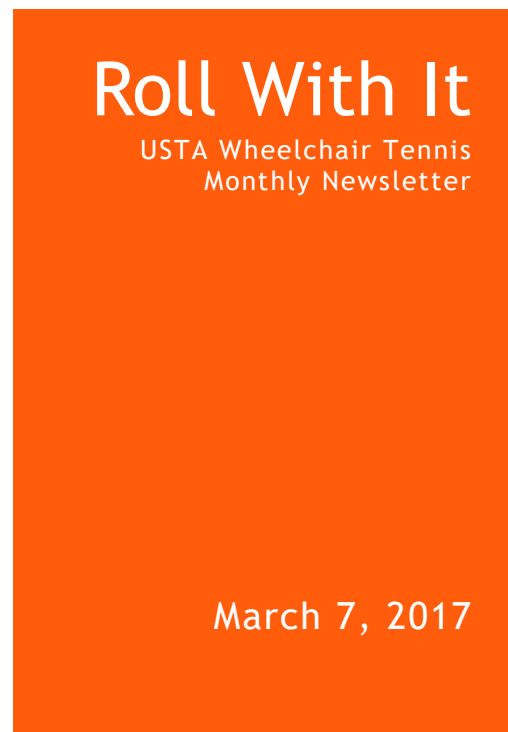


LEFT: MARTIN BLACKMAN HITS WITH CASEY RATZLAFF RIGHT: JEFF WATERS HITS WITH CONNER STROUD.



IN THIS ISSUE

USTA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND WHEELCHAIR TENNIS HOST A HISTORIC EVENT AT THE NATIONAL CAMPUS

A few months ago, Jason Harnett decided to have a short training camp at the USTA National Facility for the Men's Team in preparation for their trip to Quito, Ecuador. This small idea morphed into an amazing event to celebrate a union between USTA Player Development and Wheelchair Tennis. Joanne Wallen and Jason Harnett put their minds together and decided to utilize the event to truly showcase our athlete's talents to National Campus Staff and VA staff. Therefore, the following people were invited: David Wagner, Nick Taylor, Dana Mathewson, John Devorss, Paul Walker, Chris Herman, Casey Ratzlaff, and Conner Stroud.

Friday morning, March 3, various national coaches from USTA Player Development were on the court trying to play tennis in a wheelchair with some of the best players in the USA. All this was occurring during a USTA Pro Circuit Men's Futures tournament which gave way to hundreds of spectators passing by. The following day, we hosted a large event in which many special guests were invited: Kurt Kamperman, CEO of the USTA National Campus; Martin Blackman, General Manager USTA Player Development; Tim Liezert, CEO of the Orlando VA Hospital; Dr. Portee of the VA Hospital, and many more.

Joanne Wallen gave an impactful speech in which she related how tennis has changed and enhanced her life positively forever. It is her hope that through tennis, others too can have life-changing experiences. After speeches and introductions, guests jumped on the courts and played tennis in with the wheelchair athletes. Some guests utilized the experience to try wheelchair tennis for the first time.

After the tennis clinic, guests were invited to a reception, took a tour of the entire National Campus, and shortly thereafter had dinner at the Tournament Administration Building upstairs patio. All in all, it was a momentous occasion for the sport of Wheelchair Tennis in the USA.

- USTA Player Development meet Wheelchair Tennis
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Utah All Comers Camp 2017

The first All Comers Camp of the year was a huge success with many great Wheelchair Tennis Players and some new faces. We had great press coverage as well. Here is an article published in Deseret News:

MURRAY — Rick Messer felt like a fool as he attempted to maneuver the specially made wheelchair around the tennis court.

But the 42-year-old was happy in that he has learned that while a motorcycle accident could steal his ability to walk, it couldn't steal his desire to seek — and conquer — challenges.

"It's a lot harder than I thought it was going to be," the Alabama native said of participating in the All Comers Wheelchair Tennis Camp sponsored by the USTA and Utah Tennis at the Sports Mall Athletic Club this weekend. "I was over there, and I looked like a fool, just trying to make the right cuts to hit the ball. ... It's extremely difficult."

But the man who moved to Utah so he could pursue his dream of alpine skiing in the Paralympics said he has no doubt he'll stick with the sport that's so new to him, he's still learning the terminology and rules. "It's a challenge," he said smiling. "And I like challenges." Messer said sports, mostly skiing, has given him normalcy after a motorcycle accident 10 years ago left him paralyzed.

"I was hating the world when I first got hurt," he said. "My therapist said, 'I'll figure out something to get the wind back in your face.'" She sent him to a ski camp in Colorado, and the man who'd never played sports of any kind said, "It was all downhill from there. ... They couldn't keep me from it. I became a completely different person." Messer was one of 24 people who participated in the four-day camp that concluded Sunday. About half of them were from Utah, while the others came from New York, Idaho and Georgia.

The purpose of the camp ranges from an introduction to the sport to allowing the U.S. national team coaches to find promising young talent.

"Unfortunately, leagues do not exist for wheelchair tennis," said Jason Allen, manager of wheelchair and technical support for USTA. "So we try to create other opportunities for our players, such as these camps."

Wheelchair tennis does, however, have a professional tour, and it is a Paralympic sport. The number of wheelchair tennis players is tough to know because the official count — 600 — comes from USTA sanctioned tournaments or events.

"We know that number is incorrect because a lot of people don't play tournaments," Allen said. "So we say there are probably around 1,300 people nationwide playing wheelchair tennis."

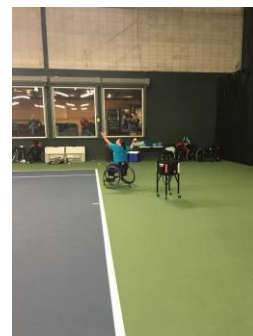
Laurie Lambert of Utah Tennis organized the camp, which is about seven years old. She said the camp is just one of the local offerings for wheelchair tennis players.

"We try and get our wheelchair players out in the public playing in able-bodied tournaments and able-bodied leagues," she said. "So more able-bodied people see them, and they might have friends or know someone who is in a chair." Utah Tennis officials see hosting the camp as an opportunity to increase local opportunities.

"I think it's just to make them love the sport even more," Lambert said. "I mean, they definitely will be better tennis players at the end of the weekend. But just to connect them to each other, to love the sport and to want to keep playing year-round." Currently, Utah Tennis offers 52 weeks of wheelchair programming year-round that is free to all players. It all has junior camps and clinics about 24 weeks of the year.



We held an open forum for questions at the hotel.



Jessica Hillier-Davidson practicing her serve.



Jason Harnett carrying a big stick and swinging it hard!



Michael O'Keefe with legends Rick Draney and David Wagner



Players taking a break

Utah Camp continued:

"Our goal is just to grow," she said. "We're not talking hundreds of people, but if we grow two or three juniors and three adults a year, that's success. We have about 100 (local) players on our email list." Most of those are in Salt Lake City, but certainly not all. Nathan Hunter, who was born with spina bifida, is a sophomore at Grantsville High, and he's one of two high school players participating in the camp. "I tried able-bodied baseball and tennis, and my knees just started to wear down," Hunter said. "I tried to find other opportunities, and in 2009-10, my parents found this. I've been hooked ever since." Hunter competes with and against able-bodied athletes on Grantsville's tennis team, which he said can be difficult.

While most of the rules are the same, the biggest difference is that wheelchair athletes get two bounces to return a ball, while able-bodied players get one bounce. That extra bounce, Hunter said, can give an opponent more time to get in position, while the opposite is true for him. Still, he said playing with able-bodied athletes is making him a better player. "I don't think I would be as good as I am," he said, noting he has coaches and teammates willing to play with him. "I discover for myself what I need to work on." Hunter dreams of playing in the Paralympics, and that dream became a bit more realistic when he met David Wagner at this weekend's camp.

The 42-year-old is the most decorated wheelchair tennis player in history with eight Paralympic medals and 18 grand slam titles, and he's coaching at this weekend's event. He said it was a camp like this that helped him rekindle a passion for tennis he'd discovered just 10 months before a surfing accident left him paralyzed.

"I learned right away that there were a lot of options out there," he said. "It absolutely helps. I mean, if you weren't an athlete before you got hurt, just because you sit in a chair doesn't mean you're going to sit down and be an athlete." Still, he said, whatever you love, you can find a way to do it if you're willing to be creative. "You might have to adapt something, change something to make it fit your disability," he said. "But you can still do all of the same things."

Jason Allen said the Utah camp is so successful, they'd like to replicate the model across the country. "We do three of these All Comers camps a year, and we'd like the others to fall in line with the quality of this camp," he said. "The amount of players, the level of coaching, they're also very fiscally responsible with the money we give them. The players have a great time, so we want to duplicate this model throughout the country. We'd like to see over the next year and a half an increase from three camps to six nationwide. This is a developmental training ground for our next Paralympians and our pro tour." Wagner knows his success might inspire some of the athletes at the camp, but for him, it's as much about the first-time player who may only use the sport as a way to have fun with family or friends.

National Wheelchair Committee gets to work

This past January, a new National Committee took the reins of Wheelchair Tennis for the USA. All were eager to get to work, and thanks to Curt Bender's and Shima Grover's leadership, they have hit the ground rollin'.

Committee members were divided into the following sub-committees:

1. Tournaments
2. USTA/ITF
3. Rules/Regulations
4. Medical
5. Grants
6. Camps
7. Collegiate
8. Grassroots organizations

If you have any expertise in the sub-committee areas, please reach out to Curt Bender at nuts4tennis@sbcglobal.net or Shima Grover at Shimagro@gmail.com

*Committee members are appointed for a two-year term. If you are interested in serving in the future, please reach out to Curt Bender.

Section Highlight – Missouri Valley and Caribbean

The USTA National Staff conducts monthly section webinars in order to increase communication across the nation and ensure that the sport is growing. Recently, we had two sections speak about programming for Wheelchair Tennis; Missouri Valley and the Caribbean Section. Mo Valley's section is quite active and had many events coming up. Jaren Glaser, Wheelchair Tennis Section Staff Member works hand in hand with one of the superstars and legends of the game, Nick Taylor. Here are some upcoming events:

- April 1- Wheelchair Tennis Trainings in Tulsa/OKC Oklahoma
- April 8-10- Wheel It Forward- Wheelchair Tennis Tournament in Kansas City, MO
- May 17-21- Wichita, KS
 - May 17, USTA Train The Trainer Workshop
 - Air Capital Classic Wheelchair Tournament and Camp
- August, Nebraska Wheelchair Tennis Tournament
- August, Iowa Wheelchair Tennis Tournament
- August 29-September 3- US Open USTA Wheelchair Championships



Jaren Glaser



Caribbean Section – Arlin Hernandez, Staff Member



Puerto Rico Wheelchair Tennis Association was created in 1985, although the initial purpose was to have another option for rehabilitation and recreational activity for people with any kind of physical disabilities, it quickly developed into a competitive sport and after several years a National Team was created.

Today the Puerto Rico Wheelchair Tennis Association works along with the Puerto Rico Tennis and Caribbean Tennis Associations in order to keep growing the sport and to continue helping people with different physical disabilities to improve their self- esteem, develop leadership skills, sportsmanship, self-discipline and athletic conditioning both on and off the court.

The mission is to develop and promote the sport of wheelchair tennis and recreation opportunities for people with physical disabilities to take part at a level of their choice. Throughout the year the Wheel Chair Tennis Association visits different disability centers, hospitals and institutions in Puerto Rico to let them know that programs are available. Sport plays a vital role in the rehabilitation of those with disabilities and can often be a catalyst for increased confidence and self-esteem. During the last two years the Puerto Rico Wheelchair Tennis Association has celebrated three wheelchair tennis tournaments including the ITF Reginal Qualification Tournament - Visited and offered tennis clinics in over 20 different institutions for people with different disabilities. - Participated in more than 10 different summer camps - Created a Tennis Related Drawing Contest for those that cannot play due to severe physical condition.

Upcoming tournaments:

March :

EZMED Arizona Open – ID 750004217 (March 16-19)

Cajun Classic – ID 700010617 (March 22-26)

April:

Lee County CTA Adult Wheelchair Celebration 150063917

(April 1-2)

4th Annual West Coast Wheelchair Classic – 650015317 (April 1-2)

South Florida Open Wheelchair Championships – 150056917 (April 7-10)

Mississippi Rock N Roll Wheelchair Tennis State Championship - A Grand Prix Series Tournament – 700002918 (April 7-9)

Cherokee Wheelchair Championships (GA Level III-150 pts) – 700107017 (April 7)

Virginia Beach Wheelchair Open - VTA Wheelchair Tennis Grand Prix Tournament – 300006817 (April 8)

America Wheelchair Tennis Championships (GA Level II - 200 pts) – 703487817 (April 20)



USTA Launches new website!

Please send any feedback regarding the launch of the new website to Jason Allen at Jason.allen@usta.com. Please make comments specific to the Wheelchair portions of the page.

Anything newsworthy?

If you have any news regarding wheelchair tennis that you would like highlighted in our newsletter, please send it to us.

Please like our Facebook page!



New Tournament Designations

The USTA National Wheelchair Tennis Staff and National Committee have put a new policy in affect in order to simplify and streamline ITF tournament distinctions as it relates to USTA ranking points. This policy is immediately in affect:

ITF Super Series = USTA Category 1

ITF 1, 2, 3 = USTA Super Category 2

ITF Futures = USTA Category 2

Non ITF events = sectional-level ranking points

Special Note: The individual categories within tournaments will not change. Whatever the tournament distinction is, it will be that distinction for every division.

Roll with it Monthly is a publication created and designed by Jason Allen, Manager Wheelchair and Technical for USTA National. It is published during the middle of each month. If you have any feedback please email him at Jason.allen@usta.com.

