



Podcast 2 - Participant Perspective

Tom: Welcome to Are You On Board! You're listening to a Vicsport podcast about helping our sport industry to be more inclusive. Support comes from the state government of Victoria.

Sam: Hi, I'm Sam Bramham. I'm a Paralympic gold medalist, ambassador for disability sport and recreation, and a motivational speaker. I'm also currently working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Today I'm speaking with Monty Cooper and Genamarie Richards. Monty is a seventeen year old triathlete and Genamarie is a recent convert to the sport of tennis. They are here to chat with me about their experiences playing sport as people with a disability. Welcome Monty and Genamarie.

Genamarie: thank you.

Monty: Morning.

(0:39) Sam: So what I'll do guys, I'll kick off with you first Monty. How did you get into the sport of triathlon?

(0:44) Monty: My parents were doing triathlons and I started off by doing the Weetabix Kids Triathlon about 10 years old and I have been doing triathlon ever since.

(1:18) Sam: And what is your favorite leg in the triathlon?

Monty: Running.

(1:22) Sam: Genamarie, how did you get into tennis?

(1:24) Genamarie: I lost my vision about ten years ago and I was trying to find my way back into the world. There is a lot of learning and I had an advocate and it just turns out that the advocate I had was the President of Blind Sports and he a couple of months later rang to see how I was going along and I said good and he said would you like to try tennis? And that is how it all came about. But I had no history of sport so I was terrified.

(2:02) Sam: So pretty strong backhand?

(2:03) Genamarie: He said I went there kicking and screaming. It wasn't quite that dramatic. Yeah my backhand is good. Fairly good backhand if I can hit the ball.

(2:15) Sam: And what makes it harder for you both to play sports?

(2:19) Monty: Getting up early in the morning.

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(2:23) Genamarie: (Haha) he's a teenager.

(2:27) Sam: And for you Genamarie?

(2:28) Genamarie: I think it was giving myself permission. I never had a history of being good at sport so it has really taking me awhile. It's the mentor, it's the coaches you get to work with and when you get to hold that racket in your hand or you get to run or do a triathlon, especially if you have a background like I do, then it's just wonderful. I just feel so blessed to now be playing sport. And tennis, I love it, I really really do.

Sam: that's great.

(3:08) Genamarie: So yeah what makes it harder is I guess you hold yourself back by opinions.

(3:15) Sam: Genamarie, how is the sporting landscape changed since you were at school?

(3:19) Genamarie: I think enormously. I think there's a lot more inclusion and a lot more understanding of children's different abilities and different ways of learning. In my day you were judged very quickly, it was like this, if someone throws a ball at you and you don't catch it, she can't do that. You don't get another chance. If you don't catch it, she doesn't play that game. Try and hit it with a bat and you don't hit it, she doesn't play that. Nobody wants you on the team, not even the teacher, so it was quite harsh. And you were divided very quickly and I was one of those that didn't have that connection with the eye and the hand and the ball, I just couldn't coordinate it. Now because I can hear it, I'm allowed to hear it, it's another approach. I believe now teachers try other ways because they understand that children learn in different ways to grasp something.

(4:28) Sam: Very powerful and does anything make it easier to participate in your sports?

(4:33) Monty: Support from friends and family and your parents who are able to take you to and from training.

(4:53) Sam: And Genamarie, yourself?

(4:54) Genamarie: Well it's so much of getting to a place because I try to go independently and you have to learn it with a trainer in my condition and your guide dog has to learn it with you. And when we play it's at a time when it's peak hour on Friday nights and we're catching trams and they are so crowded and I don't know where I am, but you just have to ask and then I have to catch the one that has all the football crowd is on it. So what makes it easier is a volunteer waiting for you on the platform and having them at the other end to tell the story too and maybe sharing it with someone who knows a bit better.

(5:45) Sam: For your retrospective sports Monty and Genamarie, Genamarie you said before that you have a powerful backhand and Monty you like the running component. What are your other unique abilities that make the sport more enjoyable for you? Monty would you like to start?

(6:00) Monty: I am able to go for a swim and I am able to ride my bike and I am able to go for a run.

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(6:15) Sam: And Genamarie, do you have any other unique abilities that make your sport more enjoyable?

(6:20) Genamarie: Yes, I think because I've gone over that threshold of giving myself permission and now I am incredibly passionate and enthusiastic about it so I come in with a good attitude. So much so that my coach says I am the most valued player off the court, which I don't know whether is a compliment or not, but I think it's just that I am happy to be there. It helps enormously. It gets you through the struggles.

(6:52) Sam: In your minds then, how does an inclusive sports organisation encourage more participation by everybody? Genamarie perhaps you could give us your thoughts first.

(7:00) Genamarie: Yes, I think that's such an excellent question and I think it's the million dollar question because it's very much a personal thing and I can imagine many people would've had a history of sport if, like myself, their life changes they can feel like it's no longer possible, but it is. It's meeting the people that encourage you. I think out in the world it's getting better, it's more inclusive, but I think we need more coverage of that, more media, more people in pictures playing sport that have a difference that they might be blind, vision impaired, or any other challenge and just show them, "look at us. We're doing it." and it's fine. Or you show people that there is another way of doing it and you can get help and assistance. You're not on your own cause there are so many wonderful volunteers and helpers out there.

(8:11) Sam: And in your mind how does an inclusive sports organisation encourage more participation by everybody? How can organisations be more inclusive?

(8:21) Monty: Probably getting some more kids and schools involved to what they're doing.

(8:37) Genamarie: You know Monty, what about you going to the schools? Talking to them? You could be an ambassador as well.

Monty: Yeah.

(8:50) Sam: An advocate for participation.

(8:53) Monty: Yeah. Yeah that sounds like a pretty good way.

(8:56) Genamarie: Yeah you might get paid.

Monty: Yeah (haha)

(9:03) Sam: Well very good ideas guys. I would like to thank you both for chatting with me today Monty and Genamarie. I think sports organisation in Victoria can learn a lot from hearing your stories and your passion for sport. Thank you very much.

Genamarie: Pleasure.

Monty: Thanks for listening.



Tom: Thank you for listening to the Are You On Board podcast by Vicsport, supported by the State Government of Victoria. For more episodes please visit vicsport.com.au and follow the links to the Are You On Board page.

Key Messages:

1. How did you get into your sports?

- Monty's parents were involved in triathlons and then Monty did his first triathlon when he was 10 years old and has done them ever since. Genamarie lost her vision 10 years ago and her advocate asked if she wanted to try tennis and she accepted. **(0:39)**

2. What makes it harder for you both to play sports?

- For Monty it's a challenge to get up early in the morning and for Genamarie it is giving herself permission to play sport because she had never played sport in the past. **(2:15)**

3. Genamarie, how has the sporting landscape changed since you were at school?

- There is a lot more inclusion and understanding now then there was in the past. If you didn't have the coordination that everyone else had in sport when you were younger than you just weren't welcomed on the team. Now there are easy ways to modify sport so that it is more inclusive and people have changed their perspective and have been more understanding to people that have disabilities. **(3:15)**

4. Does anything make it easier for you to participate in sport?

- Having support from family and friends helps. It also helps when there are people to assist with public transportation because some sports are offered during peak times of travel and it can be difficult to get from one place to another so having people there to help out is important. **(4:28)**

5. What are other unique abilities that you have that makes your sport more enjoyable?

- The ability to go out and participate in sport. To run, swim and bike and to give yourself permission to do those things. **(6:15)**

6. How does an inclusive sports organisation encourage more participation by everybody?

- Getting more kids and schools involved and being an ambassador for change and inclusion. **(6:52)**