



Wheelchair tennis and Tennis 10s.

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ABSTRACT

Wheelchair Tennis in the 10 and under age group requires a great deal of growth, this article looks at some of the barriers for children in this age group and how tennis could be presented better to them.

Key words: Tennis 10s, wheelchair, barriers to learning.

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INTRODUCTION

There are a relatively small number of wheelchair tennis players in the 10 and age group. However, it is estimated that for example there are some 770,000 disabled children under the age of 18 living in the UK and it is reported that many of them are routinely excluded from play, sport, leisure and physical activity. Only a proportion of these children will have a physical disability and be eligible for wheelchair tennis but the numbers are not insignificant and these children should be included in sports activity. It would seem likely that disabled children in other countries share similar experiences.



There is very little research into sports delivery for this age group in disability sport. There has been some work done in the area of play, as opposed to sport, for children with a disability. Disabled children are frequently over protected and denied access to challenging and risky play. Lack of accessible

transport and accessible tennis facilities coupled with discriminating attitudes and parents' tendency towards overprotection mean that many disabled children rarely leave their home.

Currently there are not enough junior wheelchair tennis players to compete in age categories. The majority of competitive wheelchair tennis play for juniors is 18 and under. Junior tournaments in wheelchair tennis are not broken down into further age categories at this stage as there are insufficient numbers playing. If possible it seems sensible to have players of a similar age competing with each other but at this stage numbers do not allow this. In addition boys and girls often compete together.

Strength is a factor at this age for children with a disability. In terms of developing wheelchair tennis juniors suitable age groups in the future might be 14 & under and 18 and under. The principle of the Play and Stay Campaign and the smaller courts and slower balls apply to tennis for people with a disability. Wheelchair users are far more likely to enjoy tennis and be retained in the sport if they serve, rally and score from the first session. Perhaps all 14 and under wheelchair tennis should be played with the green ball. If players play 18 and under then the regular ball can be used.

Which ball to use with young wheelchair tennis players? Clearly it makes sense to use a lower bouncing ball with players who are seated. Some research needs to be done as to the suitability of different balls. Is the red ball the most appropriate ball for players aged 7 and 8 playing in a wheelchair? Perhaps the second bounce from a red ball is too low so the orange ball may be more appropriate.

The disability of the player is a factor in addition to strength. Some children may have an upper limb disability and need to

tape the racket to their hand. Some children may be in a power wheelchair. Whatever the circumstances the player should be encouraged to push as much as possible.

Limited availability of sports chairs for this age group and the cost of having to frequently change the wheelchair due to the player's growth is a possible barrier to participation for this age group. A chair in the UK is in the region of £2000 an expensive outlay for a child that is growing.

It is vital that young wheelchair users are integrated and included in PE and physical activity. A key factor in ensuring that children with a disability are introduced to sport is that they are integrated into mainstream PE sessions. The lesson can be differentiated by using an appropriate ball, court size and rules for the wheelchair user. In addition parents should play ball games with young wheelchair users at home.

Research carried out by the Playwork Inclusion Project has demonstrated that attitudes are the biggest barrier to inclusion. Experience and research with able bodied children suggests that the best time to learn new motor skills is between the ages of 8 – 12. There is no reason to think that this would be different for children with a physical disability. Disabled children (wheelchair users) need to develop throwing and catching, wheelchair skills (starting, stopping and turning) alongside their able bodied friends.

Much more research and information is required about wheelchair tennis for this age group to establish best practice in introducing and retaining children in the sport.

Possible actions

Assess who is attending your coaching sessions and who is not. What are the barriers?

Make sure you publicise your project widely to disabled children and their families in your community via Family

Information Services, schools, disability groups, doctors/dentists surgeries, local shops and websites.

Coaches/clubs should be proactive in including disabled children. (Disability Training may be required).

Consult with disabled children and their parents to find out what support they need in order to participate.

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