Goalball UK Activator Handbook



Goalball UK
Transforming Lives

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Welcome to Goalball UK. Thank you for giving your time, energy, and enthusiasm as a goalball activator to support goalball and the people who make our sport so special.

Goalball UK events and activities rely on dedicated activators who help create safe, welcoming, and well-organised opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to play, compete, and belong.

This handbook explains what to expect as a Goalball UK activator. It covers how to prepare for your role, how Goalball UK events work, how to stay safe, and how to support players, families, clubs, coaches, officials, spectators, and the wider activator team.

Depending on your role, you may help with registration, set up equipment, provide spectator information, assist table officials, support coaches and players, guide people around the venue, help with social media, or support the wider event team.

You do not need to be an expert in goalball to make a difference. We will provide guidance, role information, and support so you understand what is expected and feel part of the activator team.

If you have any questions before, during or after your role, please speak to your named contact.

Thank you for being part of the Goalball UK community.



What is goalball?

Goalball is a sport designed specifically for blind and partially sighted people. Players wear eyeshades so those with different levels of vision can compete equally, and they use the sound of a ball with bells inside to attack, defend and score. The sport was created after the Second World War to support the rehabilitation of injured soldiers and is now a much-loved Paralympic sport, recognised as one of the Summer Games disciplines.

Goalball is a fast-paced indoor team sport played by two teams of three. Each team attacks by throwing the ball towards the opposition's goal and defends by listening for the ball and blocking it with their bodies. Teams can include up to six players, with three on court at any time in the positions of centre, left wing and right wing. Shots may be thrown, bounced, spun, or curved to make them harder to defend.

What makes goalball remarkable is the level of skill, communication and trust it requires. Players must judge the speed, direction and movement of the ball using sound alone, then react quickly to defend a goal that stretches across the width of the court.

What makes goalball unique?

- Eyeshades help ensure all players compete on an equal basis.
- Goalball is played indoors on an 18m by 9m court. Tactile markings, made from string taped to the floor, help players understand their position on court.
- The ball contains internal bells, which help players track its movement during play.

To find out more, watch the short Discover Goalball video and visit the Goalball UK website



Visual Impairment (VI) Overview

In the UK, goalball is mainly played by visually impaired people, although anyone can take part. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimates that more than two million people in the UK live with sight loss, meaning vision that cannot be corrected and significantly affects daily life.

By 2050, this number is expected to double to over four million, mainly because:

- People are living longer, and much sight loss is age related.
- Rising obesity rates increase the risk of diabetes and related eye conditions.
- Advances in medical technology can preserve life in cases where sight is lost, such as premature birth or traumatic injury.

People may be registered as Severely Sight Impaired (Blind) or Sight Impaired (Partially Sighted), based on visual acuity and visual field. Only a small percentage of blind people see nothing at all; many have some useful vision.

Types of Eye Conditions

There are many types of eye conditions, but four common examples are:

- Macular degeneration – loss of central vision
- Glaucoma – loss of peripheral vision
- Cataracts – blurred vision
- Diabetic retinopathy – patchy vision

Some eye conditions are present from birth, while others result from injury or illness. Some are stable, while others may change over time. A newly diagnosed person may face different physical and emotional challenges from someone who has lived with an eye condition for longer. Someone who previously had sight may retain visual memory.

Eye conditions vary from person to person, day to day, and environment to environment. Some people may have more than one eye condition.

Introductions

When you start speaking to someone who is blind or partially sighted, introduce yourself by name and explain your role clearly. Speak directly to the person, rather than to anyone accompanying them, and always ask before offering help. When you leave, let them know you are going, as they may not realise you have moved away.

Guide dogs

Guide dogs are trained working animals and should not be distracted while wearing their harness. Some owners may allow you to stroke their dog when the harness is off but always ask permission first. Never feed a guide dog.

Sighted guiding

The person being guided should hold you; you should not hold them. They may hold your arm near the elbow, place a hand on your shoulder, or follow closely behind. Communicate clearly and use descriptive language, such as “Door left” or “Steps down.”

Never take someone’s cane or guide dog harness, grab them, or assume they want guiding. Introduce yourself by name, ask if they would like help, and let them know before you leave.

Here is a guide from the RNIB on how to guide people with sight loss – Click HERE



Meet the Team

The Goalball UK team will vary depending on the event or activity, but there will always be someone available to welcome you, explain your role and answer questions. Your event information will confirm your main contact before you attend.



Katy Whitworth – Workforce Development Officer



Dan Webster – Competitions and Events Officer



Alex Bunney - Development and Learning Director

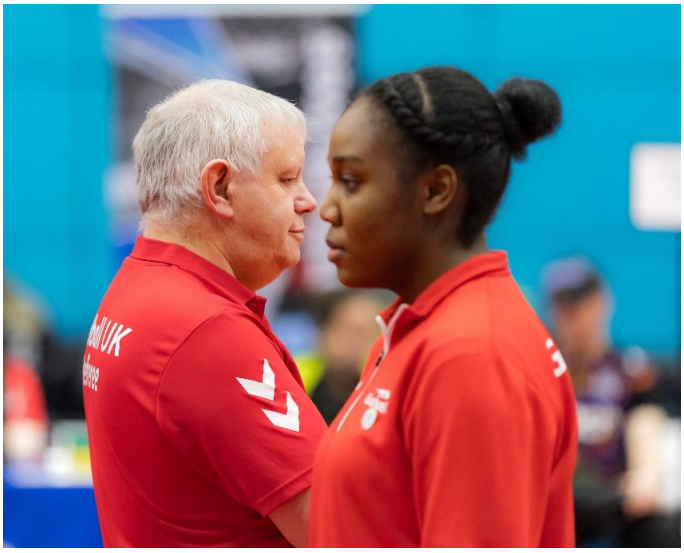


Stephen Newey - Community Development Officer



Steve Cox – Operations Manager and Lead Safeguarding Officer

Our activator team



Behind every Goalball UK competition, club session, development day and community event is a team of people working together. This may include event leads, referees, table officials, coaches, welfare officers, media support, logistics support, medical support, and activators in a range of roles.

As a goalball activator, you are a trusted part of that team. A friendly welcome, clear communication, reliable support, and respect for everyone involved can make a big difference to a player, parent, coach, official, spectator, or another activator.

Role boundaries

Activator roles are designed to support the safe and effective running of Goalball UK activities. Please stay within the role you have been given, follow the event briefing, and ask your named contact if you are unsure about a task. Do not take on coaching, medical, safeguarding or supervision responsibilities unless you have been specifically asked to do so and are appropriately trained or authorised.

Event format



Goalball UK delivers and supports a range of events and activities throughout the year. These may include National League competitions, cup competitions, individual entry events, taster sessions, club development activity, coach and official education, fundraising events, and community engagement activity.

Each event will have its own timetable, venue layout, staffing structure, and activator roles. You will receive event-specific information before you attend, including your arrival time, role, shift pattern, main contact, and any important venue instructions.

Event schedule

You will be sent the confirmed event schedule before the event. Please read it carefully so you know when to arrive, where to report, who your main contact is, and when your shift is expected to finish.

Locations, travel, and parking

Venue details, travel information, and parking arrangements will be shared before each Goalball UK event. Please check the event information carefully, as arrangements can vary depending on the venue, local parking restrictions, school or leisure centre access, and the number of teams or individuals attending.

Training

Before your first event, you will be signed up to the Introduction to Officiating course. This will provide a helpful introduction to the basics of officiating and support everyone to understand key aspects of the game. Any additional training, role-specific guidance and event procedures will be provided on the day as part of the event briefing.

Arrival and check-in

Before each event, you will be told who your main contact is and how to reach them. This may be the event lead, activator coordinator, club contact, or a member of Goalball UK staff. Please keep these details available during your shift so you know who to contact if you are delayed, have a question, need support, or need to report a concern.

When you arrive, please report to your main contact. They will confirm your role, introduce you to the relevant team, explain any key tasks, and answer questions before your shift starts.

Please arrive in good time so you can sign in, receive any role briefing, collect equipment or Goalball UK-branded clothing if provided, and familiarise yourself with the venue. If you are delayed or can no longer attend, contact your main contact as soon as possible so alternative arrangements can be made.

Meals, clothing, and equipment

Please wear comfortable clothing (sportswear or activewear – please do not wear denim jeans) and suitable indoor footwear, as your role may involve standing for periods of time, moving equipment, or supporting people around the venue. Goalball UK-branded clothing, such as an activator T-shirt, will be provided at the event where required. If you are unsure of what to wear, please contact your main contact

Food and drink arrangements vary by event. Please bring a refillable water bottle, reusable coffee cup, snacks, and any medication or personal items you may need during your shift. If refreshments or meals are provided, this will be confirmed in the event information.

Health and safety

Goalball UK wants every activator to feel safe and confident during their role. Please follow the event briefing, use equipment only as instructed, keep walkways and court areas clear, and report hazards, accidents, near misses or concerns to the event lead or named contact as soon as possible. If you are asked to move equipment, please only do so if you feel able and have been shown how to do it safely.



Communication during the event

During events, Goalball UK may use a combination of face-to-face briefings, email, phone calls, WhatsApp groups, or other agreed communication channels. The method used will depend on the event and your role.

If a WhatsApp group is used, please keep messages relevant, respectful and event focused. Once the event is live, important operational updates should not get lost among social messages. Your event contact will send you a link or QR code similar to the one below before your event



Competition Roles

The roles below help ensure Goalball UK events run smoothly, safely, and consistently, both on and off the field of play. All roles can include set up and / or break down at events / competitions.

- **Timer** – responsible for timing the whole game. The timer operates the clock, which indicates the remaining match time.
- **Ten Second Timer** – ensures the 10-second rule is adhered to by the teams. There are two ten-second timers in each match.
- **Scorer** – responsible for recording the game accurately, including time outs, substitutions, goals, and medical stoppages.
- **Goal Judge** – responsible for indicating if a goal has been scored, as well as assisting the referee with substitutions, time outs and returning the ball to the field of play.
- **Event Assistant** – assists with the running of the event, keeping the off-field teams up to date with match timings and scores.

Code of Conduct

Goalball UK expects everyone involved in its activities to uphold high moral, ethical and sporting standards so that all participants and spectators can enjoy the sport safely and fairly. Everyone must follow the relevant Code of Conduct. Where someone has more than one role, they should follow the Code of Conduct for each role, as these codes work together and should not be read in isolation. The Code of Conduct can be read on the policies page here.

Expenses

Activators supporting Goalball UK-coordinated activities may claim reasonable out-of-pocket expenses in line with the Goalball UK expenses policy. Relevant forms and guidance will be emailed the week after the event, and payment will be made within four weeks of the event.

Safeguarding

Goalball UK is committed to creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for everyone involved in goalball. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and all concerns, disclosures, allegations or reports about a child, young person, adult, or the behaviour of someone towards them must be taken seriously and shared without delay.

Goalball UK's safeguarding policies, reporting routes, and supporting guidance are available on the Goalball UK safeguarding pages. These include information about how to report a concern, what to do if someone is at immediate risk, and how concerns will be managed.

How to share a concern

If you have a safeguarding concern, do not try to decide whether abuse, neglect or poor practice has taken place. Listen, stay calm, reassure the person that they have done the right thing by speaking up, make a clear record as soon as possible, and report the concern straight away through the Goalball UK safeguarding lead at the event.

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call 999 without delay. For any concern during an event, speak directly to the event lead, named contact or Goalball UK Lead Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible, even if you are unsure whether it meets the threshold for a safeguarding concern.

Feedback, questions, and concerns

Your feedback helps Goalball UK improve the activator experience. If something works well, if something could be clearer, or if you have a concern about your role, please speak to your named contact, event lead, activator coordinator, or a member of Goalball UK staff. We want activators to feel listened to and supported.

Ending or pausing your volunteering

We understand that circumstances change. If you need to pause, step back or stop volunteering with Goalball UK, please let your named contact know as early as you can. This helps us plan safely and gives us the opportunity to thank you properly for the time and support you have given.

Frequently asked questions

I can no longer attend. What should I do?

Please tell your named contact, activator coordinator, or event lead as soon as possible so cover can be arranged and the event plan can be updated.

What should I bring?

Bring comfortable clothing, suitable footwear, a refillable water bottle, coffee cup, snacks, and any medication or personal items you need.

Do I need goalball experience?

No. Many goalball activator roles do not require previous goalball experience. You will be given information about your role and supported by Goalball UK staff, event leads, coaches, officials, or experienced activators.

How should I support blind or partially sighted people?

Always ask before offering help. Introduce yourself clearly, speak directly to the person, explain what you are doing, and follow their preference. If guiding is needed, offer your arm rather than taking hold of the person. If you are unsure, ask your event lead for guidance.

What should I do if I do not feel included or feel excluded?

If you do not feel included, welcomed or respected at any Goalball UK activity, please speak to your named contact, event lead, or a member of Goalball UK staff as soon as you feel able. If you would prefer to raise the matter independently, or if it relates to a wellbeing concern or serious misconduct, you can use Goalball UK's safeguarding, complaints, or Independent CareLine reporting routes. Information about all of these reporting options can be found on the Goalball UK Website.

In the spring of 2027, Goalball UK will launch a dedicated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion page on its website. This page will include an anonymous feedback route, providing another way for participants, volunteers and members of the community to raise concerns, share experiences and help us improve.

What should I do if I have a safeguarding concern?

Report the concern without delay. You do not need to decide whether abuse or poor practice has happened. If something does not feel right, speak up and follow the Goalball UK safeguarding reporting process. If someone is at immediate risk, call 999.

Can I watch goalball when my shift has finished?

Yes, where venue capacity and event arrangements allow. Please follow spectator guidance, remain quiet during play, and support the event team by keeping walkways and court areas clear.