

WORLD FIRST FOR HAMPSHIRE COACH

Hampshire Disability player Leon Badger has become the first ever powered wheelchair user to gain a UKCC1 (Coaching Assistant) cricket coaching qualification.

Leon, who has cerebral palsy, epilepsy and diabetes, has begun coaching after making history when he gained the UKCC1 certificate last year.

Having played disability cricket at county level for over ten years, and playing a central role in the establishment of a disability cricket team at his Day centre, Leon has faced many challenges in his effort to become a coach. Health problems, he explains, have strengthened his determination to be involved in cricket.

"I decided when I had come out of hospital to go and take my Level one. That was a challenge of mine, having had a bit of a rough time and being in hospital, I thought: 'I need to get out there and achieve some goals.'

"My first port of call was to take the CSLA (Community Sports Leadership Award), and then they put you onto your chosen sport – mine was cricket – so I went and took my coaching badge.

"When I went on the course I thought 'Will they take to me, won't they take to me? Are they going to question whether I know what I'm talking about, because I'm a guy in a wheelchair? But I met a lot of really good young lads who really wanted to get down and work with me."



The Hampshire Cricket Board has one of the most successful Coach Education programs in the country and has seen six coaches with disabilities qualified in the past two years. Coach Education CDO, John Cook, was delighted to accept Leon's application and has worked closely with tutors to ensure that the course is accessible to all. "The HCB is committed to providing opportunities for people with disabilities throughout cricket. The qualification of Leon (and others) has hopefully paved the way for other cricketers with a range of disabilities to be inspired to become part of the coaching fraternity."

To coach, Leon requires someone to help with setting up drills and with some demonstrations, although he is now qualified to assist with the actual coaching himself. As he explains: "You have to work as a team, as disabled coaches. It's a team effort between you and the person that's helping you out."

"I'm someone who's enthusiastic, wants to see cricketers improve their game and to bring enjoyment to their training session. As a coach enjoyment is the most important thing. It's about bringing enjoyment and fun."

ECB disability cricket manager Ian Martin was full of praise for Leon's groundbreaking efforts. said: "Leon's achievement is fantastic. It shows that disability is no barrier to being involved in sport, and symbolises the opportunities that cricket presents to get involved in sport both as a player and as a

coach.

"The ECB wish to extend their congratulations to Leon, and wish him every success in the future."



Leon has received support from the Eastleigh Disability Leisure Access Group to fund transport to attend coaching sessions with the Under 11 age-group at Fair Oak Cricket Club and is keen to do more.

"It's difficult for me to get to games, so I'm looking at trying to get some sponsorship, or someone who might be willing to help me get there and help out within the community."

He is hopeful that his example will help to maintain the current strength of Hampshire's disability cricket teams who are sponsored by Leon's care company, AQS Homecare.

"I'm looking forward to there being a few more disabled cricketers taking their badges and for the disabled team to keep having coaches," he said.

By Edward Kemp