

Football 5-a-side

Hello everyone! My name is Stephen Cannell. I'm a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Toyohashi. Today I would like to introduce the Paralympic event football 5-a-side (also known as blind soccer.)

Football 5-a-side is a sport for athletes with visual impairments. Teams consist of 4 field players and a goalkeeper. The field players must all have a visual impairment, but the goalkeeper is not required to have one. Because of this, most goalkeepers have no visual impairment. Goalkeepers are only allowed to touch the ball within a specified area in front of the goal. All field players are required to cover their eyes with eye shades.



The rules of football 5-a-side are based on futsal rules, however a few adjustments have been made for the safety of the players and the competitiveness of the matches. For example, like goalball, the ball has bells inside. The players can listen to the bells to judge the ball's position. They don't only rely on the sound of the bells, though, they also receive information from the goalkeeper and the guide who stands behind the opponent's goal. They relay information such as the position and direction of the ball, as well as the positions of the goals, players, etc.

Until the 2016 Rio Paralympics, the goal was also the same size as a futsal goal, but in 2016 the goal was made larger to the size of a field hockey goal. The length of matches was also changed. Matches were previously two 25 minute halves, with a running clock. That means that even if the ball went out of bounds or there was a foul, the timer would continue. After the change, the halves have been reduced to 20 minutes each, but the clock now stops in cases such as out-of-bounds or fouls.

The pitch is surrounded by a 1 meter fence. This means that out of bounds is much less common than standard soccer. The athletes can touch the fence to understand their position, as well as use the fence to redirect the ball.

When a foul is committed in the penalty area, a penalty kick is awarded. In a penalty kick, the player stands 6 meters from the goal, and attempts to score 1 on 1 against the goalkeeper. Penalty kicks are also awarded when 6 or more fouls are committed in the same half. In this case, the penalty kick is taken from 8 meters from the goal instead of 6.

In order to avoid collisions, players are required to yell “Voy!”¹ when they attempt to steal the ball from the opponent. That being said, football 5-a-side is a very aggressive sport, and collisions are still quite common. To make sure that the players can hear the bells, the other players, and the guide and goalkeeper, the audience is asked to be silent during play.

8 teams will appear in the Paralympics. Currently Brazil, Argentina, and the host country Japan are qualified. Brazil has won gold in football 5-a-side at every Paralympics where it has been an event. They have also won the world championship 5 times. Ricardo Alves has been with the team for 3 of their Paralympic gold medals.

The only team that could be called a rival for Brazil is Argentina. Argentina defeated Brazil at the world championships in 2002 and 2006. They have a silver and a bronze medal at the Paralympics, and will surely be aiming for gold next year. The incredibly strong Maximiliano Espinillo took the gold medal and MVP at this year’s blind soccer grand prix.

Japan will be making its first football 5-a-side appearance. The captain, Ryo Kawamura, as well as veteran Tomonari Kuroda and 2019 Grand Prix Best Goalkeeper Daisuke Ito are all strong competitors. Let’s cheer on Japan as they make their world stage debut!

¹ Voy means “go” in Spanish.