

Episode 2 - Tom Reeves

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Rich Hurst, Tom Reeves

Rich Hurst

Hello and welcome to Spotlight on Inclusive Coaching a podcast series brought to you by Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire and the University of Worcester. The series aims to inspire and inform aspiring coaches across all sports and disciplines who are interested in gaining knowledge about how inclusive coaching can have a huge impact upon the athletes and the differences and similarities about how it should be approached. So we're inviting coaches to engage with us, take away some tips, and see how they feel about inclusive coaching. There are six podcasts in the series covering a mixture of sports, ice skating, football, tennis, athletics, rugby, and basketball. In these interviews, we're going to discover how our coaches have adapted and rounded their skills to become more inclusive and what it requires each time they step on the pitch the court or the arena with their athletes. We talked about the challenges faced and the incredible rewards. In this episode, we're talking with Tom Reeves, an amateur rugby player who turned his hand to coaching at local and youth levels before coming across Worcester's mixed ability of rugby side a few years ago. He feels the approach you need to athletes in inclusive sport is one that should be applied everywhere. And he loves welcoming new players to the club with a key mantra that you're not alone. He recently won an award for his coaching with the team, which makes him the perfect coach to kick off our series on inclusive coaching.

Tom Reeves

Hi, I'm Tom Reeves, and I'm the mixed ability lead at Worcester Rugby Football Club.

Rich Hurst

Just tell us about your current coaching role and what that isn't who that's for?

Tom Reeves

Yes, I'm the head coach for the two mixability teams that we now have both men's and women's. So oversee the teams and the coaching that goes on.

Rich Hurst

And what do you love about being involved in that?

Tom Reeves

It's just so much fun, can be stressful, but it's the small but consistent incremental gains that you see those people make week after week and the smiles on their faces. And when you talk to them the bar and you get WhatsApp from them. And you speak to their parents or their friends, or you have those little moments, usually drunkenly or afterwards when people are relaxed and they tell you maybe where they're at where they have been, where they are now and the difference you've somehow helped make. That's what you do.

Rich Hurst

So how did you first get into your sport?

Tom Reeves

In terms of mixed ability, that was a kind of a happy accident. In terms of rugby, I've always been a massive rugby fan played a played for like school and played county Prop would you believe the svelte version of me now, I was smaller and chunkier in my youth until about 16, but played a t a decent level for my age, but you always felt difficult because, this show's my age, contacts weren't so common then didn't really get on with them when I did try them, then we didn't have a team 16 to 18 and this shows how important is schools, sport in schools and then yeah so had a natural break it was difficult to get to a club, just concentrated on my job and my life until about 28 where I got made redundant and I had to move up to the Midlands to start a new job. And I was working as a radio producer. So, I was kind of you know, very early shifts or I was done by early afternoon and one of my neighbours just trying to get to know people didn't know anyone in the area just bumped into him in the street got talking, trying to make friends, hello friend, and he helped out at the local rugby club. And so he invited me up he said they needed a coach for their under thirteens got me to come along and it's just a way of I suppose getting to know the community they're getting to know people they had no coach so I helped out it's kind of an assistant coach because one of the dads kind of stepped up but I was quite into my fitness so I just got fit. So, for like the next season I blasted them fitness wise and got to know the lads and just yeah began that there.

Rich Hurst

And this this mixed ability role that now sort of takes you on to a whole new level I suppose of inclusive coaching. So what's unique about how you do it or what it involves with mixed ability rugby?

Tom Reeves

I'd never heard of it. And yeah, I just saw in a news article, I think I was trying to get to know the area and really picked up a paper and they put something in the back there about a mixed ability I'd never heard of the concept. And it spelt it out that you know you have people with disabilities, visible and non-visible disabilities playing on the same team as able bodied people and I just thought someone's gonna get hurt, this is ridiculous. But they needed a coach. It's strange, until you said that, do you know what all good coaching should be inclusive, whoever you're coaching if it's not inclusive you're doing it wrong, and it doesn't matter who your audience are, because if you're all you know, they're all able bodied, and they're all men, and they're all 15 You still got a squad of 20, 30 people who are all different, they have a lot of similarities and maybe more than some of the things but they are all different. They'll have different fears, they'll have different objectives come from different places have

trained and learn for different amounts of time have different plusses and weaknesses in their skill set. So it has to be inclusive and I think that's changed in me I've mixed ability sport mixed ability rugby has changed me as a person. I never, I didn't have as much empathy for other people's point of view other people's problems, challenges in life. And I like to think this has improved me as a person. But yeah, to get back to I suppose your actual question, you do have to be more aware that's what it makes you think, or you have to be more aware, you're more inquisitive of, okay, you look to abbreviation, quote, marks 'what normal is', and it you're just asking them the question is going on, rather than if you played rugby before what standard right crack on? Yeah. Is there anything you need to share with us? What do you do for work? Do you have family? You give them a bit of a get tell them about the ethos of the team in terms of how inclusive is and we welcome people, of all backgrounds and of all challenges. And I usually say to most people, when they start as well, I kind of remind them, I said, Look, everyone here, and everyone in life has something, it could be that they still like to go to bed with a teddy bear that they had when they were eight years old, they still might still need to have the light on the landing when they go to sleep. It might be something bigger than my PTSD might suffer with dyspraxia, dyslexia, depression, bipolar, they might have an eating disorder, they might have sensory needs, they might have physical disabilities, everything, everyone's got something. And if people keep that in mind, when they come to a session, then they'll fit right in. And that usually then opens the door to a conversation about whatever their challenge is and not everyone has one, we have plenty of able bodied players who have no physical or mental needs, but they might be beginners, they might not play for 20 years, 30 years one guy Lee, he's just to come back recently completed two years in school, but wants to get fit, you know, jump into a high level be too much for him as he just wants an inclusive, friendly, welcoming team where he can just run around and shake off the rust for 30 years.

Rich Hurst

So Are there similar or different challenges in inclusive coaching? It doesn't sound like actually there are if you're applying the same things, but what things did you sort of have to overcome when you first got into it that were different to normal coaching?

Tom Reeves

I think he's just been much more aware. And again, I think all coaches should be this but you don't have to be so you forget to be, which is natural. We have a lot more coaches per head. So you know if your we look over at the senior teams, they'd be maybe one coach two coaches when in a session for 20-30 lads you know, we've got seven or eight coaches not always there at the same time, but you normally have at least three or four coaches during the session who are they might be joining in but they're visible they're aware they're watching because you have so many different needs abilities. And we might have three or four different drills or games going on simultaneously for various reasons so we have to have I suppose a bigger staff, bigger support the volunteer base, but it just be more aware what's their needs, what's their objectives and there are a lot more whereas before when the whole team needs to get better at passing and one or two might need to improve the kick in was this when you've got Scott you s,o I use them as a direct example he's been with us 18 months and so he'd been working really hard he couldn't catch a cold when he first arrived but like he had to really focus on his on his catching and he's excellent at catching and stuff now and catching and passing. So now he's competencies is his attacking plane and going through contact he never took contact before so now it's taking contact and to do that confidently and effectively, he's a winner. Then we've got lad Andrew,

who's joined us recently Andrew Massey, if you listening Andrew Hello, who came with his mum and dad and didn't on various of the rugby clubs because he had a lot of the issues he sometimes finds you know he gets quite frustrated with the world quite quickly. So, it's getting to know him and how he best works. So talk to his mom and dad and to him and sit down and go how do we help you improve and do that and so we played at Medallia on the weekend and he score and genuine worldly of try I'll share it with anyone else scored that try, you wouldn't you wouldn't know he has his own challenges match winner as well and he's so happy he's buzzing. And then we have guys who are brand new they don't know if you throw the ball backwards or forwards or they've never seen a rugby ball before. Then we have Tommy who has sensory needs sometimes we played on the Astro on a weekend in Darby. That was very challenging for him. So grass we've gotten used to going with grass now so we can lie down on grass which he couldn't do before, Astro it's very sad to imagine all your whistles and bells and burglar alarms by alarms going off in your house simultaneously on your mobile phone. It's like that sometimes for him. So, it's just being aware of the hits. But there's you have just more of those. So you just have to be a bit more aware.

Rich Hurst

I'm gonna go back to something you said about the number of coaches does potentially good inclusive coaching require more coaches per head?

Tom Reeves

I think it helps, I think because you can do so much more. It's very hard sometimes to go, oh, we need to work on this. And then you're like, oh, yeah, you know, another guy mentioned Simon, he completely otherwise able bodied but it's been with us a long time and kind of he never played rugby or not played for a long time. But he's been with us for a while. He recently played for the mixed ability, representational Invitational, representative Invitational the Mary's but so he played for them recently, which is a great honour and a he's a lovely lad. But he wants to transition over to become a scrumhalf. So you've got players like that sometimes you want to change position, so they want to improve their skill set. So you're doing a certain drill, and you go, yeah, Simon wants to practice on his passing and like that, and some of that you have to put back on them. Like you grab a mate, and you go do that. And then we've got another lad, Justin, who's still really new with us. He does like CrossFit, super fit fella, but he wants to get us more used to contact, this is a new thing. So you're trying to build on all these individual needs as well as the group needs. So yeah, we have a whatsapp chat for our coaches. And it's always like, what went well, last week? Or what happened in the match goods, bad's? What is everyone's thoughts, and then we sort the middle of kind of plan, but then we try and do what we kind of like a little breakout session. So throughout that there's a common theme, there's a few need to work on that contact skills, will say, right, who wants to do that for 10-20 minutes. We need to do this and someone do that. So it's just yeah, having more allows you to do more, I think, you know, our job is to super serve them and to feel like they're improving every session, both as a team and individually. And the individual thing is often some and can be as just as important if not more so as a team because it's, it can be, it can be easy to get lost, especially if you know what you're doing. So it's a lot of to make sure they're getting improvements individually. And just reassuring. The stuff fitting in the team will come.

Rich Hurst

I hope you are enjoying the Spotlight on Inclusive Coaching podcast so far, and taking some inspiration from our guests. We'll get back to that conversation shortly. But we just wanted to make you aware of the other episodes in the series, there are going to be six interviews with the different coaches, plus an introductory episode where we sit down and discuss all of the coach's chats with the people behind the podcast. The Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire partnership and University of Worcester. That episode is available now go and check it out. Remember, you can find more details and links to the episode at www.activehw.co.uk Or just search for Spotlight on Inclusive Coaching. For now, let's get back to this episode.

Do you think? And you may well go back and say it is you know, as you said right at the start, you know inclusive coaching is should be the pathway for kind of all coaching in theory. But how much is that? You know that conversation with a player before you even let them on a field? More important in in inclusive coaching, how much does that form? The basis of really of what all coaches should be considering if they're inclusive coaching, but also, you know, how much more is that a thing compared to maybe what you were your coach before?

Tom Reeves

Yeah, I mean, as the lads will say, everyone gets the spiel. When they start to, I speak to every new starter, if I'm not there the first session which I tried to be.

Rich Hurst

And also their family, you know, their families and people around them who you know as well.

Tom Reeves

Yeah. So we have we've now built because we're sort of like you rewind, three years ago coming out of lockdown. It was me and one or two others doing everything. We now have a team of seven or eight coaches. So one of the guys is kind of there's three or four of them doing their badges presently. We've got a safeguarding team of three. I've got two team managers, two guys to help you with social media. Social Secretary, do you mean it becomes a large project and as we've set up now, the women's mixability team, we've sat them down a lot, Learn the lessons because we've been running this for seven years now, get this structure in place as soon as possible because it spreads the ownership, which means then people taking more seriously, they're more involved and more committed. And they also start to understand and appreciate how much hard work it is. But yeah, everyone gets the spiel, everyone gets the chat when they first arrive at all the new starters about this is what it is. This is what it isn't. You won't hear aggressive swearing, you might hear frustrated. So we're in but you won't to hear aggressive that was this, that and the other, you're completely? You know, you won't get that. And if you do, they need to test because that's not how we roll. And we had the talk about everyone has their one thing that I mentioned before. And I also say, look, it's really simple. Our job is to make sure that you're better than you were 60 minutes ago. And you're you enjoyed it. And that's all we ask. And if you do that, then we hope you'll come back. We're given the first month for free. And we just try and break it down to make it nice and simple. Like and ask the question at the end of every session. Have you? Have you learned something? Yeah. Did you enjoy it? Yeah, as they're sweating and covered in mud. And that's it. That's it, and we just break it down and take it week by week.

Rich Hurst

What have you learned from it all, as someone who's someone who, who coaches who's gone from starting out as a coach and are coaching? In a way similar discipline, but something with completely different demands? What have you learned as a coach?

Tom Reeves

Sport is the vehicle. It's not the destination. People, and I think this is the challenge for a lot of sports clubs. People don't necessarily come to play rugby, they come to find a home, to find a family, to not be alone, to feel reassured for support, structure, social networking, to find a place a place to belonging. Today's society strange, an awful lot. It sounds very old. But you know how many of us actually know the names of our neighbours. I know one of mine. And he's lovely. Well, they're lovely Alan and Sue. And, and, but I don't know many others, I might know, one two, wave at. But it's very easy to feel isolated as a society I work from home now we don't maybe. And that has great benefits. I love it. But also it's nice to be around people. And I get my people fix when I when I go to rugby in it. We need that. And it's very much a vehicle for that the sport bit is actually just how we get there. But I've learned to listen more and I've been I've realised how important relationships are of actually getting the most out of your players. And yeah, spending an hour at a point or coffee or a chat or just stood on the sidelines is just as valuable if not more valuable than an hour on the on the on the pitch itself showing them something.

Rich Hurst

Do you think inclusive coaching has a bit of a power beyond just I think you're getting at it there but beyond just someone playing a sport and get fit?

Tom Reeves

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I've seen grown men cry. We feel we've fulfilled lifelong dreams include my own you mix abilities allowed me to play on the Principality stadium. I've played in two World Cups, done things I should do my talent would should not just not let me do I'm not, I'm not very good. I've seen a lot of tears of happiness and joy. Talk to parents, we've changed their life, their kids' lives that, you know, the way they do things both at home and socially. You know, it teaches you so many things when we went to the World Cup in Ireland last year. And a lot of what some of the guys learned was not actually on pitch. They learned to be more independent. They were used to being served and waited on. And obviously that doesn't fly when you're a bunch of other lads in the flat do itself perfectly capable. And I think a lot of people are gonna be careful always. It's a lot of people with disabilities are mollycoddled. And rightly so, to begin with, because absolutely, that's what you would do as a parent, I need to fix this, what can I do to help them? How do I make, How do I do things for you? But it only goes so far and it gets them so far been a part of our job is to stretch them and push them as safely and professionally as possible. And they're capable of so much. And then then when they do these things, you know, they just see them fly and it's incredible. You know, we've had guys turn up, they could barely catch and pass. I've had guys with learning difficulties sensory difficulties, can now what we call you know, they make good decisions pass at the right time. They can pass it one handed. They can fake passes and scoot around people. Yeah, we've had, you know, people win awards for the work that they've done in the community. Not just us, you know, they've come with us and then been empowered

to do that. We've had people, we had Joanne an amazing story, she came with us the World Cup last year when we didn't have a women's team but we took two women who and Sarah to the World Cup, and they played with the Spanish side. She went away from home for the first time on her own with 30 lads and Sarah and we didn't really we were worried about them. You know what they can are they gonna be okay. We found a Spanish team for them. They say And the Spanish teammates, and then Sunday, we didn't really see the rest of it. We just see them after every game, they come around the corner, sweating and full of the joys. And she actually played on the pitch on her own, they've really put the two of them on the pitch at the same time. And so she had all her safety blankets taken away from her, she took contact for the first time, because that's what mixability allows you to do. There's a mix of contact and limited contact. So people can play with some form of identification, like a bib or head guard or something like that, and to identify them as limit contact, but she took her identification off and played full contact. And then yeah, her mom and dad, unbeknownst to her turned up on the last day to watch her play and watch the play on the on the main pitch there. And there were tears all around for that. But no, it's been life changing for so many people in so many ways. And that that truly is it, you know.

Rich Hurst

And it's a mark of the turnaround for you personally as well, with this award. Yeah, just tell us about it. Tell us about that and what that means.

Tom Reeves

This means an awful lot. So, the UK Coaching Inclusive award 2020 is one of those things you've seen you enter anything whenever when that but I'd be nice. And just to be nominated was amazing. You know, we were very lucky to win an award from the active partnership, four years ago, and I think is the most welcoming club which we talk about a lot, because it's such a lovely title for an award. And I, I do hope you guys bring it back, because I think it's great for people to be on the show. But that's what people want they want to be welcomed. And that's done us so much credit. So to be recognised on a regional basis is amazing. But on a national basis, just to be nominated was incredible. But yes, everything we stand for, it's a kind of, I don't know, it's probably it's not, it is the right word inclusive, but it's not powerful enough or word in a way. I don't know. But it's it. Yeah, I think everyone was genuinely shocked and moved. You know, when they asked us "Do you want to come up with an award ceremony leads and all this and can't really afford it? It's a Tuesday night and we're not going to win? And then I've sat at home with the little lad. Yeah, Instagram popped up and was like, if you've been tagged in a post by UK coaching, like what? Yeah, it was amazing.

Rich Hurst

Finally give us give us some advice, either a piece of advice you've been given, or some of that you'd pass on to people when it when it comes to, you know, good inclusive coaching and all the benefits.

Tom Reeves

We used to be told when I used to work in radio, we start with the listener and work backwards. What did they want? And work backwards, you won't go far wrong. It's the same thing. What do your players want, what your members want? I had this conversation a year or so ago with someone at the club, when he will get some people who are resistant to change. And they were very much like, well, we

need a new team should be playing every week. And we need all you know, as many teams playing so my point was, is that what they want to do they want to play every week? Some people will, some people won't. Some people who are less serious, older, injured the social, not so good players. These are the things you've got to listen to your audience, what do people want, and you give them what they want the guys who come to mixability the girls never come to explain they want and there's different things. And that was that's the been interested in me as well. Women want a different set of criteria to what to what guys want. And there's a guy who knew. So that's been an education, but listen to them. So you know, girls, for women so far, he seems to be learning new skills, a welcoming, safe environment and inclusive is very important for them but a safe place a safe space where they can change in privacy and be and be secured and welcomed. And it's friendly. It's about you know, that new group of friends as well as being safe and secure and empowered with the guys are getting, it's more it's fun as well, guys very much it's fun, open to everyone, no judgments and stuff like that. And just what did what do they want? What do people want and give them what they want.

Rich Hurst

So there we have it a huge thanks to our guests and of course to you for listening to this episode of Spotlight on Inclusive Coaching. Remember if you want to know anything about the coaching academy or get more support on your coaching journey, then go to the Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire website, which is www.activehw.co.uk We'll see you soon.