

DEI & Blindness

Having a disability in the USAW

Topics

1. Gym inclusion socially and practically
2. Barriers to entry for people with low vision, or vision impairment
3. Competing while Blind
4. Why should everyone in the USAW take these steps? The Paralympics is an option!
5. Resources

Social and Practical Inclusion

1. Gym Culture

- a. I tried three gyms with barbell clubs before I found a socially welcoming and physically safe barbell gym.
- b. Social gatherings and Team building events
 - i. Indoor v. Outdoor
- c. Requirements for coaching disabled athletes:
 - i. Curiosity
 - ii. Patience
 - iii. Tenacity
- d. Programming
 - i. Printed out Programs v. Digital Programs

Barriers to Entry

- Your Website
 - Is your website WCAG compliant? (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)
 - Why do I need it and what does it cost?
 - Consumers check out businesses websites and social media several times before taking action on visiting or buying from them.
 - If your website isn't user friendly to me, which is one of the easiest accommodations to make, what other hardships will I face being a member of your community?
 - The cost is minimal and relative to the changes made to the website
 - Add Reader View and screen reading functionality to the site
 - Use high contrast colors
 - This is not only helpful to vision impaired people, but people with color blindness as well
 - Use Sarif fonts and consistent font size throughout the site
 - Font size needs vary, but become a moot point when Reader View is enabled

Barriers cont'd.

- Your Layout
 - Raised platforms v. Flat ones
 - Standing barbell holders v. wall mounted
 - Plate storage and placement
 - Signage throughout the facility
 - Lighting
 - Light blocking shades, curtains or tinted windows
 - Spotlights at local, regional and national meets
 - Trip hazards and clear pathways
 - Team buy-in
 - Speaks to the culture and gym leadership
 - Ex: my teammates locally and at meets

Competing while Blind

- My first year lifting blind at competitions
 - Good lifts red lighted due to not seeing the down signal
 - Tripping over A/V cords
 - Walking into equipment
 - Falling down unmarked steps
 - Spotlights
- My Second year
 - Coach allowed to walk me to platform / give me down signal
 - Wearing sunglasses while competing
 - More space in the backrooms
 - Marshall moved closer to me to give me an audible down signal, versus a visual one
- My Third year
 - USAW and Meet Directors were mindful of cords, and the removal of unnecessary A/V equipment.
 - Portable down signal arrow placed at the edge of competition platform that I could see, in addition to audible down signal
 - Coach allowed to walk me to/from the platform
 - One additional person in the back for help if necessary

Now, why do this, again?

- Empowerment and Engagement
 - With the increase of people choosing home gyms over gym memberships, there is a segment of the disabled community who also see that as a way of disengaging from feeling marginalized in global and local gyms. Taking steps in inviting, involving and empowering them, we have an enormous opportunity to show them the opposite of the cultural standard of exclusion.
- Marketability
 - As a board member of one national organization and a member of a few others, I know first hand that options are slim for people like me, to find communities we can easily become a part of. Your gym, your team and this organization advertising itself as an option makes an mutually beneficial experience for all involved.
- Because it's Easy and you have everything to Gain
 - If the local gym market is saturated and someone like me has options between gyms which are similar, I'm going to go with the one who has the accessible website, socially inclusive environment and engaged coaches we talked about previously.
- But, we have the Paralympics...
 - An organization born of the need to give sport to those the mainstream considered unable to compete.
 - The paralympics doesn't have OLY lifting. And even if it did, with USAW already taking strides towards more inclusion of those with vision impairments, the paralympics wouldn't be necessary in this particular case because we have it handled. There's pride that should be celebrated in that notion.