

□ **READING CHALLENGE**

The Blind Footballer

A ball with bells inside, a goalkeeper who can see, and five players in total darkness — welcome to blind football.

Level	A2 — Elementary
Age Group	Teens (11-16)
Topic	Sports & Adventure
Duration	~12-15 minutes
Skill	Reading
Vocabulary	15 words
Quiz	5 questions

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Close your eyes. Now imagine you are on a football pitch. You can hear the crowd shouting. You can feel the grass under your feet. Somewhere nearby, a ball is rolling — you can hear the small bells inside it. A voice behind the goal shouts, “Left! Two metres!” You turn, you kick, and the crowd goes wild. You have just scored a goal, and you cannot see a thing. This is **blind** football, one of the most **incredible** sports in the world. It is fast, skilful, and exciting — and every outfield player on the pitch is completely blind.

How Blind Football Works

Blind football, officially called “football 5-a-side,” is played on a smaller pitch than regular football — about 40 metres long and 20 metres wide, roughly the size of a futsal court. Each team has five players: four outfield players who are completely blind and one goalkeeper who is **sighted** (can see normally). The outfield players all wear blackout masks to make sure nobody has any advantage, because some players may have a tiny amount of vision.

The ball is the key to the whole game. It is a special ball with bells inside, so players can hear it when it moves. When the ball stops rolling, the bells stop ringing, so players have to listen very carefully. The pitch has boards along the sides, about one metre high, which stop the ball from going out and allow players to feel where the edge of the pitch is. This means the game never stops for throw-ins, which makes it fast and continuous.

Each team also has three guides who help the players. The goalkeeper guides the defenders. A coach stands on the side of the pitch and guides the midfield. Behind the opponent’s goal, there is a third guide called the “caller” who tells the attackers where the **goalposts** are, how far away they are, and when to shoot. The caller often shouts instructions like “Shoot!” or “Two metres, centre!” Players must combine what they hear from their guides with their own **instinct** and sense of space.

The Rules

Most of the rules are similar to regular football, but there are some important differences. The most famous rule is about safety. When a player runs towards an opponent who has the ball to **tackle** them, they must shout “Voy!” This is a Spanish word that means “I go!” It tells the player with the ball that someone is coming, so they can protect themselves. If a player forgets to shout “Voy!” the **referee** gives a foul. This rule exists because blind players cannot see each other, and crashing into someone at full speed without warning would be very dangerous.

The crowd must also follow a special rule: they must stay silent during the game. This is very different from regular football, where fans shout, sing, and make as much noise as possible. In blind football, the players need to hear the ball, the guides, and the other players. If the crowd is too noisy, the players cannot play properly. Fans are only allowed to cheer after a goal is scored or when the referee blows the whistle. This creates a very unusual atmosphere — the pitch is almost silent except for the sound of the ball, the players’ feet, and the shouts of “Voy!”

The Skill Is Unbelievable

If you watch blind football for the first time, you will probably not believe what you are seeing. The players **dribble** past opponents, do tricks, and score goals that would be impressive even in regular football. They run at full speed into space they cannot see, trusting their ears and their memory of the pitch. Some blind footballers have such incredible ball control that people watching on television do not realise the players are blind until they see the masks.

Jefinho, a Brazilian blind footballer, is often called the “Messi of blind football.” He can dribble past three or four defenders and score from difficult angles. He has won multiple Paralympic gold medals and has scored some of the most spectacular goals in the history of the sport. Watching videos of Jefinho online is a good way to understand just how skilful blind footballers really are.

Blind Football at the Paralympics

Blind football became an official **Paralympic** sport at the Athens 2004 Games. Since then, it has been played at every Summer Paralympics. The **tournament** brings together teams from all over the world, including Brazil, Argentina, China, Spain, France, and many others.

Brazil is the most successful country in blind football history. The Brazilian team has won every Paralympic gold medal from 2004 to 2020 — five in a row. They also dominate the World Championships and the Copa America for blind football. Argentina is usually their biggest rival, and matches between Brazil and Argentina are just as passionate and intense as in regular football.

At the Paris 2024 Paralympics, blind football was played at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, on a temporary pitch built in the Place de la Concorde. It was one of the most popular events of the entire Games. Thousands of fans watched in careful silence as players dribbled, tackled, and scored. The atmosphere was magical — imagine watching football beneath the Eiffel Tower with the crowd completely quiet, hearing only the bells of the ball and the shouts of “Voy!” France scored a late **equaliser** in one match, and the explosion of noise from the crowd was unforgettable.

How Players Learn the Game

Many blind footballers started playing as children at schools for the visually impaired. Others lost their sight later in life and discovered the sport as teenagers or adults. Learning to play blind football takes a lot of practice and courage. Imagine running at full speed when you cannot see any **obstacle** in front of you. It requires enormous trust — trust in the guides, trust in the other players, and trust in your own body.

Training for blind footballers includes many exercises that develop hearing, balance, and spatial **awareness**. Players learn to build a mental map of the pitch in their head. They practise remembering where the goals are, where the sideboard is, and where the other

players were a few seconds ago. Over time, the best players develop an almost supernatural sense of where everything is around them.

More Than a Sport

Blind football is much more than just a game. For many players, it is the thing that changed their life. Many blind people face serious obstacles in daily life — not just because they cannot see, but because society often does not give them the same opportunities as sighted people. People with a **disability** are sometimes told what they cannot do instead of what they can do. Blind football proves that blind people can be elite athletes. They can run, compete, win medals, and **inspire** millions of people.

The sport also changes how sighted people think about blindness. When fans watch a blind player dribble past four defenders and score a goal, they stop thinking about what that person cannot do and start admiring what they can do. This change in attitude is perhaps the most important thing about blind football. It breaks stereotypes and shows the world that disability does not mean inability.

Try It Yourself

Some schools and sports clubs now offer “blind football experiences” where sighted people can put on a blindfold and try to play. It is much harder than you think! Most sighted people cannot even kick the ball properly when they are blindfolded. They walk slowly, feel scared, and quickly realise how much they depend on their eyes. It is a powerful experience that teaches empathy and respect for blind athletes.

Blind football is growing around the world. More countries are starting national teams. More schools are teaching the sport. More fans are discovering how exciting it is to watch. And every time a blind footballer scores an incredible goal, the message is the same: do not let anyone tell you what you cannot do. If you can play football in total darkness and make it look beautiful, you can do anything.

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	blind	not able to see; having no sight
2	disability	a condition of the body or mind that makes it harder for a person to do certain things
3	goalpost	one of the two tall posts at each end of a football pitch that the ball must go between to score
4	referee	the person who controls a sports game and makes sure the rules are followed
5	tackle	to try to take the ball from another player in football
6	incredible	very hard to believe; amazing
7	dribble	to move a ball forward with small kicks or touches while running
8	tournament	a competition with many games or matches, where teams play until one wins
9	equaliser	a goal that makes the score equal; a goal that ties the game
10	sighted	able to see; having normal vision
11	instinct	a natural feeling or ability that makes you act without thinking
12	obstacle	something that is in your way and makes it difficult to move or do something
13	Paralympic	related to the international sports competition for athletes with disabilities
14	awareness	knowledge or understanding of something; knowing that something exists
15	inspire	to make someone want to do something or give them a new idea

Comprehension Quiz

1. How many players from each team are on the pitch in blind football?
 - A) Eleven, like regular football
 - B) Seven players on each side
 - C) Five — four blind outfield players and one sighted goalkeeper
 - D) Three players and two goalkeepers

2. How do blind footballers know where the ball is?
 - A) A coach tells them through an earpiece
 - B) The ball has bells inside that make a sound when it moves
 - C) The ball lights up with a bright colour
 - D) They can feel vibrations through the ground

3. What must players shout when they run towards an opponent with the ball?
 - A) "Goal!"
 - B) "Here!"
 - C) "Voy!" which means "I go!" in Spanish
 - D) "Stop!"

4. Which country has been the most successful in blind football?
 - A) Germany
 - B) England
 - C) Japan
 - D) Brazil

5. Why is blind football important beyond just being a sport?
 - A) Because it makes a lot of money for the players
 - B) Because it shows that people with disabilities can achieve amazing things and changes how society sees them
 - C) Because it is more popular than regular football
 - D) Because all schools must teach it by law

Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	C	How many players from each team are on the pitch in blind football?
2	B	How do blind footballers know where the ball is?
3	C	What must players shout when they run towards an opponent with the ball?
4	D	Which country has been the most successful in blind football?
5	B	Why is blind football important beyond just being a sport?