



NEURODIVERSITY AND SELF-ADVOCACY IN CRICKET

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NEURODIVERSITY AND SELF-ADVOCACY

What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in how brains function. Neurodivergence describes individuals whose cognitive functioning differs from what is typically expected, including differences like ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and dyspraxia.

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand and communicate your own needs, rights, and preferences to others.

What Is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand and communicate your own needs, rights, and preferences to others. It involves expressing yourself clearly, seeking support or accommodations when necessary, and making informed decisions about your life.



THE STRUGGLE TO SELF-ADVOCATE

Why Neurodivergent People Struggle...

Self-advocacy can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals due to inherent difficulties with communication, identifying their own emotions and understanding their own needs, as well as fear of stigma.

For example, conditions like autism, ADHD and dyslexia may affect an individual's ability to organise their thoughts and to articulate them effectively. Anxiety from past misunderstandings can compound these difficulties.

In Sport

In a sporting context, individuals may fear being perceived as weak or incapable, which could lead to losing opportunities, exclusion from the team, or damage to their reputation. This fear can make it even harder to speak up about the support they need.

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Top Tips for Self-Advocacy

Here are some top tips for you to **share with your neurodivergent athletes**. Consider how you can support them on this journey.

1

Practice Self-Advocacy

Build confidence by starting with low-pressure conversations before addressing needs in formal settings.

2

Leverage Support Networks

Work with a mentor or practitioner to develop advocacy skills and facilitate team discussions if necessary.

3

Communicate Needs

Explain your neurodivergent traits, how they manifest in you, and what accommodations would help you perform.

4

Highlight Strengths

Emphasise strengths like adaptability and creative play to demonstrate positive contributions to the team.

5

Request Support Tools

Propose practical solutions, such as shared training schedules, visual aids, or time buffers for planning.

6

Focus on Team Goals

Frame requests in terms of benefiting the team, such as improved preparation leading to better contributions.

7

Educate and Raise Awareness

Share relatable information about your particular traits to help the team understand, with support from a trusted ally if needed.

Case Study: Sam, 18

Player with ADHD

Introduction

Sam, 18, is a talented batter, with a natural flair for timing and accuracy. Despite her potential, Sam struggles with consistency in training and performance due to challenges associated with executive dysfunction. Diagnosed with ADHD, her difficulties in planning, organisation, and emotional regulation have impacted her development as an athlete.



Sam's Challenges on the Field

Challenges

Despite her best efforts, Sam consistently faces the following challenges that leave her feeling anxious and unprepared.

➔ Working Memory Challenges

Sam often forgets to bring essential equipment to practice, such as gloves or pads, and struggles to follow multi-step drills.

➔ Difficulty Managing Time

Sam frequently arrives late to training or matches because she underestimate how long it takes to pack her gear or travel to the venue.

➔ Impulsivity

Sam sometimes makes rash decisions, like attempting risky shots when a defensive approach would be more appropriate.

➔ Emotional Dysregulation

When Sam underperforms, she becomes visibly upset, unable to recover quickly and focus on the next opportunity.

Barriers to Sam Self-Advocating

Sam faced the following barriers to self-advocacy:

➔ **Misunderstanding**

Sam's teammates or coaches didn't fully understand executive dysfunction, sometimes misinterpreting her needs as laziness or a lack of discipline.

➔ **Fear of Judgement**

Sam felt nervous about being judged as "different" or "difficult" for requesting accommodations, which made her hesitant to speak up.

➔ **Lack of Self-understanding**

Sam struggled to fully understand her own needs or articulate them effectively, resulting in vague or unclear communication.

How Sam Overcame These Barriers

Sam overcame these barriers by:

➔ **Seeking Support**

Sam worked with a mentor to identify and understand her specific needs and how executive dysfunction impacted her performance. She then developed a clear and structured way to communicate these needs.

➔ **Practicing Self-Advocacy**

Sam practiced self-advocacy in one-on-one, low-pressure settings, such as casual conversations with her coach or teammates, before addressing the group.

➔ **Sharing the Facts**

Sam organised a team meeting to explain executive dysfunction using relatable examples. She shared personal insights and provided educational materials to foster understanding and empathy.

Support Strategies Implemented for Sam

By addressing barriers to self-advocacy, Sam, her mentor and her coach were able to work together to develop the following support strategies for her executive functioning challenges:

➔ **Checklists**

Sam uses a laminated checklist to pack her cricket bag and ensure she brings everything needed for practice and games.

➔ **Visual Timers and Alarms**

Multiple alarms remind her to leave on time for training, with a buffer to account for distractions.

➔ **Decision-Making Cues**

During training, the coach introduces clear cues for shot selection, helping Sam develop situational awareness in matches.

➔ **Pre-Performance Routine**

Sam practices mindfulness exercises before games to manage anxiety and improve emotional regulation.

The Outcome

By addressing these barriers and advocating for herself, Sam was able to foster an environment where her strengths are recognised and her challenges are supported. This approach not only helped her succeed but also built awareness and empathy within her team.

With supports in place, Sam began to feel more in control of her game. Her punctuality improved, her impulsive decisions on the field decreased, and her emotional resilience grew. Recognising her progress, the coach encouraged Sam by highlighting her creative shot-making skills and ability to adapt to challenging situations.





KEY REFLECTIONS

Sam's experience illustrates the challenges neurodivergent individuals often face with self-advocacy and highlights its importance in accessing effective support. It also emphasises the need for a collaborative approach to help overcome self-advocacy barriers and address challenges related to neurodivergence. With the right support in place, individuals can thrive and contribute in extraordinary ways.