

Disability Workshop, Northfleet Youth Centre, Kent, 23 January 2010

This event was organised by Dr Peter Drewry, of C.E.D.A.K. (Centre of Excellence for Disability Archery in Kent), with support from Kent Disability Sport and at the request of the Regional Coaching Organiser.

Arriving at the hall, we were signed in and given a "Goody Bag" containing brochures and a DVD relating to Kent Disability Sport, plus a resource disk covering the day ahead. In the lecture room, after drinks and biscuits, I was pleased to see some familiar faces, including some from "over the water" in Essex.

The programme started with a welcome and short introduction from Peter, followed by an explanation of the support offered by Kent County Council to disabled athletes, this was delivered by Paul Panton, a Project Co-ordinator for Kent CC. From this we learned of the heavy commitment of the County Council to disability athletes and Paralympians. An interesting example he gave was of a blind downhill skier, who trains by riding at speeds of 110km/hr on the roof of a car, being driven by a blind driver. Thankfully for the rest of us, on a race track!!!

Peter then gave an overview of archery for the disabled, showing that virtually any disability can be catered for, with a bit of ingenuity. Disabilities mentioned covered loss of sight and limbs, parts of limbs or at least loss of use of parts of the anatomy. We then had the opportunity to watch some wheelchair-bound archers shooting in the sports hall. This included the Paralympic medallist, John Cavanagh. This gave us an insight into the adaptations made by and for these archers to enable them to compete at the highest levels. We also had the opportunity to try shooting from a wheelchair, not as easy as some of the archers made it look.

Next we had a detailed talk on Visually Impaired Archery by Peter March, explaining the various categories, a rather complicated list. After a splendid buffet lunch, we were able to see Peter's son, Lewis in action. We were astounded by his level of accuracy, but rather dismayed to learn that this is not a category accepted for the Paralympics. Afterwards, we were given the chance to try shooting with a blindfold and tactile sight and were even more appreciative of his achievements.

After more refreshments, Peter Drewry explained the implications of drug testing for disabled archers, effectively as severe as for able bodied athletes, even though their need may be much greater. John Cavanagh then gave us a summary of what the day had all been about, showing by his experience what it can all lead to.

A Question and Answer session then brought the day to a close. I think all of us learned a great deal about the determination of disabled athletes to stay in their sport and reach the highest levels of achievement, irrespective of the hurdles they have to overcome to do this. Altogether a very instructive workshop.

Mitch Vaughan, County Coach, Billericay, January 2010