WHEELCHAIR ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

EMBRACE THE FUTURE OF THE GAME

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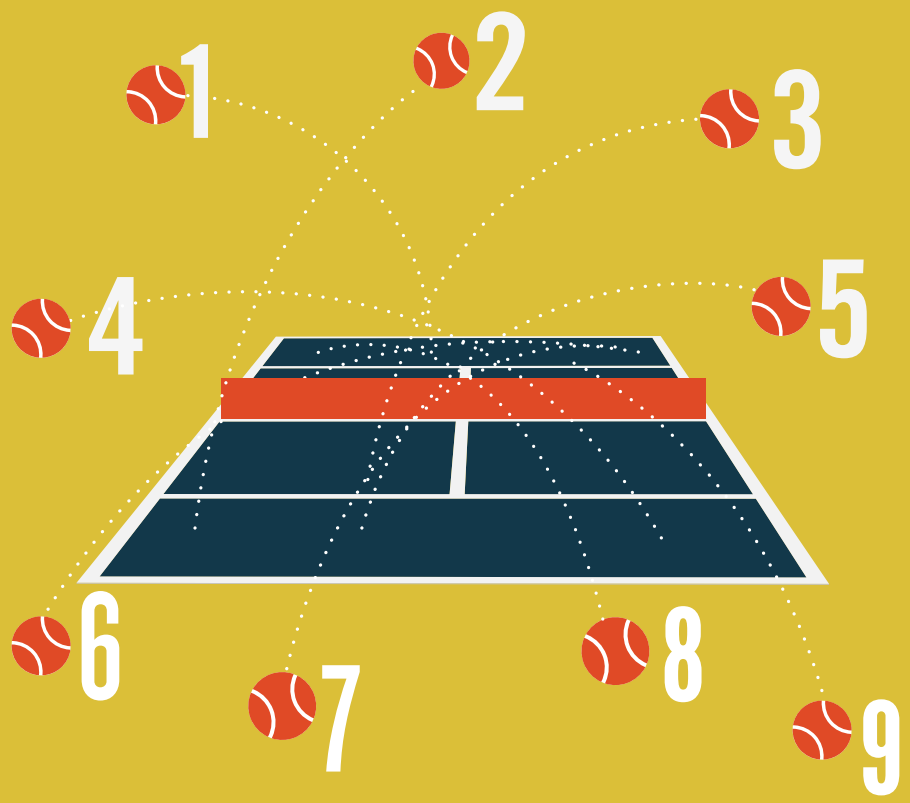

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Photo Courtesy: Dan James

Photo Courtesy: Karen Cumbers

WE BELIEVE IN AN OPEN GAME

At the USTA, we celebrate an open format- the idea that anyone from anywhere should be able to play and compete equally and fairly in a sport that is inclusive and welcoming to everyone. That's the principle behind our signature tournament, the US Open. It's also the driving force behind our Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, which is designed to grow and promote our sport to the next generation of fans, players and volunteers and to make sure that the face of tennis reflects the face of our country. To do that, we are removing barriers and creating opportunities wherever we can, so that tennis becomes a true reflection of all of America.

At the USTA, we want the game of tennis and the tennis courts across this country to reflect the unique diversity that makes America great. Not only are we striving for diversity in ethnicity, but also in age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, physical capabilities and all other reflections that contribute to the richness of our local communities and this nation.

Photo Courtesy Karen Cumbers

Our mission is to position the USTA and the sport of tennis as the global model for diversity and inclusion in sports. And the first step in that mission starts right in your own community with you.

This guide is designed to help you connect with a key segment vital to the growth of tennis: individuals who use wheelchairs to play tennis. You will learn about the history of the sport, steps for engagement and success stories from others. With your help, we can make sure the game of tennis remains relevant, and passed on to the next generation of players. This is only the beginning and a way to get the engagement started. Our hope is that with this information and inside hand, you'll be able to begin to engage with wheelchair tennis players, coaches, volunteers and programmers in a meaningful and productive way.

THE OPPORTUNITY

THE PLAYERS: WHEELCHAIR TENNIS IS TENNIS

Since 2005, the US Census has estimated over 3.4 million wheelchair users over the age of 15 and 121,000 under the age of 15. Fewer than 8% of people with disabilities use wheelchairs and there are more than 269,000 new cases of disabilities added each year.

Since 1998, the USTA has remained dedicated to providing top flight programing and developmental opportunities to wheelchair athletes. The awareness of the wheelchair community is growing across the nation with amazing success stories of these athletes making an impact and inspiring others in their same situation to never give up. Role models are inspiring young and old to experience the game of tennis and what it has to offer.

We should not promote tennis for the sport alone but what the sport can build within an individual, character traits such as confidence, self-esteem, leadership, motivation and many more. This being said, it's important for all of us to work together to provide more tennis opportunities for the wheelchair community.

GROWTH OF THE GAME:

There are over 45 wheelchair tennis tournaments in the US annually and many of which are ITF level international tournaments that attract players from all over the world. Most recently, over 170 wheelchair tennis tournaments were held in over 40 countries annually with the prize money totaling over $1.5 million. There are also players in wheelchairs playing on USTA league teams. They play singles or doubles. Some high school players that use wheelchairs are playing on varsity and junior varsity teams. The University of Alabama and the University of Arizona are just two examples of Universities that have wheelchair tennis teams.

Wheelchair tennis and able-bodied tennis are virtually identical. It is the most easily integrated wheelchair sport to play with able-bodied friends and family as it is played using the same court, same racquets, same balls and same rules with the single exception that the ball can bounce twice before it is out of play. The first bounce must be within the court, but the second bounce may or may not be within the boundaries of the tennis court. Other than that the rules are the same.

A player using a wheelchair can also easily be a fourth in a doubles game. The ball is out of play after two bounces for able bodied players and the ball stays in play until it bounces three times for players in wheelchairs.

Photo Courtesy: Sharon Greiner, USTA

INTO THE NET

CHALLENGES

Photo Courtesy: Karen Cumbers

KEY POINTS: WHY PLAY WHEELCHAIR TENNIS?

Wheelchair tennis gives players with mobility challenges the opportunity to play with family and friends in both competitive and recreational settings. In addition, players in wheelchairs can compete in tennis tournaments, in tennis leagues, singles, doubles and up/down doubles (also referred to as run/roll doubles in which a player in a wheelchair partners with a player who can run).

- Not all tennis facilities are wheelchair accessible. Most tennis chairs have cambered wheels making them wider than their everyday chairs. Tennis players in wheelchairs are resourceful and can remove wheels from tennis chairs to move through doorways and gates. If your community is building a new tennis facility, speak ahead of time with owners, club directors and architects to ensure the facility is completely accessible by installing automatic doors, wider sidewalks and wider gates.
- Tennis chairs can be and are expensive. The cost can range anywhere from $2000-3000 and can be a difficult curve to overcome for wheelchair players who want to compete at a higher level. Players should be encouraged to reach out to other wheelchair athletes looking for used or loaner chairs to try out the sport and apply for grants.
- Another struggle is that there are few players playing wheelchair tennis. In order to compete in a wheelchair tournament, players will be required to travel great distances and incur significant expenses.

INTERESTING FACTS
ABOUT WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

$1.5 million+
in prize money on the Uniqlo Tour.

170/40/6
There are 170 tournaments in 40 countries on 6 continents on the ITF schedule.

There are 38 USTA sanctioned wheelchair tennis tournaments and 11 ITF sanctioned wheelchair tennis tournaments in the USA this year.

David Wagner and Nick Taylor earned gold medals in three consecutive Paralympics

David Wagner has three gold medals, two silver, one bronze, 14 Grand Slam trophies and too many trophies to store at his Olympic Training Center locker.

Standard wheelchairs average 35 pounds, but tennis wheelchairs average 20 pounds and some are much less.

PTR and USPTA have 335 tennis pros who are certified to teach wheelchair tennis.

1976 Brad Parks invented wheelchair tennis in 1976.

The first wheelchair tennis tournament was held in 1977. **1977**

1992 Wheelchair tennis became a part of the Paralympics in 1992 in Barcelona.

Top 16 US cities in number of USTA wheelchair tennis Facebook fans

1. New York
2. Grand Rapids, MI
3. Atlanta
4. Los Angeles
5. San Diego
6. Denver
7. Chicago
8. Seattle
9. Tucson
10. Phoenix
11. Lakeland, FL
12. Charlotte, NC
13. Indianapolis
14. Salt Lake City
15. Cincinnati
16. Marietta, GA.

COACHING
SUCCESS STORIES

You can learn a lot from watching what others have done. The following stories highlight some of the great work being done by other local community tennis associations to get you excited about the power you have to help others find themselves in the game.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

WHO:

Fort Lauderdale Parks and Recreation
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

CHALLENGE:

Fort Lauderdale Parks and Recreation did not have a wheelchair tennis program and decided to introduce wheelchair tennis in 2013. Their challenge was to have loaner tennis chairs for players who are interested in giving wheelchair tennis a try.

APPROACH:

Fort Lauderdale Parks and Recreation applied for a USTA Wheelchair Tennis Grant to purchase two chairs, and two additional chairs were purchased by the city fund. Loaner tennis chairs and the instruction were offered free of charge. The program grew so rapidly that four more chairs were purchased using a grant from the USTA Florida Foundation.

RESULTS:

Two wheelchair tennis programs were initially offered-one at the George English Tennis Center, and another one at the Veltri Tennis Center in Plantation. The programs were offered every other week, but the demand increased to warrant the program at the George English Tennis Center to be offered every week. A second instructor was hired so that beginners and more advanced players could receive appropriate instructions.

As a secondary benefit of a successful programming, new sidewalks and automatic doors were installed at the George English Tennis Center to make the center completely accessible. The success of the wheelchair tennis program played an important role in the City of Fort Lauderdale capturing the All American City title in 2014.

Susan Krowitz, the former Fort Lauderdale Tennis Director considers the wheelchair program she launched and nurtured one of the highlights of her career.

KEY LESSONS:

- Only serious wheelchair tennis players own tennis chairs. A stable of loaner tennis chairs are an essential part of a wheelchair tennis program.

- Grants are available from national USTA and USTA sections.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

WHO:

Southern Crescent Tennis Association (SCTA) out of Peachtree City Tennis Center in Peachtree City, GA

CHALLENGE:

Introduce persons with disabilities to wheelchair tennis

APPROACH:

SCTA worked with Sheppard Center in Atlanta, one of the nation's top rehabilitation hospitals for spinal cord and brain injury. The hospital primarily cares for the newly injured. SCTA held an EXPO at the hospital to introduce and demo the sport of wheelchair tennis to the attendees. Following the EXPO, there was a field trip to Peachtree City Tennis Center where the attendees were able to watch an exhibition, ask questions, and try wheelchair tennis.

RESULTS:

The SCTA was able to get those who have been recently injured see the opportunities presented by wheelchair tennis and consider the sport as part of their rehab.

KEY LESSONS:

- Find a strong partner organization or individual who can introduce you to the community
- Take Tennis the their community, location, and organization. Go to them, show them tennis can be practiced and played everywhere. Use portable nets and other equipment to showcase the sport.
- Let them try to play, don't just instruct, get them engaged!

Photo Courtesy: Sharon Greiner, USTA

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

WHO:

Clocktower Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournaments, GA

CHALLENGE:

How to plan successful wheelchair tennis tournaments.

APPROACH:

The 2015 Clocktower Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournament had twenty-seven participants. The Tournament Committee reached out to organizations outside the geographic region, and half of the players were playing in Rome, GA for the first time.

RESULTS:

The 2014 and 2015 Clocktower Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournament received the USTA Georgia Wheelchair Tennis Tournament of the Year award. New players lined the fences to observe and learn. Some of them joined local programs, and some are now playing weekly with ALTA teams in Atlanta.

The organizers plan to host even larger events when the Rome Tennis Center, with fifty-four fully accessible courts and a spectacular club house with a huge covered porch for viewing are completed in the summer of 2016.

KEY LESSONS:

- Reach out to those you haven't reached out to before.

Photo Courtesy Ann Hortman

GETTING STARTED

Creating a bridge into the Wheelchair community might not happen overnight. But if you stick with it, success can and will happen. Here are a few points to keep in mind as you put your plans into place.

Tennis is your "passport" into any new community

You don't need to be an expert on wheelchair tennis. You are already an expert in tennis- and that should be your entry point into any new community.

Try Wheelchair Tennis by playing in a wheelchair

This will give you a feel for wheelchair tennis and the incredible athletic ability of the players.

You already know enough to get started

The materials and the stories shared here are enough to help you make your first call or set up your first meeting.

One call will snowball

The very first call or visit with any organization may be your biggest hurdle but make sure you leave by owning the next step with the contact. After that, your contacts and opportunities will spread. It may take time, but don't give up. The fear of trying something new for anyone takes time and persistence.

Photo Courtesy Karen Cumbers

PUTTING YOUR PLAN IN PLACE

Here are five simple steps to follow as you kick off your plan.

Step 1: Find an idea you are passionate about

Now that you are inspired and motivated to reach out to the wheelchair tennis community and players, find an idea that you and your organization/CTA can get excited about and commit to

Step 2: Find a local partner

If you are not familiar enough with the wheelchair community, team up with a partner or guide to reach out to this community.

- Start by talking to your USTA contacts. Tell them your plan. Have them connect you to other USTA people or resources, including your section Wheelchair Tennis Committee and Wheelchair Tennis Staff.
- Next, reach out. Talk to other programs and contacts who have tried programs and see what has worked for them and what solutions they found to any barriers.
- Finally, partner up with an organization within the community

The “Partner Up” diagram on the next page walks you through this process and gives you ideas for helping to identify partners in your community.

Step 3: Formalize your plan and develop activation elements for your launch

Now that you have your plan and your partner, time to formalize everything:

- Create a budget
- Define your milestones
- Determine ways to track your success
- Design and distribute your activation elements.

Step 4: Execute and have fun!

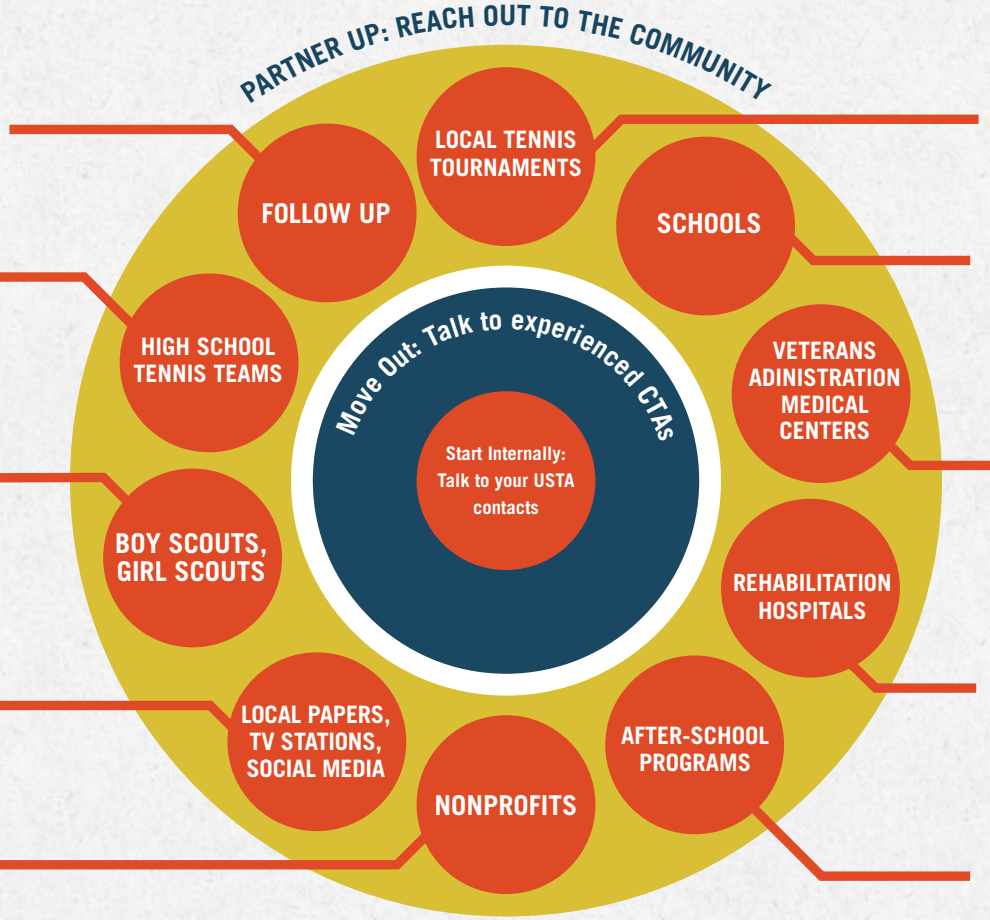
The main goal is to make it happen. Remember that there is trial and error. As long as you are playing tennis and having fun, that is all that matters!

Step 5: Track, monitor, course correct and share

As you build your program, keep track of your successes and your learnings. Sharing all your learnings with other CTAs is important. The more we all learn about what works, the better we can all become at spreading the love of tennis.

PARTNER UP

Having a partner in the community in order to get started is an important first step. Start internally and work your way out and you'll be well on your way to becoming an important part of the community yourself. Here are some suggestions:



Most importantly remember to follow up. Always put the opportunity to make contact in your court by asking when would be a good time to contact the interested party.

Solicit volunteers for wheelchair tennis clinics and tournaments. Provide opportunities for high school students to earn community service hours.

Encourage them to volunteer at wheelchair tennis events. Also ask any group that needs volunteer hours such as local church or Christian schools.

Promote wheelchair tennis and publicize specific wheelchair tennis events by including a wheelchair tennis exhibition event or have a booth with information available to the general public at tennis specific events.

Let them know that USTA is interested in partnering with them for potential grant funding, scholarships and networking.

Encourage professional, semi-professional and large tennis tournaments to have a wheelchair tennis exhibition match. Start small with one demo match and work up to a novice division with the ultimate goal of having a USTA sanctioned event.

Contact physical education teachers and provide school assemblies on wheelchair tennis.

Offer an outreach program on wheelchair tennis but be very sensitive to the needs of veterans. Partner with a known veteran and person in a wheelchair.

Provide an in service to inpatient and outpatient therapists (PT, OT, Rec, spinal cord and amputee teams) or invite them to the demos at local a tournament.

Let after school tennis programs know that wheelchair tennis is available to school age children as well seeking out those with physical disabilities.

CULTURAL CUES

As you move through the process, keep a few cues in mind.

Personalize your invitation

Make your invitation known. Many communities unfamiliar with tennis need a warm, direct invitation to play. Just being open to their joining your program if they find you on their own may not be enough. A personal phone call, a personal invitation go far.

Meet the community where they are

Inviting wheelchair players to your courts is one approach, but going into their community or location is another great way to get people involved. Make sure the courts you are using are wheelchair accessible.

Reflect the community

Having a diverse volunteer staff is always a powerful way to make diverse audiences feel welcome and a part of your organization. The more you get wheelchair player volunteers involved, the more you can reflect diversity. Contact the USTA for starting points to see if there are wheelchair volunteers or players right in your own backyard!

Schools, Hospitals, Rehab Centers are all diverse

These may be your easiest entry point into the community. Some may have never tried wheelchair tennis, encourage them to try and play and educate them to the rules of the game that make it easier for them to pick up a racquet.

Don't forget social media

Having a digital presence can be another great way for the wheelchair community to learn more about your organization and what you are trying to do. Having a meaningful social-communications strategy can be an easy way to stay connected.

Families want what's best for their loved ones

That sentiment is universal. If you can engage the whole family, and not just the wheelchair player you have given them a way to connect in another way. Showing them how to get involved by playing doubles with a wheelchair player, or supporting them by practicing or playing with them is a great tool to offer them.

Inspiration from other wheelchair players

Being inspired is a powerful way to get motivated. There are many role models, including the Paralympic athletes and local wheelchair players.

It's OK to say "I don't know"

Authenticity is key to any true connection. If you ever feel unsure about something, just say you don't know and make efforts to find out.

Remember there will be trial and error

This is all about having fun and spreading the love of tennis. Don't be afraid to swing and miss. Just keep sharing your love of the sport and before you know it, you will have touched many lives.

CONNECTING: ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

**Looking for more ways to connect with Wheelchair players?
There are many organizations/groups you can reach out to right in your own community. The following are just a few worth considering.**

COMMUNITY CONTACTS

- Tennis clubs and recreation associations
- Tennis professionals
- Rehabilitation hospitals
- Shriners Hospitals
- Adaptive sports associations
- Physical therapists/occupational therapists
- Wheelchair dealers
- Amputee centers
- Schools and universities
- Center for Independent Living
- Support groups for spina bifida, spinal cord injuries and amputees

USTA CONTACTS

- www.usta.com/wheelchairtennis
- Contact wheelchairinfo@usta.com, (914) 696-7000
- Facebook at www.facebook.com/ustawheelchairtennis
- USTA Section offices
- CTA

SOURCES AND VALUABLE RESOURCES

- Wheelchair Tennis Committee
- Wheelchair Tennis Grassroots Manual

(Photo courtesy Karen Cumbers)

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS — These can be good resources to find local chapters serving your area.

Veterans Administration Medical Centers	va.gov/health/vamc
Paralyzed Veterans of America	pva.org
Randy Snow Push Forward Foundation	randysnow.org
Challenged Athletes Foundation	challengedathletes.org
Orthotic and Prosthetic Activities Foundation	opafonline.org
Blaze Sports Clubs	blazesports.com
Intercollegiate Tennis Association	itatennis.com
International Tennis Federation (ITF)	itftennis.com/wheelchair
- See coaches review and resource page for more info	
National Paralympic Committee	usparalympics.org
National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)	nrpa.org

FURTHER TRAINING AND RESOURCES:

Professional tennis Registry (PTR) (offers a development course)	ptrtennis.org
United States Professional Tennis Association(USPTA) (offers a a specialty course/certification (DVD)	uspta.com