



## **Best Practices for Modern Language**

***Practical Application of Language in Soccer for All Abilities***

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## Best Practices for Modern Language Pertaining to Ability

As part of its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, **United Adaptive Soccer Association (UASA)** provides these language guidelines to foster an inclusive culture across the American soccer community. This resource aims to educate athletes, coaches, officials, and fans on the importance of using respectful and empowering language when discussing disabilities.

Careful word choice influences perceptions, mindsets, and the overall experience of inclusion. These guidelines are designed to help the American soccer community:

- Use inclusive and non-ableist language.
- Embrace individual preferences, such as identity-first (e.g., disabled athlete) or person-first language (e.g., athlete with a disability), based on context.
- Avoid stigmatizing terms or phrases.

By integrating these practices, members of the soccer community can ensure that all participants, regardless of ability, feel valued and represented.

### Understanding Disability Language

Language about disabilities is deeply personal and varies among individuals and communities. Understanding these preferences and avoiding ableist language is essential for fostering inclusivity and respect. Below are key principles and recommendations based on research and guidelines from the disability community:

#### Respect Individual Preferences

- Use person-first language (e.g., athlete with a disability) when possible, but consider identity-first language (e.g., disabled athlete) depending on individual preference.
- When in doubt, ask individuals how they prefer to be identified and respect their preferences.

#### Avoid Ableist Language

- Avoid terms or phrases implying typical abilities are superior (e.g., inspirational or overcoming). Highlight achievements based on skill and sportsmanship.
  - *Example:* Instead of "She's an inspiration for overcoming her disability," say, "She's a skilled athlete excelling in her sport."

- Refrain from group labels (e.g., the disabled). Instead, expand the wording (e.g., athletes with disabilities) to be mindful of personhood.
- Avoid euphemisms like special needs. Use disability, which is the preferred term for most individuals.

### Practical Usage Tips

- **Prioritize Context:** Use disability-specific language only when it enhances understanding or relevance to the topic.
  - *Example:* "Blind soccer provides athletes who are blind or visually impaired with competitive opportunities."
- **Avoid Stereotypes:** Refrain from portraying athletes as inspiring solely due to their disability.
- **Focus on Athleticism:** Emphasize achievements based on skill, strategy, and sportsmanship.
  - *Example:* Instead of, "They played well for players with Down syndrome," say, "They demonstrated exceptional teamwork and leadership during the tournament."

### Contributing to an Inclusive Soccer Landscape

UASA supports Disability Soccer Organizations (DSOs) that are members of the U.S. Soccer Federation, each adapting the game to meet the needs of athletes with disabilities. These DSOs provide both recreational and competitive opportunities for athletes of varying abilities, reflecting UASA's commitment to accessibility. Members of the UASA community - athletes, coaches, fans, and officials - are encouraged to consider visible and invisible disabilities in every aspect of the sport, from language to event planning.

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### Feedback and Engagement

This document is a **living resource**. UASA welcomes feedback from stakeholders to ensure these guidelines evolve alongside the community's needs. **To contribute suggestions or share insights**, please contact United Adaptive Soccer Association at [info@unitedadaptivesoccer.com](mailto:info@unitedadaptivesoccer.com).

## Best Practices for Modern Language Pertaining to Ability Chart

Avoid Saying...	Use Instead...	Soccer-Specific Example
Afflicted by a disability	With a disability	<i>"Athletes with disabilities showcase their unique skills on the soccer field."</i>
Amputee	With limb difference	<i>"Players with limb differences compete in amputee soccer leagues with modified rules and equipment."</i>
Brain damaged	With traumatic brain injury (TBI)	<i>"Athletes with traumatic brain injuries find pathways to excel in adaptive soccer programs."</i>
Confined to a wheelchair	Who uses a wheelchair/mobility device	<i>"She coaches power soccer, an adaptive sport for athletes using motorized wheelchairs."</i>
Developmentally delayed	With a developmental disability	<i>"The program supports players with developmental disabilities, fostering skill-building."</i>
Disabled soccer	Adaptive or accessible soccer	<i>"Our league is proud to host an adaptive soccer tournament featuring athletes with various abilities."</i>
Downs players	With Down syndrome	<i>"Players with Down syndrome can participate in Down Syndrome Futsal or other adaptive leagues."</i>
Epileptic	With seizure disorder	<i>"Referees with seizure disorders can work safely with appropriate accommodations and support."</i>
Handicapped parking/restroom	Accessible parking/restroom	<i>"Accessible parking is available near the soccer field for ease of access."</i>
Hearing impaired	Deaf and/or hard of hearing	<i>"Deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes thrive with visual communication strategies and support."</i>
Inspirational; overcoming	Excelling in their sport	<i>"He is a skilled goalkeeper known for his quick reflexes and leadership."</i>
Learning disabled	With a learning disability	<i>"Players with learning disabilities benefit from supportive coaching strategies that build confidence and skills."</i>
Normal soccer	Traditional game; without modifications	<i>"Adaptive soccer models are derived from the traditional, 11-a-side game."</i>
Mentally ill	With mental health differences or needs	<i>"Players with mental health differences find support and community through soccer programs designed for inclusion."</i>
Midget	With dwarfism; little people; short-statured	<i>"Little people can participate in most youth soccer programs without modifications."</i>
Mute; dumb	Uses alternative mode of communication	<i>"The coach uses sign language to lead his team during matches."</i>
Normal; able-bodied	Without disabilities	<i>"Our inclusive soccer programs welcome players with and without disabilities."</i>
Paraplegic/quadruplegic	Who has paraplegia/quadruplegia	<i>"He excels in power soccer, demonstrating that paraplegia is no barrier to competition."</i>
Retarded; slow; victim; sufferer	Has areas of need, growth, or limitation	<i>"She has areas of need relating to processing what Coach says and applying it to the game."</i>
Special needs	With a disability	<i>"Fans with and without disabilities are welcome at every game."</i>
The blind; sightless	Blind or visually impaired	<i>"Athletes with visual impairments benefit from adaptive equipment and guides."</i>

## References

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