

Visit to the 'Big Apple' with Blind and Visually Impaired Cricket

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By Adam Hall

(Adam is a Cricket for Change Development Officer and Coach)

On May 13th 2010, the Cricket for Change (C4C) Development team went to New York City for part two of the British Airways supported programme of setting up a USA Blind and Visually Impaired Cricket Team. C4C have had in the past a great success rate of setting up international blind cricket teams in places such as the West Indies, Panama, parts of Africa and Sri Lanka. All these teams have really embraced Blind & Visually Impaired cricket and this is the same thing we are hoping to do with the US Blind & Visually Impaired squad.

C4C have been working very hard alongside Clifford Hinds of, The United States of America Cricket Association (New York region) (USACA) to ensure a strong training programme would remain in place in the US once the C4C team had headed back to the UK.

The first day of the programme was spent in the 'Lavelle School for The Blind' where members of the C4C Development Team (*Andy Sellins, Andy Dalby-Welsh, Tony Joseph, Adam Hall & Danny Baker*) were warmly met by Principal Diane Tucker at reception. The school was very excited at the prospect of British people coming to the school to teach a sport that as whole the US nation knows very little about. The C4C team was greeted by great cheers from 60 young visually impaired people and around 20 staff and teachers.

I (Adam Hall) started the day by doing a little a talk about who C4C are, what they do and what they were doing in their school. The C4C team then went around and met all the teachers and young people. They were highly amused by the C4C teams', 'Hugh Grant' style accents! Danny Baker (one of the C4C team) had an interesting conversation with one young man who was a Freddie Mercury look a like and even when Danny spoke to him he tried to speak like Freddie Mercury!!!

With all the meeting and greeting said and done the C4C team got down to teach the basics of Visually Impaired and Blind (VI & B C) cricket. The C4C team split off into groups of around 10 young people each to teach the basics of the game to. The USACA coaches who were there also got involved with the games. The C4C team played games based around bowling, batting, fielding and the awareness of space.

The staff at the Lavelle School then held a dinner reception for us whilst we all chatted about the benefits to everyone involved with blind cricket being played in the NY region. At the end of a successful day the C4C team said their goodbyes for now and said they would be returning in a few days to hold some matches and more training for everyone.

“I (Adam Hall) had been to New York four times before to this trip and thought I new the place fairly well. All the previous times I had been it had been minus Celsius conditions, so jumpers and hoodies were packed galore! However, this time NYC was in the midst of a heatwave!! Every where was so hot we were wearing sunglasses, t-shirts and shorts! It was great!”

On the next day, it was time to get working with the USACA coaches. We went on the subway over to Queens where a match was being played. Danny Baker & Tony Joseph (both C4C Development coaches) worked hard in the morning with coaches and spread the word of Blind Cricket. All at the same time a local T20 match was going on!

The USACA coaches picked the concept of the game up very quickly and were excited to go and work with some young people!

On Saturday night the USACA coaches took us to 'Hibbicus' which was in Queens. It was a traditional Guyanese restaurant in the heart of an area of Queens, called Little Guyana. The food was amazing and one of our team even won a cricket bat in a raffle! We later found out that this was were all cricketers in the NY region hung out and caught up with each other.

The weekend continued with the training of the USACA coaches and on Sunday night the C4C team let their hair down from hard work and some went out to check out the nightlife and myself (Adam Hall) and Danny (Baker) went to a world title boxing fight at Madison Square Garden to watch Amir Khan retain his world title!!!

Now on Monday, we went back to the Lavelle School for the Blind, but by this point everyone was a little nervous as the story had broke in the US about the return of the ash cloud over the UK. And we were due to fly out Monday night with BA!!!

However, we pushed this worry to the back of our minds and got on with the coaching sessions in the wonderful US sunshine! We got down to some really in-depth work regards B & VI cricket. For this particular session we had, John Aaron, the Executive Secretary for the USACA watching us teaching and coaching. He was extremely impressed as were all the USACA coaches as to the amount of work and the level of standards for work that were involved in this programme!

All the young people taking part in the sessions had had a great time. One lad, named 'JC', even said that he had never done sports outside before until C4C came to NYC. He was 16 years old!!!!

At the end of the day, we had a mini-graduation ceremony. Clifford Hinds and I (*Adam Hall*) handed out accredited USACA certificates, to all the USACA coaches who took part in the training and acknowledged their ability to now teach Blind and Visually Impaired Cricket.

C4C again said their goodbyes and departed for the airport to catch their plane home - which was only delayed by one hour!!

C4C learnt some strong lessons from working in NYC. We have built really strong relationship in the US with USACA. We have also linked them in with the World Blind Cricket Council and all we need to do now is watch this space to see what happens...

The C4C team had a great time in NYC working with and developing Blind and VI cricket and we want to thank British Airways as without them this would not have been possible!!!