

Paralympics

From social goalball competitions, B1 to B3 players have the opportunity to go all the way to the Paralympics, the pinnacle of world sport.

Players generally must compete in their State championships to be chosen to represent their State in national competitions. Selection is done through the State body, such as the New South Wales Goalball Association, Blind Sports Victoria, or Goalball Queensland (a sporting sub-committee of the Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association).

In Australia, the national championships are held annually on the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June. It is rotated through each competing State. Players must compete at the Australian National Goalball Championships to be selected to represent Australia at any forthcoming events such as the **Far East Pacific** (FESPIC), world championships or the Paralympic Games. The Worlds were held in August 2002 in Brazil and FESPIC 2002 in October in Korea.

Suggested learning plan

When starting off with a group of new players, it is important to get a game under way as soon as possible to maintain the interest of players. Initially, explain the three key rules – no hogging the ball (third throw penalty), it's a hot potato (ten second team penalty), and no chucking (high ball and long ball penalties). Place the players on the court behind the player orientation markers. Have the ball speed kept slow for the five or ten minute game.

The next stage is to work on court orientation (being able to move around the court, with and without markings), and player defensive positioning (being able to lie on the floor, and in such a way to prevent injury).

In the next training session, players should go through a warm-up routine, practising player positioning (dropping to the left, centre and right), before conducting another quick game.

Add a new rule each week. Work the players into it – don't expect everyone to remember everything first up.

Resources

Goalball is played socially in several areas around Australia. The Goalball Australia secretary, care of 23 Clare Avenue, Wynnum North Q 4178, can provide more information including about the State associations:

Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Sport and Recreation Association of Queensland

New South Wales Goalball Association

Victorian Blind Sports Association

Goal balls may also be hired from these associations, and videos may also be loaned upon request.

A copy of the rules of goalball may be found at <http://www.ibsa.es/>.

With e-mail, and recourse to telephones and mail, new coaches or players should be able to easily establish some good contacts to help and support them in their new venture. There are also several web groups and web sites.

Compiler

Forward corrections to Warrick JACKES at q8682@yahoo.com, or care of Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association at 60 Edmondstone Road, Bowen Hills, Q. 4006. All efforts have to made to ensure the accuracy of the information, but no liability accepted.