

## Zprávy

### International Opportunities in Disability Sport and Blind Football

#### The Development of a European Blind Football Network

Universal opportunities in football, futsal and sports coaching and exercise science has now more readily extended to involve and ensure disability sport has now become commonplace on the sports event calendar. A collaboration of effort has tried to help widen this opportunity to the Czech Republic in blind football. Representatives from Masaryk University and Worcester University in the UK are aiming to establish a European blind football network. Innovative work from Lukas Masilko, Jitka Graclikova and Katerina Kmentova, who are all Masaryk University's staff members based at Teiresias Support Centre for Students with special Needs ensured a visit in March 2009 took place at Worcester University in UK for a blind football development week and tournament.

#### Masaryk-Worcester Universities Blind Football Development Week in Worcester, U.K.

The Football Development week in March 2009 witnessed 14 Masaryk University's players and coaches travelling to England to participate and share social and culture values and the initial success has since evolved to include a variety of coach education workshops, seminars and a return development week has seen both Universities join together in an attempt to promote a wider European blind football network. The staff and students attitude, effort, organization and willingness to learn, develop and share excellence of practice has been the catalyst for this current success.

The people involved at Masaryk and Worcester have been inspirational and very proactive at ensuring their staff and students experiences is of paramount importance. It has been a refreshing challenge to collaborate on these blind football initiatives and the aim for both Universities is to continue to support each other's quest for disability sporting success.

#### Masaryk and Worcester Universities Partnership

Since March 2009 University representatives have continued to build a strong relationship and have shown both passion and desire to ensure a positive environment is in place to promote the development of blind football and disability sports. The mutual efforts of Masaryk and Worcester have now seen the two Sports and Disability faculties combine with their respective international offices to form a Bi-Lateral Erasmus agreement. It is hoped that over the next few years this sports disability specific focus will allow both staff and students mobility to further develop these collaborations in learning, teaching and research.

The University of Worcester has a very good reputation for blind football, it has excellent facilities and has been delighted to be associated with a prestigious University such as Masaryk's one. David Mycock from Worcester University declares: "We are fortunate and enjoy showing both players and coaches how we do things as seven of the Great Britain Paralympics team either study or work at the University. We hope to learn and develop alongside our friends and colleagues from Brno and would hope the visionary initiatives we are aiming for will activate IBSA, UEFA, FIFA and the Czech and English Football Associations to invest more time, effort and money into the ongoing development of blind football and futsal."

This support is very needed because of plans to spread blind football among more visually impaired people in the Czech Republic interested in the game. Masaryk University's staff participated in several seminars and meetings held last two years in their country and they confirmed there is a big interest to establish more teams of blind footballers. They support, together with Czech Football Association, the team of blind footballers in Prague, which started to run regular training sessions in Autumn 2009. They are prepared to help another group of blind sportsmen from Opava to run their training sessions too. There are also some initial activities to establish the team in the Czech cities Ceske Budejovice or

Olomouc. We are happy to announce the Czech Football Association is ready to provide financial and mentoring support to these activities.

The Universities have continued to build relations through coach education workshops, seminars, lectures and practical coaching sessions. The sessions have included over 30 players and 10 members of staff and volunteers from both the UK and the CR. Elements such as communication, spatial awareness, decision making and confidence and motivation have been implemented through the use of Psychological Skills Training (PST). The introduction of PST has included players and staff working within the areas of: imagery, visualization, mind and pitch mapping, self talk and goal setting strategies. The psychological elements have also been combined in direct relation to the identification and development of the physiological components to combat the psycho-physio demands of blind football. The technical application of these disciplines has encouraged the student players to have a higher exposure to the game through the simulation, reciprocation and activation of skills, drills and small sided games. We offer these workshops to people who may be motivated to help with establishing more teams of blind footballers in both countries. It is planned to prepare the sessions in more interactive way so the participants will enjoy getting to know information about sports for disabled.

Later on in January 2010, the Camp in Polnička was awarded by the Czech Football Association as the best event of disabled football in 2009.

### **Blind Football Camp in Polnička**

In an attempt to further promote these psycho-social and psycho-physio elements the Teiresias Centre recently provided a fantastic opportunity for both universities' staff and students to attend a residential blind football development course. This took place in August 2009 in Polnička, Czech Republic. The residential camp brought the vital component of team cohesion and feelings of inclusivity to be used to support the knowledge and understanding of the game. This was evident as players and coaches lived and worked together whilst developing their social and sport specific skills. This was a vital aspect which helped heighten areas such as the coach-player relationships, team cohesion, team dynamics and role responsibilities. This excellence of practice was shared across an intense training schedule which included a variety of morning and afternoon sessions that embraced the various sociological, physiological, psychological and technical aspects.

Following the success Masaryk and Worcester universities have continued to support each other and have since signed a disability sport specific cooperation and an Erasmus agreement so they can evolve to include teaching and student mobility whilst trying to promote research and scholarly activity between the Masaryk university's Faculty of Sports Studies and Worcester's Institute of Sport and Exercise Science Department.

### **The project Blind Football Networking**

Masaryk's Teiresias staff have taken the initiative again on blind football and futsal and have made a successful bid to the European Union (EU). Staff from Teiresias Centre have acquired funds from the Youth for Europe for a 'Blind Football Networking' week to take place in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem in May 2010. 10 players and staff from each club have been selected from Worcester Blind Football Club, MTV Stuttgart 1843 e.V. and will join the hosts from Masaryk University.

Blind Football Networking is a project of three European partners: University of Worcester from Great Britain, MTV Stuttgart 1843 e.V. from Germany and Masaryk University from the Czech Republic. Masaryk University as the developers of the Youth for Europe project aim to assign the network as a Youth Exchange action. The project aims to exchange 18 blind and visually impaired young players of football and let them share their sport knowledge and experience whilst exploring their social and cultural differences and similarities. It should establish a European club partnership in supporting visually impaired young players of football and futsal. Most of the activities are planned to be executed in the areas of sport, recreation and leisure and the programme of the project is divided into Educational process by sport activities, mainly blind football through practical applications with problem based learning

which are ignited by seminar discussions. The overall focus of the project is definitively aimed towards visually impaired people and their inclusion in major society.

The rationale for establishing a blind football network is to increase awareness, participation and standards through player and coach education programmes. It is hoped this focus will help Masaryk University via the Teiresias Centre and the Faculty of Sports Studies become a National Centre of Excellence for blind and disability sports within the Czech Republic. The proactive and often unrecognized work by staff at Teiresias Centre has continued to inspire more blind football players and coaches to become involved. The visionary work by staff at Teiresias Centre is continuing in the process of establishing their own town, regional and national teams to play in leagues and tournaments as the first results were described above.

In comparison the English Football Association has recently become involved in blind football and the domestic Blind Football League. After being involved for the last 12 years in International tournaments England and Great Britain teams are currently ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the world and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Europe. However, the domestic blind football league is only in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of running since its inception. And Worcester University team achieved the success of being first in the league, twice in the last three years. The opportunity to increase this awareness of disability and sport is especially pertinent at the moment as England is set to hold the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA), 5-a-side Blind Football World Cup in August 2010. Hopefully the continued collaborative work will witness teams from the Czech Republic eventually compete both nationally and internationally in blind football and futsal.

### Plans for future

In an attempt to solidify this vision both universities are firmly convinced that equal access to all levels of education will represent a major challenge for European universities in the near future. In view of this, both universities have declared their commitment to ensuring the highest possible level of accessibility to their degree programmes and services for students with disabilities. To properly fulfil this commitment and to meet the challenges related to it, both universities have the intention of strengthening and deepening their present cooperation in order to promote the integration and inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education, academic life and civil society.

The main areas of cooperation between the institutions will be those of teacher mobility, student exchange, curriculum development and work on joint projects, with special focus on disability sports provision, education, research, scholarly activity and staff and student exchange programmes. Coordination of activities within the framework of this agreement will be the responsibility of the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs, in cooperation with the Faculty of Sports Studies at Masaryk University, and the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science, in cooperation with the Disability and Dyslexia Service, at the University of Worcester. The outputs, in the form of recommendations related to actions to be taken within the universities as well as joining external initiatives, will be presented to the authorities in order to improve the situation of disabled students at both universities as well as to raise their level of education and the quality of teaching in accordance with the Equal Opportunities principle. This relationship overall is aimed at educating and stimulating the next generation of players, coaches, teachers and educators of disability sport.

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