

Great Coaching Podcast Transcript

- Organised -

(Series 1 Episode 3)

Voices of the Podcast

Intro / Outro Theme: Craig Blain, UK Coaching

Narrator: Craig Blain, UK Coaching

Guest: Anna Jackson, Wheelchair Basketball Coach & UK Coaching

Ambassador

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady, UK Coaching

Podcast Transcript

Guest: Anna Jackson

But I could have sat there at the start and said, “for us to get better passes into the key we need to pass them over the defenders” but if they realise it themselves, and that actually is so nice to sit back and watch.

That’s amazing, because you can come away from those sessions absolutely buzzing, but then so are the players. When I look at my session plans, it’s making sure there is some ‘them thinking time’. My name is Anna Jackson, I am a Paralympian and a UK Coaching Ambassador.

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Intro Theme:

This is the great coaching podcast. A series dedicated to exploring the Great Coaching Principles from UK Coaching. Episode 3: Organised.

Narrator: Craig Blain

Being organised in both the presentation and delivery of sessions both promotes confidence in the activity and in your coaching practice for those taking part. A coaches ability to confidently facilitate their sessions and respond dynamically to individual needs without affecting session outcomes or timings is key. Our ability to provide clear and understandable information about session plans, any associated risks and being able to manage these effectively throughout are all key contributors to creating an experience that feels organised. We took the time to explore the great coaching principle of organised with UK Coaching Ambassador and wheelchair basketball coach Anna Jackson. To begin, I was curious to learn more about Anna's backstory.

Guest: Anna Jackson

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I am involved in wheelchair basketball. I am a retired hockey player, ended up having nine lots of surgery on my knees. Got to the point where I couldn't run around anymore, struggling to walk. Thought, well I'll go into hockey coaching but couldn't stand up long enough to do that, couldn't really demo the skills. Then I discovered wheelchair basketball, and that gave me something incredible in my life, gave me that love for sport back again.

Narrator: Craig Blain

Considering Annas own transition from able bodied to disability sport, there was an obvious importance she placed on the principle of organised.

Guest: Anna Jackson

If you want to go out and play basketball on foot, you stick your trainers on, you grab a ball and you go. You don't really worry about the surface of the court, or is it gravelly, is there any glass on the court, you just go and play. Whereas to go and play wheelchair basketball, have you got your chair in the car?, are your tires pumped up?, have you got the right

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kit?, have you got your knee pads? - from my point of view -, then is the court you want to go to accessible?, can you get in there?, can you park?, so there is this whole other pile of things that suddenly you have to think about.

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

My name is Jenny Coady, a Coach Developer for UK Coaching. As a coach it is important to reflect on the positive aspects of your coaching. I will help guide you with your reflections for this podcast.

Narrator: Craig Blain

Anna's own journey from player through to coach gives her a unique insight and increases her ability to empathise with those that she is coaching. I wanted to understand more about the potential challenges her participants face and as a coach, how she supports them to overcome these.

Guest: Anna Jackson

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When you first start playing the sport, then to fork-out to buy a chair to play your sport is difficult. So, we're in a lucky situation in this area that we've got, the club I'm involved with, has got a load of chairs. So, people can just turn up and have a go. For a lot of people, it is that bit that puts them off. "Well, where is it, it's a new building, can I get in?, who's going to meet me?" It's that fear of taking that first step in the door isn't it.

We're quite tight on policies and procedures with all the clubs I'm involved with, because it gives people a structure and they know what's happening and they know what they're doing. But I've got a brilliant secretary who waits outside the sports hall. So, she is in the same place every week, they know what they have got to do. We tend to know if somebody new is coming, we always say to people "contact us first" just to make sure the sessions on. Because I think the most important person in that session is not me as the coach, it's not our Great Britain players, it's the newest person who has walked or wheeled in that door. I work with a group of adults with learning disabilities, and for them, the biggest issue for them is just getting in the front door. So, let's go and meet them at the front door! And that's not about me going "ah come on?!, I will meet you in the sports hall because that's my domain." No, I

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will meet you in the car park or at the front. When I retired from playing for Great Britain I kind of fell out of love a little bit with the sport but then fell back in love with it. But I started struggling from a mental health point of view, I struggled to walk in the door of a sports centre, struggled to walk in the door of a gym. So, if I'm feeling like that as a Paralympian with a background in sports coaching and playing, Wow!, that must be mind blowing for people who haven't got that behind them. When you're looking at barriers to activity and barriers to things then I know that can be a massive one. If somebody emails about coming to a session, I make sure they come to a session that I am definitely at, and I make sure I can meet them. Rather than, "ah yeah just rock up at 6, somebody will sort you out" NO!, I will tell them where I am going to be, who I am. Often it will be, "go and look at the website so you know who we all are." If somebody has made it to your session, Wow! celebrate that. And with these adults I work with, that is a massive thing, that we've got them in a sports hall, a new environment, I am somebody new to them, but actually they are coming and doing it. That's a massive

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

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As Anna has just shared her journey with us, how do your past experiences play a part in shaping how you coach?

Narrator: Craig Blain

Coaching fundamentally is about plan, do and review. I wanted to learn from Anna how she approached the planning process and how important she felt this was in achieving an organised session.

Guest: Anna Jackson

My players are used to me, they know I'm not a six week out planner because if I plan something six weeks out, I would have forgotten it by the time I'm due to deliver it or do it. So, I'm very much about, I'll get a chunk of work out of the way, so this week has been focussing on this weekend. So, getting our team lists, knowing who our players are, talking to the players, but they know that's what they are going to get from me. I think if I was a six week out coach, I think that's difficult, especially around disability sport when you don't know if players are ill or injured, there is a whole mix of things. There are two ways to look at it isn't there, you can either be that "let's plan it until you're blue in the

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face” but then if something goes wrong what are you going to do? The biggest thing that I have had to work on as a coach is that I can’t just rock up to a session and coach, it doesn’t work, because your players don’t get the best from you. And I know when I was a player, I wanted to know that the coach had done some planning into what we were doing. I plan my sessions before I go to every session, but I don’t do these big long session plans. Anyone in disability sport will know that you can write the best session plan ever but if you get there and some of your players are having an off day or they’re not particularly well, or if they’ve got stuff around their behaviours that they’re having a rough day, your session plan may as well be crumpled up and thrown out the window. So, I always go to a session with an idea of roughly what I am going to do. So, let’s say this week we are going to focus on passing skills, but the way I do it is that they will play a game really quickly. So, they’ll have a bit of a warm up, usually play some fun games, but then they will play a game, but there will be conditions in that game that will show that they need to work on their passing. So, you get away from everybody going, “oh when are we playing a game?, when are we playing a game?, are we playing a game at the end?” but you structure that game, so it shows

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what they need to work on. I'm going to give away all my secrets now really in coaching. When I look at my session plans it's making sure there is some 'them thinking time'. If I turn up to a session and work on passing, right we will do 'this game' first, and then when the teams are getting annoyed that they're not winning I just say like, "right, well so what could you do to be more effective with that pass into the key?" and you start to tease those answers out of the players. And if you look at the session and take a step back, we've still done a session about passing, and we've still done a skill, we've done a warm up and a cool down. But the way we've got to that decision is very different, so the players have more ownership over it. They start to realise that they need to start doing higher passes over the defenders, and that actually is so nice to sit back and watch. That's amazing, because you can come away from those sessions absolutely buzzing, but then so are the players.

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

What considerations do you think of when planning and structuring your sessions?

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Narrator: Craig Blain

It was fascinating to listen to Annas take on how she approached the planning process. Organisation doesn't necessarily mean rigidity. I wanted to learn more about how Anna used organisation to aid the development of her players?

Guest: Anna Jackson

What I try to do within my coaching is structure our sessions in a certain way so that they get into a routine. They know what they need to do, they know when they need to be there. Where we train, there is a set of stands at the side, and players tend to just dump their kit and they dump their water bottles all over the place. We get them to put their bottles in the same place, they're all together, so everybody has a drink in the same place. We put little bits of things within sessions, because we know if we don't, the players A) can't find their bottles or B) they drift off all over the place around the court, and it's about keeping everyone together as a team, and what we try and get them to do then is, they'll

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pass somebody else their bottle and those little bits of, it's about a team mate then and helping a team mate out and those kind of things.

It is difficult, when you know it's, forgetting stuff or getting confused about things is a disability reason, that can be difficult. What I have done is gone away and learned about them and learned what works for them and what doesn't work for them. I can't just look at a player and go, "right this is how I'm going to coach you" and look at another player and say, "right this is how I am going to coach you". I have to really look at them as individuals. So, "I don't really need to know your disability, but gimme a clue. How does it impact on you?" "Hmmm, I'm having to say the same thing every week to them. Right, let me have a think about this one, how can we help?" And sometimes it's about, we have a club Facebook group, we'll post things on there, "right who is at training tonight, don't forget to bring X, Y, Z with you." And little things like that, it's not about me trying to mother them and tell them everything they need to take with them. I just recognise that players will forget and as a coach, you have to get your head around that. Let's help them along that way, so that they turn up with the right kit, at the right time in the right place. If I look back at my time as a GB player, if you go away to tournaments or you're

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away at training weekends. The thing that I craved for was knowing exactly what I was going to be doing right the way through the weekend, I hated any vague gaps or not knowing. Because for me, with the problems I have with my legs and my back, I have to know I can get some rest and I have to get some down time. And if I didn't know when I was getting that, I used to find that really difficult. Because I have got that understanding as a player, then I make sure I do that with my players, so they know this is what we are doing, this is what time we're playing, so were going away to Women's League, so the players already know what time they're playing, they know what time they're meeting. They know what they've got to do. They know when they've got downtime. I don't want those players in front of me every minute of every day, I'm not going to sit them through hours of video analysis and hours of team meetings because I've been there as a player, I've had that, and you reach a point where you just glaze over, and you've got no chance of it going in.

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

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How important are routines in your coaching? How do they benefit everyone involved?

Narrator: Craig Blain

It was obvious that Anna was well practiced in reflection, of both her own experiences as a player and as a coach. I wanted to spend more time exploring this with her.

Guest: Anna Jackson

Anybody with a disability doesn't want to be identified by their disability, as coaches we have to take that on board, we've got to have that understanding. Because if you try to treat everybody the same it just isn't going to work. It does make you think slightly differently, and I think for me as I've been there as a player, I hope that my players trust where I am coming from with some of the things that I'm doing. I don't just get them to do stuff because I just fancy it, or I've seen it on the back of a fag packet. I will often explain that to them, it's not "we are doing this because I say we're doing this", it will be "We're doing this because". I can look at players we've got in the club and look at players I work with

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at 'Women's League' level and there are a number of players in there who will flourish and thrive what ever you do with them, but there are definitely some that will need that little bit more and if I can give them a little bit more support, a little bit more advice, a little bit more knowledge and a little bit more attention then they will start to thrive like the others do. When you're talking about preparing people for work and things in wider life I think those skills of communication and teamwork are vital, as is being in the right place at the right time with the right kit. So, when I'm saying to players "we start at 6:00, so you need to be here at the latest 5:45 so that your chair is ready, your sorted, your kits down, we get going at 6:00". Sometimes it takes a time to get them to cotton on to that, and if you think of that in a work life, you don't just rock up to work a minute before you're due to start, you have that time. Some of it I almost do without realising, 'this' is building your teamwork, 'this' is building your communication skills, 'this' is building your time keeping and you being more organised and that sort of personal responsibility. It makes me think about what I do, and sometimes some of the things I do, I don't know where I have got the ideas from but the next thing, you can see the benefit to the players. The water bottle one was because I was getting

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cheesed off that every time we have a break in training it was like they were bomb-bursting out of there and there were players everywhere, or they were then chatting to someone else, or mum or dad, or who ever had brought them, and then you couldn't get them back in again to carry on training. So now they are all sat in one lump having a drink, which means I can talk to them while they are all sat having a drink. So, there's a whole little pile of things that come around the things I've ended up doing with them. Every coach I meet I take something from. Doesn't matter if they are in sport or in another sport, it's that not "I don't like that, that wouldn't work with my athletes, I'll try something different!". We're all there trying to help players become better, so why not share that? Some people are very protective over their skills and their drills and their knowledge, if someone wants to pinch some of my skills (drills) than feel free, but I've probably already pinched them off someone.

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

How do you connect with the people in your sessions to better understand their needs?

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Narrator: Craig Blain

When working with a mixed ability group, or welcoming new people to your sessions, challenges can arise with how activities and sessions are delivered from an organisational point of view. I want to understand if Anna changed her approach in any way when working with different people?

Guest: Anna Jackson

I think it's about being really honest with your players. So, within disability sport, you all tend to be more open with each other just by the nature of what has taken you into disability sport. But for me as a coach, I've learned over the past few years, that if I am open with them about either the levels of pain in my legs, or about my mental health – what that's done is - they've opened up more to me. The more real I am with them, the more real they are with me. So, whether you're a seven or eight year old coming to your first session or an you are an experienced player playing at an international level, I think they still get the same me. So, from a values and beliefs and the way I coach, it is still the same. I want players to go away from a session with a smile on their faces,

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having achieved something, having learned something new. Or improved on a skill. I think the thing that changes is sometimes the terminology I use. I know with my more senior players, a couple of words is all they need to go off and do something, whereas newer players need more of an explanation of what they are doing.

Coach Developer: Jenny Coady

If you work with more than one distinct group, like Anna, how do you adapt your coaching practice to connect with those taking part?

Narrator: Craig Blain

The Great Coaching Podcast is a series of six episodes that explores each of UK Coaching's great coaching principles. You may have noted in listening to this podcast that some of the sentiments from previous episodes are echoed here. As a final point from Anna, I wondered how she uses organisation to both engage and empower participants within her sessions.

Guest: Anna Jackson

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If you look at someone who has been born with a disability who may have gone through primary school or main stream secondary school as one in a school of hundreds of pupils, yeah they're identified because they are the only disabled kid. Whereas now they're like "yeah, it's not about my disability, I'm a member of this club!" For a lot of our players, they've not been part of something before. They might have come through school where they've not been included in activities, they've not been included in sports, they've been told they're not allowed to do it because it is too dangerous. The stories I've been hearing are horrific. Whereas actually, now they are part of something. They really want to shout about that. What I've started to do within the club now is that 'they' start to do the warm ups. But then also within sessions, we've got one little lad who always wants to play 'King of the Court' (so, all bouncing a basketball, if you knock someone else's away they are out) he always wants to play that, so we let him organise that game and let him run it. Because, it's a warm up, it really doesn't matter what you do in a warm up, so long as they're getting warm and it's safe. Or we have fun nights, they can pick what they want to do. Whether it's basketball or they want to do another sport, inevitably they fall back to basketball, but they can

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make their own teams and their own rules, and they're like "what you mean I can be captain?". Even those little things make a big difference, we might achieve the same end result that I would have planned as a coach, but they've planned it. At the end of the day they're going out of the sports hall laughing and smiling and that's, for me as a coach, whatever the level of a player I am working with that's what I want. What I get from that is massive, if you're helping other people, each person you help, you're helping yourself. That's really true.

Outro Theme:

This has been the Great Coaching Podcast from UK Coaching. If you would like to find more episodes on the great coaching principles, search for the Great Coaching Podcast on the UK Coaching website ukcoaching.org.