

Different Strokes With Alistair Jones at Badminton, Wycombe

By Tony Flower



A recent opportunity arose for Talkback to take advantage of badminton sessions, coached professionally by Alistair Jones of Badminton Wycombe. Inevitably there is a vast range of abilities among our members and Alistair's patient and calm approach has been vital to the success of the sessions. When they first started, some members were quiet and reluctant to join in. However, there has been massive progress in everyone, as their hand/eye coordination has improved and listening skills developed.

We caught up with Alistair to gain his perspective on how things were going:

What is your background in badminton?

I started playing at 8 years old and have represented the County and England internationally. I met my wife through playing badminton, so it's been a big part of my life.

How did you get involved with Talkback and running sessions for our members?

Through coincidence - I saw some people knocking a shuttlecock around in the car park at Hilltop and invited them in to have a look at our facilities. From there we started talking about how Talkback members could benefit and what we could offer.

Have you any previous experience of working with people with learning disabilities and/or autism?

None at all. My father taught people with disabilities in Devon and I had some exposure to what he was trying to do. He made some mistakes, but learnt from them. For instance he bought bespoke rackets with larger heads to try to make it easier, but it didn't work. My philosophy is to treat everyone the same and don't make assumptions about their ability. Initially I had assumed that a person who is non-verbal wouldn't understand what I was telling them, but I soon learnt that their ability to hit a shuttle bore no resemblance to my preconceived ideas. I try to start from a base and make improvements, to develop them as players. We focus on a particular technical theme each week and you can see the difference. There are a lot of skills to gain from playing badminton – developing independence, absorbing information, concentration, communication etc.

What are your aspirations for the future of Badminton Wycombe?

I want to continue to promote diversity. I like to see the place full with all members of the community – top European players on one court, older people on the next, and family groups alongside those with a disability. I'd love to put on an afternoon or evening where parents can come along and see what we're doing. We have been fortunate to gain funding from Badminton England for our disability sessions and we are very grateful for the opportunity. We want to run as many sessions as possible from the funding and make it mainstream.

Thanks to the generous funding from Badminton England and Alistair's donation of his time, 23 people with a learning disability and/or autism have benefited so far from some excellent coaching. It's a pleasure to see so many participating and reaping the rewards.

