

Transcript- Episode 57 – The Blind Sport Podcast Tandem Cycling with the Blind Stokers Club

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Introduction

This is episode 57 of The Blind Sport Podcast, entitled Tandem Cycling with the Blind Stokers Club.

Hi I'm Mike, and this is The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show for the blind, the partially sighted and the supportive sighty.

Thanks for joining me for episode 57.

On the show we'll be talking with Dave and Andy from the Blind Stokers Club in San Diego about their club and how they are supporting the Blind and Vision Impaired to enjoy the sport of tandem cycling.

When was the last time that you rode a bike?

Being part of a tandem team of sighted captain and blind stoker is pretty amazing. Whether your goal is to improve your fitness, to cycle at a competitive level or just have a bit of weekend fun, riding a tandem could be the sport for you.

Hi there, I hope this episode finds you fit and well.

Before we chat to Dave and Andy from the Blind Stokers Club, I would like to thank you for the feedback received re episode 56, where we spoke with Jonathan Mosen from New Zealand about the Apple Watch.

Some of the comments that I received included:

From Maria: I also love my Apple Watch. It doesn't do everything that I want it to, but it's pretty cool.

From Tony: Thanks for the info. This has made me reconsider the Apple Watch as a credible tool.

Please email me with any comments.

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Interview

Mike - OK, well on this episode we've got something a little bit different.

I'm currently in San Diego. I've come over for the CSUN conference which is underway and I have the great privilege of being in the company of Andy, Dustin and Dave. Andy and Dave are part of the Blind Stokers Club here in San Diego, which is a blind tandem club, which I was very lucky to go out with last Saturday on a club ride, and also do a bit of a tour around San Diego with Dave on Sunday which was awesome. So, welcome along guys.

Dave – Thanks, good to be here.

Andy – Yeah thanks for having me.

Mike – So what we are actually doing here is, just to introduce yourselves individually, what would you class yourself as Dave in regards to the Blind Stokers Club?

Dave – The Director.

Mike – You're the Director. We have Andy who is a blind stoker, who is actually a DeafBlind Stoker.

Andy – I'm a DeafBlind Stoker, that's exactly who I am.

Mike – And we have Dustin who is his interpreter today, who is signing for Andy so we can hear what he has to say as Andy does not speak.

So firstly to you Dave. How did the Blind Stokers Club come about and why did you decide to get it going.

Dave – Well let's see. It was a combination of a sequence of events that began with me becoming a tandem pilot and taking up the sport with my wife, after I had first been in a running career and marathoning and then cycling.

I wanted to do something and include my wife so we tried the tandem and it worked well for us, and that brought us into the community of cycling for two.

Following that I did some volunteering with a City of San Diego program that enabled cycling on tandems for people with physical or developmental disabilities. And the significant thing there was that it awakened me to the joy of guiding, and in this case, sharing my joy of cycling with someone who couldn't otherwise enjoy that without the help of a tandem and a pilot.

Mike – So is this club for people of all abilities?

Dave – Yeah so, we're as inclusive really, and in fact we do have a minimum level of involvement, and in fact we for those who are just starting out or are not ready to ramp up in our style, to our distance rides, we refer them back to that same program just mentioned, which rides just once a month and of shorter distances of several miles. But we take all levels that want to join our program and participate. We have no dues or fees, but we just ask people to involve themselves in our program and all the way up to competitive levels if they wish.

Mike – Tell us about these training programs that you do for both captain/pilot and stoker. How does that work?

Dave – Stokers can come into our club with little or no experience in cycling, just the desire to do so, and that's because they have a built in mentor in their pilot. Their captain is always going to be experienced, so the stoker can come and literally start from zero and work with their captain and work their mileage, and also learn all the things about the sport. They become a full-on cyclist, not just a power-maker, which is where the term Stoker in Tandem language comes from.

On the front end of the bike, we have a different standard. We require anybody who wants to become a captain to have at least intermediate cycling skills and group riding in their resume, so to speak. So that way we have many single cyclists around that see us on the road, that hear about our program and our model and love the idea and say how can they join?. We have a "Captain in training" program that both gives a loaner tandem to their custody, and the benefit of an experienced stoker from our club who will help them learn how to do the piloting part and the special skills involved in that.

Mike – So where do the tandem bikes come from?

Dave – Initially most of the bikes came from the tandem captains that I recruited from that local group of people who of course we had made friends with, and they brought themselves and their tandems to the club to partner up with the stoker.

But soon we found out that some of our stokers either had their own tandem or applied for a grant and received one because they were that dedicated to the sport, so another third of our tandems are stoker owned.

And the final third are generously donated or loaned to the club from others who either find them under-utilised in their garage or otherwise don't need them anymore and if they're good enough quality, we happily take them in and re-purpose them out in our "Captain in Training" program.

Mike – To you Andy. How did you get introduced to the sport of cycling and how did you go about it?

Andy – Gosh, I rode a lot when I was roughly 12 to 16 years old. I rode up and down the coast with my parents, mostly with my Dad.

My first job that I got at the age of 14, I worked in South Carlsbad, at the state park there. I rode eight miles each way all summer to get to work.

After high school I diverted my interests really to surfing and I kind of gave up the cycling.

Later, I found BSC. Gosh I was probably 36 years old at that point and I've been cycling ever since.

You know, the way I found the BSC is the Department of Rehab, I had a counsellor there who was kind of concerned about my well-being. You know, I was kind of sad when I stopped driving and I was sad when I stopped being able to surf and all that kind of thing. I became legally blind at that time, and yeah, my counsellor, she gave me a card with BSC on it. It was written across the front and you know, I had it for like three months, and after three months I decided to get in contact with Dave here, and then I rode March 2011 I remember, and now it's been five years. My five year anniversary right? So yeah, it's been great. You know, there's been a lot of good things come of it and it has led to many other great things in my life. We probably don't have time to list them all, but I'm very thankful to the BSC for that.

Mike – Excellent. So what was the attraction to cycling in the first place? Why cycling over the other sports?

Andy – I guess, in my situation, I kind of had limited choices I feel like. For example, I'd like to surf, but you need a lot of, you need like eight captains, you know, if you were to surf for one person like me. On the tandem bike you only need the one support person. I live in San Diego and BSC is in San Diego, so I have this great opportunity. They are very very available to me. Whereas a lot of other programs are not so accessible for me, but it's interesting, the BSC has made a lot of other things outside of cycling available to me as well.

Mike – Wow that's awesome. Dave, obviously the communication between the captain is important at the best of times. Do you have to do things differently? How do you communicate with Andy as a DeafBlind stoker?

Dave – Yeah that's very interesting because we do have normally verbal calls and signals in addition to chit-chat, and when Andy came onboard he helped us learn how to adapt our communications. While I learned a little bit of sign language, but we started using touch instead of sound. So we developed some special signals that he could either make on my back, or I can grab his hand and do some "Finger Spell" and it was a great challenge, but one that we tackled energetically and enjoyed being able to communicate as well as we can on the road.

Mike – That's pretty awesome. Andy, how does that work for you? Is it quite a challenge to get a captain trained up to a level that you are comfortable with? With a captain that doesn't communicate clearly, do you feel safe or do you feel quite vulnerable or just generally frustrated?

Andy – Yeah, from captain to captain there's total variables, their different. I like to give the captains options on how they want to communicate with me and I let the captain kind of decide how they want to communicate with me and from there I work to accommodate them. Often captains are willing to change and work with me. Most of the time we communicate through tactile signs, for example, I'll touch the captain's back, I never obviously use my voice so I'll touch the captain and it works out really well. I do have some small tunnel vision so I can read paper so if I really need to have like deep communication I can write something on a piece of paper and we can write back and forth. But for the most time, I mostly touch the captains back to direct them.

Dave – I'd like to also interject here. We've also realised the importance of bringing in an interpreter to the part of our activities that it's practical and feasible, and in fact one of our key coordinator roles is our interpreter coordinator who arranges for those services. Often times from a student interpreter who needs the practice and then gives us the opportunity to dialog with Andy informally before we get going during our ride meeting and often times afterwards when we're recapping the ride.

Mike – Dave, What makes for a good captain?

Dave – Gee that's a good question and I think I'd know one if I saw one, but ah Hahaha. So it is good because I personally introduce all new stokers locally with my own ride that I go on them with. At the same time I want to at least see a tandem captain or a prospective captain on a bike, either a single bike to start with or of course a tandem before fully qualifying them and making a match.

One thing that I'm not sure that we described, but I would like to make it clear, is that one of the real fundamentals of our club is that we make what we call "Permanent tandem teams".

So we join three elements. For every stoker that comes onboard, we add the tandem and a captain and form up those teams and we ask that they support the program for the rest of the calendar year. And then those teams usually just turn over and continue into the next year.

Mike – I suppose like a lot of guiding situations, it's more than just the rules and how people do things, it's actually the relationship and the natural bond that people create when they work with someone else isn't it?

Dave – Now that's one of the points that I definitely wanted to make, because one of the surprises that came out of just starting up and performing the simple mission of what we wanted to perform which was to go bike riding with our blind and visually impaired friends. But one of the surprises then became the strength and the joy of having the relationships that formed between those partners that we matched up for that simple purpose. And so guiding in general I think is something that really is something that a lot of athletes are awakening to and the opportunities are there and the joy of guiding an athlete who needs a guide is really something special.

Mike – Definitely. Now, I know that you do regular Saturday rides every fortnight or so, what other types of events does the BSC put together or manage or participate in?

Dave – So our annual calendar which we forecast an entire twelve months at a time, in December each year. We sit down and layout our calendar for the following calendar year and it includes those series of rides of course, but we also like to sprinkle in other activities of a non-cycling nature. So for example we've gone and decorated Rose Parade floats, for the world famous Pasadena Rose Parade. We've gone on tours. We've gone to theatre events that come to town. So it's a bit like a fraternity instead of focusing entirely on cycling. Our members have grown to enjoy the company of each other so much that we plan other outings.

Mike – So it has that general like club aspect to it as well.

Dave – It's a club of course, and we also go on at least one road trip each year which is a cycling activity but its more than that it's usually a three day excursion where we leave town and have a special out of town over-night experience along with it.

Mike – Brilliant. A question for you Andy. What have been some of the best cycling events that BSC have put together that you've been part of?

Andy – I'd say the best event for sure was "[Cycling for Sight](#)" – CFS. I've been involved 5 years so far, yes involved with cycling for sight. It's one of my favourite events that we host. Most of the time we are prepping and planning for that, and yeah it's just a great event. We raise money for the Centre for the Blind as a result of the event and we are also raising awareness about Blindness and vision loss.

Mike – Cross training, Andy, Do you do cycling off the road, like on a spin cycle or any other type of cycling?

Andy – Yeah, every once in a while. I have so many captains that are available here in San Diego so if I want to go for a ride I would rather go with a captain. Last year I rode with 21 different captains, so yeah, I do do some cross training, a little bit. I do some running. I do some swimming. I really do love to run, I'd like to do an ultra marathon or become an ultra runner, I mean, it's great cross training for the cycling that I do do.

Mike – Question for Andy – How much does being a part of a club like Blind Stokers actually allow you to cycle, I mean could it be possible without this type of club?

Andy – I have been involved in many clubs of course, but it's funny, I always connected to those other clubs because of BSC. If it wasn't for BSC I don't think I would have the opportunity. I don't know how it would be possible, I really don't. It would be tough to imagine.

I've ridden with many many clubs – I want to say probably more than eight – "Trek" I've ridden with. I rode with "CAF", "Sub5", gosh, I can't think of any more but I have ridden with several – Yeah. BSC has been the best experience.

Mike – One question I like to ask everybody – For you first Andy, can you recall one of your more funny or comical moments that you have experienced with Blind Stokers?

Andy – Gosh, I don't know if it's exactly funny or..., gosh four or five years ago one of my captains, he bought a vintage 1970's Sovereign tandem bicycle. It's very very old, very nice, very solid – solid like a rock – and we rode a lot on that bicycle. It often happened that we would be riding and riding and riding and we would pass by a group of guys on like ten thousand dollar bicycles and we would go flying by them. And it's funny, I would turn my head and they would look at us like we are riding on this old old bike and they would try and chase us and chase us and chase us and they couldn't catch us. And it's funny, whenever they did try to catch us they would try to talk with my captain and try to keep up and it would be so funny to notice that

we would fly by and they couldn't keep up. We saw that all the time and thought wow how crazy - it must be a horrible investment right, a ten thousand dollar bicycle that can't keep up.

Mike – Same question to you Dave, What would be some of the more comical moments that you can recall?

Dave – I'll tell a story that brought me to the Olympic Training Centre here at Chula Vista to do the introductory ride a couple of years ago with a fellow by the name of David Brown. We met David through another athlete, Lex Gillette, who we ran into at the Para cycling world track championships, anyway, David filled out the membership form, we talked to him, lined up the checkout ride. He was all excited and we were excited. He was new as a resident at the Olympic Training Centre to train on the track in sprints, the outdoor running track not the cycling track, and so he came down and we went for a ride and he whole time I am saying to myself these have got to be the strongest legs that have ever been behind me on a tandem - we were both enjoying it. I brought him back and we were talking about getting him partnered up in the club so he could ride some of our club rides with us when his training schedule allowed. By the time I got home though on my commuter was an email message from David and the subject was "My first and last tandem ride:.". And I knew without opening it that David must have talked to his coach and his coach must have decided that riding with our club would not be acceptable cross training. The footnote to the story is: - Today and as of sometime late last year, David Brown and his guide Jerome Avery set the world record for the Blind Category in the 100m! We were actually fortunate, we scheduled a club ride last Saturday on the tour of California stage one route and included a tour at the Olympic Training Centre and David and Jerome were our guides.

Mike – They were awesome too. Andy, what have been some of the more challenging moments?

Andy – So David and I decided to sign up for Challenged Athletes Foundation's Million Dollar Challenge which was in 2012. The Million Dollar Challenge itself is essentially a fund raiser. It's a fund raising event that is a weeklong and the goal is to raise funds for challenged athletes. It's a ride from San Francisco to San Diego.

I think, yes it was the fourth day, we were getting pretty close to arriving in Santa Barbara and just before we were about to go through Solvang, it just got insanely hot and Dave and I were just struggling, huffing and puffing. It had been four days of brutal riding and we still had three ahead of us. So, I was there to support Dave and we decided to pull off the road and get off the bike and we started to chat and strategize about what we were going to do.

Oh I forgot a key element to this story. Actually before that we managed to get lost for 13 miles. So fast-forward to our meeting, you know we were really really struggling at that point and we finally arrived in Solvang and we were talking about should we continue riding, do we feel like suffering more, so we talked back and forth, back and forth and figured that we could drive 13 miles to account for the 13 miles extra that we had ridden, so we went ahead and did that. We tossed the bike in

the van and rode over the next hill luckily Hahaha... Then we finished the ride and ended up arriving in Santa Barbara that night.

Dave – And we managed exactly the route mileage for the day, 123 miles.

Mike – Excellent. A question for both of you. Firstly Andy, Do you have a personal saying or personal quotation that means something special to you?

Andy – You know I don't know if I have just one. I always have new and fresh ideas that I keep in my mind, but the one that has stuck in my head recently is "Don't just ask. Counter invite". Often I get tired of people complaining, or for example, things don't pan out or you can't make plans and all that kind of thing. I've noticed that my plans work out really well because what I do is counter-invite the person, or I teach my friends and family how to counter-invite.

If for example things don't work out, if schedules get conflicted. Like for example if I offer to make a plan and that person says that they're not available and all of that kind of thing, it's nice to have that person counter-invite. Let me know when you're available, or offer something else. So I have been encouraging people recently to do that. I know most people don't practice that.

Mike – What about you Dave, do you have a favourite saying or quotation?

Dave – I guess something that I live by is "To arrive early and have a good attitude". I've found that those two things together have made a lot of difference in a number of my encounters.

Mike – Dave, we talked a little bit earlier about your "Tandem Finder Database". Can you tell us what that program consists of?

Dave – Sure. When we set up the club obviously with a San Diego base, but I just naturally as a systems engineer I thought well with the power of the Internet, perhaps we can take a little bit of our model and share it with others and I wasn't aware at the time of any similar resource. So I set up a simple database on Google Docs with a short script that anybody can enter and identify themselves as either a stoker, a captain or other, so it's open for anybody. They identify themselves, their location, their interest, and then I can make the same kind of matches that I do in the club. I can suggest matches that way on an open basis anywhere.

One thing that we do there is, it's what I call "One way information flow" so that the information of a candidate captain is always provided to a candidate stoker and then the stoker can use that information however they like. And we have over 450 entries currently in that database that we started in 2008. I made two connections like that just today so people pop in there all the time.

Mike – Good stuff. Andy what advice would you give to anybody who's considering looking at starting tandem riding as a Blind cyclist or a DeafBlind cyclist?

Andy – So I guess I would start with a helmet, definitely clipless shoes and pedals. They will improve the cycling experience for anyone who wants to get involved. You

can find enjoyment in any level of cycling, you don't have to get to the point where you're competitive. You can get a lot of enjoyment by just getting out there. Distance is often more rewarding than speed.

Mike – What about you Dave, What would be your advice?

Dave – Well I guess something that my wife and I practice is regular riding. It doesn't need to be long, but when she joined me, we've been riding pretty much once a week since then. Also complemented by special experiences where we go on multi-day tours. We've been on five day, week-long and up to two week cycling tours, where we go to somewhere that we haven't been and it's just the greatest way to learn about and immerse yourself into a culture somewhere.

Mike – Most definitely. Just the other day, obviously I'm fresh new blood here in San Diego and Dave was very kind enough to invite me out on a day's cycling tour of San Diego. Like we said, we put the tandem into "Touring Mode" and literally just toured around with a guide on the front which was pretty amazing, and like I said afterwards, it's probably the absolute ultimate way to see a new town or somewhere that you haven't been before. Walking, you can only cover so much ground, in a car or in a bus you're stuck behind a window, but on a bike you experience the sights, the sounds, the culture and a feel for the layout of the city. It was great, it was an amazing day.

Dave- Yip I enjoyed it just as much taking you around. We didn't cover a whole lot of miles, but we sure saw a lot of things.

Mike – Just before we finish, Dave can you give us some contact information for anybody who's possibly interested in finding out more about the Blind Stokers Club here in San Diego.

Dave – Sure. Our website is blindstokersclub.org and then we also share a lot on our Facebook page which is facebook.com/blindstokersclub. And both of those have plentiful resources and contact information.

Mike – Excellent. What about you Andy, would you be happy to hand out your email or contact information for other like-minded people to get hold of you for tips or ideas or just encouragement?

Andy – Yes, of course. I can be contacted at deafblindstoker@gmail.com and if you are unable to email me you can absolutely find me on almost every BSC event you go. If you go to the BSC website and click on members, you'll see the activity schedule and you can see exactly where I'll be.

Mike – Well thank you very much Andy, Dave and Dustin as well. This has been a bit of a first time thing for "The Blind Sport Podcast" doing the hotel room interview or conversation, so thank you for being part of it and all the best for your cycling future.

Dave- Well thanks for having us Mike.

Andy – Yeah thanks, thanks.

Jingle – You're listening to the blind sport podcast with Mike Lloyd. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport.

Quotations

Here is a selection of quotations of a cycling theme.

"Next to a leisurely walk I enjoy a spin on my tandem bicycle. It is splendid to feel the wind blowing in my face and the springy motion of my iron steed. The rapid rush through the air gives me a delicious sense of strength and buoyancy, and the exercise makes my pulse dance and my heart sing." - Helen Keller (Would you have guessed that?)

John Howard - "The bicycle is a curious vehicle. Its passenger is its engine."

John F. Kennedy - "Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of riding a bike."

"I thought of that while riding my bicycle." - Albert Einstein in reference to the Theory of Relativity. (Hahaha, as you would)

And another by Albert Einstein. - "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving."

Greg LeMond - "It never gets easier, you just go faster."

And lastly, this would have to be the most annoying commonly heard saying while you are tandem cycling: "The person on the back isn't pedalling."

Closing

Mike - I hope you enjoyed our chat with Dave and Andy from the Blind Stokers Club about tandem cycling.

A huge thank you to Dave and Andy for sharing their knowledge and experiences with us.

My San Diego tandem cycling experience was absolutely incredible thanks to the generosity of the Blind Stokers Club members. What a great bunch of people.

If you also belong to a tandem club or just enjoy cycling then do send me an email and tell me what you've been up to.

If you have a story or know of a person who you think would be great to feature on a future show then contact me and let's make it happen.

Contact Jingle - To contact Mike or comment on The Blind Sport Podcast, submit a feedback form from the website www.theblindsportpodcast.com, email Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com, send us a tweet or follow us on Twitter @blindsportmike, or visit The Blind Sport Podcast page on Facebook.

Mike - To help me with the growth of The Blind Sport Podcast I need your help.

If you know of others who may get value from listening to this show, then please do tell them about it.

Tell your friends, your family, your club members, your work colleagues, whether it be face-to-face or via social networks, let's get the word out there.

If we do this together, we can promote the awareness of Blind Sports and make a difference.

OK, that's us for another episode, so train hard, play fair, give it your all and most importantly, enjoy your sport.

Thanks for listening. Take care. See ya.

Closing Announcer - Thank you for listening to another edition of The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport. With Mike Lloyd. Visit theblindsportpodcast.com

End of transcript