

JANUARY 2022

ENGLAND ATHLETICS GUIDE

RUNNING AND SPRINTING WITH GUIDES GUIDANCE



RUNNING AND SPRINTING WITH GUIDES

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Welcome to our Running and Sprinting with Guides Guidance

This guide is designed to offer support and advice for anyone considering becoming a guide runner.

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INTRODUCTION

Being a guide runner can bring rewards for both runner and guide. Training with a Paralympic hopeful might provide a guide with new motivation, the buzz of competition or the chance to experience a world class arena. For the social, fitness and goal achieving runner, guiding can offer a whole new dimension to a running group.

Not all blind and partially sighted athletes need a guide. The rules for athletics also limit the use of guides to T11 athletes, and a choice for T12. Indeed, some athletes, for example Libby Clegg, will train without a guide most of the time but in races will always use one. Noel Thatcher chose the opposite – training with guides but racing solo. Each athlete's vision and preference is different, so a coach and athlete must explore what works best.

Running distance track and road events with a guide introduces technical challenges including physical interventions – shoulder knocking and pulling – and lots of verbal feedback and encouragement. For a perfectly run sprint, the emphasis is on executing a synchronised start and pickup.

Whilst a very good guide can help with race strategy and setting the rhythm, it is not pacing. During a race the leadership should come from the athlete. The advantages against rivals are made with well organised training, plus excellent team-work and understanding.

At the 2012 Paralympic Games, guide runners received medals and financial rewards for the first time for assisting with podium finishes. Elite guide runners often receive the same physiotherapy and medical insurance to ensure they are kept in track-shape.

THE BASICS

A guide ensures that a blind or partially sighted athlete can train and race along a set course. This is usually performed by the use of a loose strap or rope held between hands.

- ✓ On the track the guide will run on the right-hand side in races 200m or longer, going the long way around. The guide will need to stretch their stride around the bend and shorten again on the straight.
- ✓ In the sprints this depends on preference or field of vision.
- ✓ During a marathon up to four guides can be used (changing at 10k, 20k, 30k points).
- ✓ A guide can be of any gender, from any age group.



ORGANISATION AND RULES

General guidance

- ✓ Ensure that races are held in good light: daylight or well floodlit conditions.
- ✓ Provide lightweight, breathable fluorescent vests marked 'Guide' if possible.
- ✓ Guides do not pay an entry fee but will need accreditation.

Basic competition rules

- ✓ At the finish the athlete must cross the line before the guide runner.
- ✓ Athlete and guide must not run more than 0.5m apart, except for last 10m of the race when the rule doesn't apply, providing no interference is caused.
- ✓ An 'elbow lead' or 'tether' may be used, but no pushing/pulling etc.
- ✓ Verbal instruction is allowed.
- ✓ Guide runners must run! No bikes or roller skates permitted.

Road races

- ✓ Check how many guide runners are needed – and ensure they are transported to their appropriate place on the course.
- ✓ There should be awareness at water stations of what is needed for handing drinks to blind and visually impaired athletes.
- ✓ Assistance is allowed at water stations for athletes in T11-T13.

On the track

- ✓ World Para Athletics competition rules state blocks must be used by athlete and guide for all events up to 400m.
- ✓ Two guides may be used in races 800m or longer, but only one change is permitted. The Track Referee must be notified in advance and will instruct on procedures.

Pairings

- ✓ Ideally pairs should be of similar height and stride length.
- ✓ The speed/ability of the guide should be relevant to the session or distance.
- ✓ Guides are usually quicker than the athlete (for sessions and elite races).
- ✓ The pair should be able to synchronise arm and leg movements. The guide can use the athlete's free arm as a visual guide to keep in step.
- ✓ It is most important to encourage the athlete to use both arms correctly.
- ✓ Guides should be fit and healthy, and not prone to injury or DNFs.
- ✓ Guides should be well organised, but flexible.
- ✓ Similar interests and humour definitely help!

Running Buddies

There is more to it than just the technical aspect. It is important the pair get on well.

- ✓ Be honest. The athlete or guide simply may not 'get on'. This may not be personal, but simply due to different personalities.
- ✓ A successful pairing depends on confidence, timely feedback etc. However, this could be upset by being unreliable or a more subjective or personal factor such as an annoying running habit or unsuitable stride pattern.

Multiple Guides

Where possible it is best to train up and use several guides to cover for different distances and paces, but also having back-up should the 'race' guide become injured or not available. With a mix of long, short, easy and hard sessions, slower guides can be used for recovery runs and sprinters used for track sessions.

DISTANCE AND ROAD RUNNING ESSENTIALS

The run

- ✓ Discuss the route, the pace, any niggles or any other issues before the run. Even if it's a pre-arranged session or a regular route, it is always worth clarifying these so there is a clear understanding.
- ✓ You should both be honest if you think the run will be too fast, far, hard or risky – particularly if you or they are carrying a potential injury. Remember, there are two of you to get home!
- ✓ Always allow time for the pre-run brief, stretching and warm-up. For drills a guide is often needed.
- ✓ As there are two of you, account for twice the chance that the run may overrun or come into problems.

- ✓ Synchronising the running action between athlete and guide can take a few runs to perfect. Don't be surprised if you need to re-adjust or it takes some practise. This can also be affected by:
 - Fatigue after hard training or a race
 - Using a different guide since your last session together (especially if they're taller or smaller)
 - The session being set at a different pace.
- ✓ If you don't synchronise at first, stop and try again.
- ✓ Remember to relax!

Verbal feedback

- ✓ Simple, clear advice and feedback is needed – but once going you can start talking about the things runners normally discuss on a run.
- ✓ Timing is critical. For example, running up a kerb or over a speed-bump needs to be known as soon as the standing foot hits the ground.
- ✓ Pre-alert potential problems such as an oncoming dog or a child riding a bike. You should then run 'tight' (meaning close together with the guide rope pulled more tightly, not with a tight running technique) and cautiously.
- ✓ A person walking towards you may expect you to separate, so letting them know in advance will prevent a rude reaction (wearing a fluorescent bib with 'Guide Runner' on it may help).
- ✓ In a distance race you can also feedback on competitors, current pace and potential overtaking etc.

WELFARE

- ✓ For supervised training with a coach, or as part of a group, a guide can be of any age or gender. The important thing is that a guide is suitable for the session and the needs of the athlete.
- ✓ If required, an escort to the toilet should be by someone of the same gender. If this is not possible it should be in pairs to an accessible toilet door. A guide should never need to enter a toilet cubicle with any athlete.
- ✓ When a junior and adult are working together as guide and athlete, training should be supervised by a coach.
- ✓ For a junior athlete the parents should be aware that their child may be guided in training by someone of a different gender or senior athlete, and parental consent should be obtained. Similar consent should be obtained regarding escort to the toilet and any competition/travel arrangements.

BECOMING A GUIDE RUNNER

Anyone can support blind or partially sighted people by guiding them whilst running.

You don't have to complete a course to be a guide runner, but to support blind or partially sighted runners and guides, England Athletics have a specific Guide Runner licensing scheme, supported by British Blind Sport.

This licensing scheme helps connect blind and partially sighted runners with guides. The scheme includes a Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running training course. Courses are arranged in areas where there is a demand from blind or partially sighted people to run.

To become a licensed guide you need to:

- 1 Attend a Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running workshop.
- 2 Undertake a DBS check.
- 3 Complete safeguarding training.

Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running Workshop

The Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running Workshop has been developed in conjunction with British Blind Sport and provides runners, leaders, coaches and volunteers with information about supporting blind and partially sighted people to run. The workshop covers several areas including types of visual impairment (VI), behaviour and terminology and how to make running sessions blind and partially sighted friendly.

The two-hour workshop also includes a practical element where attendees get the chance to experience guiding and being guided by each other.

SAFETY

01 » Before the first guided run, it is worth meeting or talking on the phone about expectations, concerns and if appropriate, to offer advice.

02 » Start slow and if possible, run some strides.

03 » Make sure both runners are wearing visible tops.

04 » The strap should be strong.

05 » Use verbal instructions.

06 » Know the route.

07 » Know the quick routes home.

08 » When running in the dark or the snow, you should know the obstacles really well.

09 » If possible, tell somebody where you're going.

10 » Let the athlete know if there are any weather or light changes imminent.

11 » Obstacles are high and low, and sometimes unexpected.

12 » Use verbal caution and warning in advance wherever possible.

13 » Run 'tight' (shortened guide rope and closer together) and slow down when needed. Stopping is an option.

14 » Don't try to unnecessarily put yourself at risk of injury by running too close to the edge of a road, in the line of trees etc. If the path is narrow, slow down and run 'tight'... or avoid that route.

CASE STUDIES NOEL THATCHER



Profile

Noel Thatcher MBE competed at six Paralympic Games (1984 to 2004), won five gold medals and set a 5k world record at Sydney. Noel was inducted into the England Athletics Hall of Fame in 2009.

Advice

"For me, my guides were absolutely pivotal to my winning races. Although it was difficult to find suitably fast guys. I ran 3.50 for 1500 and had 3.34/5 runners to train with, and 2.14 marathon runners! In training, the guide gets you through the session safely, pre-empts potential hazards and gives feedback. Try running 10 mile tempos around Regents Park in the dark and wet! For the visually impaired person who would like to run but who lacks the confidence, a guide can make dreams come true. Guides are worth their weight in Gold Medals!"

CASE STUDIES SELINA LITT



Profile

Selina Litt is currently the leading English athlete. She trains at Charnwood AC with Joe McDonnell for the 100m, 200m and Long Jump.

"It's like a three-legged race, only your hands are linked instead. Begin with walking, then jogging and progress to running, lengthening the distance each time. You eventually don't have to think about it. A guide rope can be made out of anything from a piece of string or a headband with a knot in the middle. You don't want it too stretchy and distance between guide and athlete is personal preference, but the closer the better seems to be the way most athletes do it"

Advice from Selina Litt on:

Drills

- A partially sighted athlete can do most of the drills a sighted athlete can do.
- The blind or partially sighted athlete needs to become coordinated on their own first (such as high knees etc). They can then do these with their guide.
- Many blind and partially sighted people struggle with balance, so drills to improve this is beneficial, such as standing on one leg.
- A blind or partially sighted athlete will always want to be close to the ground, even without realising. Jumping drills such as squat jumps will help this.

Communication

- Simple communication will make the pairing more effective

- Simple, quick instructions, e.g., nose to the left or right, will make the athlete not only move their head, but entire body position too if veering.
- Bigger arms will lengthen out stride length. It's the guide's responsibility to match the athlete's foot strike.

General technique

- Good technique for a blind or partially sighted athlete should be the same as for any other athlete.

Standing start

- The guide should line the athlete up with the line, ensure head, hips and feet are straight.
- The guide should wait for the athlete to step first and then match that first stride to get the rhythm.

Blocks start

- Most guides set their blocks slightly further back to ensure they don't go running off without the athlete. Blocks should be placed close together so there is little strain on the guide rope.
- Both guide and athlete need to use knuckles instead of fingers for the 'set' position due to the lack of space.
- The guide should line up the athlete first and then get into their blocks.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Sight Loss and Guide Running Workshop

Workshops can be found on
[Athletics Hub](#)

Finding a Guide Runner

You can find a guide runner by searching
the national [Find a Guide Database](#).

Classification and Rules

For details on rules please go to the
[World Para Website](#)

For more information on competing
domestically please contact British
Athletics to register with them.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to:

- Robert Matthews MBE
- Noel Thatcher MBE
- Selina Litt
- Job King
- British Blind Sport





For more digital club
support, visit the
England Athletics
Club Hub