Original Research Article

International Review for the Sociology of Sport
1–23


Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/10126902251394577
journals.sagepub.com/home/irs

Beyond the boundaries of humour: Disabled cricketers' experiences of sledging

James Brighton
Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Ben Powis
Bournemouth University, UK

Robert C Townsend
University of Waikato, New Zealand

Abstract

Normalised within the social fabric of cricket, sledging is a form of gamesship where players aim verbal jousts at one another in order to gain a competitive advantage. Both intimidatory and humorous, existing research into sledging has focused on non-disabled cricketers without considering the experiences of those that do not match this corporeal norm. Accordingly, in this paper we offer the first exploration of sledging as experienced by disabled cricketers and how it contributes to disablism and the social ordering of disabled sporting bodies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 elite players (21 male, 1 female) with physical (12) and intellectual impairments (5) and d/Deafness (5) who compete in non-disabled, impairment-specific and pan-disability cricket. Framed by theories of humour and disability studies, an abductive analytical approach to analysis was undertaken revealing five themes – sledging as *the norm, inclusive humour, gamesship, disablism and subversion*. Findings show how sledging offers a unique lens to explore disabled peoples experiences of cricket. While facilitating inclusion and belonging, sledging is however often euphemistically used to mask discriminatory behaviours. In particular, d/Deaf and learning disability players were subjected to more disturbing forms of disablism than physical disability players. Safeguarding disabled cricketers and strategies for inclusion are discussed.

Keywords

sledging, disability, cricket, banter, humour

Corresponding author:
James Brighton, Section of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 1QU, UK.
Email: james.brighton@canterbury.ac.uk

Introduction

In June 2023, the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket's (ICEC) *Holding Up a Mirror to Cricket* report revealed that 'deeply rooted and widespread forms of structural and institutional racism, sexism and class-based discrimination' (ICEC, 2023a: 8) are entrenched in English and Welsh cricket. According to the ICEC, this elitist and exclusionary culture continues to limit opportunities and diversity within the game. As part of the commission, empirical evidence of players, coaches and officials demonstrated how experiences of discrimination were often made overtly and veiled as 'banter' (ICEC, 2023b). Significantly, this was commonly enacted through verbal abuse, name-calling and '*sledging*' – a particular form of gamesship[1] in cricket, in which opposing players insult and verbally intimidate each other for the purpose of gaining a competitive advantage (Duncan, 2019).

Deeply engrained and mythologised within the social history of cricket (Smyth, 2015), due to its humorous dimensions and reciprocal nature sledging is frequently positioned as 'subtle and humorous banter' (Joseph and Cramer, 2011: 238). Characterised by a 'rapid exchange of humorous lines' (Norrick, 1993: 29), banter is commonplace across sporting contexts and participants are encouraged *not* to take it seriously (e.g., Hickey and Roderick, 2024). Research has demonstrated that banter can strengthen social relationships and reinforce group affiliation (e.g., Oosthuizen, 2021) and the ability to respond appropriately in 'verbal ping-pong' (Dynel, 2009) is important in identity construction and the acquisition of status in sporting fields (e.g., Edwards and Jones, 2018). However, like other types of humour superficially labelled as 'playful', banter possesses more insidious undertones and is often euphemistically used to mask discriminatory behaviours. Indeed, banter has been shown to legitimise verbal abuse and reinforce racist (Burdsey, 2011) misogynist (Abell et al., 2024), homophobic (Evans, 2023; Magrath et al., 2015) and ableist (Powis, 2020) discourses in elite and amateur non-disabled sporting cultures and disability sport (Munro-Cook and Fullagar, 2025). In grassroots cricket, for example, Lawless and Magrath (2023) explore the fine lines between 'inclusionary' banter in fostering close team relationships and 'exclusionary' banter which transgresses levels of acceptability becoming hurtful. While banter acts as a disciplinary practice in sport urging 'compliance with norms' (Munro-Cook and Fullagar, 2025: 10), it should however be taken seriously in exposing multifarious forms of discrimination. It is somewhat surprising then that despite the prevalence of banter in sporting cultures and its role in constructing identity, marginalising others and euphemistically legitimising discriminatory behaviour, it remains chronically under-researched.

Similar to trash talk in sport (Kassing and Sanderson, 2010), sledging can be differentiated from banter as one of its central functions is the disruption of psychological, emotional, and embodied states diverting attention and resulting in errors (e.g., Davis et al., 2018; Duncan, 2019). Accordingly, the presence of sledging appears dependent on a number of individual, situational and relational factors including the perceived ability of the opponent, their role in the team, the period of the innings, the state of the game, how many runs the batter has scored, the level of competition and the history and relationships between opponents (Davis, 2019; Davis et al., 2018; Joseph and

Cramer, 2011). While this body of research has explored the rationales, strategies and impact of sledging there remains scant qualitative analysis of how such practices are experienced by disabled cricketers (Powis, 2020). Likewise, romanticised stories of sledging in cricketing folklore (e.g., Smyth, 2015; Wagg, 2019) predominantly feature white, male, heterosexual and non-disabled players without adequately considering those who do not fit this corporeal norm. Even in the valuable research contained in the '*It's Not Banter'* report (ICEC, 2023a), the lived experiences of disabled people remained peripheral with disability lumped alongside other distinguishing identities (LGBTQ+ and Jewish people). Consequently, very little is known about disabled cricketers experiences of sledging. This seems amiss given that it may further contribute to the systemic exclusion experienced by disabled people in non-disabled sport (Maher et al., 2023) and the environmental, material and social barriers preventing disabled people engaging in disability sport (Fitzgerald, 2018; Kiuppis, 2018).

Furthermore, although the significance of humour has been established within disability cultures as being central in the reproduction of dominant social hierarchies and in the subjugation of disabled bodies (e.g., Garland-Thomson, 1997), limited empirical attention has been paid to the role of alternative forms of humour in disabled sporting cultures or to disabled athletes' uses of humour. Recently, Alexander-Urquhart et al. (2024) explored the use of humour among head coaches of Paralympic teams demonstrating how it may be both facilitative and debilitative as a coaching strategy. Alternatively, within visually impaired cricket, Powis (2020) revealed the role of banter as a form of humour in reinforcing ableism within an impairment-specific sporting sub-culture. In doing so, he found that impairment-based banter served as a unifying social act which simultaneously reinforced divisions between players – as evidenced by the practice of 'B1 bashing', or the deliberate targeting of those players with the least amount of usable sight. Banter was therefore used as a hegemonic device in sustaining ableist social hierarchies. Although an important feature in disability cultures then, the impact of humour and banter on disabled athletes and the role it plays in forging connections between social groups or reinforcing ableist discourses is also largely unknown and warrants further exploration.

Research aims

The aims of our research are twofold. *Firstly,* we aim to explore sledging as experienced by disabled cricketers and the subjective meanings this holds for participants in *non-disabled, impairment-specific* (i.e., Physical Disability (PD); Learning Disability (LD); d/Deaf[2]) and *pan-disability* cricket. The latter has recently been introduced by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to include all three impairment groups in the formulation of the Disability Premier League (DPL) (see Powis et al., 2025). *Secondly,* given the centrality of humour in both sport and disability cultures, we explore how sledging offers a unique lens to explore these intersections and the relational dynamics which contribute to the social ordering of disabled sporting bodies. In doing so, we address if sledging practices are inclusive and enhance belonging, or if they go 'beyond the boundaries' of humour representing a shift into explicit discrimination and

abuse as enactments of disablism and becoming another exclusionary practice experienced by disabled people in sport.

Conceptual framework

In order to develop our understanding of sledging and disability, we act as conceptual bricoleurs as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2018). Here, we approach the phenomena through multiple theoretical approaches and conceptual ideas in order to piece together a diverse multifaceted depiction of disabled cricketers experiences. As Powis et al. (2025) indicates, when acting as researchers-as-bricoleur theorists, one specific theory or concept is not prescribed, rather research is characterised by theoretical eclecticism in generating interpretations. Accordingly, at certain points in our analysis, we use diverse concepts from the fields of sociology, disability studies and novelly, from approaches located within broader discussions of humour and disabling/disability humour.

Defined as forms of communication which generate laughter, amusement and mirth (Critchley, 2011) humour strengthens human bonds, provides a sense of identity and belonging, helps resolve conflict and enables coping (e.g., Aggerholm and Ronglan, 2012; Martin and Ford, 2018). Conversely, humour is used to ridicule, belittle, trivialise, disempower, subordinate, derogate, humiliate and 'test' others knowledge and the appropriateness of their reactions to potentially sensitive social issues (e.g., Adams, 2020; Hylton, 2018). Considering this contested nature, it is unsurprising that the analysis of disability and humour has revealed two main competing 'storylines' (Clark, 2022). Historically, disabled people have been denigrated, demoralised and demeaned as the object of humour (Rosqvist, 2012) and ridiculed by non-disabled people or 'normates' (Garland-Thomson, 1997: 8). This is referred to as '*disabling humour*' which works through positioning impairment under the medical model of disability as something that is tragic, non-normative, unruly and unwanted. Within this approach, disability is medicalised and humour enacted as 'thinly disguised hostility and hatred' (Lisicki, 1992: 66) towards disabled people and fear of becoming disabled. Alternatively, humour that 'centres disability or is offered by disabled persons' (Reid et al., 2006: 631) is known as '*disability humour*'. Through challenging existing sociocultural structures and ableist ideologies and by offering contradictory narratives to disability as tragic, disability humour can be agentic, liberatory, empowering and contribute to a sense of group solidarity, all of which are key elements of the social model (Albrecht, 1999).

Set against this backdrop, Bingham and Green (2016) provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of disabling/disability humour outlined above which we draw on alongside other approaches. They link empirical findings from interviews with disability comedians with four theories of what makes something funny (*superiority; relief; inferiority; and incongruity*) and the common 'models' through which disability has been conceptualised. *Superiority* humour works by making downward comparison, laughing at the inferiority and misfortune of others with jokes made at the expense of disabled people. Disability is individualised and understood through the medical model by being demeaned (i.e., impairment is tragic, non-normative and unruly) reinforcing the power and dominance of the non-disabled majority. *Relief* humour works as a release mechanism to help people cope with the tragedy of

disability and provide a sense of hope. Here the medical model is reproduced through emphasis on self-pity and overcoming. Relief humour however is used by disabled people in navigating interactions in the disabling world, easing anxieties, fears and awkwardness over impairment (see Stebbins, 1996), counteracting notions of pity and tragedy and forging positive relationships. Humour is therefore reformatory, used as relief from frustrations of living in ableist world, not as relief form the tragedy of impairment in ways which enable agency and challenge feelings of helplessness and being Othered. Alternatively, *inferiority* humour works by acting as a relational tool in appealing to the non-disabled majority to empathise with differences in being human, sharing in sense of fragility, vulnerability and emotion. Laughing is not directed at another but is undertaken together about the 'collective human experience' (Bingham and Green, 2016: 292) and imperfections of the human condition reshaping negative understandings of disability (Berger, 2013). Finally, *incongruity humour* destabilises the accepted order of things in society (e.g., the expectations, norms, rules, responses and values) to evoke laughter and amusement. Through holding up a mirror to non-disabled experience, meaning is inverted through evocation of the unexpected and questioning the 'absurdity' (Bingham and Green, 2016: 294) of the public encounters routinely endured by disabled people. Drawing on this and others work (e.g., Goffman), we were able to produce complex, multiple and overlapping interpretations of disabled cricketers experiences located within intersections of disability, humour and sport.

Methodology

Positionality

Underpinned by a relativist ontology (reality is humanly constructed, multiple and subjective) and a subjectivist, transactional and constructivist epistemology (knowledge is not independent or objective) (Sparkes and Smith, 2014), our research is located within an interpretivist paradigm. Within this approach, meaning of human experience is derived through our interactions with participants. Accordingly, we first position ourselves in relation to disability and the disabled cricketers who make up this study. Each of us consider ourselves 'non-disabled' but through the course of our academic careers have developed a 'disability consciousness' (Berger, 2004: 800) in our work with disabled athletes in varied sporting contexts. We have also at differing stages in our lives, considered ourselves as 'serious' cricketers having played in the top levels of club competition in England. James' interest in cricket and disability was sparked by playing with his Dad who has Polio (Brighton, 2022) and Ben and Robert have been actively involved in the field of disability cricket occupying roles as coaches and support staff (see Powis, 2020; Townsend and Cushion, 2022). These formal and informal roles afforded us with many advantages including gaining access, familiarity with the cultural codes of sledging in cricket and the unique embodied experiences and issues facing disabled cricketers. Our positionality and biographies as researchers and cricketers and the impact this had throughout the research process were continuously reflected upon. For example, as Brighton (2015) has previously highlighted, while possessing knowledge to respond to banter in an appropriate way as a dramaturgical performance (Goffman,

1959) in disability sport cultures, it does not mean that we are not critical of it. In this case, our backgrounds in the field of disability studies and experience of participatory research in disability cricket enabled a greater *attempt* at being empathetic to experiences of disabled cricketers and interrogation of ableist, masculinist and raced assumptions we might hold as non-disabled white male researchers. Equally, having previously gained knowledge of the hierarchical organisation between impairment groupings in disability cricket (Powis et al., 2025) we were careful not to homogenise experiences of sledging among all disabled cricketers and instead offer multiple interpretations of it.

Data generation

Having achieved institutional ethical clearance[3] a gatekeeper (see Cresswell and Poth, 2023) in disability cricket was approached by Ben with who he had previously developed a trusting relationship with (Powis, 2020). This enabled access to disabled cricketers who were 'drafted' into the Disability Premier League (DPL) whose availability for selection was dependent on their existent participation in impairment specific cricket (i.e., PD; LD; d/Deaf) (see Powis et al., 2025). All participants had at some stage in their cricketing careers played non-disabled cricket. After the DPL draft, players were contacted via e-mail and invited to take part in an interview as part of a criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). Arrangements were offered to all players to engage with the study, including the use of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, to facilitate inclusivity. This offer was not taken up by any d/Deaf players involved in this research as each of those who comprised the sample felt that they could engage in an interview through other strategies (e.g., using a hearing aid and through lip reading). Significantly, however, the use of BSL interpretation may help explain the underrepresentation of d/Deaf players in our final sample. As Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) determine, disabled research participants might see such arrangements as another hurdle to overcome and stigmatising resulting in lack of engagement. In total, 22 (21 male, 1 female; 21 White, 1 Asian) players with physical (12), intellectual impairments (5) and d/Deafness[4] (5) gave informed consent to participate in online semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams and varied in length between 25 and 79 min. While this approach presented challenges such as making it problematic to pick up on non-verbal cues, risking disembodied interaction and a loss of intimacy (e.g., Khan and MacEachen, 2022), it also proved useful as participants indicated that they felt comfortable telling stories in the accessible and familiar environment of their own homes. Questions on the interview guide were structured around 'grand tour questions' (Spradley, 1979) (e.g., Can you tell me what you understand by the term sledging?) and subsequently broken into sections that aimed to elicit experiences of sledging in differing contexts (e.g., Can you tell me about your experiences of sledging in non-disabled/impairment specific cricket/in the DPL? How do these experiences impact you?). After each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and distinguishable names and places removed for confidentiality purposes. The interview process was supported with observational and methodological notes to provide contextual relevance and inform future practice. Reflections on what was said, how it was said and issues of researcher reflexivity, positionality and empathy were made. For

example, one d/Deaf participant asked James to draw the blinds in his room so block out the glare from the sun in order to assist lip reading which subsequently ensured in future interviews with d/Deaf participants.

Data analysis

In order to make sense of our participants experiences, a thematic analysis with abductive reasoning was employed. This was approached by moving back and forth between the empirical data generated from interviews and engagement in broad range of social theories and concepts relating to disability, humour and sport. Such mixing of inductive and deductive reasoning is known as abductive analysis (Brinkmann, 2014; Timmermans and Tavory, 2022), which according to Ryba et al. (2012: 27) involves moving 'between everyday meanings and theoretical explanations, acknowledging the creative process of interpretation when applying a theoretical framework to participants' experiences'. This approach offered advantages over more typical inductive and deductive processes which made it suitable for our study. According to Tavory and Timmermans (2014: 1), taking a deductive approach risks fitting the experiences of participants into a predetermined theoretical framework usually developed by 'some en-vogue theorist' resulting in odd or surprising findings being discarded. This is particularly the case given our position as non-disabled researchers and how this can result in tacit non-disabled assumptions of the world to be made (Brighton, 2015). As Powis (2020) has previously warned in disability sport research, adopting a fixed priori theoretical position can result in unexamined and uncritical assumptions especially given that many theoretical choices are underpinned by individual agendas and political manoeuvring. Alternatively, inductive analysis is problematic due to the inherent problems of cleanly separating theory from researchers beliefs and worldviews (Rinehart, 2021). Rather than assuming a deductive or inductive approach therefore, we took principled and ideologically informed decisions (Sparkes and Smith, 2014) about which theories and concepts to employ from the academic fields we are immersed in and relative to the phenomena under study.

The reasoning outlined above was undertaken through the following processes. Initially, James read and re-read each transcript to familiarise himself with the data and proceeded to identify important chunks of meaning. Theme development was made dialectically with existing theory (e.g., Goffman's referential afterlife (1981), disabling/disability humour) knowledge of which has been gained from previous engagement in the field (e.g., Brighton et al., 2021) and further conceptualisation relative to the specific phenomena being explored (e.g., on disability/disabling humour). Once key themes and theories were identified, they were checked with Ben and Robert who also read and analysed interview transcripts, made notes and developed themes independently drawing from their own conceptual backgrounds and ideas. The authors then came together to discuss commonalities and discrepancies, continuously shifting between data and theory until an overview of the phenomena and theoretical framing was produced. For example, whereas some interpretations of sledging were initially conceptualised as superiority humour, upon further interrogation and relative to the implicit intention and the cultural context in which it occurred, they were deemed as a more inclusionary

from of inferiority humour. Rather than representing an attempt to justify inter-rater reliability where two or more researchers aim to seek agreement and/or consensus on the 'truth' (see Smith and Sparkes, 2016), this process focused on negotiating plausible and coherent interpretations of the reflections provided by participants. Notably, we found that such a collaborative approach proved particularly useful in abductive reasoning as each author has contributed to the 'chocolate box' of differing theory and concepts to choose from. Keeping participants voices central, an important commitment to the 'nothing about us without us' (Charlton, 1998) mantra which opposes exploitative of research with disabled research participants, these findings are now discussed.

Findings and discussion

Five themes were crafted from our abductive analysis, sledging: as the 'norm'; as 'inclusive humour'; as 'gamesship'; as 'disablism'; and as 'subversion'. Participants did not experience these sledges in a fixed or sequential fashion, rather they were experienced dynamically and interchangeably in the specific context (e.g., format), time (e.g., state of the game) and space (e.g., on/off field) in which they occurred. With this in mind, we now discuss each theme.

Sledging as the norm

Humour and banter were perceived as central in the way disabled cricketers socially interacted with each other and with non-disabled cricketers. In non-disabled club cricket in which friendly and trusting relationships had been established over time, *banter* enacted in various social settings was often aimed at participants' impairment and physically distinguishing characteristics:

> Yeah, it's accepted between me and my teammates in my club, and we all have a laugh, where I can go in the shower and they hide my leg brace, while I'm in the shower, for a laugh, things like that. It's just I know who I'm close with and I accept it off, but not people I don't know on a cricket field. (Carl, PD)

> There is a stigmatism in [non-disabled] club cricket. I do get a few sort of from my clubmates and stuff, you know, blue badge [disabled parking permit] and things like that, but it's all said in jest, it's part of being in the team. (Rich, PD)

Although this might be deemed as disabling humour, such teasing was generally accepted as entertaining and enjoyable, contributing to group affiliation and fostering a sense of belonging, as has previously been demonstrated in sporting cultures (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Sullivan, 2013). Likewise, participants articulated the ubiquity of *sledging* while playing and its embeddedness within the cultural fabric of all forms of cricket in which they participate:

> There is a lot [of sledging]. I'm guilty of that, but I think that's a good thing though, nothing nasty, everyone likes a bit of banter you know, everyone likes to get in peoples' heads when

> they're playing cricket but it's naturally part of game, and now everyone's talking to each other and getting to know each other better… So I think it's good, it's healthy. (Freddie, PD)

When playing impairment-specific matches, sledging was seen as 'fair game' and 'a laugh' as players sledged disability-to-disability group. As Russell (LD) revealed 'Oh yeah, everyone does it, right from ball one'. While initially causing shock, under these circumstances sledges were interpreted as having more comedic than offensive qualities as players became socialised into cultural norms:

> They just started ripping into each other. One lad with cerebral palsy just started getting absolutely rinsed and I was like 'wow, what's going on?' and laughed. (Arthur, d/Deaf)

> But it's [sledging] kind of the banter. Like everyone takes the piss out of each other. (Philip, PD)

As Philip alludes to here, being able to take it and give it back in culturally appropriate ways represents a 'dramaturgical performance' between teammates (Hickey and Roderick, 2024: 392), which is important in gaining social acceptance and constructing valued cricketing identities. As Edwards and Jones (2024) discern then, like humour, sledging possesses what Goffman (1981: 46) terms a 'referential afterlife', where insider group identity and knowing relationships are generated and maintained through the (re)production of culturally appropriate and humorous sledges. Consequently, participants expressed that disability cricket should not be exempt from sledging, nor that disabled cricketers should be deemed as vulnerable or too fragile to be sledged as doing so would only serve to reproduce medico-tragedy understandings of disability, diminishing and trivialising their involvement:

> There is going to be banter, there is going to be sledging. It's part of the game. A lot of players, they play club cricket so they will receive it no matter where they go. If we put a lid on it, disability cricket is just edging away from real world scenarios that are actually going to happen. (Robert, PD)

Similar to Clark (2022: 1542), who in the face of disablement misses 'being the object' of humour, participants firmly established that their disability should not render them 'off limits' from being the recipients of sledging. Indeed, Robert's comment above points to the valuable roles that banter and sledging has for disabled cricketers in their everyday interactions in the social world, helping them manage and navigate the microaggressions and abuse commonly endured as disabled people (Lockyer, 2015; Stebbins, 1996). Banter and sledging then were commonly employed in easing anxieties and awkwardness around impairment as 'relief' humour (Bingham and Green, 2016) in ways that helped participants navigate interactions in the disabling world.

Sledging as inclusive humour

Used within the spirit of play (Duncan, 2019), sledging contributed to enjoyment of playing sport. For example, in non-disabled cricket, as indicated in the quotes by Carl

and Rich above and reinforced by Shane below, jokes were often made to create an atmosphere of inclusivity with disabled players:

> It can be done in what I would say is good taste, well that's not the word, but the wicketkeeper might, when I was going through the ranks, maybe in the 2's or something, and the standard wasn't particularly great, and there was someone else in the field who didn't move particularly well in the field and they would say 'It's nice not be the slowest one in this game eh'. (Shane, PD)

The comment made by the wicketkeeper above risks drawing Shane into a form of 'superiority' humour by positioning his disability as less severe than the other player. However, such inclusionary putdowns, or gaining amusement at the expense of another were employed here in generating a sense of inclusion in a friendly and caring way (Abell et al., 2024; Edwards and Jones, 2018; Hickey and Roderick, 2024). What exactly is deemed playful and acceptable without crossing the line into ableist evaluation of the body was determined by culturally constructed boundaries and was dependent on what was said, its intention, and who it was said by. Importantly, these boundaries shifted as players transitioned between alternative disabled and non-disabled cricketing contexts (Maher et al., 2023). For example, in impairment specific cricket, participants emphasised that there was only a small circle of players which helped to establish respectful relationships, set borders of acceptability and decipher intentionality:

> The thing with disability cricket, because it's not massive, everyone sort of knows each other, so a lot of it is your mates who will be just having a joke with you, they'll push it a little bit, but they know the boundary. (Russell, LD)

Here, with mutual understanding forged through pre-existing relationships, sledging and humour were deemed within the boundaries of acceptability and were prominent in enhancing senses of togetherness, camaraderie and integration. As Philip and Rich highlight, this was often achieved through self-deprecation which normalised disability generating mutual empathy and understanding:

> They've got to take the piss out of themselves first. So I love taking the piss out of myself and my brother. So I'll take the piss out myself. And then all of a sudden, everyone will just take the piss out of me. Which is nice in a way. (Philip, PD)

> I think my first game someone said something, which I was like, 'woah', like something about being 'Come on, mate. Someone would think you're disabled,' Like, with how slow like you're running or whatever. It's just like little things like that, but it almost, it got some laughs and it does almost normalise something if that's a word. (Rich, PD)

Superficially, such comments reflect 'superiority' humour (Bingham and Green, 2016) through appearing to reinforce the privileged position of the non-disabled majority. However, mutual self-deprecation was intended to be interpreted as 'inferiority' humour by appealing to shared experiences of disabled cricketers. Rather than exclude, under such conditions sledging enhances inclusion by re-positioning disability

as normal and so is enacted under the transformative philosophies underpinning the social model. However, whereas joint understandings of the experience of disability helped determine the acceptability of sledging and banter in impairment-specific cricket, the recent introduction of pan-disability cricket has destabilised these boundaries problematising both what is suitable and inhibiting the development of social connections:

> I would never take the piss out of [another player] for being deaf. Like that's the one thing I would say about the deaf lads, it's really hard to get a rapport with them. Like, and I'm all about that in like a team environment. (Philip, PD)

Sledging practices between impairment groups further reinforce the social divide between different impairment groups, asking questions about inclusion and exclusion and how disabled people feel in the contexts and spaces they find themselves in (Maher et al., 2023). For example, Simon (d/Deaf) recounts how he was labelled as 'fake-disabled' when making the transition from impairment-specific into pan-disability cricket, in which a 'true' disability identity was closely guarded and somewhat exclusive criteria of entry:

> I definitely felt like a fraud. And that, you know, jokey comments that I was always called the 'fake-disabled'. And I find it's banter and it's a good laugh. I sort of go with it and bring it on myself and I kind of find it funny. But it is true, like, especially the pan-disability when you're playing with someone with one leg or one arm and I'm there going 'Well, I can't hear perfect, but I'm going to play cricket against you.' You do sometimes feel hang on … or someone's in a wheelchair and, it's like this can't be fair. (Simon, d/Deaf)

Although recognising the added complexity of sledging in pan-disability cricket it remained readily employed, especially in questioning the belongingness of alternatively impaired bodies in differing sporting structures. Justified as 'banter', such strategies are employed to destabilise players' inclusion, creating anxiety and challenging or undermining the legitimacy of their success. In the case highlighted above, Simon is jokingly accused of being complicit in a 'disability con' (Dorfman, 2019: 1051) through faking his disability in order to compete in pan-disability competition. As Maher et al. (2023) discuss, disabled bodies do not fit neatly into sporting structures, many of which are constructed by non-disabled people and are inherently ableist. Here, the exchange of banter and sledging provides a seemingly accepted way of explicitly communicating the tensions disabled people experience in navigating non-disabled, impairment specific and pan-disability sport, impacting on their sense of belonging and value. Rather than recognising the shared aspects of disablement, physical impairment is seen as a signifier of disability and any other claim to disability (e.g., d/Deafness; LD) is scrutinised through banter. Questioning players criteria for inclusion in such ways also provided opportunities to practice sledging as gamesship.

Sledging as gamesship

More sinister yet still deemed within the boundaries of the game was the sledging of disabled cricketers for the specific intention of gaining a competitive advantage. Here, the

visibility of impairment (Powis et al., 2025; DePauw, 1997, 2022) was central in what sledges were made towards specific players. As Zack outlines, this included goading players to execute techniques which are more difficult or impossible

> It was coming to the point of win or lose, I think I was batting nine or ten and we hadn't got many more runs to get but we didn't have many wickets in hand. They weren't very disability specific, but they were just like, 'Oh yeah, he's not going to be able to hit it through the offside,' or something like that, or, 'Go on, play him through cover, let's see actually play through the offside'. (Zack, PD)

While such sledges could be seen as being predicated on assumptions about individual players' impairment based on what can be seen, given the pre-existing relationships that had been established in impairment specific cricket they could also reflect assumptions about players ability as a batter informing sledging as gamesship. Significantly however, the lived experience of a specific impairment was used in order to enact sledging as gamesship effectively in impairment-specific cricket as players possessed greater insight *what* to say to affect each other. For example, due to the apparent invisibility of his impairment, Russell (LD) infers that while playing non-disabled cricket non-LD players will not know either that he is autistic, or have understanding of what sledges will have an impact. However, when playing impairment-specific cricket, LD players used such knowledge to their advantage:

> So obviously when I play mainstream cricket a lot of people won't know that I'm autistic and they won't see it on the pitch. Obviously when you play disability cricket it will be people on the pitch that are non-stop talking to you, they'll try and get in your head and because a lot of the LD lads… You overthink a lot, so they'll just ask you a simple question, like 'Why is the sun so yellow today?' then you'll be thinking about that question for the next couple of balls or whatever and just taking your mind off the game. They'll do anything they can, but because they know it works, they'll just keep doing it, so everyone uses other people's disability to their advantage. (Russell, LD)

While non-LD players might be oblivious or see such a sledge as light-hearted then, shared mutual understandings of impairment among players help reveal its harmful consequences. Nevertheless, Freddie thought that impairment specific banter remained well within the boundaries of the game:

> I feel like there's a certain line to it. If a PD takes the mick out of a PD, or a deaf takes the mick out of deaf perhaps, or LD takes the piss out of an LD player that's more understandable, but there's a certain line. I mean, I don't care whatsoever, if someone said something to me I'd laugh, but maybe some players might get a bit more emotional.

Sledging as gamesship then is particularly damaging to LD cricketers who cannot always distinguish between literal and figurative gests and threats. Significantly, in switching emphasis from a physical challenge to a mental one, the battle shifts to regaining cognition and focus further disadvantaging some LD players whose impairment impacts on capacity to undertake refocusing techniques and emotional regulation. Aware of the

contentiousness of sledging LD players, caution was taken by PD and d/Deaf players who altered their sledging strategies in pan-disability cricket:

> They [cricket administrators] try and say leave it out. I do [sledge] with my close mates if I was there, we just have a bit of a laugh, but you know certain individuals who'd struggle with it, especially the learning difficulties lads. I've played against them before, and they've [cricket administrators] told us not to interact with them because they just snap. From our side it'd probably be a laugh but from their side its more dangerous what you're doing to them. (Carl, PD)

Although this helps explain how the majority of sledging remained confined to specific impairment groups in pan-disability cricket, sledging as gamesship was still enacted across impairment groups where it was felt that prior relationships had been built and knowledge existed of how it would be received:

> Yeah, I think it's between, like you said, LD to LD and PD to PD. The boys that we're comfortable with we have a chat, whether it be across disabilities, we like to have a chat. We know that there are certain players that will get riled up over certain things and we know what to say. I think it becomes like a one-up; with a deaf player you could say anything to them, they're not going to actually hear you, so for them, they're just focused on the ball. But PD and LD, you can say something to them, there are certain characters even within the PD squad that get agitated, riled up, and there are certain characters in the LD squad that will probably get agitated and riled up quicker than certain other players. (Zack, PD)

The form and acceptability of sledging as gamesship was therefore determined by who made the sledge as well as what was said as disabled cricketers began to develop mutual understandings of impairment-specific stereotyping. While the affinity between disabled players was an important contributory factor in making decisions to sledge therefore, the emphasis on gamesship surpassed empathetic consideration of impairment with sledging deemed as another skill to use over opponents.

Sledging as disablism

Whereas sledging as gamesship was contentious yet generally accepted, sledging that weaponised disability as a personal insult crossed boundaries of humour. Here, sledging moved from implicit microaggressions to explicit, abusive and violent enactments of disablism (see Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011; Swartz et al., 2018). As Arthur (d/Deaf) describes:

> You be surprised at the number of players both deaf and PD who have received abuse in mainstream cricket, it's kind of people's go to, isn't it? There's a line between sledging and discrimination and very quickly they've crossed that yeah, that's that seems to be quite a common thread amongst experiences.

As an example of Arthur's point above, Robert and Carl both reported having their impairment 'mocked' for their non-normative gait in non-disabled cricket:

> I have received my fair share of sledging and stuff like that when I am out there, I run with an abnormal gait, but I tend to laugh it off most of the time [but] they looked at my running style and compared it to galloping like a horse. (Robert, PD)

> Last Saturday, somebody mimicked my limp when I was batting. So it went pretty serious, I ran at him, just shoved the bloke, and then one of our lads ran on, got there right away. So yeah, you get the odd idiot unfortunately. We were 20 for 5 chasing 140 when I went into bat, we were 130 for five when he did it, [mimicked limp]. He was just trying to get under my skin, but there's other ways you can get under your skin instead of just being personal. (Carl, PD)

Multiple factors contributed to taunts progressing from being light-hearted and amusing to more disturbing acts of disablism. In non-disabled cricket, players were abused more because of their disability when the result is in the balance, or as Carl highlights above, when someone who does not fit the corporeal norm is playing well and challenging norms of ability. Sledging as disablism which attacked impairment as an individual flaw in such ways was positioned as antithetical to the spirit of play and become increasingly 'mean-spirited' (LoConto and Roth, 2005: 215) over time. Consequently, recipients experienced emotional distress, anger and disappointment compromising their desire to continue playing:

> I've played local cricket and I've had people going 'You're deaf, you shouldn't be playing cricket.' And I'm going 'But I can bat, I bowl, I can field. I can see what I'm doing.' Jog on, mate. But it doesn't make it right because my fear is somebody a bit like me is coming through and wanting to play is put off by it and never plays cricket again, because they're more sensitive to their disability or they're just getting used to being disabled or whatever else and not quite adapted yet. They get that abuse and that turns them off cricket forever. (Oscar, d/Deaf)

Sledging as disablism then risks becoming another hegemonic device, preserving non-disabled privilege and Othering and excluding disabled cricketers. Although some participants explained how they were able to 'ignore' disablist sledges (Oscar, d/Deaf), their presence is a stark reminder of the 'harsh reality of divisive humour' (Powis, 2020: 168) in cricket. It also led to many participants experiencing what Abell et al. (2024: 8727) term 'banter fatigue'. In such instances, players felt hurt and grew wearisome of sledging yet felt unable to divulge the enduring emotional impact it had on them, as Duncan (PD) reveals:

> There's just too much of it [sledging]. I'm not one who sledges I just don't agree with it. I've been given the send-off by England PD players, they just got proper up in my face… I had a bit of a ding dong with [player]. When I shook his hand after the game I said, 'just leave your ego at the door'. And then he was apologetic. He was trying to buy me a pint in the bar, and I said 'no, you've done what you've done, it shows your character, don't try and buy me a pint now to apologise. Just own it, don't bully or offend anyone'.

Given the affinity among disabled players and the commonality of their experience playing in impairment and pan-disability cricket, sledging as disablism could therefore

be considered what Thomas (2011: 107) terms a 'mate crime', an action enacted 'against disabled people at the hands of someone, or several people that the disabled person considers to be their friends'. When sledging becomes an explicit expression of disablism then, disabled cricketers are left exposed by both non-disabled and other disabled players who they may have considered having previously developed mutual and respectful relationships with.

Sledging as subversion

In contrast to the comments made by Duncan above who is PD, with experience some PD and d/Deaf players articulated that they were able to use being the recipients of sledging to sharpen their focus, repositioning it as something that was useful: 'If you've got someone tussling or fighting or having words with you, I think it just engages you all the more' (Zack, PD). Equipped with appropriate knowledge of the cultural codes of banter, participants were here able to respond to sledges using disability humour in ways which diffused the power of the perpetrator. For example, Joel replies to sledges about his impairment in 'funny' ways, disarming the intended purpose thereby making such jousts powerless:

> And I always use a term for myself because I've got one cochlear implant, I've got nothing on the other ear. So I just say 'it goes in one ear comes out the other.' People find that baffling, and it's funny. So it [sledging] never bothered me. (Arthur, d/Deaf)

By switching power from the giver to the receiver in such an amusing way, Arthur uses 'incongruity' humour (Bingham and Green, 2016) to invert the relational dynamic rendering the attempted sledge meaningless and belittling the actions of the giver and countering the tragedy of disability. Under specific conditions then, experienced PD and d/Deaf players were able to subvert sledges and use them to their advantage. In a similar vein, some participants reported that if they were being heavily sledged they would 'play' on their disability by pretending to be more impaired than they are. Resultantly, would be sledgers were surprised when players executed skills, requiring them to re-think what disabled cricketers were capable of. As Zack and Philip describe:

> He [the bowler] was like, 'Oh yeah, you won't reverse sweep to win the game, you can't play from the offside, I've seen him play a couple of times,' and then, you know, being who I am I've just gone and reverse swept it and I've said, 'Good game.' The first person I've gone up to is the person who said it. (Zack, PD)

> I got chat from a 15 year old last year, I didn't like that. 15 year old like sprayed me for not running a quick single. And there was like five to win… There was 20 overs left and I hit my first ball for like a ginormous six. And I turn around at the end and said 'if you want to take the piss out of my disability go for it'. (Philip, PD)

In such situations, participants demonstrated how they integrated their impairments and 'stigma symbols' (Goffman, 1963: 59) as 'purposeful slips' (p. 124) to wrestle back control and reclaim subjectivity. As Lockyer (2015: 1405) discerns, humour which

switches the 'comic gaze outwards towards disabling social norms and critiques disabling stereotypes' here produces a 'reverse semantic effect or anti-disablist resistance'. Responding to sledges and skilfully executing successful sporting performance therefore enabled disabled cricketers to elicit a sense of control subverting ableist assumptions of ability.

Although the strategies outlined above enabled PD and d/Deaf players to challenge power relations between the giver and receiver, as Powis (2020) highlights, they do not detract from the necessity to defend themselves through banter and demonstration of sporting ability. Such emphasis on individual agency is problematic as it does little to affect the structural or cultural change in cricket or the reduction of impairment to 'undesirable, stigmatised markers of difference' (Powis, 2020: 168), which continue to marginalise the 'mainstream' sporting spaces of disabled people (Maher et al., 2023). Significantly, subversion was less accessible for LD players who often found it problematic to respond to sledges:

> Obviously [sledging] it gets into his head because he's LD and he's trying to then not show it, but it's kind of hard for him [to respond]. Whereas [player who is PD] he will just ignore it or give it back. (Russell, LD)

Consequently, while culturally informed and well delivered humour equipped disabled cricketers with 'arsenals' (Bingham and Green, 2016: 298) to contest disablism, it continued to restrict others, in particular players with LD. Although sledging is an important part of the game for players to navigate then, it is not one that LD players may fairly engage in. Such findings provide further evidence for the hierarchical ordering of bodies in disability sport (e.g., Powis et al., 2025; Howe, 2011; Sherrill and Williams, 1996) where people with physical or sensory impairment are positioned above those with intellectual and developmental impairments.

Reflections

This is first paper to explore sledging as experienced by disabled cricketers. Theoretically, we have blended sociological theory, concepts from disability studies and discussions of humour and disabling/disability humour laying a novel conceptual grounding for the undertaking of future work into disability sport, banter and gamesship. Empirically, through the voices of players themselves, we have revealed that like banter, the ubiquity of sledging provides 'an interlinking thread of group life' (Edwards and Jones, 2024: 413) normalised through the social processes inherent in cricket participation. In each of the formats in they play, participants were not deemed 'off limits' from sledging as such prohibition reproduces medical understandings of disability. Within the boundaries of inclusive humour, ritualised patterns of light-hearted and good-natured sledging were central to social interaction and group affiliation fostering senses of togetherness and belonging. As players became socialised into accepted ways of being in the teams that they are part of then, the ability to appropriately administer and receive sledges acted as important cultural codes of inclusion and sharpened communicative tools to manage microaggressions and disablist interactions away from the cricket field

in disabling society. Sledging as gamesship was however more harmful and exclusionary. Here, insider knowledge of impairment was used to enact specific forms of sledging which were effective in disrupting concentration and creating a competitive advantage. LD players, whose impairment impacted on their capability for refocusing and emotional regulation in fast-paced sporting contexts, were left particularly vulnerable.

More worrisome still was the widespread presence of sledging that weaponised disability as overt, explicit and violent enactments of disablism. Intensified when disabled cricketers challenge acceptable limits of performance threatening non-disabled players perceptions of normativity, sledging as disablism is another example of a hegemonic device, preserving non-disabled privilege and Othering and excluding disabled athletes. More sinister in their intentions, such practices offer further evidence for the darkening of the art of sledging, seemingly providing acceptance for disablism under the justification of cricketing culture and banter. Echoing findings in broader sporting cultures where impairment and physical difference is deemed appropriate to target as humour (e.g., De Haan et al., 2015) sledging as disablism transcends amusement and gentile 'gamesship' and is interpreted as offensive, hurtful, humiliating and challenge notions of fair play and the 'spirit of cricket'[5] (e.g., Brearley, 2020; Rae, 2012).

Significantly, our findings show how the introduction of pan-disability cricket has muddied the waters of acceptability of sledging across impairment groups, leaving players unsure about boundaries of sledging and questioning each other's inclusion as they transition between formats and non-disabled/disabled sport (Maher et al., 2023). d/Deaf players for example were at risk of labelled as 'fake disabled' or being excluded from sledging and banter entirely as a result of their impairment. Our focus on sledging then also provided a novel critical lens through which to explore the relational dynamics affecting the social ordering of disabled bodies in sport. Such hierarchical ordering of impairment offers further evidence for pecking orders in the ranking of disabled sporting bodies which become more apparent in pan-disability competition (Powis et al., 2025). Specifically, sledging practices discriminate more against d/Deaf and to greater extent against LD players. This extends to attempts of resistance, where more experienced PD and d/Deaf disabled cricketers were able to subvert ableist assumptions of ability through responding to sledging with humour or enacting 'purposeful slips' in order to reclaim power and subjectivity – yet LD players felt unable to access such strategies of subversion. Such findings resonate with previous research that demonstrates that both non-disabled and disabled people themselves express preference for physical and sensory impairment and harbour more prejudice towards those with learning, developmental and mental impairments (e.g., Harpur, 2019).

Our study provides important empirical evidence to further distinguish how disablism is manifested in cricket and should be considered when addressing strategies to address discrimination and exclusionary practices in the game. Given the impact that sledging has on players and the prevalence of adverse mental wellbeing experienced by cricketers (Ogden et al., 2022; Schuring et al., 2017), findings should also contribute to safeguarding policy to help protect the health and welfare of disabled cricketers. This should include developing coping mechanisms for managing sledging and educating stakeholders (e.g., coaches, umpires and administrators) on the unique forms of discrimination experienced by disabled cricketers, including those euphemistically masked as 'banter'.

Guidance on what is determined as acceptable (within the boundary) and what is not acceptable (beyond the boundary) should therefore be generated in conjunction *with* disabled players and made available through official ECB communication channels. Such a resource should form part of the curriculum on ECB coaching and officiating pathways and be mandatory for completion criteria for those involved in formal ECB roles in disability cricket. At a ground level, it would also assist players, managers and umpires manage situations when sledging arises, helping safeguard against disablism as it occurs.

In closing, we recognise that our study has limitations. Our sample was made of up mainly white, elite disabled cricketers in England who identified as male. In depth analysis of how multiple differentiating identities (e.g., sexed, gendered, raced, classed, aged and ethnic) impact experiences of sledging alongside disability is required. Given the racism, sexism and classed-based discrimination raised in the ICEC report (2023a), female and non-white disabled cricketers in particular need their voices heard. Methodologically, our study required participants to recall previous experiences of sledging through interviews, which are not only politically and contextually bound but are subject to various social dynamics in the process of remembering and telling (Smith and Sparkes, 2016). Ethnographic approaches which observe sledging in naturalistic terrains as it occurs would therefore be useful, particularly when exploring sledging among disabled players who face barriers in communicating their experiences in normative ways. Away from cricket, the impact of banter, humour and trash talk in disability sport is virtually absent and requires further attention. Impairment should be acknowledged as central in disability experience and in the hierarchical ordering of disabled sporting bodies, rather than be reduced to an invisible presence.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the participants who have provided them with the stories that they have presented in this paper.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Southampton Solent University institutional review board (approval number: 28510).

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained for anonymised participation information to be published in this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

James Brighton https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7282-8558
Ben Powis https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4324-5668
Robert C Townsend https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7343-5329

Notes

1. Gamesship can be understood as the strategic employment of behavioural tactics which aim to distract and disrupt the concentration of a competitor. Although we recognise the term gamesmanship, we use the gender-neutral term gamesship here.
2. The lower case 'd' 'deaf' refers to those with a hearing loss of any degree, including those who cannot hear at all, whereas the capital 'D' Deaf refers to those who voluntarily belong to the Deaf community.
3. Southampton Solent University Ethics Board (acceptance number: 28510).
4. The lower case 'd' 'deaf' refers to those with a hearing loss of any degree, including those who cannot hear at all, whereas the capital 'D' Deaf refers to those who voluntarily belong to the Deaf community.
5. According to ex-England men's captain Mike Brearly, for example, sledging has escalated to become 'gang warfare', in which players are systematically targeted for mental denigration (cited in Rae, 2012).

References

Abell L, Buglass SL, Betts LR, et al. (2024) 'It's all part of the culture': Undergraduate students' experiences of banter in university sports clubs and societies. *Current Psychology* 43(10): 8727–8739.

Adams A (2020) Humour, masculinities and youth sport coaching: 'good morning, ladies!'. *Sport, Education and Society* 25(4): 463–474.

Aggerholm K, Ronglan LT (2012) Having the last laugh: The value of humour in invasion games. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 6(3): 336–352.

Albrecht GL (1999) Disability humour: What's in a joke? *Body & Society* 5(4): 67–74. https://doi:10.1177/1357034X99005004007

Alexander-Urquhart D, Bentzen M, Kenttä G, et al. (2024) Exploring interpretations and implications of coaches' use of humour in three national paralympic teams. *International Sport Coaching Journal* 1: 1–9.

Berger RJ (2004) Pushing forward: Disability, basketball, and me. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10(5): 794–810.

Berger RJ (2013) *Introducing Disability Studies*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bingham SC, Green SE (2016) Aesthetic as analysis: Synthesizing theories of humor and disability through stand-up comedy. *Humanity & Society* 40(3): 278–305.

Brearley M (2020) *Spirit of Cricket: Reflections on Play and Life*. London: Little Brown Book Group.

Brighton J (2015) Researching disabled sporting bodies: Reflections from an 'able'-bodied ethnographer. In: Wellard I (ed) *Researching Embodied Sport*. London: Routledge, 163–177.

Brighton J (2022) Disability and ageing: Dads, sons, sport and impairment. In: Powis B, Brighton J, Howe PD (eds) *Researching Disability Sport :Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Routledge, 126–140.

Brighton J, Townsend RC, Campbell TL, et al. (2021) Moving beyond models: Theorizing physical disability in the sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 38(4): 386–398.

Brinkmann S (2014) Doing without data. *Qualitative Inquiry* 20(6): 720–725.

Burdsey D (2011) That joke isn't funny anymore: Racial microaggressions, color-blind ideology and the mitigation of racism in English men's first-class cricket. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 28(3): 261–283.

Charlton J (1998) *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clark JN (2022) On disability, humour and rabbit holes: A personal reflection. *Disability & Society* 37(9): 1541–1545.

Cresswell J, Poth CN (2023) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London: Sage.

Critchley S (2011) *On Humour*. London, New York: Routledge.

Davis P (2019) Psychology of sledging. *Sport Health* 37(1): 28–31.

Davis PA, Davis L, Wills S, et al. (2018) Exploring "sledging" and interpersonal emotion-regulation strategies in professional cricket. *The Sport Psychologist* 32(2): 136–145.

de Haan D, Osborne A, Sherry E (2015) Satire or send-up? Paddy power and blind football: A case for managing public relations for disability sport. *Communication & Sport* 3(4): 411–433.

Denzin NK, Lincoln YS (2018) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DePauw K (1997) The (in)visibility of disability: Cultural contexts and 'sporting bodies'. *Quest (Grand Rapids, Mich)* 49(4): 416–430.

DePauw KP (2022) Disabled female sporting bodies: Reflections on (in)visibility of disability in sport. In: Powis B, Brighton J, Howe PD (eds) *Researching Disability Sport: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Routledge, 85–99.

Dorfman D (2019) Fear of the disability con: Perceptions of fraud and special rights discourse. *Law & Society Review* 53(4): 1051–1091.

Duncan S (2019) Sledging in sport—playful banter, or mean-spirited insults? A study of sledging's place in play. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 13(2): 183–197.

Dynel M (2009). Beyond a joke: Types of conversational humour. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 3(5): 1284–1299

Edwards CN, Jones RL (2018) Humour in sports coaching: 'It's a funny old game'. *Sociological Research Online* 23(4): 744–762.

Edwards CN, Jones RL (2024) Humour, agency and the [re] negotiation of social order within workplace settings. *Sports Coaching Review* 13(3): 412–431.

Evans P (2023) Football and homosexually themed "banter": The disconnect between positive social attitudes toward gay people and the use of homophobic language. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 15(1): 95–122

Fitzgerald H (2018) Disability and barriers to inclusion. In: Brittain I, Beacom A (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Paralympic Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 55–70.

Garland-Thomson R (1997) *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Goffman E (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin.

Goffman E (1981) *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Goodley D, Runswick-Cole K (2011) The violence of disablism. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 33(4): 602–617. https://doi:10.1111/j.1467-9566.2010.01302.x

Harpur PD (2019) *Ableism at Work: Disablement and Hierarchies of Impairment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hickey C, Roderick M (2024) When jokes aren't funny: Banter and abuse in the everyday work environments of professional football. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 24(2): 383–403.

Howe PD (2011) Cyborg and supercrip: The Paralympics technology and the (dis) empowerment of disabled athletes. *Sociology* 45(5): 868–882.

Hylton K (2018) I'm not joking! The strategic use of humour in stories of racism. *Ethnicities* 18(3): 327–343.

ICEC. (2023a) Holding up a mirror to cricket: A report by the independent commission for equity in cricket. Available at: https://theicec.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/HOLDING-UP-A-MIRROR-TO-CRICKET-REPORT-ICEC-2023.pdf (accessed 29 November 2024).

ICEC. (2023b) It's not banter: Lived experiences of discrimination in cricket: A report by the independent commission for equity in cricket. Available at: Its-Not-Banter-Lived-Experiences-of-Discrimination-in-Cricket-Report-ICEC-Annex-1.pdf (accessed 29 November 2024).

Jones RL, Potrac P, Cushion C, et al. (2011) *The Sociology of Sports Coaching*. London: Routledge.

Joseph S, Cramer D (2011) Sledging in cricket: Elite English batsmen's experiences of verbal gamesship. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 5(3): 237–251.

Kassing JW, Sanderson J (2010) Trash talk and beyond: Aggressive communication in the context of sports. In: Avtgis T, Rancer AS (eds) *Arguments, Aggression, and Conflict: New Directions in Theory and Research*. London, New York: Routledge, 275–288.

Khan TH, MacEachen E (2022) An alternative method of interviewing: Critical reflections on videoconference interviews for qualitative data collection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21: 1–12.

Kiuppis F (2018) Inclusion in sport: Disability and participation. In: Kiuppis F (ed) *Sport and Disability: From Integration Continuum to Inclusion Spectrum*. London: Routledge, 4–21.

Lawless W, Magrath R (2023) Inclusionary and exclusionary banter: English club cricket, inclusive attitudes and male camaraderie. In: Naha S, Malcolm D (eds) *Cricket in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 235–251.

Lisicki B (1992) Nice face, shame about the legs… Confessions of a disabled female stand-up comic. In: Rieser R, Mason H (eds) *Disability Equality in the Classroom: A Human Rights Issue*. London: Disability Equality in Education, 66–67.

Lockyer S (2015) From comedy targets to comedy-makers: Disability and comedy in live performance. *Disability & Society* 30(9): 1397–1412.

LoConto DG, Roth TJ (2005) Mead and the art of trash talking: I got your gesture right here. *Sociological Spectrum* 25(2): 215–230.

Magrath R, Anderson E, Roberts S (2015) On the door-step of equality: Attitudes toward gay athletes among academy-level footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50(7): 804–821.

Maher AJ, McVeigh J, Thomson A, et al. (2023) Exclusion, inclusion and belonging in mainstream and disability sport: Jack's story. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 15(1): 123–138.

Martin RA, Ford T (2018) *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Academic press.

Munro-Cook G, Fullagar S (2025) Writing through the affective dynamics of body shaming as emotional abuse in para-sportswomen's stories: A feminist posthumanist approach.

Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, Online First: 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2025.2549027

Norrick N (1993) *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ogden DJ, Coates JK, Plateau CR, et al. (2022) UK Professional male cricketers' mental health and support experiences: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 35(3): 372–391.

Oosthuizen RM (2021) Resilience as moderator between work place humour and well-being, a positive psychology perspective. In: Vanderheiden E, Mayer CH (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Humour Research*. Champaign: Palgrave Macmillan, 263–287.

Patton MQ (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Powis B (2020) *Embodiment, Identity and Disability Sport: An Ethnography of Elite Visually Impaired Athletes*. London: Routledge.

Powis B, Brighton J, Townsend RC (2025) The dis/appearing sporting body: The complex embodiment of disabled athletes. *Sociology*, OnlineFirst: 00380385251325452. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385251325452

Rae S (2012) *It's Not Cricket*. London: Faber & Faber.

Reid DK, Stoughton E, Smith R (2006) The humorous construction of disability: Stand-up comedians in the United States. *Disability and Society* 21: 629–643.

Rinehart EK (2021) Abductive analysis in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry* 27(2): 303–311.

Rosqvist BH (2012) The politics of joking: Narratives of humour and joking among adults with Asperger's syndrome. *Disability & Society* 27(2): 235–247.

Ryba TV, Haapanen S, Mosek S, et al. (2012) Towards a conceptual understanding of acute cultural adaptation: A preliminary examination of ACA in female swimming. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 4(1): 80–97.

Schuring N, Kerkhoffs G, Gray J, et al. (2017) The mental wellbeing of current and retired professional cricketers: An observational prospective cohort study. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* 45(4): 463–469.

Sherrill C, Williams T (1996) Disability and sport: Psychosocial perspectives on inclusion, integration, and participation. *Sport Science Review* 5(1): 42–64.

Smith B, Sparkes AC (2016) Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise sciences. In: Smith B, Sparkes A (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. London: Routledge, 125–145.

Smyth R (2015) *Gentlemen and Sledgers*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sparkes AC, Smith B (2014) *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Spradley JP (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stebbins R (1996) Defusing awkward situations: Comic relief as interactive strategy for people with disabilities. *Journal of Leisurability* 23: 3–7.

Sullivan P (2013) Humor styles as a predictor of satisfaction within sport teams. *Humor* 26: 343–349.

Swartz L, Hunt X, Watermeyer B, et al. (2018) Symbolic violence and the invisibility of disability. *African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention* 16(2): 21–30.

Tavory I, Timmermans S (2014) *Abductive Analysis: Theorising Qualitative Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Thomas P (2011) 'Mate crime': Ridicule, hostility and targeted attacks against disabled people. *Disability & Society* 26(1): 107–111.

Timmermans S, Tavory I (2022) *Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: Theorizing with Abductive Analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Townsend R, Cushion C (2022) Understanding disability and cultural (re)production: An ethnography of coaching practice in high performance disability sport. *Sociology* 56(5): 892–908.

Tregaskis C, Goodley D (2005) Disability research by disabled and non-disabled people: Towards a relational methodology of research production. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8(5): 363–374.

Wagg S (2019) *Cricket: A Political History of the Global Game, 1945-2017*. London: Routledge.