

PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT AND WHEELCHAIR TENNIS



WHAT IS A PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT?

A physical impairment reduces the mobility of a person and can be permanent or temporary. Physical impairments include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Amputation
- Spinal cord injury
- Cerebral palsy
- Muscular dystrophy
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Spina bifida
- Brittle bones (osteogenesis imperfect)

GENERAL INFORMATION

If a person with a physical impairment chooses to use a sports chair they are joining one of the fastest growing wheelchair sports in the world. Wheelchair tennis integrates very easily with the non-disabled game since it can be played on any regular tennis court, with no modifications to tennis rackets or balls. Wheelchair tennis players are allowed two bounces of the ball and can easily play against other wheelchair tennis players, as well as alongside or against non-disabled friends and family.

PLAYER PATHWAY AND COMPETITIONS

There are opportunities for players to enter tournaments from beginner level right up to the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Tour, where the world's top players compete in two different categories - Open (separate for Men and Women) and Quad, which is for those players with a disability that affects three or more limbs. As well as a number of events in Great Britain on the ITF Tour, there is a National Wheelchair Tennis Series run by the LTA open for absolutely anyone who would like to compete.

To play in competitions and to be considered for the LTA performance and development squads you must have a medically diagnosed, permanent mobility-related physical disability, resulting in a substantial loss of function in one or both lower extremities.

There is a player pathway from local sessions and beginner/improver camps to national and international tournaments (Grand Slams and Paralympics). For those who do not wish to use a wheelchair they can follow the same pathway as non-disabled players.

DID YOU KNOW:

49% OF DISABLED PEOPLE in the UK have a mobility condition (Family Resources Survey 2017-18).

There are currently **AROUND 1.2 MILLION** wheelchair users in the UK.

Two thirds of them are regular users (NHS England).

People who have a physical impairment can

CHOOSE WHETHER TO PLAY IN A SPORTS WHEELCHAIR OR NOT (ambulant).

Wheelchair players **CAN COMPETE IN NON-DISABLED TENNIS**

sessions and competitions, the only adaptation is they receive up to two bounces of the ball. Wheelchairs do not damage a court surface any more than footwear would do.

COACHES' CORNER

When coaching players with a physical impairment you should make some adjustments to your coaching methods to suit their individual needs, the STEP Principle is an ideal model to follow and this is described in the below table.

- Remember not everyone with a physical impairment will use or want to use a chair in their daily lives or to play tennis. It's important to listen to their views and not force anyone into a sports chair if they do not want to use one. They can play ambulantlly also.
- Check participants' range of movement as they may; for example, find it difficult to raise their arms above their head. Or some participants may not be able to bend and reach the floor.
- There is a common mis-assumption that if a person is a wheelchair user they cannot use or bear weight on their legs, this often may not be the case.
- Participants may tire easily during a session due to their lack of motor-skill efficiency. Participants may also struggle with temperature regulation – both hot and cold.
- If transferring to a different wheelchair, participants should do this independently or with the help of a parent/ partner/ friend/ carer, or with a trained individual.

SPACE/ ENVIRONMENT	TASKS	EQUIPMENT/ RULES	PEOPLE/ COMMUNICATION	SAFETY
Are courts/ facilities wheelchair accessible? Can wheelchair players get off court in an emergency.	Can integrate with non-disabled players (only difference is the bounces).	Specialised tennis wheelchairs both manual and powered.	Recognise that wheelchair players have different abilities.	Get to know your individual or group to help assess their ability.
Is there enough room for everyone to move around?	Teach player to push and turn holding the racket.	Balls, rackets, courts and scoring is the same as non-disabled.	Don't be afraid to ask what players can and can't do.	Take into account any medical or behavioural considerations.
Consider the surface. Grass and carpet are difficult surfaces to push a wheelchair on.	Adapt the drills you do with non- disabled players and give clear demonstrations.	Use regular equipment such as cones, lines, targets, etc.	Try not to be patronising and bend down to speak to a player.	
Work in zones to enable people of similar ability to be matched.	Consider chair movement and turns as part of gameplay and tactics.	Can use a mitt and no racket if having problem holding racket and propelling chair at the same time.	Select team roles carefully to challenge but not frustrate.	
Consider safety in mixed groups of non-disabled players and wheelchair users.		Larger, lower compression balls and smaller rackets may help beginners.		

For more coaching tips please read our [Disability Tennis Coaching Resource](#)

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO

For further information on wheelchair tennis please contact the LTA Disability Development team:

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