



Welcome to Issue 3 of the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review. I would like to thank the coaches who have made contributions to this issue and the two preceding issues. The Review has been well received. If you have any comments on how it could be improved or if there are any topics you would like to see covered please do not hesitate to contact me.

This issue includes articles by Wayne Elderton on the 'wheel around' forehand and by Dan James on stroke production. There are features on making your coaching effective and the value of mini tennis in wheelchair tennis. There are also articles on 'momentum' by Alistair Higham, author of 'Momentum – the Hidden Force in Tennis' and an article by former top 10 player, Michael Foulks.

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The “Wheel-around” Forehand

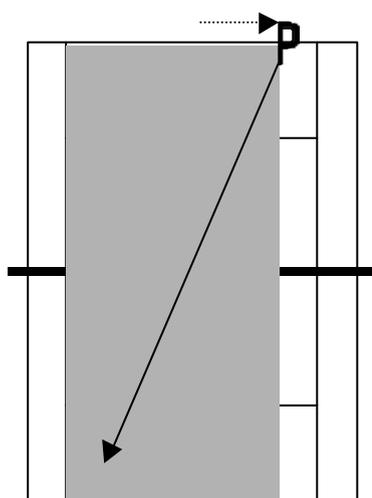
Wayne Elderton

Wayne is a certified Tennis Canada national level 4 coach and the Head Course Conductor for Coaching Certification in British Columbia. He is currently the Tennis Director at the Grant Connell Tennis Centre in North Vancouver and a National Wheelchair Coach. He is the personal coach of many of Canada’s top international wheelchair players. If you have any questions, please visit his website at: www.acecoach.com

Just like the able-bodied game, wheelchair tennis has evolved in the last 10 years. Players are less content to stay far back and circle until the opponent makes a mistake. They are taking the ball earlier, with one bounce being preferred in many situations. Power is invading the game. Domination is becoming the rule.

The Situation

One of the key ways a player can dominate is to take advantage whenever an opportunity presents itself. A weaker ball in the centre of the court (or even a little to the backhand side) is one such opportunity. If a player has a stronger forehand (and most do), it makes sense to use the forehand as much as possible. In the able bodied game this is called a “Run-around” or “off” forehand. The situation is where a player is in a position that would normally require a backhand. Instead, the player “runs-around” their backhand and uses their stronger forehand. The shot is often hit “inside-out”.



Player runs around backhand and hits a forehand “inside-out”.

Player can potentially use their forehand for all balls landing in the shaded area.

Top wheelchair players use this tactic as well and every aspiring tournament player should have this shot in their repertoire. In wheelchair tennis, I call it the “wheel-around” forehand.

The Challenge

The challenge in the wheelchair game, is that it takes good mobility to move around the backhand and position well enough to perform a good forehand.

Wheeling around and hitting a shot that would be worse than the original backhand would have been, is of little use. The challenge is even greater when the player is coming from the forehand side of the court.

The Advantage

The advantage is that, by being able to use their stronger forehand on 75% of the court (depending on how fast the ball is received), a player can pressure an opponent more.

Learning progressions

Here are some suggested steps that have been used successfully to help players master the wheel-around forehand. To help players with their decision-making and problem solving, it is good to set shots into a context. If players can recognise a common situation that the shot occurs in, they can use it more often, and more successfully. Let's imagine a frequently encountered situation that would present a good opportunity to use this shot (situation represents two right-handed players):

Situation:

"The player is in a forehand to forehand crosscourt rally. The opponent has hit a weaker ball into the centre of the court. The player could come across and hit a backhand however, they choose to wheel-around and hit a strong forehand inside out to the opponent's backhand."

Step #1: Decision-making

The first step teaches the player to identify the right time to use the shot. By deciding quickly if it is the appropriate time, the player can prepare early. The coach can have the player call out cue words to identify the right time. The right time in this case consists of two key characteristics:

Will the ball land close enough to the player in the court to be able to wheel-around it? A marker can be placed on the court to indicate if the ball is too far (anything to the backhand side of the marker), or close enough (anything inside the marker). To train the decision, the player can call out "Yes" if they anticipate the ball will land inside the marker.

Will the ball be slow enough to allow the player to wheel-around it? The same procedure is used for the speed of the shot. The player should call "Yes" if a wheel-around forehand is possible, "no" if it is not.

Having the player call out the decision word allows the coach to observe *when* the decision is being made. For example, if the player cannot call the word before the ball bounces on their side, it may indicate they are not focussed on judging the ball. Progress the player from deciding before the bounce to before the ball comes over the net.

Step #2: Motor Pattern

Once the player can quickly select the right time to apply the shot, the next step is to help them feel the correct movement. There are three quick mobility movements that need to be performed in rapid sequence:



Wheel quickly past the intended point of impact (indicated by the ball-tube in the photo). Speed is important, so push strongly. (see photo #1)

Once past the intended point of impact, grab hard on the wheels and 'brake'. (also see photo #1)

Pivot on the spot by pulling on the left wheel with the non-racquet hand, and pushing on the other wheel with the racquet hand (both at the same time). This will put you in a position to hit the forehand. (see photo #2).



Step #3: Tactical Objective

The third step is to challenge the opponent with the shot. An inside-out forehand to the opponent's backhand is a good option. The player can wait for the opponent's response and place it to the open forehand corner or move into the net and intercept with a volley to the open court. For variety, players should also learn how to send the wheel-around

forehand to the opponent's forehand corner. These shot sequences can create a devastating pattern.

Conclusion

To dominate play, it is important for a player to be able to use their strong forehand from many positions on the court. The technique of the wheel-around forehand gives a player the tools to do just that. Remember, it is important to teach shots in a tactical situation so the technique will be integrated more easily into match play.

Being an effective wheelchair tennis coach – make your coaching realistic

Mark Bullock, ITF Wheelchair Tennis Development Officer

The challenge for all coaches is to make situations as close to match play as possible. Wheelchair tennis coaches who play on their feet may be creating an unrealistic situation for their players. This article is designed to give you some ideas on how to make your coaching more realistic for your pupils playing in a chair.

Let the ball bounce twice

When appropriate the coach should let the ball bounce twice to give the player realistic time to recover for the next shot. By taking the ball on one bounce all the time it may discourage your player from developing proper movement patterns.

Play deeper

Related to the above the coach should rally from deeper in the court.



Lower Contact Point

Think about your contact point on the ground strokes to give a realistic trajectory for your player.

Reverse mobility

If drawn in the coach should turn and run away from the net as in the same way as a player would use reverse mobility.

Turn Out

When playing a backhand or if you are on the defensive turn out and follow the movement pattern that your pupil would take. This helps with teaching your player to 'hit behind' their opponent.

Serving

You can serve kneeling/crouching down to make the trajectory and pace realistic. You may want to use a towel to protect your knees (or wear knee pads).

Return of serve

You may want to sit in a garden chair so that when your pupil looks up they have a realistic target. This is particularly useful when your player is developing an aggressive serve hit straight at their opponent.

Spins

There tend to be more emergency shots hit in wheelchair tennis. A head high forehand may be hit with slice/sidespin. A player may use a sidespin backhand to defend a shot hit straight at them. Use these spins in your feeding at the appropriate time to ensure your player can read and deal with such shots.

Learn to play in a wheelchair

This is the ultimate to making your feeding/rallying realistic. It is also fun to learn a new skill. The better you become in wheelchair the more options you have as a coach to use it.

Strapping

As a coach it is worth trying to play with different straps. Feel the difference between no straps and being strapped into the wheelchair around the waist restricting your movement.

Quads

If you teach quads try to play with your racket taped to your hand. If you coach a player who uses a device to attach the racket to their hand ask if you can try it.



Decision Making in Wheelchair Tennis

Mark Bullock, ITF Wheelchair Tennis Development Officer

The two bounce rule was introduced to give players more time to reach the ball. However, the two bounce rule makes wheelchair tennis more complex in the sense that players have to make an extra decision – do they play the ball after one bounce or two.

When working on players receiving skills coaches should be aware of this and introduce drills that involve making a decision as to whether the player is going to take the ball on one bounce or two. A useful drill is for players to call out 'one' or 'two' as the ball approaches. The coach can then analyse when the player makes the decision and whether they are making the correct decision.

Beginners can undertake throwing and catching exercises that involve making a decision as to whether the ball should be caught after one or two bounces.

Get a grip

Michael Foulks

Michael Foulks is a former top 10 player with more than a dozen titles on the NEC Wheelchair Tennis Tour who is now coaching in the United States.

The best grip is the one that allows you to swing aggressively through the ball without fear of the dreaded unforced error. If your swing is loose, fast, and fluid, and the ball is consistently landing in the court with some depth, you are doing it right. For the aggressive forehand, look at Andre Agassi. In this forehand is a potent combination foreword arm motion in the direction of the target and aggressive brushing or snapping up above the contact point. His grip is not all the way over to the western.



Are your forehands too flat or are they too 'loopy'? The former causes too many unforced errors while the latter invites opponents to stroll in and crush short balls. What you're looking for is your ideal combo of both spin and depth. By allowing the racket to shift from slightly open to slightly closed, you can be your own coach. Watch the trajectory (or flight path) of your shot and correct accordingly. An example:

If, due to excessive top-spin, your ball is not penetrating deep enough into your opponent's court, you can:

- a) slightly open your racket face;
- b) swing in more of a foreword direction (or, as I tell students, hit through a line of four tennis balls in the direction of your target, thus lengthening your stroke);
- c) slightly reduce your racket speed, although this is not recommended since it requires too much finesse.

Next time tennis is on television, record a few games and study both the men and women pros. Wait for a close-up, slow-motion and see how their arm motion gives their ball depth and spin. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. Have fun out there!

Intermediate Groundstrokes

Dan James



Dan graduated in 1992 with a major in Speech/Communications. He was introduced to Wheelchair Tennis in 1992 and began travelling to clinics, camps and tournaments in 1993. In 1998 he was appointed assistant coach to the US World Team Cup team and the following year he was made head coach. Dan was the men's coach for the US team at the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney. He works as the Head Tennis Professional at the Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama.

The Forehand

Grip

Choosing a grip for the forehand is very important. For most people the forehand is their stronger shot and will eventually be turned into their weapon. Developing a weapon as an intermediate player is essential to advancing from the intermediate level to the advanced. The forehand should be very versatile allowing you to drive the ball with extreme pace, or to loop the ball with extreme topspin. The grip for this stroke is the semi-western. It can be found by placing your index finger's base knuckle on the flat bevel of your racquet's grip. Hold the racquet loosely and turn it in your hand until your index finger knuckle has moved on bevel to the right (if you are right handed, to the left if you are left handed). This is the semi-western grip. The strings of your racquet should be angled down.

The Stroke

Stroke production occurs in three simple phases: preparation, contact, and finish. Preparation of the racquet should be timed with the bounce of the ball right before contact. This allows you to keep both hands on the wheels for the longest possible time maximising mobility. Your chair should be at a 45



degree angle approaching the ball. Preparation for the forehand can take two forms. You can take the racquet straight back, but beneath the ball, or you can continue the straight back backswing until the racquet head is above the wrist. This is what we call the inverted C and is only to be used once you are comfortable with taking the racquet straight back. Preparation should be as short as possible, the long the backswing the more likely you are to be late at the contact point.

Once you have prepared the racquet you must time the swing so you are hitting the ball just in front of or directly at your knees. Letting the ball back any further causes a change in your stroke production as well as increasing the possibility that your chair will be in the way of the swing path. You should now use your free hand to turn into the ball so you are almost directly facing the net post at contact. Your swing should be a gradual low to high maintaining a smooth hitting zone of two to three feet. The hitting zone is the amount of time the ball can potentially be on the strings. The longer the hitting zone the better your contact will be. Bringing the racquet up to the ball with the semi-western grip (which has a slightly closed face) will create topspin. The more severe the low to high the more topspin you will create, but it also decreases the hitting zone and may lead to miss hits. Once you have hit through the hitting zone you are ready to finish.

The finish of the swing continues the upward motion across your body so you are actually looking over your hitting arm. Your chair should continue the turn until you are actually facing the hub beginning your recovery. You should maintain a firm wrist initially through the entire stroke remaining locked even at finish. As you become more and more comfortable with this position you will be able to "roll" your finish. Rolling your finish requires both wrist and arm action. Both pieces roll over the ball so at finish your hand is facing toward the back fence. This is not a "slap" where the wrist actually breaks back and forth, but rather a smooth roll to create more topspin.

Remember, the forehand is hit with the semi-western grip. Preparation occurs at the bounce of the ball before contact, your contact point is just at or in front of your knees, and finish occurs after a long hitting zone across your body.

Backhand

Grip

The backhand is hit with many grips and you will have to decide which is best for you. The options are the eastern forehand, which places your index finger base knuckle on the large flat bevel of your grip. The other option is the continental grip, which is one bevel away from the eastern forehand to the left (if you are right handed). This opens the strings and allows you to create

underspin which is the most commonly hit backhand. The backhand has the same three basic steps as the forehand: preparation, contact, and finish.

Preparation for the backhand is timed similarly to the forehand. The racquet comes straight back, but this time the racquet face should be above the ball before contact. The elbow should be slightly bent and the arm relaxed. The swing speed on the backhand is considerably slower due to the spin created. Underspin will not drop into the court like topspin so you are relying on gravity to bring it down. Your chair should be turned less than the 45 degrees used in the forehand closer to a parallel position to the baseline.



The contact point is similar on the backhand. You want to take the ball at your knees, but away from the body to maintain an almost straight arm. Again, letting the ball get too far back changes stroke production as well as increasing the chances of the chair getting in the way of the swing path. Be careful not to let it get too far out on front or you will

lose balance and strength. The swing should generate from the shoulder coming down slightly to the ball. The hitting zone on the backhand should be even longer than on the forehand. While you are creating underspin with the stroke there is no need to chop the stroke. Your grip and preparation will be enough to create the underspin.

The finish should not go across your body like the forehand. It should stop when it is even with your body well out in front of you. Once you have hit through your hitting zone the palm of your hand gradually rotate down opening up the face of the racquet. When finished with this stroke your hitting surface should point toward the sky and your palm should be straight down. This is an advanced finish. If you are new to this stroke technique stop your swing before you begin to roll your wrist, arm, palm down.

Hitting the backhand, like the forehand, happens in three simple steps. Prepare the racquet slightly above the ball with a continental grip. Drive the racquet forward and slightly down to the contact point maintaining a long hitting zone. Finish by rolling your arm down opening up the strings to the sky.

Wheelchair tennis is played from the baseline, but the game is advancing to the point where you need to be able to be aggressive with your strokes. Using the correct technique is the only way to insure proper spins, flexibility of shot selection, as well as consistency. Changing your stroke is hard work and may take time, but it will be well worth it in the end.

Mini Tennis – A vital tool in wheelchair tennis

Source: Mini Tennis – Developing the Base

Just as mini tennis has allowed young players/beginners to gain more success and allowed tennis to be introduced in school halls etc., the able bodied game it is just as important in wheelchair tennis.

Mini tennis is played on a smaller court, approximately the size of a badminton court, with softer balls. It allows new players to enjoy playing the game as success comes quicker.

Mini tennis also allows wheelchair tennis to be played in school halls, rehabilitation centres and in restricted spaces outside. A court can be made on any flat surface and can be marked out very cheaply with a pot of paint.

What kind of a racket that is used is not too important as long as it is not too heavy or the grip too big. A small wooden paddle will do fine. It can also be played using plastic, wooden or aluminium rackets.

Mini tennis is valuable to people of all ages as an introduction to the full game. All the skills used in regular tennis – flat and top spin ground strokes, volleys, lobs etc. can be developed in mini tennis.

Mini tennis offers a unique opportunity for wheelchair tennis to attract innumerable new participants.

Mini Tennis is:

Easy & Fun – it can be played with other wheelchair users and family and friends;

Suits young & old;

Suitable to be played almost anywhere e.g. school halls, rehabilitation centres, the garden

Inexpensive.

Court Size

There are no rules to the size of the court. A badminton court is ideal; just lower the net and play. Temporary lines can be taped indoors, chalked or indicated in any manner outside.



Ideally there should be a space of 2 metres behind each end of the court and ideally there should be a 1 – 2 metre gap between courts.

Net

Any lightweight net will do. A badminton net is fine. If a net is not available it is possible to improvise with a rope with streamers attached. The net should be 80 cm in height at the centre and 85 cm at the posts.

Posts

Commercial nets and posts are available. Posts for volleyball and badminton work fine. If none of these are available, just tie the net or a rope across the playing area to anything that will support it. If nothing else, just draw a line on the ground and play. Drawing two parallel lines as a net means the players have to hit up and over the barrier.

Rackets

Small rackets are best and are safest. Racket length can vary from 18 to 26 inches. For raw beginners a bat made of wood can be used.

Balls

Foam balls are excellent beginner balls for young and old, provided they are used indoors or outdoors in windless conditions.

Ideally, when the basic strokes have been learnt using the foam ball, the players should then move on to a low compression ball (so called because it is lighter and softer than a regular tennis ball).

If neither of the above balls are available a dead or punctured tennis ball can be used.

Wheelchairs

Regular wheelchairs can be used although it is best to remove high arm rests if possible. For players to feel comfortable in the wheelchair they may use straps to increase stability. Straps can be used around the ankles, knees or waist depending on the players balance and personal preference. Belts, bungee cords or elastic bands can be used. Commercial straps are also available.

Source: ITF Mini Tennis – Developing the Base

Coaches Corner

Teach mobility on clay

Clay courts are ideal for teaching movement to wheelchair tennis players. The court can be swept before a rally and the coach can then see exactly where the player has been.

Court Surfaces

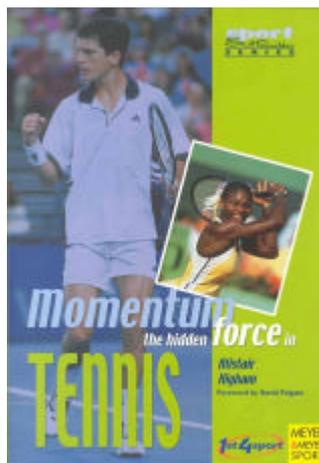
As coaches it is important that we get the message across that wheelchair tennis can be played on all court surfaces with the exception of natural grass. This summer there have even been a few experiments on grass courts including a demonstration at Wimbledon!

Integration

To give your players a wider range of competitive and social experiences include them in able bodied groups at the appropriate level. This will give them more tennis opportunities and enable them to play more matches than if their programme is restricted to playing other wheelchair players.

Momentum - The Hidden Force in Tennis

Alistair Higham



Alistair is a National Coach working for the Lawn Tennis Association and is the Great Britain 16 & Under Girls Team Captain. He has worked with many of Britain's top junior players. He is based at the LTA Regional Centre at Loughborough University in England.

You often hear the phrase "momentum has turned against him/her". But what is momentum? Well, thankfully for us none-too-scientific coaches, this kind of momentum has nothing to do with physics! It is the force that controls the flow of the match. It is a hidden force. It is invisible because it comes from the flow of energy between competitors. You can sense it when competing or

spectating. It dictates the run of play - you can feel things going for/against you or the players you are watching.

Momentum shifts at key times known as turning points. Turning points all have one thing in common: they have the potential to cause a change in the balance of the mental energy of one player or the other, which then causes a change in the momentum flow of the match. Turning points can happen when a player is boosted by something or, more often, when a player is distracted by something. The bigger the boost or distraction, the faster the momentum can swing.

These turning points can be caused by many things - a bad line call, a missed match point, breaking a string, a change of tactics, etc. A good example of a turning point affecting a match happened at last year's U.S. Open. Jelena Dokic lost the momentum after having a line call go against her in the tiebreak against Serena Williams. You could feel the energy change between the players - the score says it all 76 60.

The trick to controlling turning points, is to control your attitude when turning points arise. It's why it is so important to stay positive, stay focussed and never give up. The fact is, at any level, things will go wrong in a tennis match. What goes wrong doesn't really matter, it's your reaction to it that counts.

Alistair Higham, British National Tennis Coach and author of a new ground breaking book for all levels of tennis player, 'Momentum - The Hidden Force in Tennis'. Available online at Barnes and Noble on www.bn.com or www.amazon.com or by ordering at your local bookshop ISBN 1-84126-0401.

Wheelchair Tennis Publications

ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Manual

Written by Marko Polic

To order telephone +44 (0)20 8392 4788 or print off an order form from www.itftennis.com.

Issues 1 & 2 ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review

Available on www.itftennis.com or by contacting the ITF Office.

Wheelchair Tennis – Myth to Reality

Written by Randy Snow & Dr Bal Moore

To order telephone +44 (0)20 8392 4788 or print off an order form from itftennis.com (limited availability).

102 Wheelchair Tennis Drills

Written by Randy Snow & Dr Bal Moore

To order telephone +1 888 832 8291. The item number for ordering is INS21. The cost is \$15 + shipping & handling.

New books

More Than Tennis – The First 25 Years of Wheelchair Tennis

Written by Sarah Bunting this new book gives an historical account of wheelchair tennis since Brad Parks started the sport in 1976. This publication will bring back many fond memories for all those who have been involved in the sport and will also provide inspiration for the future. The book is available from the ITF Office at a price of \$20. A special price of \$10 will be charged at NEC Tour events where the book is available or if it is purchased in person at the ITF Office.

Pushing Forward

Former ITF World Champion and contributor to the Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review, Randy Snow, has written a new book 'Pushing Forward'. The book is divided into 3 sections. The first section is an autobiography taking you through Randy's childhood, injury, rehab and then his wheelchair sports career. The second section presents some meaningful and illuminating stories about overcoming adversity and making a stand. The third section presents Randy's personal perspective of living life in a wheelchair.

This book is available from Kendall Hunt Publishing: tel.: + 1 800 228 0810 or www.kendallhunt.com

More information

If you would like information on programming or coaching wheelchair tennis do not hesitate to call the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Department on +44 (0)20 8392 4788.

If you know of other coaches who would like to receive wheelchair tennis coaching information please ask them to send their name, address, email and an outline of their coaching experience to mark.bullock@itftennis.com or fax + 44 (0)20 8392 4741.

<p>The articles in Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review are written by a variety of contributors and the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the ITF.</p>
