Overview

Have you ever wished you could be more involved in sports? Do you want to contribute more to everyday conversations about sports? If you have lost your vision recently, do you want to get back into your former fitness routines? If so, this course can suggest a variety of sports and recreational activities that are accessible by those who are blind or visually impaired. Its goal is to help you or your blind family member participate more in sports and recreation. The course is divided into three lessons. Lesson 1 analyzes the value of physical activity. It suggests how to overcome obstacles that have often limited participation by those who are blind or visually impaired. Lesson 2 describes activities in which blind and visually impaired people can participate either with sighted or visually impaired people. Lesson 3 describes how specific sports can be adapted for participants who are blind or visually impaired. The Resource List that accompanies this
course includes general sports organizations, associations for specific sports and recreation activities, as well as vendors of adapted equipment and games.

You do not need any skills or equipment to start this course. You are, however, required to submit three assignments, one at the end of each lesson. These assignments enable your instructor to measure your ability to apply the concepts presented in the lessons. Submit each assignment when you complete each lesson, and wait for your instructor’s reply before sending in the next assignment. In this way, you can apply any corrections or comments from your instructor to subsequent lessons and assignments.

Complete each assignment in the medium of your choice. Then mail it to your instructor at The Hadley School for the Blind, 700 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL 60093-0299. If you are blind or visually impaired, you may send your assignments in an envelope labeled Free Matter for the Blind. Sighted students must affix postage. To fax your
assignments or to send them electronically, contact your instructor for instructions.
Lesson 2:
Sports and Recreational Possibilities

Lesson 1 analyzed the value of physical activity. It also suggested how to overcome obstacles that have often limited participation by those who are blind or visually impaired. This lesson describes activities that you or a family member who is blind can participate in with either sighted or sight-impaired people.

As this lesson points out, the variety of sports and recreational activities available to people who are blind or visually impaired is nearly limitless. The lesson briefly describes some of these activities and the organizations that offer information and group programs. It also includes three personal accounts by athletes who are blind. Familiarizing yourself with this information may inspire you or a blind family member to be more active in sports and recreation.

Objectives
After completing this lesson you will be able to
a. Choose sports and recreational activities that blind and visually impaired people commonly engage in with other blind and visually impaired people

b. Choose sports activities that sight-impaired people engage in with sighted people

c. Examine how sports improved the lives of three individuals who are blind

Activities for Blind and Visually Impaired Participants

People who are blind or visually impaired can choose from many activities, and many sports organizations promote their participation. If you are just beginning to get involved in sports, you may feel more comfortable starting out in an activity designed for people with sight loss. This section describes some of the activities and sponsoring organizations for those with sight loss. You might find other activities, or you may even create a group recreational activity in which you or a family member can participate.
Bowling and Lawn Bowling

One relatively easy and less intimidating sport to try is bowling. The American Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA) provides local, state, regional, and national opportunities for bowlers who are blind. Many large cities in the United States have ABBA bowling leagues that operate in the same way as other local leagues, except that they usually use adaptive bowling rails and sighted volunteers. You can participate in bowling as a social recreation or you can join a competitive league. Highly competitive tournaments offer cash prizes.

Lawn bowling is, as it sounds, an outdoor version of bowling. The Canadian Blind Sports Association (CBSA) sponsors this sport in North America. The Vancouver, British Columbia, chapter of the CBSA is especially active in lawn bowling. Lawn bowling has been proposed as an official Olympic sport.

Darts

Voice output technology has made this popular game accessible to individuals who are blind or
visually impaired. A talking dartboard provides the feedback for a regulation game. The Braille Sports Foundation holds annual audio darts competitions in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The talking dartboard is available for purchase.

**Beep Baseball**
You may enjoy following professional baseball in the media, or you may have enjoyed playing softball before experiencing sight loss. If so, a good way to get active again is to play beep baseball, an adapted version of this popular sport. It is sponsored by the National Beep Baseball Association (NBBA). Many major towns and cities in the United States have beep baseball programs. The Telephone Pioneers (a national volunteer association) developed and produces the beeping softballs and bases.

**Basketball**
The adapted version of this game has been receiving increasing attention in the last few years. The Visually Impaired Athletic Association (VIAA) worked with Wilson Sporting Goods to develop a
goal and a bell-filled ball that allow sight-impaired players to play on organized teams. Though few teams have been organized yet, basketball is surely destined to become a more popular activity for people with visual impairments as the equipment becomes available. If this sport appeals to you or a family member, you might be able to organize a team in your community.

**Goalball**

This goal-oriented sport is the only sport especially designed for blind or blindfolded players. The playing area is about the size of a volleyball court, with raised boundaries. Each team has three players. The offense tries to roll the ball past the defensive players and across their goal line, which is the entire end line. The ball is rubber, similar in size to a basketball, with bells inside. The defensive players slide across the floor on their sides in an attempt to block the ball with their bodies. Of the three, the center player is placed slightly ahead of the wing players so that the center can move safely across the front line to block balls. The wings can move toward the middle
of the playing area without colliding with the center. The game can be rough because the hard rubber ball travels rapidly from the thrower to the defender, especially in competitive games involving top-notch players. Hip, elbow, and knee pads are usually worn during such games. But despite the powerful play, people of all ages enjoy playing this game when the players are at a similar skill level. If you would like to find a goalball team in your community, contact the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) and ask for the sponsor nearest you.

Golf

Though this game has been adapted for players who are blind, few local programs are available. Nevertheless, the U.S. Blind Golf Association (USBGA) is the main advocate of golf for those who are visually impaired or blind. It oversees an annual national competition.

USABA

If you or a family member would like to progress to competitive sports, the USABA offers numerous
competitive opportunities. This national organization, which is divided into regions, includes several state chapters. Its members are primarily blind athletes and their coaches. State, regional, and national competitions are held in track and field, swimming, gymnastics, judo, wrestling, power lifting, tandem cycling, and ski racing.

Athletes from the USABA compete nationally to qualify for international events. The best-known international event is the Paralympics, held every four years in conjunction with the Olympics. Refer to the Resource List that accompanies this course for contact information.

**Activities for Sight-Impaired and Sighted Participants**

People who are blind or visually impaired participate in the same recreational activities, workouts, and sports competitions as everyone else. Unless you live in a metropolitan area, the organizations described in the preceding section may not be readily available to you. Therefore, community activities are a good way to enjoy
lifelong recreational endeavors.

In choosing sports, you might consider individual sports rather than team sports. Individual sports such as swimming or track require less adaptation, and success depends on your own performance rather than the combined efforts of team members. You may wish to begin with a basic fitness class, because the skills you acquire there can make it easier to adapt a new sport. Similarly, if you have a child who is blind or visually impaired, the earlier your child starts developing physical skills the easier it will be for your child to participate in sports. Find activities that develop spatial awareness, balance, coordination, and the basic skills used in all sports and recreational activities.

Fitness and recreation programs may be competitive or noncompetitive. Many people who are blind compete in distance races, bowl in sighted leagues, ride in tandem cycling races, ski in cross-country events, wrestle in open events, battle in Tae Kwon Do meets, throw the discus in track-and-field meets, and hoist barbells in power-
lifting matches. Many young people who are blind or visually impaired compete in high school and college interscholastic sports, including competitive swimming, wrestling, cross-country running, track-and-field events, and even football. In noncompetitive activities, the most popular activities are bowling, jogging, hiking, fishing, aerobics, weight lifting, tandem cycling, and canoeing. The following paragraphs describe some of these activities. You can find more information about these and others in the Resource List.

**Tandem Bicycling**

This is one of the most versatile recreational activities, which people can do at any skill level, and in almost any season right from their home. It is a wonderful way to spend recreational time with family members and friends. The person who is blind or visually impaired sits on the rear seat, holds onto the handlebars, and pedals. The sighted
guide, who sits in the front seat, steers the bicycle and pedals.

**Canoeing and Rowing**

As you glide through quiet waters, you can enjoy nature while increasing your physical activity. Both canoeing and rowing require little skill. In a canoe, where both people paddle while facing forward, the sighted guide sits in the stern (back) because you steer a canoe from the stern. In a rowboat, the guide again sits in the stern. The rower and guide face one another, and the rower controls the boat, following the directions of the guide. If you are concerned about tipping a canoe, you may prefer a rowboat. Because of its flat bottom, it is much more difficult to capsize a rowboat than a canoe. Another advantage to rowboats is that the oars are fixed in their locks, so they cannot fall or twist away. Always wear a well-fitted life jacket or personal flotation device when canoeing or rowing.

**Downhill and Cross-Country Skiing and Waterskiing**

For many people who are blind or visually impaired, skiing seems daunting. This sport need not be
frightening, however, especially with experienced organizations to instruct and encourage you. Once you have acquired the basic skills, you can enjoy skiing with a sighted guide at any resort or facility. Or you can compete with other blind or visually impaired skiers.

Opportunities for snow skiing are offered through the USABA and Ski for Light, Inc. (SFL). The Sons of Norway sponsor SFL, which provides cross-country ski instruction and competition during an annual one-week outing held at ski resorts around the United States. Its regional organizations also provide summer programming.

USA WaterSki offers instructional and competitive programs for blind water-skiers. The annual competition is held at Florida’s Busch Gardens, and some state chapters offer clinics. Competitive events include slalom, jump, barefoot, and trick skiing.

**Personal Experiences with Sports and Recreation**

The following stories tell the experiences of three
people who are totally blind. The first is from Lori, a 19-year-old college student who has been extremely active in sports and recreation throughout her life. The second personal account is from John, a teacher in his 40s who lost his sight as a young man, yet still runs marathons. The third story is from Harold, a retired counselor who started his own bowling league.

**Lori’s Story**

Sports and recreational activities have always been an important part of my life. While attending my local public school, I started tap dancing. At age seven, I switched to roller skating. As my skills improved, I eventually progressed to the competition level. My skating partner and I brought home several trophies and qualified for national competitions. At the same time, I pursued other interests. I spent my Saturday mornings with our local youth bowling league. My summers were filled with gymnastics, waterskiing, canoeing, biking, swimming, and ballet lessons. Later, I started riding horses. Though it conflicted with my
schedule, I still managed to participate in a few horse shows and long-distance rides.

At a sports camp I was exposed to several new activities, among them track and field, wrestling, ice skating, sailing, and, best of all, goalball. I pursued this sport and became the center for the Western Michigan University women’s team. We traveled to a number of regional and national competitions, always bringing home a medal. My interest in goalball made me aware of my physical conditioning. Before long, I was working out on a regular weight-lifting schedule. All of these activities are still in my life, but my latest discovery is downhill skiing. I really love it!

Along the way, I encountered people who insisted that I was not capable of participating, but I never gave up. I am blessed with parents who always encouraged me to pursue my goals. I originally started roller skating because my mother read that it was a good way to build balance and coordination skills. With practice, my ambition to be successful matured. I soon found myself
applying my drive for perfection to everything I did. Though I still encountered people who tried to discourage me from trying certain things, I was determined to overcome these obstacles. I’ve always known that I am capable of doing just about anything.

It is not unusual for someone at first to try to prevent a disabled person from participating. For instance, even though I have earned ribbons for showing horses, I was denied the right to compete in an equestrian club simply because of my blindness. Nevertheless, I was determined to prove that I was qualified to perform. I took the time to explain to the instructor how I could be a contributing member of the equestrian team. With practice and experience, your ability to handle situations like this can also improve and you, too, can gain acceptance.

**John’s Story**

Mainly, I am a long-distance runner. I began running seriously when I was about 30 and now run five miles daily. I also swim, bike, and ski. I get
into running so much that I sometimes forget to stretch, which has cost me an injury or two. Stretching is obviously really important, but I just can’t get into it.

In the early 1980s, I was cross-country skiing and my guide asked me about running. I thought I’d try something new. At first, I started running slowly for short distances, but I became so enthusiastic that now I really look forward to my daily workout.

It’s challenging to find and train a running guide. Explaining what to tell me and what not to tell me, then adjusting my speed, are all hurdles to overcome. But once my guide and I are in the groove, it’s a pleasure. I have a new guide plus a new friend.

Training on my own is somewhat of a problem. But a treadmill, pool, and exercise bike all help. Though training guides and working out on my own were initial obstacles, I overcame them with a lot of desire and assertiveness.
I’m 45 years old and still participate in marathons and triathlons. Marathons are 26-mile races and are as challenging as anything I have ever done. Triathlons are long-distance races involving running, swimming, and bicycling. Exercise and sports are an integral part of my life. I enjoy the health, friendships, and challenge that result. I love to pass all those sighted runners during races and hear how I inspired them.

Harold’s Story

In 1964 I began bowling, but it was not easy. I thought I was lucky because there was a blind bowling league in town. That meant I wouldn’t have to deal with the attitude that the public typically had about blind people. Unfortunately, I ran into another kind of barrier—one related to my skin color. They wouldn’t let me in because African-Americans were not accepted in the Caucasian blind leagues. Therefore, I decided to start a league that anyone, regardless of age, race, sex, or national origin, could get into. To do this, I contacted as many visually impaired people as I could, both black and white, but only black people
showed up. After a year of bowling together and becoming better acquainted, we formed a league in Detroit, Michigan, at the Lucky Strikes Bowling Lane.

This league consisted of four teams of four people each. The league, the Blind Associated Bowlers, began in September 1965. When we tried to enter state tournaments, we were not well accepted. We were always placed at the farthest end of the bowling alley, and, whenever possible, in areas that excluded us from the other bowlers. At the time, I was a representative to a state organization. Because bowling was so important to us, I went to the state meetings and complained about the treatment that we were receiving. This gradually led to change. In 1970 I was elected president of the Michigan Blind Bowling Association (MBBA), which includes 10 states of the Midwest. During my 12-year tenure, blind bowlers became fully accepted in state tournaments. I am now aiming to include seniors and people with other disabilities in our organization.
As a result of all our efforts to include anyone who wanted to join in blind bowling, the American Blind Bowling Association asked me to host the 1980 National Tournament near Detroit. Blind bowlers had achieved national equality!

I have also learned that bowling can help get people involved in vocational rehabilitation training and into employment. When we attend tournaments, we talk to other blind people about their careers and how they support themselves. These conversations have encouraged many blind bowlers to find work. Fourteen of the sixteen people who began in the original Detroit league are employed.

Bowling has obviously meant a lot to me. I would encourage everyone to give it a try.

**Summary**

This lesson described activities that you or a family member who is blind can participate in with either sighted or sight-impaired people. It briefly described organizations that offer group programs, suggested community activities that individuals
Assignment 2

Complete the following assignment in the medium of your choice. Begin by including your full name, student ID, address, and phone number. Also mention the name of this course, Assignment 2, your instructor’s name, and the date you plan to mail this assignment to the Hadley School. Then respond to the following items:

1. Select a sport or recreational activity that you or a family member would like to engage in with other visually impaired people. Gather information from various organizations about that sport. Describe how this information could help you or a family member access this sport.

2. Select a sport or recreational activity that you or a family member would like to engage in with sighted people. Gather information from various organizations about that sport. Describe how this information could help you or a family member access this sport.
3. How did Lori’s, Harold’s, and John’s participation in sports and recreational activities influence their outlook on life? Describe how participating in a sport or recreational activity could change your or a family member’s outlook on life.

When you have completed this assignment, send it to your instructor according to the instructions in the Overview to this course. Then proceed to Lesson 3, Adapting Sports and Recreation Activities.