



Chapter 1

An Overview of BlazeSports America





Introduction

BlazeSports America's Mission

To improve the lives of children and adults with physical disabilities worldwide through sport, healthy lifestyles, the prevention of chronic illness, sport diplomacy, and human rights.

The History of BlazeSports America

BlazeSports America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is the legacy organization of the 1996 Paralympic Games held in Atlanta, Ga. These games, the first held on American soil, were the realization of the dreams of thousands of Americans involved in the growth and promotion of sports for persons with physical disabilities in the United States.

Seeking to develop a national program of community-based adaptive sports for children and adults with physical disabilities, the Atlanta Paralympic Organizing Committee established the United States Disabled Athletes Fund in 1993. In partnership with the Georgia Recreation and Park Association and its member agencies, the USDAF rolled out a model program called BlazeSports Georgia in 1998. The program, named BlazeSports Georgia after the wildly popular Atlanta Paralympic Games' mascot Blaze, quickly evolved into a comprehensive plan providing year-round local programs delivered by the community recreation provider; state-level sport camps, clinics, junior teams and competitions delivered by BlazeSports Georgia; and state and regional competitions sponsored by USDAF and other partnering organizations.

In 2002, USDAF launched a national program, BlazeSports America, in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association. Today BlazeSports America provides direct service in Georgia and nationally and internationally in developing countries. BlazeSports is also affiliated with local BlazeSports teams/programs in more than 60 communities and 29 states and the District of Columbia.

In 2006, USDAF officially changed its name to BlazeSports America. In 2007, the organization restructured to create the BlazeSports International Institute for Applied Sciences – the Division of Training and Education and the Division of Policy and Global Outreach to reflect the organization's historical role in capacity building and creating more local opportunities for disability sports in the United States and the developing world such as Egypt, South Africa, Jordan, Morocco and most recently Iran and Haiti.

BlazeSports America is recognized by the United States Olympic Committee serving on its Multi-Sport Organizational Council and serves as the National Coordinating Body for competitive sports for individuals with cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and survivors of stroke. BlazeSports is also the national member organization of the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association. CPISRA is a founding member of the International Paralympic Committee.

BlazeSports is led by a multi cultural and interdisciplinary staff and board representing the fields of disability sport, therapeutic recreation, physical education, sport psychology, sports science, nutrition, health promotion, and public health.



Who We Serve

BlazeSports America serves children and adults with spinal cord injury, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, muscular dystrophy, amputation, visual impairment or blindness as well as other physical disabilities.

Offices

BlazeSports America National Office

535 N. McDonough Street
Decatur, GA 30030

BlazeSports Office of Policy and Global Outreach

1050 K Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20001

BlazeSports Georgia Division

BlazeSports Georgia is a division of BlazeSports America that directly provides teams, camps, clinics and technical assistance in the state of Georgia. BlazeSports Georgia also serves as the local organizing committee for local, regional and national competitions.

BlazeSports Office of Public Policy and Global Outreach

A division of BlazeSports America that coordinates policy initiatives; builds grassroots networks; trains consumer spokespersons; conducts media advocacy training; enhances visibility through sports human rights strategies nationally and internally; and supports legislative initiatives.

BlazeSports Institute for Applied Sciences

BlazeSports Institute for Applied Sciences (BIAS) provides training, education, and professional growth opportunities that translate science into evidence-based practice. BIAS offers a variety of educational programs and technical assistance to cross-disciplinary professionals, persons with disabilities and their families, and community-based practitioners to encourage best practice in the fields of disability sport, physical activity, and health promotion. BIAS monitors new and emerging trends and developments in the field and provides *need-to-know* information in user-friendly formats.

Engrained in the BIAS philosophy is the commitment to the dissemination of information. BIAS utilizes an extensive network of partners in sport/exercise science, sport management, rehabilitation medicine, human services, and health sciences/public health to ensure successful interpretation and implementation of research and standards of best practice. This toolkit is one of the many products of the BlazeSports Institute.

Blaze Training, Education, and Certification (BlazeTEC)

BlazeSports Training, Education, and Certification (TEC) offer training, education, and CDSS (Certified Disability Sports Specialist) certification to ensure community-based competencies in disability sport services for persons with physical disabilities. BlazeTEC works closely with BIAS to develop standards for the CDSS criteria and curriculum, maintains an up-to-date certification procedure, and conducts CDSS renewal and recertification. BlazeTEC provides information to all BlazeSports clubs, partners, and affiliated entities regarding the CDSS criteria and curriculum.



Certified Disability Sport Specialist

The Certified Disability Sport Specialist (CDSS) is a certified coach, professional, or volunteer who has passed the CDSS examination administered by BIAS, and who has received certification to practice disability sport programming. Currently, BIAS provides four levels: CDSS Level I, II, III, and IV. These levels of accreditation are based on educational background, professional/work experience, continuing education, completion of the BIAS CDSS Curriculum, and successful completion of exams. The BIAS staff work closely with candidates to determine which level of certification is appropriate for their individual situations. The credential signifies the ability to provide safe, effective disability sport programs and knowledge of the latest research in the field. Further, the certification enhances existing credentials such as CTRS, CPRP, PT, OT, and others by demonstrating specialized knowledge in disability sport.

Distance Learning Opportunity

BIAS has developed a series of monthly webinars on current disability sport topics. Webinars are offered free to BlazeSports Clubs, Park and Recreation departments, colleges and universities and other organizations in the United States and across the world.

BlazeSports America Annual Conference

The Annual Conference is a three or four-day program of presentations, classroom instruction and hands-on training, attracting program staff, recreation professionals, coaches, academia, students and rehabilitation/health professionals. The Conference allows attendees to learn what is new in the world of disability sport, brainstorm with fellow colleagues and gain new ideas for program operations, among other benefits.

Training Sessions

BlazeSports America hosts training sessions on a variety of sport and program related subjects at a regional or national level. These educational programs are held at various sites around the country and are designed to enhance the skill levels of local service providers and participants.

Individualized Leisure Education and Community Reintegration Services

BIAS staff is available to assist local programs develop best practices in the area of leisure education and community reintegration skills.

Curbside Consulting

Curbside consulting is a service available through BIAS which allows local programs to contact BlazeSports America with questions on any type of program development issue, concern, or idea they are in need of assistance with. BIAS staff will research the topic and hold a direct consultation session with the local program.



International Programs

BlazeSports has implemented international sport development projects in emerging and developing countries worldwide using evidence-based best practices directly training and providing sustainable sport programs for thousands of persons with physical and multiple impairments. Over one-third of the participants have been women or girls and fifty percent of coaches, officials, and sport administrators trained have been persons with disabilities. In coordination and collaboration with in-country organizations and partners as well as other international non-governmental organizations (NGO), a comprehensive strategy for ensuring sustainability and best practice are successfully deployed on the ground. BIAS hosts several programs that involve sport professionals and athletes from other countries traveling to the United States to participate in various programs and learning opportunities.

BLAZE, The Mascot



BlazeSports' most prominent symbol is its mascot Blaze. Blaze is a phoenix, a mythical bird that rises from ashes to experience a renewed life. The phoenix appears in Egyptian, Arabian, Chinese, Russian and native American lore and in all instances symbolizes strength, vision, inspiration and survival, making it the ideal mascot for BlazeSports. Blaze first appeared at the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, before becoming BlazeSports' official mascot. With his bright colors, height and broad wing span, Blaze best represents those with disabilities' drive to succeed as they pursue sports recreationally and competitively. Today, Blaze is the most recognizable symbol of disability sport in America – and perhaps in the world.