

In this section we will examine some general teaching concepts that apply to all aspects of wheelchair tennis.

Similarity to Tennis

With only one major rule difference separating able-bodied and wheelchair tennis coaches need only to familiarise themselves with the technical and tactical differences in the games, which will be covered in this manual. Most of the principles that apply to able-bodied tennis can be used when coaching wheelchair tennis, especially in areas such as basic strokes, grips, tactics, corrective techniques, teaching methodologies, progressions, mental training, match and tournament preparation. Remember that this is tennis, only played from a seated position.

Similarities	Differences
Strokes	Methods of Mobility
Progression techniques	Movement to the ball
Need for good positioning and balance	Early racquet preparation
Court surfaces	On court positioning
Need for trunk rotation	How to generating trunk rotation
Fundamental tactics	Recovery

COACHING TIP

Court Surfaces

Wheelchair tennis can and is played on all court surfaces.

Two Bounces

The “two-bounce rule” which is officially recognised in the ITF “ Rules of Tennis” states that wheelchair tennis players are allowed two bounces of the ball, the first bounce landing in the normal playing area, the second can land anywhere.

You will find that beginner and intermediate players will have better success when they learn to utilise the second bounce from the baseline. Modern wheelchair tennis, especially at its

highest level is played predominately on the first bounce. We will discuss further the two approaches later in the Tactics Section.

Strokes

The basic tennis strokes are also applied to wheelchair tennis. The same principals and physical considerations from which tennis strokes were adapted apply also to the wheelchair game. The basic low-to-high motion for topspin and high-to-low for slice are applicable.

The major difference lies in what occurs in the lower half of the body. As tennis pros we have commonly stress the importance of not only footwork but also using the legs to power stroke. In wheelchair tennis the feet and legs do not fit into the equation.

Many of the same corrective techniques for used in able-bodied tennis can generally be applied to wheelchair tennis coaching. A few wheelchair tennis specific strokes and tendencies have evolved in adaptation to a variety of factors the wheelchair tennis player is faced with position and which will cover in the Strokes section of the manual.

COACHING TIP

The strokes are probably the area that is most similar, so just apply what you already know and use the principles of spins and contact points accordingly.

Basic Stroke Sequence

Pay particular attention to when the racquet is taken back. The basic stroke sequence typically is as follows:

1. Turn in the direction of the ball
2. Push to the ball using both hands with racquet in hitting hand (Not turn and racquet back)
3. Slow down on approach (No stop-plant-hit)
4. Backswing timed with the *final bounce* of the ball
5. Swing to contact point in front of the body as non-playing hand remains on wheel/rim
6. Follow through

7. Both hands returned back to the wheel-rims

8. Recovery

Positioning

Proper positioning and spacing from the ball is one of the most difficult and at the same time extremely important considerations for executing the wheelchair tennis shot. Manoeuvring the wheelchair and stopping at the right distance from the ball is no easy task, even for the best of players. Able-bodied players can make simple and quick leans or back-steps as last minute adjustments to allow proper spacing from the ball if needed. This, however is much more difficult in a wheelchair because,

- Both hands must be used to manoeuvre the chair
- Players may prefer not to lean backwards for chance of tipping.
- The hands must do the work - therefore restricting racquet preparation, and at the same time the chair must be pushed backward.

Players can learn to execute a “wheelie”, (the ability to raise the front end off the ground while leaning on the back two wheels) to quickly out of the way and beside the ball. This is often easier for players with better balance. Players must often compensate with creative shots, such a push shots.

Progressions

Most of the same progressions you now use can be applied to wheelchair tennis.

- Begin students close to the net and work them back slowly.
- Controlling the backswing is very difficult when players begin to have to move to the ball.

Hands v. Feet

Keep in mind that wheelchair tennis is played entirely with the upper body; arms, torso, head and particularly the hands. The rules of play state that a player loses the point if at any time

during the point the players feet come in contact with the ground. Movement to the ball, ball striking, and recovery are all accomplished with the hands and arms alone. Aside from mobility, other considerations when eliminating the feet are:

- **Racquet preparation** - When hands are active in getting to the ball, racquet is not taken back until the final bounce of the ball.
- **Power production** - When legs are not used to create forward rotation and torque the hands must take over that function.
- **Leverage and stability** - In able-bodied tennis the feet and legs act as stabilisers the body during the shot. In wheelchair tennis the hands must be used for leverage during the shot.

Working Different Disabilities

You will soon realise that each student will have different physical (as well as mental) abilities depending on a host of factors, but largely dependent on their disability or lesion level. A few important generalities about spinal injuries are that:

- The higher up the spinal column the lesion, typically the less upper body balance the player will have. (See Appendix A)
- Level or lesion will typically relate directly to the muscle function, which aid in trunk balance.

In wheelchair tennis, the stomach muscles seem to play an important function for several reasons.

- Ability to recoil after reaching for a shot or pushing the chair
- Ability to keep the torso upwards during the stroke
- Ability to rotate the torso on the serve
- Ability to lean back and side to side

COACHING TIP

Physical abilities of each student are different. Get to know your student through open communication and adjust accordingly.

Ball Feeding

Things to consider for ball feeding are:

- **More precision** - concentrate on hitting beside the player
- **Timing** – the one bounce feed is typically easier for beginning players when starting at the service line area
- **Less pace with more loft** - first bounce landing around the service line area when feeding to the baseline
- **More time between ball feeds** - recovery will take longer

COACHING TIP

When working with novice players look to feed balls to the side of the player with consistent accuracy.