

## DEVELOPING WHEELCHAIR TENNIS IN IRELAND.

Peter Farrell.

More than twenty coaches came along to David Lloyd Riverview recently to take part in a workshop on wheelchair tennis. The event was run in conjunction with Irish Wheelchair Association Sport, courtesy of its Development Officer Mark Barry. The date and venue was selected to tie in with the Tennis Ireland/Invacare Irish Wheelchair Tennis Open Championship, scheduled for the same weekend at Riverview.

The ITF's Wheelchair Development Manager **Mark Bullock** was attending the tournament, so we saw it as a perfect opportunity to benefit from his worldwide experience of the wheelchair game (he has spoken at conferences in 57 countries on the subject!).

Mark kicked off by bringing the delegates up to date on where wheelchair tennis is at now. His first and vital point was that wheelchair tennis is – **tennis**, not a different sport. It is fully integrated into the ITF, and has its own website within the main ITF site at [www.itftennis.com/wheelchair](http://www.itftennis.com/wheelchair).

Being closely tied in with the ITF means that the wheelchair game is a

part of all the world governing bodies projects – it is included in Play and Stay, and there is information about the game in all the ITF coaching manuals. The ITF also publish a specific wheelchair tennis manual in three languages, and the game has its own Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review, available at [www.itftennis.com/wheelchair/coaching/index.asp](http://www.itftennis.com/wheelchair/coaching/index.asp). The ITN applies equally to wheelchair and non-wheelchair players - an ITN5 player using a wheelchair will be a good match for an ITN5 who is not competing from a chair.



The game is going from strength to strength, and at the elite level prize money makes the competition very keen – there is \$100,000 in prize money available at this year's US Open, from a total annual pot of \$1.3m on the wheelchair tour. As a sign of the interest in the game, the worldwide sports management agency IMG has recently signed the world's number one wheelchair player.

Mark mentioned that 60% of wheelchair users in Ireland are pretty much inactive. I think it would be fantastic if we could bring some of these people into tennis, and get them involved in clubs all over Ireland. At some venues accessibility can be a problem – narrow gates, steps, changing facilities etc, but many Irish clubs that have rebuilt in the last few years will have dealt with these issues. With a newly developed sports chair now available for a little over €200, **this is the time for all coaches and clubs to**

**consider how they can integrate wheelchair players into their everyday playing and coaching programmes.**

The on court part of the evening focused on the techniques and tactics of wheelchair tennis. The game is becoming faster, and the play more attacking. Some players serve and volley, while 80% of the men's play at this years Australian Open was off one bounce. We had a definitive answer to the question "can wheelchair tennis damage an artificial grass court surface?" (The answer is **no!**).

The game has obviously had to develop its own techniques due to the implications caused by using a chair on court. The best way to discover more about the technical side of the game is to read the 'ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Manual', which is available from the ITF Store at <https://store.itftennis.com>. Also try putting 'USTA wheelchair tennis' into YouTube – you will get an excellent series of videos produced by the United States Tennis Association.

The coaches present found the evening very useful, and hopefully are set to develop wheelchair tennis at their clubs. Many thanks to Riverview for the use of its facilities, to Mark Barry for organization and Mark Bullock for sharing his expertise. TICA hopes to see more wheelchair tennis being developed around Ireland. Please contact Peter Farrell if you would like any further information.



Samantha Bullock demonstrates technique

