

# Behind the scenes of wheelchair tennis

By Taylor Jantzi

The Invictus Games 2017, presented by Jaguar Land Rover is excited to welcome back one of the fastest growing wheelchair sports in the world, wheelchair tennis. Wheelchair tennis made its first Invictus Games appearance at the 2016 Invictus Games in Orlando.

Wheelchair tennis is often broken down into two classifications, open and quad. Open competitors have lower-limb impairment, but normal upper limb and hand capabilities. Quad competitors have impairment in both the lower and upper limbs. Both classifications include both singles and doubles tournaments.

Wheelchair tennis is played at all four tennis Grand Slams and at the Paralympic Games, in addition to the Invictus Games.

## Origins of wheelchair tennis

Brad Parks is credited with creating wheelchair tennis in 1976. Parks was a former acrobat skier who suffered an injury that left him paraplegic. One day, he hit a tennis ball from his wheelchair and realized the potential for the sport. Parks and Jeff Minnenbraker, another wheelchair athlete then began to develop the sport together.

During the following year, Parks and Minnenbraker began to promote the sport on the west coast of the U.S. They set up camps and exhibitions to draw attention to the sport. The first ever wheelchair tennis tournament was held in 1977 in Los Angeles.

In 1992, wheelchair tennis became a full medal sport at the Paralympic Games in Barcelona, Spain and by 2007 it was being played at all four Grand Slams around the world.

## Wheelchair tennis is very similar to pedestrian tennis

Wheelchair tennis has few differences from pedestrian tennis. Both games use the same sized courts, balls and rackets, making it very easy to integrate wheelchair tennis into pedestrian tennis tournaments. The only two differences between wheelchair tennis and pedestrian tennis are:

1. Wheelchair tennis is played with specially designed wheelchairs
2. The tennis ball may bounce up to two times in wheelchair tennis and the second bounce may be outside of the court

### **Specially designed wheelchairs**

Wheelchair tennis players use specially designed wheelchairs to play the sport that allow athletes to move quickly and easily on the court. Tennis wheelchairs are designed with angled wheels to create more stability when the athletes turn. The wheelchairs have two large driving wheels on the sides and either one or two castors at the front. The wheelchairs often have adjustable backrest positions and footrests to allow them to fit each athlete. Players are often strapped in at the waist and ankles.

### **Quad wheelchair tennis**

Quad wheelchair tennis is a special class of wheelchair tennis for those affected by tetraplegia or quadriplegia. It is sometimes referred to as mixed wheelchair tennis. Quad wheelchair tennis players often make use of electric-powered wheelchairs to get around the court. Rackets can be held by taping them to the hands of the players.

### **Wheelchair tennis at the Invictus Games**

Wheelchair tennis was first played at the 2016 Invictus Games in Orlando, U.S. In 2016, the gold medal was taken by the United Kingdom, with New Zealand coming in second and the Netherlands in third.

Wheelchair tennis will make a return to the Invictus Games 2017 in Toronto, Canada.