

## Forward

“I used to lay in my bed dreaming of being a champion and living the life of an athlete. I did it like many others before and after. Let’s not forget where we came from, a hospital bed wondering what next and there are people there today wondering the same. Give back.”

*Randy Snow, 1991-2009 – Friend, Pioneer, ITF Wheelchair Tennis World Champion*

### **Making a Difference**

Imagine everything that sport has offered to you in your lifetime. Think back to all those lessons learned through the hours spent on the court or training field for that dream; the ideals of team and individualism, of hard work and determination, and of sportsmanship and gamesmanship. Look back at the adversity, the excitement, the disappointments and the gratification. And finally imagine all the friendships that you gained, places that you see, and put them all together and try to think of one other activity that has offered you so much. Now, imagine waking up in a hospital bed one morning and being told you would never get to play any sport for the rest of your life.

Sport embraces a multi-dimensional function which few other rehabilitative activities can, providing physiological as well as psychological benefits. Initially, sport will serve a purely physical rehabilitative function. Enhancements of physical skills are always the first step in the rehabilitation process, and sports are an excellent means through which to improve them. With the improvement of motor skills, coordination, cardiovascular strength and muscular conditioning, the physical challenges the individual faces feel less challenging, allowing them to be in more control of their lives. By facing and overcoming the physical challenges sports present, they feel more confident and independent.

Next there are the psychological benefits associated with participation in sports. Sports create mentally challenging environments that are common place in the everyday world such as quick decision making, situational analyses, team work, adversity and social integration. Relating sports experiences to everyday life helps develop confidence to handle everyday challenges, helping bring the individual a step closer to acceptance into “normal” society. For thousands of disabled people sports have given them the confidence, skills and opportunities they needed to get out their house and give them more independence.

Sports' third benefit is perhaps what truly sets it apart from any other activities. Sports allow people the opportunity to define themselves and by controlling their actions on the playing field dictate what is happening around them. Sport promotes self efficacy and the desire to attain self determined targets, illustrating that the only limitations in life are those we impose on ourselves. These lessons transcend life.

Wheelchair tennis is integrated at every level of the sport. On an international level the sport is governed by the international governing body of tennis, the ITF. National tennis federations have become the driving force behind the growth of the sport in over 100 countries and finally at participation level, where disabled tennis players can play recreationally and competitively with able bodied friends, family and adversaries. Interaction is the driving force behind inclusion of disabled people in sport and further more in society.

By being able to participate and compete with able-bodied persons affords a true sense of achievement because they have accomplished something they have been told all their life they cannot. Wheelchair tennis is unique in the fact that the rules, equipment, and fields of play are all the same as the able-bodied game. Most importantly, it has allowed disabled persons to show society what they can do instead of what they cannot do and move closer and closer to removing the social stigma attached to being disabled.

Wheelchair tennis has a strong competitive structure with over 170 tournaments on the NEC Wheelchair Tennis Tour. The tour provides opportunities to fulfil the dreams of many top athletes by providing top prize money at professionally organised events staged in over 42 countries around the world. Wheelchair tennis allows athletes with disabilities the opportunity to define themselves with titles that previously only the physically "complete" person was allowed to carry. Titles such as "sportsperson", "superstar", or "Elite athlete".

The ultimate reason however that we play and watch sport is for inspiration. As a tennis coach, when teaching people with disabilities you can also be an inspiration to your student as well as yourself as a professional. Through your experiences as a tennis instructor, you already have all the tools needed to teach wheelchair tennis. Coaches do not need any special skills or background to teach people with a disability, rather just familiarising yourself with a few unique elements that the game entails. You do not have to be in a wheelchair or be an exceptional wheelchair player in order to teach wheelchair tennis. In fact, only a small

percentage of those coaching in the game today are wheelchair tennis player themselves. Therefore this manual will look at all aspects of wheelchair tennis, giving focus on the unique aspects of wheelchair tennis techniques and tactics. This manual is not written to instruct the coach on how to teach, but rather give coaches the material they need to know about wheelchair tennis in order to apply their knowledge of tennis and coaching.

**Mark Bullock**

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Mark Bullock" in a cursive, flowing style.

ITF Wheelchair Tennis Manager

## **History**

In 1976, American Brad Parks, known in tennis circles as “The Godfather” of wheelchair tennis, saw a video of Jeff Minebraker playing tennis in a wheelchair while in his rehabilitation hospital following a skiing accident that left him paralysed from the waist down. After some experimentation, Parks realised that the game could be realistically played without modifying the dimensions of the tennis court or equipment if players were allowed two bounces of the ball. In the late 1970’s the growth of the sport was significant in the U.S and spreading beyond it’s boundaries into Europe.

Wheelchair tennis global popularity was confirmed in 1988 with the formation of the International Wheelchair Tennis Federation (IWTF). Since then, the sport has blossomed from a sport played by a few hundred players in a handful of countries, to a sport with active players numbering 15,000 in the majority of tennis playing nations on all major continents.

In 1998 the ITF set precedence among international able-bodied sports federation by fully integrating wheelchair tennis into its organisation. The Development Department of the ITF is now fully responsible for the governance and administration of the sport.

## **The Rules of Wheelchair Tennis**

The sport of wheelchair tennis follows the ITF sanctioned rules of Tennis apart from a few exceptions. These are as follows:

- **The Two Bounce Rule** – The player is allowed two bounces of the ball before they must return it. The second bounce of the ball can be either within or outside of the court boundaries.
- **The Wheelchair** – The wheelchair is considered part of the athlete’s body. Therefore all rules applicable to an able bodied athlete’s body are applicable to the wheelchair.
- **The Service** – The service must be delivered in the following manor;
  1. Immediately before commencing the serve, the athlete must be in a stationary position. They are then allowed one push before striking the ball.

2. The server shall throughout the delivery of the service not touch with any wheel, any area other than that behind the baseline within the imaginary extension of the centre mark and sideline.
3. If conventional methods for the service are physically impossible for a quadriplegic player, then a player or an individual may drop the ball for such a player. However, the same method of serving must be used each time.

- **Player Loses Point**

A player would lose a point if:

1. He fails to return the ball before it has touched the ground three times.
2. He uses any part of his feet or lower extremities as brakes or as stabilizers while delivering service, striking a ball, turning or stopping against the ground or against any wheel while the ball is in play.
3. He fails to keep one buttock in contact with his wheelchair seat when contacting the ball.

- **Propelling the Chair with the Foot**

1. If due to lack of capacity a player is unable to propel the wheelchair via the wheel then he/she may propel the wheelchair using one foot.
2. Even if in accordance with the rule above a player is permitted to propel the chair using one foot, no part of the player's foot may be in contact with the ground:
  - a) During the forward motion of the swing, including when the racket strikes the ball;
  - b) From the initiation of the service motion until the racket strikes the ball.

A player in breach of this Rule shall lose a point.

- **Wheelchair/Able-bodied Tennis**

Where a wheelchair tennis player is playing with or against an able-bodied person in singles and doubles, the Rules of Wheelchair Tennis shall apply for the wheelchair player while the Rules of Tennis for able-bodied tennis shall apply for the able-bodied player. In this instance, the wheelchair player is allowed two bounces while the able-bodied player is allowed only one bounce.

All other rules from tennis apply to wheelchair tennis as they would in the able bodied game. The court dimensions and equipment specifications also remain the same. The only exception to this being quad players, who are permitted to use longer racquets if taping is required.

Players who have severe limitations on mobility that prevent them from pushing a manual chair and therefore use a power wheelchair for every day mobility may use a power wheelchair to play tennis; however, once players have elected to play tennis in a power wheelchair, they must continue to do so in all ITF sanctioned events.

## **Member Associations**

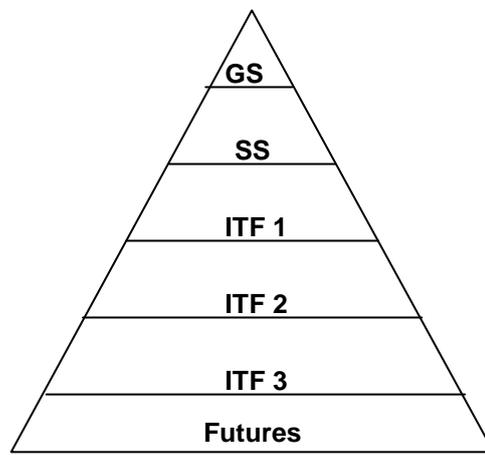
Following the merger of the ITF and the IWTF in 1998, it was important that members not tied in with their National Tennis Federation remain well represented in the wheelchair tennis arena. Only one third of the IWTF member nations were tied in with their national tennis federation (ITF members), while the others gained membership either through an independent wheelchair tennis association or their national disabled sports federation. This necessitated the formation of the International Wheelchair Tennis Association (IWTA) made up of all three types of entities. The IWTA was then dissolved in 2012. All member associations are directly responsible for developing and promoting the game within their countries with support and advice from the ITF.

## **The NEC Tour**

The NEC tour is the professional wheelchair tennis tour. Having been founded in 1992 with 11 tournaments, it is now a huge success and is continuing to grow. The tour now boasts Men's, Women's and Quad's sections, covers over 46 countries, and has over 170 tour events

The tour is split up into a pyramid system of tournaments to enable greater participation on a competitive level. There are 6 different levels of tournaments, with ITF futures being the base level and the Grand Slams being the pinnacle in the calendar.

Prize money, ranking points and entry requirements are all reflective of the level of tournament.



There will be four Grand Slams, six super series events, more ITF 1 and ITF 2 and the number of tournaments will increase as you reach the ITF Futures Series level.

### **Rankings**

The NEC Wheelchair Tennis ranking is calculated by combining the points of the top nine tournaments for men, the top eight tournaments for women and the top seven tournaments for quads, based on a 52 week roll-over period. All players must have competed in a minimum of two events and have earned points from the two events to obtain a ranking. For junior players, ranking points are obtained after one event.

The number of points a player will gain will depend on how far they progress in the given tournament, and what level of tournament it is they are competing in.

The rankings are updated and published on a weekly basis by the ITF, and the number one ranked male, female and quad players at the end of the calendar year are honoured as the Wheelchair Tennis World Champions during the ITF World Champions Dinner held at Roland Garros.

In February 2005, the ITF and its junior wheelchair tennis programme partner, the Cruyff Foundation, launched the first ever Cruyff Foundation International Wheelchair Tennis Junior Ranking. Junior girls and boys (Under 18) are now ranked based on their combined junior and senior ranking points. The junior rankings are published on a weekly basis.

## **Classification**

The main purpose of classification of wheelchair tennis athletes is to provide a fair and level playing field for all athletes. Wheelchair tennis is the only sport for the disabled that does not have a complicated disability classification system. There is the men/women's class and the Quad section. The Quad section places much greater emphasis on the classification process to ensure a minimum level of disability of its athletes.

## **Quad Classification**

Quad classification was introduced in 2002 and is an evolutionary process which is constantly being updated and improved to make the QUAD competition as fair as possible.

The classification process looks at the function and movement potential of the athlete, and in addition a minimal medical criteria must be met. It is also understood that medical conditions other than spinal cord injury may result in upper extremity impairment, and may allow a player to be eligible for the Quad Draw if the functional criteria set out in the Rules are met. The 'Quad' Draw may not be encompassing of all quadriplegic athletes.

The ITF Wheelchair Tennis Medical Commission (MC) will appoint Classifiers. Classifiers are individuals with formal training in neuromuscular evaluation and testing, for example: physical therapy or occupation therapy.

The classifiers will observe the athletes in three different ranges of tests. These are:

- *Bench tests:* Muscle testing will be performed on all upper extremity musculature in addition to examination of range of motion, muscle tone and sensation
- *Functional Movement tests.* Pushing, turning, stopping, starting, holding wheelchair against resistance, wheelies, ball stroke and catching and throwing a tennis ball.
- *Court/play observation.* Ball and racket control, grasp and release of rim, overhead service, and forehand and backhand strokes will be observed during play

The athlete will then be graded in all of these tests and a final score attained. For an athlete to be positively classified as a quad an overall score of less than 10 must be attained after all tests have been completed. Following the classification, players will be informed of their classification score and subsequent eligibility status. At any one time a player's status will be one of the following:

**E Eligible** – Players with the E status have been classified as eligible to play quad wheelchair tennis. They may now enter any ITF sanctioned event unless their medical situation changes, in which case reclassification will need to take place.

**R Review** - A player with this code is under classification review. The classifiers have been unable to reach a definite decision following the initial assessment.

**U Unclassifiable** - Classifiers have been unable to classify the player. The testing process may not have been completed or was made impossible due to pain, spasticity or lack of co-operation from the player. This player will be given an unclassifiable status and deemed ineligible to compete in the Quad Draw.

**P Provisional** - Upon receipt of the quad registration form with the fully completed paperwork, the Commission will decide if the player will receive the provisional status, which will allow him to compete in a maximum of 4 NEC Tour events over a 52 week period.

### **Open Division Classification**

All players with a medically diagnosed permanent mobility related physical disability are eligible to compete in ITF sanctioned wheelchair tennis tournaments. Players must be prepared to present medical documentation that substantiates the disability. In cases where players may be uncertain over their eligibility status to play wheelchair tennis, they may request to the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Manager that they be allowed to be classified. If classification is required to take place, the player may be observed by an approved classifier during practice, warm-up, and play and/or at any time during the tournament stay.

## **Minimum Eligibility to Compete in Wheelchair Tennis**

The criteria detailing how an Athlete may be considered Eligible to compete shall be defined for each sport by the respective International Federation. The International Tennis Federation (ITF) shall have eligibility criteria based on the specific tasks required to compete in wheelchair tennis. Eligibility to compete is assessed in accordance with the International Paralympics committee code and the International Standard for Athlete Evaluation.

- To be Eligible to Compete, an Athlete must have an impairment that leads to a permanent and verifiable Activity Limitation. The impairment should limit the Athlete's ability to compete equitably in elite sport with Athletes without impairment.
- If an Athlete fails to meet the eligibility criteria for wheelchair tennis, the Athlete will be declared ineligible for competition in wheelchair tennis.
- If an Athlete is deemed ineligible for competition under the rules of the ITF, this does not question the presence of a genuine impairment. This is only a ruling on the eligibility of the Athlete to compete under the Sport.

## **World Team Cup**

The World Team Cup is the only sanctioned international team competition in wheelchair tennis. Organised annually since 1984 the event has grown from its original four participating nations to now include 24 men's, 12 women's, 8 quad and 8 junior teams as of 2011. Because of the growing number of entries, regional qualification rounds were reintroduced from 2012.

## **Paralympics Games**

Wheelchair tennis gained full medal status at the Paralympics Games for the first time during the 1992 Barcelona Games. Since then it has grown to be considered one of the "premier" events for the Games. Member nations qualify for the Paralympics Games based on World Team Cup results, regional qualification rounds and international singles rankings. The format for the event is the same as that used for the Olympic tennis event.

## **The NEC Wheelchair Tennis Masters**

Inviting only the top eight ranked men and women, and four quad players at years-end, the NEC Wheelchair Tennis Masters is the richest and most prestigious event in wheelchair tennis. The singles only Round Robin event is based on the format used at the ATP Tour World Championships.

## **Development**

The ITF is particularly concerned with the continued development of wheelchair tennis. In 1998 a full time Development Officer was appointed to concentrate wholly on the continued growth of wheelchair tennis. The ITF organise and support player and coaches clinics throughout the world. International Junior Camps, development camps, and Coaches Workshop are also organised annually around the world.