

Episode 5 – Sarah Carter & Sophie Carter

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SPEAKERS

Sarah Carter, Tom Reeves, Rich Hurst, Sophie Carter

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 in 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 to talk about the challenges faced and the incredible rewards. This episode is about inclusive coaching in ice skating. Sarah Carter is Team GB head coach of Inclusive Skating, having coached figure skating for over a decade. Her team now consists of numerous people of all ages, abilities and disabilities by design. And she has grown that team and achieved a lot with them. With her for this episode is Sophie Carter, no relation. But Sophie is a member of that team who's progressed to become an assistant coach, and is just starting her journey into what it means to be an inclusive coach under Sarah stewardship. So here is Sarah and Sophie.

Sarah Carter

Hi, my name is Sarah Carter, and I'm the Mindset Coach, but I'm also the Team GB head coach for Inclusive Skating.

Sophie Carter

And then I'm Sophie Carter, no relation. But I am one of Sarah's skaters I'm part of Team Carter and I am training to become an inclusive coach.

Rich Hurst

Brilliant. Okay, so Sarah, let's start with your coaching role. What is it you love most about what you do?

Sarah Carter

I think it's hard to pinpoint one thing. But if I had to, I would say it's making a change to the skaters I work with and to their wider community. So their friends, their family, that kind of thing. So giving them somewhere that they possibly think isn't accessible to them, and then making it accessible.

Rich Hurst

How did you first get into, into Inclusive Skating?

Sarah Carter

I, there was a guy at my rink, and he was leaving the coaching profession. And he was teaching a little lad at the time. That is now 22. But at the time, I was like, Oh, he's really cute, can I teach him so I kind of took over teaching him and at the time, the person that was leaving said, Oh, you don't want him he's autistic. And I went, Oh, that's even more of a reason to want him. He's really, really cool. And I got to know him got to know what he likes what he dislikes, what words I could use and words I couldn't use, tones of voice that could you use, I just found the entire thing, super, super interesting. I've never been exposed to that kind of thing before. So having a chat with his mom, we worked out all these different things he competes. He's an athlete as well. So he competes Special Olympics. And then we figured out the Special Olympics in skating as well. And then Inclusive Skating came through that kind of element, we found out about it. And then that's how I've kind of dedicated my team to that now.

Rich Hurst

And it was it? Was it that child that inspired you to pursue that then so there was what you were thinking before?

Sarah Carter

No, I mean, I joke with him now because he's still a really important member of the team. Now I joke with him and like, oh, so it's a good job, you weren't a pain in the bum to teach because this could have gone the other way. So you know, he's really, really cool.

Rich Hurst

And with, with what you've achieved so far, what would you say is, is maybe the proudest moment when as a coach?

Sarah Carter

I think, from a moment point of view is one of my mainstream students that grew up the same time as my autistic guy. He has now gone into coaching, and he's also specialised in Inclusive Skating, because he was brought up around it with my team and my mainstream skaters and my Inclusive Skaters were never taught differently. They were all in the same group lessons. And it was kind of just normal. And for me, it should be normal. Everybody should get what they need to help them get where they want to be. So, I think from a moment point of view was the first time he had people competing at World championship level. And we stood ringside together. And I had my team he had his team, and it's just making me have goosebumps now just standing there next to him. Just looking at him, I was I'm really proud of this, this is really good. So from a moment, that has to be my top moment.

Rich Hurst

So take us a little bit into Inclusive Skating and the coaching of that and how it might be different from what someone assumes is coaching, skating.

Sarah Carter

Some aspects are similar, some aspects are nowhere near the same. I can have, I can have somebody come in and skate brilliantly one day. And then the next day, something's happened in the car journey on the way there, or they haven't been able to have the right brand of water that they like. And the entire training plan needs to change in an instant. And knowing how to change for the individual. Sometimes I can be on the ice for three, four hours at a time, half an hour, individual lessons. And I have people with high anxiety, autism, ADHD, ADD, I just love it. But I think to have all those people coming at you. Sometimes it gets a bit overwhelming and kind of go, oh, my gosh, and you do get it wrong. And it's okay to get it wrong. I think the main thing is the fact that you're doing it in the first place and working with the parents. That's a big difference is working with the parents and not kind of go in you stand that side of the barrier. And, you know, I mean, we joke on my team that when you're on the ice, I'm in charge, and it's up to me when you're off the ice the go find your mum. But you know, it's kind of it's not really like that is it Soph, it's a big team environment. And that's different to mainstream skating where it's normally just the skater, and then another skater and another skater, whereas Sophie said earlier on, we are Team Carter, and it is a team, and that's mums, dads, aunts, uncles, carers, brothers, sisters, everybody. And when we go out at Christmas, when we go skating on the Christmas rings, everybody gets invited. And that's the big difference.

Rich Hurst

Just thinking about it, How quickly did you have to learn to adapt? Because it sounds like it sounds like being adapting is very key to this. So how quickly did you have to learn and sort of, I suppose, adapt how you approached it?

Sarah Carter

Very quickly. My favourite story from when my guy was younger, we have a turn called a three turn, a backwards three turn. And I said, well, we're going to learn how to do a backward three turn. And he had a complete meltdown. And I was like, Oh, I don't know how to deal with that. So, we just kind of changed the lesson plan made it fun, all that kind of stuff. And I found out that he didn't like the word three turn, or words three turn. So we called it crocodile turn, because that's how the blade moves on the ice. And on our blades, we have something called a toothpick at the front, and it kind of looks like teeth. So we call it a crocodile turn. So we had to make sure the crocodile's mouth slams shut at the point of turning. And for about four years, he never did three times he did crocodile turns. And just that one, just me changing the word didn't change how I taught the step or the movement. But by changing the word, he was able to go or get it now. I can do it now. And he could do it. But up until that point, he just could it wasn't going in. And it wasn't because he didn't understand it was because I wasn't saying it in a way that he understood. Does that make sense?

Rich Hurst

Yeah, that does, so and that away, you know, is the way we kind of I suppose when you're approaching inclusive coaching then, there's so many things to kind of strip back and pretend you don't know, I

guess and go in and go in with that idea. And again, it's something we hear quite a lot. That idea of the conversation, the group with everybody involved, not just the athlete is makes that work.

Sarah Carter

Yeah, yeah, it really does. Because if I had not had that conversation with his mom, we wouldn't have known that it was the fact I was using the word three turn, I was using a technical term. If I had not had that conversation, we could have been a year down the line and thinking, why is this kid not getting this three turn? And it wasn't, it was just a simple fact of he didn't like the one word, I changed the word problem solved.

Rich Hurst

Where does that rank in the challenges that you face when you're doing inclusive coaching? Are there what you know and toughness and things you have to work to? Where does that where does that right?

Sarah Carter

I'd say it's, it is quite difficult because I have such a big team with so many different abilities and disabilities, that it's finding what works for the individual and then remembering what works for the individual because like you probably know not everybody with autism is the same not everybody with ADHD is the same. There's no one size fits all. And just having that personal touch of remembering what that person likes and what the person doesn't like. And when I have them all in a group and one likes one thing and the other one doesn't like something, then it can be fun, because they're like, Oh, hang on a minute, oh and it's just one of those. You have to know your person, you have to know your skaters. And the only way for me to do that is by working with the person that brings them to the building.

Rich Hurst

So Sophie, just tell us a little bit about how you become involved in Team Carter.

Sophie Carter

So I started off with the classic like learn to skate at the rink, and Sarah was actually my level one coach. So when I first got on the ice in like the rink, higher boots, Sarah was the one being like, okay, and now we're not going to fall over everyone. And I was with my sister at that point, the two of us where learning together, and I sort of said, Hey, Sarah, do you do like one to one lessons, because I was 17. At this point, most of the people there were about eight. So I was sort of like, I kind of want to keep moving through. Like, there's a lot of very small children. And Sarah do, you know, do private lessons. And Sarah was like, yeah, yeah, of course, like, we'll sort something out. And then I just, I fell in love with the sport. And because I was having those lessons with Sarah, I sort of joined Team Carter. And as the years went on, I've become sort of more and more involved. Like, I've started to learn to coach I've started to work on like choreography with some of the groups. Just because I find Team Carter, especially everyone's so lovely, like, and everyone always says that about that groups that was like, Oh, their so nice. But it was one of those you stepped straight in, and everyone wants to know how they can help.

Rich Hurst

Sarah when you bring a group together, how hard is it to build and instill that idea of, you know, the team being together? Because Sophie talks about it so well, they're about at that feeling she gets in a team, but that starts with, with you, I guess. So how hard is it to instill that feeling within a group that, you know, may not know each other to start with? How do you do that?

Sarah Carter

So for me, it's the fundamental thing of being a coach is making sure that everybody knows that they are safe. And everybody knows that they can speak to anybody else in the team, and somebody will help like, we have a WhatsApp group. And if somebody puts a question in there, I know, it doesn't have to be me that answers it. By the time that I've seen it, by the time I've gotten of the ice nine times at 10, three people have gone all you need to do this. And the problem is resolved. And I've purposely structured my team from day one of me coaching, purposely had that atmosphere and that element of this is a team. It's an individual sport. But it needs to be a team environment. And you know, like Sophie said, everybody helps everybody else out. And especially when we do, do in person competitions. Every single parent knows that if the skater comes to them and says, Have you got a safety pin? Have you got a plaster? Have you got a sewing kit? Then it's their job that they have to have those things on them? And they just go, Yes. And they just deal with it. You know, there's been dads in the past that have suddenly learned how to fix bra cups at the competition, silly things like that. But it's, it's what builds the team. And then you know, we all tend to, unfortunately, in the last few years, we haven't been able to because of COVID. But we always go for Christmas lunch, or we always have a Christmas party. The last party was nuts. Yeah, we had indoors, indoor snowballs, possibly won't do that again. But it was good fun. But possibly not again. But just to have that element and to have.

Rich Hurst

Do you, is that part of what you do in identifying the people in you know, because like identifying the different skills within a team and making them work to the to the team's best, you know, ability.

Sarah Carter

Yeah, everybody has their own kind of responsibility. But it's not said as I need you to do this, I need you to that. It's just sort of known that the team help each other. And when I when I choose who I'm having in my team, I'm very, very lucky that I get to choose who I have. And there have been people that have wanted to come and join the team. But I kind of look at, I look at the skater I look at who brings them to the building. And if I don't think that that person will fit within my team dynamic, then I will help them to the best of my ability to find a different coach. But I don't take them into my team, it will be very easy for me to just say oh, well, yes, that's going to be additional money coming in. That's brilliant, thank you very much. But if they're not going to be part of my team, and have the same work ethic as the rest of my team, then I can't have them within the team.

Rich Hurst

Is it work ethic? Are there other things that you will kind of you know you look forward to come into a team you know, I suppose as a coach, you set those you set those non negotiables and then you look for those who sign up to join the team. So it's work ethic. What else is it?

Sarah Carter

I think a lot of it is to be able to have empathy for everybody else in the team. And to just be a team player. It is an individual sport. But I think if you don't have the backing of the people around you, it very quickly becomes something that you don't know what to do if it goes wrong. And if you know this, there's been days where I've had people at the side of the rink, crying because it's not gone, right. But within five, five minutes, there's somebody a mom and dad, are carer another skater there so that they know they're not on their own. And I think that's, that's the biggest.

Rich Hurst

Is it even more important in inclusive sport to do that kind of looking beyond the athlete?

Sarah Carter

Yeah, always, always, always, always. For me, it's person first, and then everything else second. So whatever that person needs to get to whatever they want to be doing, because not everybody wants to be going to World Championships. You know, I've got some members of my team that they still go down the test structure, they go down our plan of the year, but they never compete, and they don't test and that's completely fine. If they want to, they want to if they don't, they don't. Even my ones that I've had, I've had one of my girls for about 12 years now 13 years, she's never wanted to test or compete. Every single time and opportunity to test or compete comes up, she gets told about it. Because you never know when she's gonna go actually, I think I will, and that's entirely up to her.

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 coaches chats with the people behind the podcast, the Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire partnership, and the University of Worcester. The introductory podcast is out right now. But you can also go and listen to the conversation we had with Tom Reeves, who coaches a mixed ability rugby team, he feels the approach you need to all your athletes is one that should be applied everywhere.

Tom Reeves

Do you know what, all good coaching should be inclusive. Wherever you're coaching, your coaching is not inclusive, you're doing it wrong, and that doesn't matter who your audience is. 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, maybe more than similar things, but they all different. They'll have different fears, they'll have different objectives. Come from different places have trained and learn for different lengths of time. So has to be inclusive, and I think that's changed in me I've mixed abilities for mixability really has changed me as a person.

Rich Hurst

Remember, you can find more details and links to all episodes at www.activehw.co.uk or just search for Spotlight on Inclusive Coaching. And now, let's get back to this podcast.

Does it mean you kind of have to manage a group size as well, because you can only really know so much about so many people as an individual coach?

Sarah Carter

Yes, I do have to manage my group size. We're quite it's quite a big team at the moment. There's 25 athletes on the team at the minute. But that's where people like Sophie come in for me that she has shown an interest in coaching. I kind of tweaked around a few of the group lessons to kind of go, can you just do that for me Soph? Can you do that for me? So just to see almost putting her in at the deep end, just see how she would react with it, how she will cope. And then knowing that she dealt with it brilliantly. And they've been times where she's picked up stuff that I've not noticed. And I've looked over and been like, Oh, she's dealing with that. Cool. All right, carry on and give her the give her a little look and be like, you okay, yeah, got it. And having people like Sophie in the team, for me, is an absolute game changer knowing that I trust her with my team.

Rich Hurst

Yeah. What's that been like Sophie? I know, it's not been very long, or what's that been like going from kind of making that transition from participant to coach?

Sophie Carter

um, it's been really fun. I really enjoyed it. I enjoy, like, part of my job. I work with kids, like I've always had this interest in coaching and teaching and what that means sort of to an athlete now. It's been challenging at times, because you're sort of you explain it one way and the person goes, I don't get it. And you have that moment of, oh god, how am I going to change what I'm saying? How is this gonna work? Because I thought my explanation was dead on and they just don't know what I'm saying. But you find a way around and I think it's almost like on the job kind of learning and that in itself is so helpful because, as Sarah said, especially in inclusive, the athletes are also different. There's no real kind of, you can't just sit, read a textbook on how to coach and be like, right, I'm going to now be able to deal with everyone. Because if I did that the first time I got on the ice, the first time I spoke to someone, immediately would be like, this wasn't in my textbook, especially because like, inclusive isn't the go to a lot of the time, it's very much like, right? How hard can we push athletes? How far can we go, and inclusivity sort of gets left behind in the kind of desire for top, top athletes. So if you sort of went into like a coaching thing, and said, well, my athlete doesn't want to do that, because they can't handle it, and they or their disability doesn't allow them to do that. It would sort of be a, well, that's what they have to do, that's what we do in the sport, it's like, but it doesn't have to be. And I think that idea of it doesn't have to be is what I've learned through sort of starting to coach is sure you get thrown in in the deep end, but you have that relationship with the person you're working with, like if you say to them, Look, I actually don't know how best to help you with this, explain what you're doing to me, and why what I'm saying isn't working. There'll be a moment in that way, like, Oh, that's it, like they've misunderstood me, or I just need to change my words there, or they actually know what they're doing. That's their effort. And that's going to be the best they can do it. And I should be really proud of the fact that they've achieved it by themselves. And I think that sort of thing that I've learned is, things don't always match up to exactly the textbook definition of what coaching is and how it should work. But that doesn't mean people are doing the wrong thing. It doesn't mean they aren't trying.

Rich Hurst

Comes back to adaptability. We talked about it, isn't it?

Sophie Carter

Yeah, yeah.

Rich Hurst

Now, Sarah, you also work in NLP? And mindset? How does that fit into what you're doing coaching wise?

Sarah Carter

It's, it's fed into it. Without kind of realising a lot of the time, I retrained in 2020 when the rinks were shut. So I kind of didn't want to waste that time, they wanted to do something else. And have a really good friend who is an NLP trainer. So I decided I'm gonna give this a go and kind of interested in it, and absolutely love it. It's on a par for me with skating coach, and how much I love it. I had some of my guys, when we were allowed to go back into the buildings, some of my guys physically couldn't get themselves to walk into the building. So there's some NLP techniques that I did, I did some work with them. And those people have handed in their videos for world championships this year, and they won gold medals last year. So for the fact that I knew how to do that, and how to get them back in the building is a massive thing and mindset and overcoming certain things that you think, Oh, I can't do that. There's no way I can do that. And then a couple of weeks later, having done the work, they're like, Oh, my God, I'm doing it. And I didn't even realise that kind of stuff all the time. And like I film little snippets of them all the time doing little bits. And then sometimes if they're having a bit of a down day, I can send them like, well, this time last year, you'd have been over the moon doing what you did this morning. Here's what you were doing last year, here's what you did this morning. And they go, Oh my God, you're right. And having the skills and the NLP and the mindset coaching behind me to do that, bring it into the rink, I just think is so helpful.

Rich Hurst

How much do you find that with Inclusive athletes than the need for those, the ways to help build confidence is much is much greater? How much is that there's ever a greater need for athletes need that confidence boost?

Sarah Carter

I think I think there definitely is, I think between my mainstream skaters and my inclusive skaters. On the whole, I tend to find that from a confidence point of view, my mainstream skaters started at like five out of 10. My inclusive skaters are generally starting at like one or two, purely because a lot of them for most of their life been told, Oh, you can't do that. Or you can't do that. And maybe don't try that because you might not be very good at it. You know, and like, my guy that I was talking about before, his original coach had told his mom, if we can get him to go backwards, I think that's going to be his limit. But if you go to his house now, down their hallway, you can literally run your fingers down all medals and the entire hallway jangles he's World Champion, God knows how many times over now I've lost count. And he's got world records to his name in lots of different disciplines within the sport. But his original coach said, if we can get him to go backwackwards. So I think me having the mindset side

behind me, enables me to work with skaters like that, yeah. And also to work with the parents or the carers or people that bring them into the building, because they've also been told your child's different, you know, that if we can get them to do this, then brilliant. And a lot of the time, I find the parents are quite shocked when they say, oh, just to let you know, he's autistic, or she's got ADHD. Sometimes I have to rein it in, because my first responses are 'amazing'. They're going to have Inclusive Skating and, and the mainstream side to go down. And it confuses them sometimes because I get excited and like, Oh, yes, getting we've got another one for the team. And they're not used to that they used to kind of go in Oh, really sorry to tell you. And for people to go, oh, I don't know how to react to that. I don't know how to answer that. Okay. Whereas, I mean, Sophie is the same as well, we just kind of go Oh, yes. Cool. All right. And like, let's find out what you need. And let's, let's, let's get you some medals, and let's do this kind of thing.

Rich Hurst

So for coaches coming to any kind of inclusive sport, but I know we've been talking about skating, but any kind of inclusive sport, what sort of advice would you give them? Maybe what sort of bits of advice have you given to Sophie, to take you through some of those that you've that you would give to those coaches?

Sarah Carter

I would say, remember, it's all about the person, the athlete, what do they want? Not what do you want as the coach because you might say, I want 10 gold medalists, it's about what that person wants. And if they don't want to compete or test, and they don't compete or test, if that means that they go through slightly differently in a different timescale, then that's up to you as the coach to work that out, make it work for them. But I think for people getting into inclusive coaching, I just said, Just do it. It's so much fun. And some of the stories that we have are like mispronounce words and things like that are just amazing, I would not change it for the world. And to be able to bring people like Sophie on board, she's clearly got a passion for the sport. She's clearly got a passion for coaching. And she's very good at it. Very, very good at it. And for me, as a coach to be able to literally go, here are five of my skaters please choreograph a whole routine? And I'll see you in an hour kind of thing. And she does it. And it's yes, I do throw her in it sometimes. But she always knows that I'm there. And if she needs to come and ask a question, she comes in ask the question. And for anybody getting into Inclusive Skating or inclusive coaching in general, I would just say, try not to be fearful of it.

Rich Hurst

And Sophie, what would you say to someone who's at that stage? Maybe where they're participating? But they're thinking going into coaching, especially if it's an inclusive environment?

Sophie Carter

Yeah, I'd say in the end, it's, you can do it, like, it's, it seems like a big thing when you're suddenly like, Oh, I'm gonna be a coach, you know, like, suddenly, I'm in charge. But the things that you sort of take for granted, especially in your sport, the little skills, things like that, that's where you begin, like, that's where you start. And it's, especially with Inclusive they're people to, like Sarah said, in the end, you all you're doing is coaching another person. Even if you did that with sort of mainstream athletes, you'd have to do something different for every single one. That's just how coaching works. That's the

importance of tailoring your coaching to your athlete, you would do that naturally. So, with inclusive, there might be a bigger gap in what you sort of expect to do and what you end up doing. But there's still that element of you are teaching someone a skill that you know how to do. You just have to help them understand what you're saying and what is going to work for them. Like there definitely shouldn't be this fear thing of all but it's inclusive. I don't, I never done that before. I don't know what to do. It's the same as any form of coaching. You just have to look at what your athlete needs and change what you need to do.

Rich Hurst

Guys, thank you very much. 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 coach's 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.