

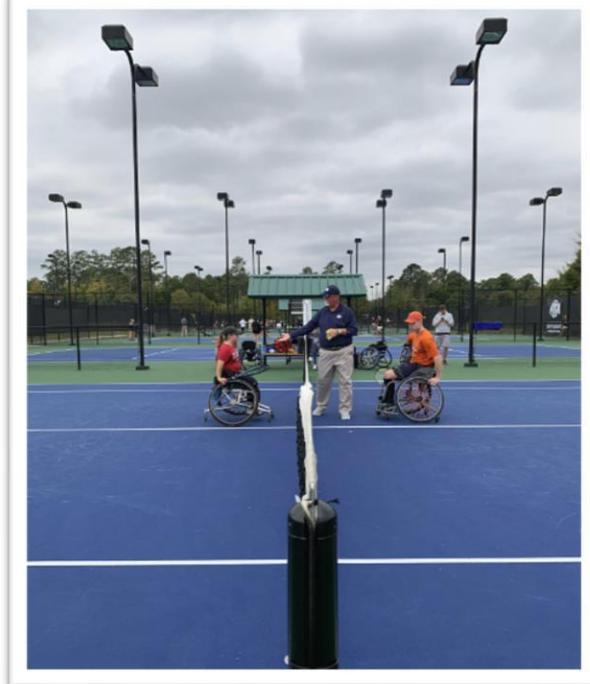
# USTA Southern Wheelchair Tennis Newsletter

December 2023

**Welcome** to the newsletter for USTA Southern Wheelchair Tennis, providing you with information about upcoming tournaments, wheelchair tennis programs, tips on how to take your game to the next level, and all things wheelchair tennis. Also, keep an eye out on USTA Southern's Facebook page for Wheelchair Wednesday twice a month when wheelchair tennis will be the featured post for the day!

## Collegiate

In October, the very first integrated annual ITA (Intercollegiate Tennis Association) Cup was held that included wheelchair tennis! Auburn and Alabama participated in this first year of the event, with lots of hype for all collegiate wheelchair tennis teams to participate next year. Wheelchair athletes received the same student-athlete hospitality as the other players, including food and swag, and the event was livestreamed. It was an awesome event, and we're excited to see wheelchair tennis participation grow in next year's ITA Cup!



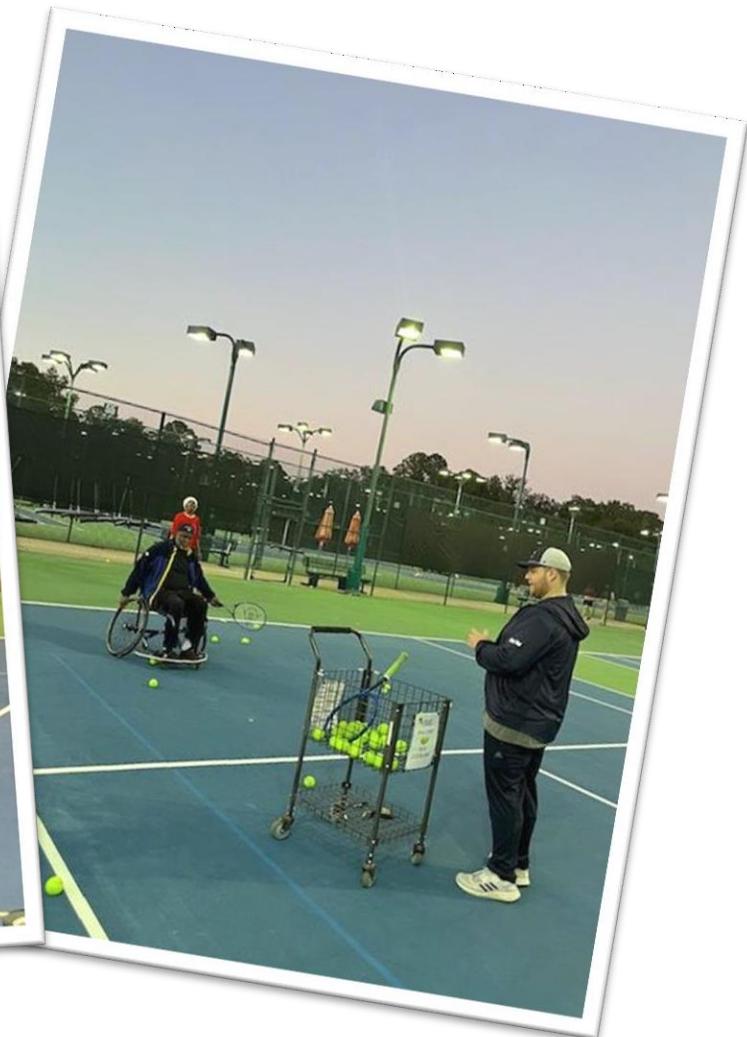
## Juniors

The second Juniors Integrated Players Development Camp of the year was recently held at Peachtree City Tennis Center in Georgia, including the best 16 junior players in the Section integrated with two of the best wheelchair athletes, Lucy Heald and Noah Schepman. Coach Harlon Mathews and assistant coach Rob Popelka worked with the wheelchair tennis players and was also an opportunity for the hometown coaches of the wheelchair tennis athletes to learn more about coaching wheelchair tennis. Many coaches begin working with these players without prior wheelchair tennis experience. USTA Southern was excited to provide this opportunity and is looking at more opportunities not only for athlete integration but also for coaches to gain more experience in coaching wheelchair tennis at its events.



## Mobile, Ala. Wheelchair Tennis Activation

After a very successful wheelchair tennis activation in Mobile, Ala. a few months ago, we are excited to report that their enthusiasm for wheelchair tennis has continued! Wheelchair Tennis Night meets every Wednesday from 6pm-8pm at the Mobile Tennis Center. The program is offered to anyone and everyone of all ages who wants to give wheelchair tennis a shot, whether or not you've played before. They've also had players attend without disabilities, creating some really fun opportunities for up/down tennis so that all are included. It has been a wonderful partnership between AdaptFocus, the Mobile Tennis Center, Mobile Parks and Rec, and USTA. Some favorite memories so far are seeing both able-body and those with a disability playing alongside one another without any criticism, seeing how much fun everyone is having, and seeing individuals fall in love with playing the sport, especially those who have never played in an adaptive sports chair before. We can't wait to see what's in the future for wheelchair tennis in Mobile!



## Coach's Corner

We are excited to introduce you to wheelchair tennis coaches in the Southern Section. Meet Harlon Matthews. Harlon was previously a wheelchair basketball player before discovering wheelchair tennis in the early 2000s. He wasn't interested in playing at first, but once he gave it a try, he was hooked. He spent a lot of time learning the game and improving and then, after seeing the physical and mental benefits that wheelchair tennis brought to his own life, he started coaching. Over the years, he has both coached wheelchair tennis players and coaches of wheelchair tennis players to introduce the sport to as many people as possible. Harlon also created a youth adaptive sports program in Henry County, Ga. that, of course, includes wheelchair tennis! Harlon remains passionate about wheelchair tennis, and in October, he coached top Juniors players in the Integrated Development Camp.



## Grants & Scholarships

USTA Southern offer grants and scholarships twice a year. The deadlines are January 31 for Cycle 1 grants and May 31 for Cycle 2. These program grants help to fund and expand wheelchair tennis programs and assist collegiate wheelchair teams in the nine Southern states to fund their pursuit of wheelchair tennis play and tournaments. For eligibility and application instructions, visit [Tennis Program Grants & Assistance | USTA](#)

## Move United Grant

Move United has an athlete grant that is available to both youth and adult adaptive athletes with a permanent physical disability. See the full grant application for eligibility criteria. Each Move United Athlete Grant (75 available) will provide an individual athlete with up to \$500 to be used to support the purchase of adaptive sports equipment or participation-related fees (including travel expenses, competition fees, etc.). Athletes who receive this grant will be reimbursed upon providing Move United receipt for purchases. Deadline to apply is January 1, 2024. To apply, join as Move United Individual Member and complete the application in the Member Hub. If you are already a member, login to your account to apply. Membership and application link:

<https://hub.moveunitedsport.org/>

## Tournament Recaps

**The Lost Mountain Wheelchair Championships** were recently held in Powder Springs, GA and included singles, doubles, and juniors. [Congratulations to all the winners!](#)

A Singles: Jeff Townsend A Doubles: Michelle Wilson/Caiden Baxter

B Singles: Dustin Strelsky

B Doubles: Dustin Strelsky / Fred Esman

C Singles: Lucy Heald

C Doubles: Venkata Anwesh Datala / Joseph Camano

D Singles: Jordan Bates

D Doubles: Jordan Bates / John Grimsley





**Halloweell** is a fundraiser tournament in Baton Rouge, LA that supports the Cajun Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournament held in the spring. With a Halloween theme, Hallowheel is a tennis tournament that includes wheelchair tennis players, an Up/Down tournament, and a free clinic to introduce people to wheelchair tennis who want to learn the sport. This year's tournament had 160 total participants, including 12 wheelchair tennis players. Fun was had by all!

The Auburn Indoor Wheelchair Tournament was held November 11 – 12 at Yarbrough Tennis Center in Alabama. This is the third year for the tennis center to host a wheelchair tournament, and this year the event was elevated to a two-day Level 4 tournament. Singles round robins were played in Co-Ed divisions for A, B, and C levels. Gabe Puthoff won the A division, and Sarah Kate Sligh and Sydney Fowler finished 3rd and 2nd respectively in the C division, all pictured below. This wheelchair tournament in Auburn came about through the initiative of a local player, Matthew Anderson. Matthew advocated for a wheelchair tournament back in 2020. As a result Yarbrough Tennis Center applied for a USTA Level 5 wheelchair tournament, and the inaugural tournament was held in October of 2021. Each year since then, a USTA sanctioned wheelchair tournament has been held on the indoor courts at Yarbrough Tennis Center. Matthew is pictured here, competing in the B division at this year's tournament.



**America Wheelchair Tennis Championships** were held November 16-19 in Locust Grove, Georgia with 70 players from across the USA competing in the four-day event. The tournament included a "White Chair" ceremony remembering two wheelchair tennis players that have recently passed away - David Rogers (North Carolina) and Allen Fiske (Florida). There was also a Disabled Veterans/First Responders recognition ceremony. The local Henry County Fire Department Honor Guard presented the colors while the national anthem was sung by local resident, Marnie Hornsby. Upon completion of the national anthem, all of the disabled veterans and first responders who were competing in the tournament were recognized, and one was selected to receive the "Daniel Brackett Service Award" for their continued service to others. Daniel Brackett is a Henry County resident who was a fire fighter that became disabled due to a motorcycle accident. The award this year was presented to Alexander Puga (Miami, Fla), who is a Victims Advocate with Miami-Dade Police Department, Organized Crimes Bureau. There was also a special guest to greet everyone for dinner on Saturday evening after the Veterans/First Responders ceremony, Captain Jack Sparrow. Captain Jack mingled with players, guests, volunteers, and staff before and during dinner. After dinner, he participated in the door prize giveaways, where numerous tennis gift cards, electronics, duffle bags and more were given away. Next year, the tournament looks forward to being the Adult Wheelchair Tennis Championship event November 14 - 16, 2024!

#### Division Winners

##### Singles

Women's Open - Michelle Wilson (Sevierville, Tenn)  
 Coed A - Maximus Wong (Bayside, N.Y.)  
 Coed B - Dustin Strelsky (Rockdale, Texas)  
 Coed C - Trey Bates (Durham, NC)  
 Coed 18 & Under A - Maximus Wong (Bayside, N.Y.)  
 Coed 18 & Under B - Jordan Bates (Duluth, Ga.)

##### Doubles

Coed A - Michelle Wilson (Sevierville, TN) / Taylor Wingate (Rock Hill, SC)  
 Coed B - Fred Esman (Austin, TX) / Dustin Strelsky (Rockdale, Texas)  
 Coed C - Allen Champagne (Brandon, MS) / William LaFitte (Laurel, Miss.)  
 Coed 18 & Under B - Jordan Bates (Duluth, GA) / John Grimsley (Gainesville, Ga.)



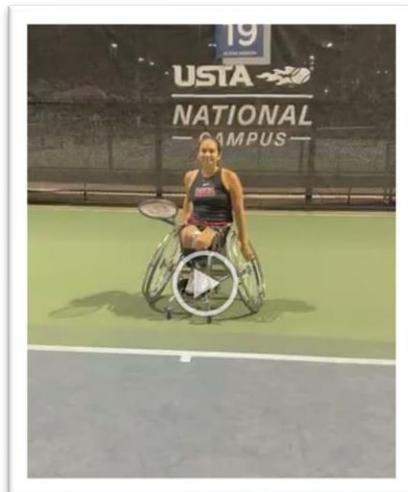
## 2024 Southern Wheelchair Tournament Calendar

### 2024 Southern Wheelchair Tennis Tournaments

Tournament Name	Sanctioning	Dates	Location	Registration Links
<b>ITF</b>				
Georgia Open	ITF Level 1 - USTA NA	02/28 - 03/03	Rome, GA	Link to Come
Cajun Classic	Super Series - USTA Level 1	03/5 - 03/10	Baton Rouge, LA	<a href="#">USTA Register</a> <a href="#">Junior Register</a>
<b>USTA Only Events</b>				
Montgomery Open	USTA Level 3	04/19 - 04/21	Montgomery, AL	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Mississippi Rock N Roll	USTA Level 3	04/26- 04/28	Brandon, MS	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Garden City Wheelchair Tennis Classic	USTA Level 4	5/3 - 5/5	Augusta, GA	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Vette City Rollout	USTA Level 4-5	05/11 - 05/12	Bowling Green, KY	Link to Come
Music City Classic	USTA Level 4	06/28 - 06/30	Nashville, TN	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Move United Tournament	USTA Level 4-5	TBD	Hoover, AL	
Clemson Tournament	USTA Level 3	07/19 - 07/21	Clemson, SC	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Lost Mountain Wheelchair Open	USTA Level 2	09/19 - 09/22	Powder Springs, GA	<a href="#">Register Here</a>
Hallowheel	No sanctioned	TBD	Baton Rouge, LA	Link to Come
America Championships	USTA Level 1 - Adult & Junior National Championships	11/14 - 11/17	Locust Grove, GA	Link to Come

### Wheelchair Tennis Skill Builder

In our last Skill Builder, Shelby Baron talked about returning to the hub after you take your shot. In this Skill Builder, Shelby talks about what happens when your next shot in the point is on the same side as your previous one now that you're facing away from that next shot. How do you move your chair to be in the right position for that next shot? [Shelby will teach you!](#)



## Need Help Starting?

Have you hesitated to start playing wheelchair tennis because you do not have a wheelchair tennis program or other wheelchair tennis players in your area? Or are you a coach who hasn't worked with wheelchair tennis players before but want to start? USTA can help you! Contact USTA Southern Committee Chair, Jennifer Edmonson, at [jennedmonson@aol.com](mailto:jennedmonson@aol.com).



## Southern Section Committee Contacts

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