

# WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

## GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS



**MOVE  
UNITED**

# ABOUT MOVE UNITED

## Why Inclusion

Move United uses sports to push what's possible so everyone has equal access to sports and recreation in their community. Established in, 1956, Move United is an Affiliate of the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee.

Move United provides adaptive sports to individuals with disabilities as a means to **(1)** improve health, **(2)** increase access to employment and economic stability, **(3)** strengthen social support and **(4)** advance social norms and attitudes about people with disabilities. Each of the four items are social determinants of health, according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2020.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague Letter in clarifying elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level schools' responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) to provide extracurricular athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. The guidance clarifies when and how schools should include students with disabilities in interscholastic athletic programs, defines what true equal treatment of student athletes with disabilities means, and urges schools to create adapted interscholastic athletic programs for students with disabilities. With nearly 1 in 4 Americans living with a disability, schools have the opportunity to change the disability narrative, creating access and opportunities for inclusion.

## What Move United Offers

- Introductory sport guidelines and best practices for adapted sports.
- Facilitation of training for your coaches and officials with adaptive sports experts. Access to hundreds of community based adaptive sports organizations, resources and tools for specific sports.
- Decades of experience in disability sport training, sport adaptations and adaptive equipment.

## Sports Are Important for Students with Disabilities

Benefits for students with disabilities who participate in sports are similar to students without disabilities:

- Supports daily living activities and independence.
- Reduces risk of health-related diseases (i.e. cancer, heart disease and diabetes).
- Improves mental health, reduces depression and anxiety.
- More likely to have better grades, school attendance and lower dropout rate.
- Builds camaraderie with peers, less likely to be bullied.
- Build discipline, self-esteem, confidence, and independence.
- Learn team work, skill development and goal setting.
- Can offer opportunities for successes in college, career and community.

Due to the resources available, it is possible to add adapted sports within school athletic programs without creating an undue administrative burden for State High School Associations or requiring the association to change existing rules for the athletes without disabilities.

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In this section you can find frequently asked questions about wheelchair tennis and helpful coaching resources.

Tennis events for students with physical disabilities can be easily integrated into local school level tennis events in regular and post-season competition.

Over the past several years, more State High School Associations have incorporated events for students with physical disabilities into their regular and post-season competition schedules.



The content in this document is intended to provide guidelines and recommendations. Move United does not carry the authority to replace existing school or sport governing rules and regulations.

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# OVERVIEW

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

Wheelchair tennis can be played as an inclusive sport, where individuals with disabilities play alongside and against individuals without disabilities. There are only a few modifications to the rules of tennis that apply to the wheelchair tennis athlete.

Players on a high school team are often ranked #1-6 for singles and doubles regardless of disability. If a #3 singles player on one team is a wheelchair athlete they will play #3 on the opposing team. That player may or may not be a wheelchair athlete.

Wheelchair tennis can be played by anyone who has the function to move a wheelchair, including athletes without disabilities and players with temporary injuries. There is also no restriction on using a power wheelchair.



# RULES

Competition rules for athletes with disabilities are the same for those athletes without disabilities, with a few exceptions.

## RULE MODIFICATIONS

### Two Bounce Rule

The wheelchair tennis player is allowed two bounces of the ball. The player must return the ball before it bounces a third time. The second bounce can be either in or out of the court boundaries.

### The Wheelchair

The wheelchair is considered part of the body and all applicable rules which apply to a player's body shall apply to the wheelchair.

### The Service Area

Immediately before commencing the service, the server shall be in a stationary position. The server shall then be allowed one push before striking the ball.

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 center mark and sideline.

If conventional methods for the service are physically impossible, then the player or another individual may drop the ball for the server and allow it to bounce before it is struck. If this is the case, the same method of serving must be used for the entire match.

### Player Loses Points

If the player fails to return the ball before it has bounced three times.

If the player uses any part of their feet or lower extremities against the ground or against any wheel while delivering service, striking a ball, turning, or stopping while the ball is in play.

If the player fails to keep one buttock in contact with his wheelchair seat when contacting the ball.

In an instance where a wheelchair tennis player is playing with or against an athlete without a disability, the adapted rules only apply for the wheelchair tennis athlete. Standard tennis rules apply to the athlete without a disability.

# COMPETITION MODELS

There are several models for competition in tennis.

## Professional Competition

Professional wheelchair tennis is classified in three categories based on gender and function. These divisions are Men's Open, Women's Open, and Quad Open. All players must have a permanent physical disability that affects their mobility at or below the waist, and Quad Open divisions must have an additional impairment to their upper body mobility. All players must be reviewed by a classifier to compete at this level.

## Letter Divisions

USTA utilizes a Letter Division system that is based on level of play, not classification of disability. All juniors and adults are eligible to compete in letter divisions. There are four divisions: A, B, C, & D. A is the highest level of play before Open competition, where D is for beginner players entering their first competition. B and C divisions are for competitive players who can consistently rally the ball over the net and employ strategy.

## USTA & ITF Junior Competition

USTA junior competition is combined age and gender in an 18& under coed division. As of 2024, USTA has separated the division into Junior A and Junior B categories. This is based on level of play with A for competitive tennis players and B for beginner/intermediate players. ITF competition is for top-ranked national-level junior players to compete internationally, and is also combined into an 18& under division for both boys and girls.

## Integrated Competition

All wheelchair tennis players are eligible to participate and compete in USTA junior and adult events and tournaments. As specified by the ITF, wheelchair-specific rules apply when the ball is played by the wheelchair player. A popular format of play is up/down doubles, where each doubles team consists of one player without a disability and one wheelchair player.

## SCORING

There are many different schemes for structuring the scoring in tennis competition.

## Full Set, Advantage Tennis

Players must win games by two points, as in professional tennis, and win two sets out of three.

## Tiebreaks

To shorten match times, a shorter tiebreak can be played in lieu of a third set if the two sets have been split.

## No-Ad

Games need only be won by one point. When the score is 40-40, only one more point is played. In no-ad tennis, typically the receiver determines which side the server will serve to for the deciding point.

## Pro Set

Rather than multiple sets, a single set can be played until someone reaches 8 or 10 games.

# EQUIPMENT & TRAINING

## EQUIPMENT

### Standard Tennis Equipment

- **Racquets** - Junior racquets 21-23 inches should be used for athletes under the age of 12. Athletes aged 13+ can use 25-27 inch racquets.
- **Tennis Balls** - Red and orange low-compression tennis balls should be used for athletes under the age of 12. Athletes aged 13+ can use green and yellow tennis balls.
- **Tennis Courts** - While learning, wheelchair tennis can be played on a gym floor, parking lot, tennis court, or a similar even and hard surface. A pop-up net and tape or lines can be used to create a court.

### Adapted Equipment

- **Sport Chairs** - Tennis-specific wheelchairs or all-sport/basketball wheelchairs can be used to play tennis. Players must use a sports wheelchair with cambered (angled) wheels and anti-tip bars in the back. The camber provides stability as well as quick movement and turning. Playing in a manual wheelchair is not safe unless they are practicing tennis strokes without moving the chair.
- **Straps & Tape** - Having a variety of midsection and leg velcro straps can help stabilize players in their chair. Some quad players with limited grip strength or hand function may need to tape the racket to their hand with athletic tape so it does not fall out (see additional resource page).
- **Tire pump**



## TRAINING

With a few exceptions, the training needs of a wheelchair tennis player are the same for players without disabilities: learning the rules of the sport, different racquet grips, the basic strokes (forehand, backhand, serve, volley), and tactics are all essential topics for training.

The most important skills that wheelchair tennis players need to learn are the specifics of moving in a wheelchair and handling a racquet while in a wheelchair. Coaches should expect to spend some time on drills that practice patterns of chair movement (see page 13 for online coaching manuals).

Wheelchair players also have additional medical considerations since they tend to have health difficulties associated with their disabilities. Proper hydration, keeping cool, and replenishing electrolytes are critical, as well as looking out for pressure spots, chafing, or ill-fitting equipment. Ask the player or parent/guardian if there are any additional medical considerations specific to the athlete that they need to be aware of.



## FACILITIES

Facilities that host wheelchair tennis must be compliant with ADA regulations but also should be aware that tennis wheelchairs have a wider wheelbase than standard chairs. The minimum width for standard wheelchair passage is 32 inches but tennis wheelchairs can require as much as 47 inches. Players should be prepared to stay in their manual wheelchair to pass through doorways because sport chairs with cambered wheels often do not fit through doorways. Venues should be sure to have water and restroom facilities readily available and accessible.



# GROUPINGS

The groupings presented here are suggested ways to create competition classes for athletes with disabilities. In order to not be confused with the national and international classification systems, we use the term groupings for school-based sport.

These groupings are only applicable if you are running a specific tennis tournament for student athletes with disabilities. Otherwise student athletes with disabilities compete alongside and against student athletes without disabilities.

**Sitting:** Athletes with mobility impairments who participate sitting down (examples: athletes with spinal cord injuries, above knee amputations, spina bifida, etc).

**Standing:** Athletes with mobility impairments who participate standing up (athletes with arm amputations, single leg below knee amputation, or impairments that impact balance).

**Visually Impaired (VI):** Athletes with partial or total vision loss. Court is smaller and net is lower. Players can also use an audible tennis ball that makes noise so they can hear it bounce and being hit. Allow the ball to bounce one, two or three times. Coaches should estimate how many bounces a player might need as they learn how to play.



## ROLE OF ATHLETES WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Programs may wish to consider a policy whereby athletes without disabilities may become a wheelchair athlete temporarily while rehabilitating from an injury, so long as the injury presents in such a way that the athlete might experience the same physical limitations as someone with a permanent disability. For example, any injury or surgery where the physician has recommended the athlete stay off a limb for a period of time, and where that time spans a full season of an adapted sport, the athlete might qualify to participate in adapted sports regularly.

## CLASSIFICATION

Athletes with a disability have impairment(s) that may lead to competitive disadvantage in sport. Classification is the process by which athletes are assessed relative to the impact of impairment on their ability to compete in a specific sport. Within the classification system, criteria are put in place to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes without a disability.

Classification is sport specific. Each sport has established groups, called sport classes, to group athletes for competition based on activity limitation for that sport. The international classification system for individual sports can be viewed online at: <https://www.paralympic.org/classification>. Most WPC classification systems are not appropriate (too detailed) for a high school setting. It is suggested to modify to simplified/grouped classes such as sitting (wheelchair athletes), visually impaired, and ambulatory. For more information see the resources section.



# SAFETY

Student athletes with disabilities do not represent a higher level of liability risk or risk management concern than student athletes without disabilities. However, players must participate in a sport wheelchair with cambered (slanted) wheels and anti-tip bars, or a stable power chair in order to safely participate. With proper planning and contingencies, student athletes with disabilities can seamlessly integrate into the dynamics of an interscholastic team. Individualized assessments can help assess or identify any potential safety concerns.



## SAFETY RESOURCES

Ensuring athlete safety is a priority. Through education, resources and training, members of the community sport can recognize, reduce and respond to misconduct in sport. Please refer to the following resources for more information.

**What is SafeSport?** <http://safesport.org/what-is-safesport/>

**USTA Safeplay** <https://usta.com/safeplay>

# GLOSSARY

## **Ad Court/Deuce Court**

The deuce side is on the right side when you're facing the net. This is the side you start each game. The ad side is the left side. After playing a point on the deuce side, you switch and serve from the ad side.

## **Advantage Set**

Set won by a player or team having won at least six games with a two-game advantage over the opponent.

## **Backhand**

Stroke in which the ball is hit with the back of the racquet hand facing the ball at the moment of contact.

## **Backcourt**

The area of the tennis court between the baseline and the service line.

## **Backswing**

Portion of a swing where the racquet is swung backwards in preparation for the forward motion to hit the ball.

## **Ball Toss**

The action of throwing up the ball prior to the serve.

## **Chip**

Blocking a shot with underspin, creating a low trajectory.

## **Deuce**

Score of 40-40 in a game. A player must win two consecutive points from deuce to win the game, unless the tournament employs no-ad scoring. A player who has won one point after deuce is said to have the advantage.

## **Drop Shot**

Play in which the player hits the ball lightly enough to just go over the net, usually with backspin; designed to catch a player who is away from the net off guard.

## **Fault**

Serve that fails to land the ball in the opponent's service box, therefore not starting the point.

## **Forehand**

Stroke in which the player hits the ball with the front of the racquet hand facing the ball; contrasted with backhand.

## **Groundstroke**

Forehand or backhand shot that is executed after the ball bounces on the court.

## **Half Volley**

A groundstroke shot made immediately after a bounce or simultaneous to the bounce and played with the racket close to the ground.

## **Let**

A call that requires the point to be replayed.

## **Lob**

Stroke in which the ball is hit high above the net.

## **Love**

Scoring term indicating zero.

## **No-ad Scoring**

A scoring method in which the first player to reach four points wins the game.

## **No-man's Land**

Area between the service line and the baseline.

## **Out**

A ball that has landed outside the playing area.

## **Overhead**

Stroke in which the player hits the ball over his/her head.

## **Return**

Stroke made by the receiver of a service.

**Serve**

The starting point stroke of each game. The ball must be hit into the opponent's half within the service box.

**Service Box**

Rectangular area of the court, marked by the sidelines and the service lines, that a serve is supposed to land in.

**Slice**

Shot with underspin (backspin), or a serve with a sidespin.

**Topspin**

Spin of a ball where the top of the ball rotates toward the direction of travel.

**Volley**

A shot hit, usually in the vicinity of the net, by a player before the ball bounces on their own side of the court.

**Winner**

A shot that is not reached by the opponent and wins the point.



# FAQ'S

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is the minimum equipment required for a wheelchair tennis program?**

The minimum requirement is a flat and even surface to play on, tennis balls, racquets, and tennis wheelchairs. For junior players, there are smaller rackets and lower bouncing balls available to make tennis easier to learn.

### **What support is there for funding wheelchair tennis programs?**

USTA offers a wheelchair tennis grassroots grant that can be used to get a program started. For nonprofit organizations, also look to connect with charities and other adaptive sports groups to share resources and in-kind or monetary donations.

### **What are some of the most important aspects of training wheelchair players?**

Wheelchair players need to learn a lot about mobility because it's harder to maneuver in a chair than it is for an athlete without a disability. There are many drills available online and in the USTA's Wheelchair Tennis Manual. It is also important to integrate physical training routines with work on the mental aspects of playing a sport: dealing with pressure, positive thinking, selfmotivation, and competitiveness.

### **How do I approach coaching a wheelchair tennis player?**

Wheelchair players are just like anyone trying to learn a sport. Except for drills to learn the specifics of moving in the tennis wheelchair, students can be fully integrated into any group of players of similar ability. Wheelchair players are striving to reach the same goals as students without disabilities: technical skills, tactical knowledge, and psychological as well as physical fitness. These are pathways to success for all athletes.

# RESOURCES

United States Tennis Association (USTA) <http://www.usta.com>  
<http://www.usta.com/adult-tennis/wheelchair-tennis/wheelchair/>

International Tennis Federation (ITF) <https://www.itftennis.com>

Move United for Adaptive Sports Resources <https://moveunited.org>

USTA Wheelchair Tennis Coaching Manual [https://s3.amazonaws.com/ustaassets/assets/689/15/the\\_final\\_and\\_completed\\_wc\\_manual\\_-\\_2020edit1.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/ustaassets/assets/689/15/the_final_and_completed_wc_manual_-_2020edit1.pdf)

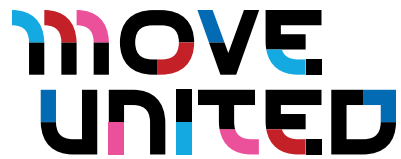
USTA Grants Assistance [usta.com/en/home/coach-organize/tennis-support/grants-assistance.html](http://usta.com/en/home/coach-organize/tennis-support/grants-assistance.html)

International Blind Tennis Association <https://www.ibtatennis.org/>

International Para Standing Tennis Association <https://www.parastandingtennis.com/>

Guide to Quad Wheelchair Tennis <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq4jNpK3078>





## MISSION

Move United uses the power of sport to push what's possible for people with disabilities, confronting ignorance, fueling conversation, and inciting action that leads us to a world where everyone's included.

## VISION

Move United's vision is that every person, regardless of ability, has an equal opportunity to participate in sports and recreation in their community. Our mission is to provide national leadership and opportunities for individuals with disabilities to develop independence, confidence, and fitness through participation in community sports, including competition, recreation and educational programs.



### Local Contact

Local adaptive sport organization may input contact info here.

For more information, visit  
[moveunitedsport.org](http://moveunitedsport.org)