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## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCCER**

**Author:** **Minhyun Kim**, Doctoral Student , Dept. Health, Exercise and Sports Sciences, University of New Mexico

### **INTRODUCTION**

The impact of social interaction and inclusion is significant for people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Social and recreational activities allow people with ID to enhance academic, social skill development, and behaviors. Research has shown that physical activities enhance a variety of health conditions of people with ID (Stanish & Frey, 2008). In addition, people with ID can improve a wide range of health conditions, such as developing body muscle, improving postural balance, and reducing fat mass (Krustrup, Dvorak, Junge, & Bangsbo, 2010).

### **Definition and Characteristics of ID**

The American Psychiatric Association (2000) found that children with mild intellectual disabilities (MID) have an IQ score between 50 and 70. Research also has shown that people with ID frequently are deficient in manual dexterity, ball skills, and static and dynamic balance (Vuijk, Hartman, Scherder, & Visscher, 2010). Students with MID showed motor deficiencies in manual dexterity (70.9%) as well as in ball skills and balance (63.6%). Borderline-intellectually functioning people showed motor impairment in manual dexterity (56.5%) as well as in ball skills and balance (44.3%). Researchers suggested that exercise intervention programs, which include basic manual dexterity and balance activity, can enhance the motor performance of people with ID, including activities such as soccer (Vuijk, Hartman, Scherder, & Visscher, 2010).

### **Benefits of Soccer**

Playing soccer is fun and easy to learn for people with ID. In addition to helping people with ID enhance motor performance, playing soccer also can improve lower body strength and cardiovascular fitness levels. Particularly, it enhances hamstring muscle strength and improves postural balance. In addition, because soccer is a team sport, the game facilitates social interaction and increases social networks. One study recommended soccer because it is more effective for

people with ID when using a small-sized soccer field due to a lack of cardiovascular level and motor skill of some of the participants (Krustrup, Dvorak, Junge, & Bangsbo, 2010). A smaller field helps keep people with ID engaged, as well as creates rich environments in terms of tactical strategies and positioning, by allowing them to touch the soccer ball more frequently. Additionally, it typically enables people with ID to score more goals. This results in increasing their enjoyment, excitement, and motivation.

### **Soccer Programs for People with ID**

Various programs and resources are available for people with ID to participate in soccer, such as United Sports, Adapted Sports Center, and Disabled Sports U.S.A. In particular, Disabled Sports U.S.A. offers a broad range of recreational physical activities, including soccer development programs for people with ID, regardless of their severity. By networking nationwide, Disabled Sports U.S.A. provides extensive opportunities for people with ID to improve and develop soccer, as well as to experience joy while playing soccer. The organization also promotes physical fitness and soccer tournaments. This kind of program can help people with ID develop independence, confidence, and fitness through participating in soccer. In fact, numerous local or city activity programs exist to accommodate people with ID to play soccer. Thus, it is recommended for families and caregivers to find suitable and professional national or local soccer programs for people with ID to learn and enjoy soccer.

### **Who are Appropriate Soccer Coaches?**

For people with ID to enjoy soccer, it is essential that coaches realize the critical role they play in teaching the skills of the game. Research has shown that experienced and competent soccer coaches can help people with ID develop their skills in an environment conducive to learning (Rizzo, Bishop, & Tobar, D, 1997). This study examined 103 soccer coaches from Southern California. A program known as Coaches' Attitudes toward Players with Disabilities (CAP-S) asked soccer coaches for their perceptions of people with ID. Results showed a strong relationship between coaches' competence and attitude toward players with ID. Competent soccer coaches were more likely to work with players with ID and accept them as people with potential. Furthermore, the study indicated that it is imperative coaches provide safe and warm environments and show patience with players with ID.

## CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicated that people with ID can benefit both physically and socially from participating in soccer. In order to create a better environment, it is necessary to consider the field size and the limited physical capacity of people with ID. In addition, social organizations should encourage each society to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities to participate. Finally, the learning environment for soccer should be enjoyable. Coaches who are competent and experienced can deliver positive educational environments.

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