



# WALKING HOCKEY



From Initial Idea to Launch



## Time to Walk the Walk?

Join our Walking Hockey revolution, a brand new sport for those that want to have fun, excitement, meet new people and have some gentle exercise whilst playing this wonderful new sport.



## **Background**

Our project started back in September 2016 as a result of our latest Back To Hockey programme. We had fifty people turn up which was great. However, as with all of our Back To programmes, there was a very wide range of both age and ability. In the past those who found Back To Hockey too much dropped out after a few weeks as we had nothing else to offer them. Those that stayed have been instrumental in our club being able to run three more teams. This time however something very different happened!

One of our new, older Back To ladies who found it too much, rather than simply giving up, looked around for alternatives and noticed that Nuneaton Hockey club had run a Walking Hockey programme. She got in touch with me and asked if I could look into the feasibility of doing something similar. After researching the market (via Google) and finding very little in the way of Walking Hockey, apart from a couple of examples in the U.K., the Netherlands and Australia I decided that it was time to do some requirements analysis to see if there was sufficient demand locally to warrant a Walking Hockey project.

## **Market Research**

Firstly I contacted Paul Smith of EH to ask about the programme that I'd found in the UK. He told me about it and that they'd based it on Rush hockey and called it 'Don't Rush Hockey' This gave me a starting point. I couldn't get a decent translation of the Dutch project and there wasn't much about the one from Australia.

My next step was to canvass those players coming to Back To Hockey to see if it appealed to them which it did. Several of them said it would be very beneficial to keep them in the sport. I asked other players in our club and they could see the benefits too.

The next stage was to think about who the project would appeal to. The ideas we came up with were:

Former players who had given up through age and/or injury, people who had played before many years ago who might be attracted to something new in a sport they liked, older people looking for a walking sport, people with New Year resolutions involving fitness, weight loss etc., people who had never played before who might want to try something new and to connect with other people, people looking for a gentle sport to help with recovery from illness or injury and so on. As you will read later these markets were spot on.

Having completed this analysis the potential was good enough for me to commit to driving forward a full blown project for Walking Hockey.



## Marketing

“Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half.”  
And this is true when you try to do it without spending money too!

As an ex marketer I adopt a blanket approach to spreading the word far and wide so it is difficult, as per the quote, to identify which channels work the best. Below are all of the areas I contacted and / or advertised the project in.

### Facebook

On my own personal page (as a sports coach by profession I have lots of friends who are interested in what I'm up to)

On our club's page

I set up a Walking Hockey page

On our parent club page (cricket hockey and tennis club)

And any other local group that was prepared to let me talk about it (after gaining their permission).

The message was sent out at regular intervals across all pages leading up to Christmas with daily refreshes after Christmas through to launch. This will continue

### Club Website

I created a dedicated Walking Hockey page for our club website and added it to our Welcome page too.

### Email

I have opt in email access to over two hundred parents of our juniors, about one hundred and twenty Back To people from our various campaigns, one hundred parents at a local school, and all of our several hundred club members. Again, I sent repeated messages out to them.

### Press

I sent a Press briefing out to two of our local papers. One came back and wanted me to pay for an advert (politely declined) whilst the other did a superb half page editorial piece including a full colour picture. This was the most quoted verbal source of awareness by participants though we have asked everyone now to let us know what sparked their interest so we can prioritise future campaigns accordingly.

### Twitter

Use my own account plus the club and other members to tag key bodies, for example @englandhockey and hope they pick up on the project



### Radio

I've done several pieces for BBC radio on both the general Olympic legacy issues starting in 2012 and continuing into 2016 as well as more about hockey. I therefore emailed my contact and was able to secure two live interviews, one on the Breakfast Show, which was chatty and light, the other during the Saturday afternoon sports show which was more serious. Both went out in the week before we launched. They asked for follow up too.

### Slimming World

One of my daughters, who plays for us, promoted the project at her local club. This resulted in five people expressing an interest; three came this week with two more following next week. Now another local Slimming World group is promoting it.

### Age UK

Two local branches offered to promote the project for us.

### County Sports Partnership

I met with a representative of our local CSP and negotiated an agreement whereby they would fund my coaching time and pay for a Facebook advert under their name as well as advertising on their website.

### School Sports Coordinator and local Sports Development team

Both offered to assist. Our discussions have now progressed to investigating a similar project for children and adults with individual needs.

### My local village community social media

They did a piece for us on their website, Twitter, Facebook and newsletter

### Local Ramblers Clubs, Lions Clubs

No response from them as yet.





### **Timing of the session**

Finding the right time to run the project was in some way dictated by my own availability matched to that of pitch availability. My preference was to run the session on a Monday evening at 7-8pm which is immediately before our Back To Hockey session. This has several benefits including:

- Those existing Back To players who wanted to try Walking Hockey could do so on an evening without taking another evening out of their schedule and then stay on for Back To.
- New Walking Hockey players can stay on afterwards if they want to so that they can see the next step in their hockey career if they so wish.

The club had this time slot available and gave it for free as part of their commitment to Community Use and Development. It was ideal for me too as I also run the Back To session. Judging by the response we struck lucky by choosing this time.

### **So who did it actually appeal to?**

Where do we start?

Listed below is what I managed to glean by individually welcoming everyone to our first session and thus gaining a bit of background information about them:

- Two people over 70 who had never played before and some over 60's too who also had never played.
- The group of Slimming World girls.
- Two girls in their 30's who had to stop full on sport due to injury.
- Several existing Back To players.
- Four ladies who had been Back To members several years ago who wanted something more gentle so came back.
- One elderly lady who is currently undertaking cancer treatment.
- One former cancer patient.
- The lady who initially asked me to investigate the project.
- Three former players who had stopped playing many years ago.
- Several people who hadn't played since school, many years ago.
- An international commentator and journalist
- Two current players returning from injury

And so on.





## **What we did at our first session**

Back To Hockey and Juniors has taught us that at the first session it is important to get a good group of existing club members along to help the newcomers settle in. We are very fortunate at our club to have such a group who all came along, including our Chair.

To put the first session together I drew upon my experience of coaching in schools, coaching juniors, seniors and Back To and took advice from one of my daughters who is a physiotherapist.

I took a feasibility check on the content of the plan by running iterations of it past my immediate family (wife, two daughters, and son) who are all players.

The program for the first session, which was a mixed sex session (as I want everyone to get to know each other), was more 'traditional' in design rather than the way we coach now. This was to enable people to 'feel' things were as they remembered, and they all need a basic skills refresh anyway— especially as hockey now is so different to when all of the attendees last played. We also had a good supply of longer sticks to help with age related mobility loss.

## **The Session**

- Individual greet of all participants as they entered the pitch to help make them comfortable
- Registration of name, contact number, emergency contact number and any medical information that was relevant to the session. They were also given a detailed registration form to return at the next session.
- Overview of the session and project objectives to everyone " to develop OUR new sport so that at the end of the project we have a fun, exciting and interesting sport that we and others will want to play"
- Quick outline of rules: You can only walk, we need to be safe, you need to only do what you can manage - it is not a competition! We need to play safely - no raised sticks, no aggression, and no bodily contact. This first session is to get us into Walking Hockey, we want you to enjoy it and come back for more, and we don't want you to be put off.
- Go for a Walk. Players went for a short walk to warm up during which they chatted and started to get to know each other.
- Stretch. A few gentle stretches as recommended by the physiotherapist. Focus on knees and lower back - don't bend to far!
- Absolute Beginners: Basics of grip, push, control, pulling ball from right to left to right. These are critical skills for Walking Hockey as accuracy is everything.
- Static pushing and control in pairs.
- Passing and controlling on the move



- Break out into matches – 4 a side, small pitch, Quicksticks ball, two club helpers per pitch.
- We concluded the session by walking together then having a brief chat about how things had gone.

### **Audience**

Of the 35 participants 8 were male, 27 female. Many had played before; two were current players returning from injury, 6-7 had never played before

### **Future Session Format**

I'd like to keep a balance between basic skills, games and matches throughout the session. It was noticeable in the matches we played (2 matches each of 8 minutes) that some people were less comfortable in competition. My intention is, over the project, to sort the players into ability based groups so everyone can get something out of each session. The guidelines I intend to use, which include simple rules, are to be found later in this report.

**Having said all of that, my overriding role will be to facilitate the sessions so that the participants develop them into what works best for them. After all, it is they who have taken the time and made the effort to attend.**

### **Commercials**

What are the benefits for our club? This is something that has not featured heavily in my thoughts to date as my main objective was to offer people the chance to join our hockey family when otherwise they would not have. So here are some quick thoughts:

- The club increases its membership pool
- Some of these participants may now return to other forms of hockey
- Awareness of our sport is spread much wider
- Those taking part are getting exercise which will help them.
- Positive PR for the club
- Increased revenue in the long term – for our initial project the first session was free, subsequent sessions will be £2 each.
- A low cost / flexible payment membership option for the Walking Hockey participants can be developed.





### **Top Tips for other clubs**

There is a list of all written feedback to date within this document. The Hockey Paper has also written a piece about the project. All verbal feedback was very positive. We have already had six more enquiries.

From my perspective there are several key aspects to the launch of a Walking Hockey project:

1. Research your local market to see if there is a need or latent requirement
2. Market across all media channels regularly and in a lively and varied way
3. Involve your local sports bodies and regional EH representative.
4. Come up with a project cost model that is attractive to and affordable for participants
5. If possible run the session before a Back To or club session so people can see, if they want to, a pathway
6. Involve other suitable club members in the launch session
7. Have a good supply of long sticks so people do not have to bend too far – lots of our people were older and less flexible than existing players.
8. Create a first session that eases people into the sport paying particular attention to a relevant warm up and a run through key basic skills
9. Have a coach who can relate to and communicate with participants in a lively, relaxed and friendly way.
10. Remember that the participants will have a vast range of expectations and will almost certainly be nervous and / or apprehensive. Greet them individually and create a session that is relaxed but well organized.
11. Follow up immediately after the session with each person to get their reaction.



## **Feedback from the Launch Event**

Hi Alan

Congratulations on Last night. What a turnout!

Alan,

Thanks so much for the walking hockey session last night – it was great to get back to playing hockey despite being banned from running by my knee surgeon! It was lovely to see such a good turnout and the session was really well organised and a great way to get to know other people.

I've advertised the sessions on the Slimming World Bromsgrove Facebook page today to try to get a few more participants coming along, and I'm aware that a number of the residents of Platform Road might also come along next week to join us.

So pleased for you last night Alan. Great turnout and nice atmosphere. Very enjoyable. See you next week.

Thank you so much for getting me off the couch. Really enjoyed the hockey and now realise how much I needed the exercise. I hope Walking Hockey takes off; it is perfect for us oldies. I thought your relaxed yet organised approach was spot on.

Hi Alan, thoroughly enjoyed last night, looking forward to next week.

Thanks for a great session this evening Alan, loved it. Am really looking forwards to next week.

Had a good time Alan. Look forward to next week.

Alan, brilliant!

Enjoyed it but many people seemed to be playing to rules that I had no idea existed!

Hi Alan, I thoroughly enjoyed the session thank you for setting up the initiative, I do hope the success of last night continues to flourish and yes absolutely I will be there next week. On the downside I have found muscles which clearly have been dormant for quite a while!

Alan, thanks for last night. Already looking forward to next week.

Many thanks for organising the session Alan it was a wonderful way of reconnecting with a lost experience. I got the impression it was really enjoyed by all including myself.



Thank you Alan - I really enjoyed it, which is something I never said about hockey when I was at school 30 odd years ago, last time I played.

It was good getting back to a game I used to love playing, it being about 50 years since I last played.

Hi Alan, thanks for your text. Can't believe how much I enjoyed Monday evening. Haven't played hockey since I left school (mid 1960's) so was a bit worried about coming. But I'll definitely be there again on Monday.



## **WALKING HOCKEY GUIDELINES – AN EVOLVING DOCUMENT**

Our sport, Walking Hockey, is a new sport and as such has no formal rules to govern it. So basically it's up to us to try things out and see how they work. However, we need a structure to get us started so I've put together a few guidelines to get us going. I hope it is OK to start with these and evolve them together to develop a fun and exciting sport that we will all enjoy playing, and that will appeal to others too.

We have to walk. Walking means one heel must be on the ground at all times.

We will adapt the pitch size to suit the number of players playing and their level of experience and ability.

We will play small sided games (number of players per team) to promote the maximum number of touches on the ball for everyone.

We will balance teams during games to keep them competitive.

There will be no goalkeepers.

We will use a large 'Quicksticks' ball which is less dense and easier to see to begin with then try a normal ball later to see which we prefer.

We will use 5 a side football goals to start with and if these are too big we will use smaller goals.

Goals can be scored from anywhere on the pitch.

The ball must cross the goal line at pitch level for it to count.

A penalty goal will be awarded if a player prevents the ball from entering the goal with anything other than their stick.

The ball must be played in a controlled manner.

The stick must not be raised in a dangerous manner.

The 'self pass' rule from hockey will be allowed.

At any restart the opposition must be at least 3 meters from the ball.



There will be no bodily contact between players. The aim is to promote a competitive but fair game without physicality.

If a ball hits a player's foot a foul will only be awarded if an unfair advantage is gained.

Corners will be taken from the corner of the pitch nearest to where the ball went out.

If the defence commits a foul within five metres of the goal, the ball is moved five metres from the goal for the attack to take the free hit.

As we develop the game the aim is to have teams comprising of players on the pitch plus two others, one acting as an umpire, the other as team coach. We will then rotate within the team so that everyone who wants to can have a go in one of the three roles: playing, umpiring, and coaching. This way we get maximum involvement for everyone.

# BROMSGROVE HOCKEY CLUB BACK TO HOCKEY / WALKING HOCKEY



PLEASE COMPLETE THE REGISTRATION FORM BELOW.

Name	Date of Birth
Address	
Mobile phone	Emergency contact name & number
Email	
How did you find out about our Walking Hockey programme?	
How long is it since you last played hockey?	
Do we have your permission to use your photograph in our media coverage?	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
<p>* In the event I become unwell or injured, I give my permission for the supervising coach to obtain appropriate medical treatment on my behalf.</p> <p>* In the event I become unwell or injured , I DO NOT give my permission for the supervising coach to obtain appropriate medical treatment on my behalf.</p> <p>* Please delete as appropriate</p>	
Do you have any allergies? YES / NO – If YES please state	
Do you have any regular medication or treatment? YES / NO – If YES please give details	
Do you have any special needs? YES / NO – If YES please give details – continue overleaf if necessary	
When was the last time you were vaccinated against tetanus?	
Is there anything else of which we should be aware?	
I will inform the hockey club of any changes to the details on this form	
Signed:	Date: