



# Rallying for all

## GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS INTRODUCING *PLUSBALLS* AND RACKETS TO OLDER PEOPLE

Please take a few minutes to read these important points

### **Plusballs**

These are highly visible, ultra-light, ultra-slow balls made of a special kind of paper. They are easy to inflate with (or without) a straw. They are entirely safe and unthreatening for older and more vulnerable people and will do no damage, whatsoever, to furniture and fittings.

*Plusballs* are a bit like balloons but with four distinct advantages. Their flight is a faithful parabola (whereas the pear shape of a balloon and/or the weight of the knot produces an unpredictable flight path), there is no knot to tie, they can be used over and over again and they won't burst – unless hit extremely hard.

Their main use for the past twelve years has been in schools and junior sports clubs for both able-bodied children and those with disabilities. We have distributed hundreds of thousands of *plusballs* mainly through educational/sports catalogues or directly to schools and colleges.

Recently we have been exploring their use with older people, mainly in residential care homes. Almost all participants have succeeded.

### **Essential information**

#### **DO**

- Take a few minutes to familiarise yourself with the flight of a *plusball* and how it moves (larger balls move slower than smaller ones) – first use your hands (with open palms) and then a mini racket.
- Select those people you think would respond well to using *plusballs* and seat them in a line, arc or circle fairly close together. (Ability to eye-track a multi-coloured object and some hand movement is necessary). Some people prefer to watch at first, but most can usually be encouraged to join in.
- Pat an inflated *plusball* playing *keepy uppy* on your own and make sure the players are watching – interact with them, pointing out how easy it is, how light the ball is and ask how many could do it.
- Give out appropriate rackets and ask players to grip the racket loosely and (depending on the racket) as close to the head of the racket as possible.
- Ensure their rackets are pointing down somewhat - at an angle of approximately 10°-20° with the horizontal - otherwise the ball won't come back to you. Hits will all be underarm initially. (THE ANGLE OF THE RACKET FOR EVERY HIT IS KEY TO SUCCESS).
- Tell players that squeezing the ball with the fingers when picking it up will deflate it. Therefore they (or you) should *scoop* it up. **INCIDENTALLY, IF THE BALL IS PARTIALLY DEFLATED, IT CAN BE (ALMOST MAGICALLY) REINFLATED BY HITTING IT SHARPLY A FEW TIMES, SO DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TO KEEP BLOWING A BALL UP.**
- Stay very close (only 1 metre away) to the players, for every rally.
- Work your way along the line from one player to the next trying to keep the ball going (in the air). Players can hit the ball more than just once so that it gets back to the facilitator. Likewise for the facilitator, of course, whose priority is to keep the rallies going and get the ball into the hitting zone.
- Pat the ball back into the precise hitting zones (i.e. on the awaiting rackets) of the players. This accuracy is vital and will come with practice. If you don't put the ball in the hitting zone the routine could break down.

- Work out if the player prefers hitting on their right side (forehand for right-handers) or the left side (backhand). Vice versa for left-handers of course.
- Be aware that whilst the balls will do no harm, swinging rackets can knock things like food and drinks over - and players need to be aware of those sitting nearby.

## **DON'T**

- Panic when first hitting a *plusball*! Many people do – quite unnecessarily! Be relaxed, hold the racket loosely and *wait* for the ball to come down – don't follow it with your racket. People take a minute or two to get used to the slow pace of *plusballs* since, not unreasonably, they expect them to behave like normal balls. Once you understand their movement you can explain it to your players.
- Take too much notice of people saying “I can't do that”. Or “I'm no good at that”. If they can hold a racket (or move their hands) and eye- track the ball then they will almost certainly experience *some* success – perhaps even a great deal of success! (Of course, if someone really doesn't want to have a go, it's pointless pressing the point – but they might find it fun watching).
- Get too far away from the players – the nearer the better. One metre is fine.
- Worry if you are hitting the ball more than once back to the player (or them to you). The point is to keep the rally going, even though you might “cheat” a bit!
- Hit the ball back to the player if (s)he isn't ready or if the racket is at the wrong angle – help him/her make the necessary adjustments.

## **VARIATIONS TO THESE EARLY ROUTINES**

The following more advanced routines clearly depend on the ability, enthusiasm, fitness, medical conditions and attention span of the players. Some of these could be tried:

- Changing from backhand to forehand.
- Hitting with both sides of the racket alternately.
- Using the non-dominant hand.
- Attempting overhead shots – a bit like a serve in tennis.
- Patting the ball along the line (any number of hits possible) rather than back to the facilitator each time.
- Playing *keepy uppy* solo – could develop into a competitive game to see which player can do the most hits before the ball falls to the floor.
- Rallying with another player, so that the two players who are seated and facing each other 1-2m apart, can keep a rally going. Seats could be arranged so that *doubles* can be played.
- Using more advanced equipment such as smaller, faster *plusballs*, longer rackets, slow shuttlecocks, fleece balls, Success Balls etc

For more able players who wish to progress to a higher level of activity which involves standing and moving, please consider ordering *Racket Skills for Beginners – Twenty Lesson Plans* from *plusballs* for more ideas.

## **Equipment**

*Various plusballs packs with or without rackets are now available.*

**PRICES**

3 mini rackets with pack of 6 x 21cm *plusballs* (+ instructions) £14.95 plus £2.95 p&p Please quote SPB3

6 mini rackets with pack of 12 x 21cm *plusballs* (+ instructions) £29.95 plus £3.95 p&p Please quote SPB6

12 mini rackets with pack of 20 x 21cm *plusballs* (+ instructions) £49.95 p&p inc Please quote SPB12

VAT will not be added

Please contact *plusballs* if varying quantities or additional equipment are required.