



wheelchair tennis coaches review



Issue 8 June 2003

Welcome to Issue 8 of the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review. The main article in this issue is on the International Tennis Number or ITN. The ITN is a new initiative launched by the ITF at the Australian Open in January 2003. The philosophy is to develop a system along the lines of a golf handicap where players can easily understand what their playing level is on an international basis. This is a very exciting development for wheelchair tennis as it will promote inclusion of wheelchair players into able-bodied tennis programmes across the world.

There is also an article by Chris Peterson of Invacare on the debate as to whether a four wheel tennis chair is better than a three wheeler. Invacare are the title sponsor of the premier team competition in wheelchair tennis, the Invacare World Team Cup. Australian National Coach Greg Crump has written an article on the serve and the return.

The new ITF development initiative, the Silver Fund, is an exciting project for coaches as it will give the opportunity for an increasing number of coaches to work on programmes worldwide. In the second half of 2003 projects will take place in Bolivia, Romania, South Africa and Sri Lanka. For more information on the project visit: <http://www.itfwheelchairtennis.com/asp/silverfund/index.asp>

The ITF is pleased that an increasing number of member nations of the IWTA are appointing coaches to work with players. The USTA have recently appointed IWTA Coaches Commission member Dan James as the full time High Performance Administrator for wheelchair tennis.

If you would like to information on coaching wheelchair tennis please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Mark Bullock
ITF Wheelchair Tennis Development Officer

In this issue

2 The International Tennis number and Wheelchair Tennis

Mark Bullock (Editor)

13 Is Tennis Best on Three or Four Wheels?

Chris Peterson

15 The most important shots in the game

Greg Crump



Dan James coaching at the ITF International Junior Camp in 2002

Rating the world: The International Tennis Number and Wheelchair Tennis

Editor: Mark Bullock



The ITF is delighted to announce the launch of an International Tennis Rating System for world tennis. The rating system will be known as the ITF International Tennis Number or simply 'ITN' for short. It is envisaged that in a relatively short time, all tennis players worldwide will be allocated an ITN between one and ten and that this number will correspond to their general level of competitive play.

what's your number?



International Tennis Number

This article outlines how the ITN has been developed in conjunction with experts from some of the leading tennis nations and explains how the ITF believe it can be used by its member nations to increase participation in tennis worldwide.

Marketing the game - the drive for growth

In 1997, the ITF began a long-term international marketing research project to ascertain participation trends and attitudes to the game of tennis. The research showed that tennis continues to grow in the vast majority of ITF member nations. However, some concerns in the more mature tennis nations were highlighted.

Building on this three-year research, the ITF developed a series of activities that focused on increasing tennis participation and growth of the game. The initiative involved a number of key partners who influence and contribute to the growth of the game including:

- **National and Regional Associations**
- **leading players**
- **the tennis industry**
- **sports marketing and communication experts**
- **development directors of the respective tennis organisations.**

Upon completing this research, a decision was made to organise the ‘Marketing the Game’ Summit in September 2000. The top (most mature) tennis nations together with the ATP, WTA Tour and other constituents of the game met with the ITF to discuss how best to market the game of tennis and increase participation, whether it be the number of:

- **players coming into the game**
- **spectators and followers of the game**
- **purchasers of tennis related material.**



Following on from the ‘Marketing the Game’ Summit, it was decided to implement a number of projects including the development of an international tennis rating system.

In early 2001, the ITF set up the International Tennis Rating Taskforce with its overall mission statement being:

‘To create, utilise and promote an international tennis rating system that will help grow all levels of competitive tennis participation worldwide.’

This Taskforce consists of experts in competition and rating systems from some of the world’s leading tennis nations and is chaired and co-ordinated by ITF Executive Director of Development, Dave Miley.

The objectives of the ITF International Tennis Rating System

The International Tennis Rating System will provide a method of classifying skill levels of tennis players’ globally which in turn can help:

- **encourage more playing of tennis**
- **unite tennis under a common rating language**
- **encourage national associations to implement a tennis rating system in their own country**
- **promote a variety of tennis competition formats, which are linked to the tennis rating system**
- **give more options for finding compatible playing partners and therefore more enjoyable competitive play.**
- **facilitate the movement of all levels of players between countries.**

It is believed that current tennis rating systems linked to a country’s competitive structure have played a crucial part in increasing the number of people playing tennis.

For example, in the Netherlands where a national rating system linked to the competitive structure has been in place for many years now, over 5% of the population are registered fee paying members of the Dutch Tennis Federation (KNLTB).

What is a rating and how does it differ from a ranking?

A **rating** is a description of standard that is used to determine the general competitive level of a player. It groups players of a similar level together within a category. The most famous example of a global rating in sport is the golf handicap. The relative level of players within each category is not determined by the rating system. This is the job of a ranking system.



A **ranking** is a more accurate estimate of the relative standard of players, based upon specific tournament results or competitions. A ranking is a comparison of similarly ‘rated’ players based on results of players within a specific rating category. For example in the proposed ITN 1 rating category (see chart on page 4), ATP / WTA rankings would represent a ranking within this rating category.

Most national associations use rankings that they produce on a regular basis at various levels of their national game. However the ITF estimates that there are less than 20 countries worldwide that have a national rating system.

The development of the ITF International Tennis Rating System - the ‘ITN’

Following an initial meeting of the Taskforce in July 2001, a strategy was formulated to develop an international tennis rating system that could be used by national associations which currently have no national rating system, and could also be used in conjunction with those rating systems currently in place in some of the more established tennis nations.

The Taskforce, with help and advice of a tennis marketing company, decided on a name for the rating system – the **ITF International Tennis Number** or ‘ITN’.

What is the ITN?

The ITN is an international tennis number that represents a player’s general level of play. In time it is hoped that every tennis player worldwide will have an ITN. This will include wheelchair tennis players.

Under this system players will be rated from ITN 1 – ITN 10. ITN 1 represents a high level player (holding an ATP / WTA ranking or of an equivalent playing standard) and ITN 10 is a player who is new to the game.

A **‘Description of Standard’** has been developed to describe each of the ten rating categories. A concise summary of this Description of Standard is shown below. Approved by the ITF Coaches Commission and the ITF International Tennis Rating Taskforce, it is hoped this guide will enable players to be accurately rated. Whilst trying to make the Description of Standard as precise as possible, the Taskforce has attempted to keep it simple and not too technical. The intention is that it should be easy to understand and useful for both the player and / or the assessor (coach / administrator).

This Description of Standard has also avoided rating players purely on the technical assessment of individual shots. Instead it has used as its basis:

- **the general characteristics of various playing levels**
- **the five-game / tactical situations of tennis (e.g. serving, returning, both at baseline, approaching, passing) and**
- **the game-style of the player.**

The challenge for wheelchair players is to compete against able bodied players and discover what their level and relevant ITN will be. The description of standards will not apply in the same way as for an able bodied player. In the wheelchair game David Hall and Esther Vergeer are the highest ranked players but when competing against able bodied players the ITN of the wheelchair player would need to be modified to give close competition. Over time as more wheelchair players use the ITN it will become easier to judge their level within the running game.

The ITF International Tennis Number – the ‘ITN’

The following is a concise summary of the 10 ITN categories:

- ITN 1** This player has had intensive training for national tournament competition at the junior and senior levels and has extensive professional tournament experience. Holds or is capable of holding an ATP / WTA ranking and major source of income is through tournament prize money.
- ITN 2** This player has developed power and / or consistency as a major weapon. Can vary strategies and styles of play in a competitive situation. Is usually a nationally ranked player.
- ITN 3** This player has good shot anticipation and frequently has an outstanding shot or attribute around which a game may be structured. Can regularly hit winners and force errors off short balls. Can put away volleys and smashes and has a variety of serves to rely on.
- ITN 4** This player can use power and spin and has begun to handle pace. Has sound footwork, can control depth of shots, and can vary game plan according to opponents. Can hit first serves with power and can impart spin on second serves.
- ITN 5** This player has dependable strokes, including directional control and depth on both ground strokes and on moderate shots. Has the ability to use lobs, overhands, approach shots and volleys with some success.

- ITN 6** This player exhibits more aggressive net play, has improved court coverage, improved shot control and is developing teamwork in doubles.
- ITN 7** This player is fairly consistent when hitting medium paced shots, but is not yet comfortable with all strokes. Lacks control over depth, direction and power.
- ITN 8** This player is able to judge where the ball is going and can sustain a short rally of slow pace.
- ITN 9** This player needs on court experience but strokes can be completed with some success.
- ITN 10** This player is starting to play competitively (can serve and return / rally) on a full court using a normal ITF approved ball.
- ITN 10.1 *** This player is able to rally with movement and control.
- ITN 10.2 *** This player has developed some simple tennis-specific skills in hitting an oncoming ball regularly, however rallying with movement and control is not yet achieved.
- ITN 10.3 *** This player is in the early stages of tennis skills development and is primarily learning simple tennis co-ordination tasks / exercises.
- *** The ITN 10.1 to ITN 10.3 sub-categories will usually involve playing in a modified environment e.g. using transition / soft balls on a reduced court and / or using adapted rackets as appropriate.

Why not have a separate ITN for wheelchair tennis players?

The Taskforce gave a great deal of thought to the different competitive groups in a country such as juniors, veterans and wheelchair tennis players. However it was decided that only one international tennis rating system would be operated and that juniors, veterans and wheelchair tennis players would be rated within the same system based on their current level of play.



A separate rating for wheelchair players would complicate the system. The ITF want to encourage integration and the best way to achieve this is to use the same ITN rating under a common language. All tennis players then understand each other and it will be simple for a wheelchair tennis player to find an able bodied opponent of the same standard. Under the current system of divisions, which the ITF do not propose to change for wheelchair tennis tournaments, an able bodied club player would not understand a wheelchair tennis player who describes him or herself as a B division player.

This means that all tennis players persevere on an international basis with ten rating categories. However, the rating categories ITN 1 – ITN 10 should not be restrictive and national associations should be able to expand and adapt by adding sub-levels within

each category (e.g. 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5 etc) if they feel it is beneficial to tennis in their country.

Growing the game - the importance of the ITN 10 category

Within the ITN 10 category, three sub-categories (ITN 10.1, ITN 10.2 and ITN 10.3) have been developed to take account of those adults and young children who have started to play tennis but are not yet ready to play competitively on a full court with a normal ITF approved ball.



The progression from ITN 10.3 to ITN 10 will see these players (usually within their lessons) being helped to achieve a series of tasks using soft tennis balls on a smaller court, with the end objective (ITN 10) being a beginner that can serve / return / rally on a full court using a normal ball a player ready to participate in and enjoy competition.

The Taskforce believes that the ITN 10 category is vital to the future growth of the game and that creating these sub-categories will ensure that a person can be included in the ITN system as soon as they begin tennis. This will help attract and retain new players in tennis.

How will players be rated?

The method of rating players can vary depending on the situation in the country, region or club and could include the following:

- **Self-rating: players can rate themselves using the Description of Standard guidelines provided.**
- **Independent verifiers / classifiers: some of the national associations may want to pass the responsibility for rating players to independent persons who understand the ITN system. This person could be the club coach, club manager or tournament director. Some national associations have already produced videos to help classifiers with their task.**
- **Computer: it is envisaged that some countries may use computers as a means of helping players to be rated. Interactive programmes can be developed which allow players to answer questions which in turn lead them to their correct rating. Computers can also be used to reclassify players' ratings based on results obtained in 'rated' tournaments.**

It is recognised that no method of rating can be totally accurate in all cases. Regardless of the method used initially to rate players, once the player begins to play matches at their level (i.e. within their relative ITN rating category), their rating should move (according to results against other rated players) to the correct ITN category within a relatively short time.

How will the ITF International Tennis Number (ITN) be used in ITF Member Nations?

For those countries that do not currently have a national rating system in place, players can be rated by following the Description of Standard chart and using it to determine which ITN best describes their present ability. Players in these countries will hold only one rating - the ITF International Tennis Number (ITN).

Once rated, a player's ITN can move up or down as a direct result of matches played in 'rated' competitions in each country. The ITF will be providing a simple calculation system linked to competitive play, which can be used (manually or by computer) from club to national level to adjust a player's ITN rating according to results.

For those countries with established national rating systems, the ITF has developed a **Comparison Chart** (see page 9). This chart compares the rating categories of those countries with the various ITN levels. Once the ITN is launched the players in these countries in effect will hold two ratings - their national rating and the corresponding ITN. Some wheelchair tennis players may already have a national rating. These players can use the comparison chart to establish what their ITN rating will be.



These countries will continue to calculate the national rating of their players as before and as players move up or down their national rating categories, so their ITN will also move up and down according to the Comparison Chart.

The Comparison Chart will also provide to those countries implementing a national rating system additional information that can be used when evaluating and determining the appropriate ITN for their players.

ITN CONVERSION CHART

ITN	Australia	Belgium	Canada	France	GBR	Italy	Morocco	NED	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	USA
1	N1	A Int'1 A Nat'1 B-15/4 (23bis-35bis)	7.0 6.5	1 st série Promotion -30 -15	1.1 1.2 1.3	Cat. 1 2.1 2.2	1 st série	Cat 1	No 1- 150	Above 600p	N1 N2	7.0 6.5
2	N2 N3 N4	B-15/4 (50bis-65 bis) B-15/2 (100Bis)	6.0 5.5	-4/6 -2/6 0	1.4 1.5	2.3 2.4	-30 -15 -4/6	Cat 2	No 151 - 300	401-600p	N3	6.0 5.5
3	N5	B-15/1 B-15 B-4/6	5.0	1/6 2/6 3/6	2.1	2.5 2.6	-2/6 0 2/6	Cat 3	3 rd cat. Group 10	301-400p	N4	5.0
4	N6 N7	B-2/6 B 0 B+2/6	4.5	4/6 5/6 15	2.2 2.3	2.7 2.8	4/6 15 15/1	Cat 4	3 rd cat. Group 9	201-300p	R1	4.5
5	N8 N9	B +4/6	4.0	15/1 15/2	3.1	3.1 3.2	15/2 15/4	Cat 5	3 rd cat. Group 8	61-200p	R2	4.0
6	N10 N11	C +15	3.5	15/3 15/4	3.2 4.1	3.3 3.4	30	Cat 6	3 rd cat. Group 7	51-60p	R3	3.5
7	N12	C +15/2	3.0	15/5 30	4.2 5.1	3.5 4.1	30/1	Cat 6	3 rd cat. Group 6 & 5	50p	R4	3.0
8	N13	C +15/4	2.5	30/1 30/2	5.2 6.1	4.2 4.3	30/2	Cat 7	3 rd cat. Group 4 & 3	NR	R5	2.5
9	N14 N15	C +30	2.0	30/3 30/4	6.2 6.3	4.4	NR	Cat 8	3 rd cat. Group 2	NR	R6	2.0
10	N16 N17	C +30/2 C +30/4	1.5	30/5	7.1 7.2 7.3	4.5	NR	Cat 9	3 rd cat. Group 1	NR	R7	1.5
10.1 to 10.3	N18 N19 N20	NR	1.0	NR	8	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	1.0

What about handicapping?

The Taskforce believes that an effective handicapping system for tennis could play an important role in increasing participation specifically at the recreational level and therefore has developed a handicapping system to facilitate play between players of different competitive levels. They believe that a form of 'free points' handicapping could be used effectively for players where the difference in level is not too great (e.g. when the average set score is between 7/6 and 6/2).

However the Taskforce concluded that establishing effective handicapping for play when the difference in level is too great (6/0 or 6/1) was at this time unrealistic and ultimately ineffective.

The system proposed involves the weaker player taking, as and when he decides, a fixed number of free points in each set. The following chart is a guide which can be used to ensure that a match is closer and so more interesting and enjoyable for the players concerned.

AVERAGE SCORE WHEN PLAYING WITHOUT USING A HANDICAPPING SYSTEM	FREE POINTS AVAILABLE TO THE WEAKER PLAYER PER SET
7/5 7/6	0 – 3 Points
6 – 4	2 – 4 Points
6 – 3	3 – 6 Points
6 – 2	5 – 8 Points

It should be noted that the Taskforce does not recommend that results from handicapped matches be included in any rating system or count towards a player's rating.

ITN Calculation System

Once players have been rated, they will begin playing competitions. It will then be necessary, on the basis of matches played, to re-classify the ratings of players on a regular basis.

Obviously, national associations will have to decide on the best method of calculation which suits the particular conditions in their country. Some countries will choose to use a very simple system while others may choose to use a more sophisticated system. Cost and administrative time will be a major factor in this decision.

The Taskforce has developed a simple low cost calculation system for re-classifying players. The head-to-head system can be operated manually or with a computer using a simple excel spreadsheet. The player receives positive points for beating players rated equal to or better than them and negative points for losing to players rated below them. The sum of their points

will be used to re-classify their ITN on a regular basis.

In addition, as mentioned before, the ITF has developed a calculation system that allows results in doubles to count towards the singles ITN of each player. National associations can then decide if they wish doubles results to be included in the national rating system

The ITN and Coaching

The ITN will be an effective tool with which club coaches can work. In addition to the competitive programme within a club, coaches will also be able to use the ITN as the basis for organising and tailoring coaching programmes to specific ITN groups of players in the club. It is also expected that the coaches will be involved in the initial rating of club members by running regular ITN rating clinics.

The ITN is a great tool for integrating wheelchair tennis players into mainstream coaching sessions. It will give wheelchair tennis players the confidence that they have been placed in a group of players of a similar level. Also, for able bodied players who have not played against a wheelchair tennis player before they will know that the player is a similar standard to them.



The Way Forward

The ITN was launched in January 2003 at the 2003 Australian Open when Tennis Australia became the first ITF member nation to adopt the ITN as their official national tennis rating system. A number of other national associations are already planning to introduce the ITN and it is envisaged that the 'pilot project' in Australia will be a valuable case study, providing important information for other national associations wanting to launch the ITN in their own countries.

The ITF, together with the Taskforce and their respective national associations, is also looking at ways to promote the ITN worldwide. A thorough promotional effort is important to the

successful implementation of the ITN. Generic material is being developed to be used by ITF member nations to inform players of the ITN and its benefits, as well as an ITF website dedicated to the International Tennis Number (www.internationaltennisnumber.com).

Promotion through coaches and tournament organisers worldwide is also vital to the success of the ITN, and at the recent ITF Regional Coaches Workshops held during 2002, over 1000 of the world's top coaches representing close to 120 nations were introduced to the ITN.



It is recognised that the success of the **International Tennis Number** will be measured by its ability to be implemented at the club and recreational level and we encourage each country to focus on this. The more the ITN is used as a base for recreational and competitive activities, the more it will grow in popularity and acceptance.

The ITF believe that the ITN can have a big impact on tennis participation worldwide. We are ready to begin to *'Rate the Tennis World'* Are you ready?

The ITN ... what's your number?

The ITF International Tennis Ratings Taskforce

Dave Miley, ITF

Peter Johnston, Tennis Australia

Martin Reiter, Tennis Austria

Allard Elema, Dutch Tennis Federation (KNLTB)

Jean-Francois Magne, French Tennis Federation (FFT)

Wolfgang Burkhardt, German Tennis Federation (DTB)

Martin Rands, Lawn Tennis Association of Great Britain (LTA)

David Schobel, United States Tennis Association (USTA)

Frank Couraud, ITF

Miguel Crespo, ITF

For further information please contact:

International Tennis Number

ITF

Bank Lane

Roehampton

London SW15 5 XZ

UK

Tel: 44 208 878 6464

Fax: 44 208 392 4742

E-mail: internationaltennisnumber@itftennis.com

Web: www.internationaltennisnumber.com

Is Tennis Best on Three or Four Wheels?

Chris Peterson

Manager, Research and Development, Invacare Top End

Chris Peterson is Manager, research and development for Top End Products with Invacare Corporation. He is responsible for product development and the enhancement of sport and recreation products, as well as the ultra lightweight, custom everyday rigid wheelchairs manufactured at Invacare Top End. Invacare are the title sponsor of the premier team competition of wheelchair tennis, the Invacare World Team Cup.



Robin Ammerlaan (NED)

A debate is raging in the wheelchair tennis world about whether it's best to compete in three-wheel or four-wheel tennis wheelchairs. The simple answer is: it depends on the player's ability and the need for stability.

Four wheel chairs were standard for the game until about 1992, when Top End introduced the T-3, the first three-wheel chair for tennis. At that time, most players sat low to the ground with their knees elevated to create a stable position. With the player seated in 'the bucket' as we call it, the chair functions

very well and is stable on three wheels.

That means we can eliminate the added weight of the fourth wheel making the chair lighter and more manoeuvrable. The benefits of the lighter weight three wheel chair became apparent to players' quickly, and they converted almost exclusively to three wheel chairs.

We're seeing now, however, that some players want to sit higher when they play because they can deliver more power to the ball from an elevated position. With the added height comes the need for added stability, so the fourth wheel is making a comeback.

How does a player determine whether to play on three or four wheels? Essentially,



the three wheel chair is still best for players such as quadriplegics or paraplegics who need to sit low to ensure stability. The four wheel chair is indicated for players with some lower trunk function and mobility or those with good balance who want to sit high.

Invacare offers three and four wheelchairs in both aluminium and titanium to accommodate a wide range of needs.

Steve Welch (USA)



The most important shots in the game

Greg Crump (AUS)

Member of the IWTA Coaches Commission



Greg is the Australian National Coach. Greg has coached the Australian teams to success in the Invacare World Team Cup and attended the 1996 and 2000 Paralympic Games as the National Coach. He is a member of the IWTA Coaches Commission.

There is little doubt that anyone would argue that the serve and the return are the most important shots in the game of Tennis. However it is amazing how little time that coaches and players dedicate to the most important part of our game. For years I have observed training session of players spending hour upon hours grooving those perfect cross court and up the line ground strokes and at the end of the session hit a few serves, mainly to get all the balls up one end to make in easier to pick up.

If a player has a shaky serve or return they may never get into a position to use these perfect ground strokes that they have been working on for 100s of hours how often have you heard from a player " I can do it perfectly in practice, then I get into a match and it all falls apart."

Take a look at the difference between a good player and a great player, I think that you will soon agree that great players serve and return with some authority, controlling the point with their first hit of the ball. A great player is now on control of the point and the good player is now playing catch up and again never gets a chance to hit those perfect ground strokes that they dream about.

How do players' improve their serve and return?

Get a huge basket of balls and a friend, they serve and I return, when their shoulder falls off from serving we switch, NO!!!

Players should incorporate the serve and return into any drill that you are working on. Start the drill with either a serve or return. This will make the whole drill more tennis specific rather than hitting hundreds of serves with little to no purpose. Keep in mind the first movement that players make after the serve or return is played.

For example after your player hits the serve do you hit and sit or start to move and anticipate the most likely shot after the serve. As with the return, if your player hits a positive return do they move into a positive position to control the point, if the return is average do they move into a more of a defensive position at least get into the point? If a player is serving well it takes the pressure off the return, allowing the player to relax and enjoy the contest of returning. "If you serve well you play

well" sounds simple but if you incorporate this into your players' game you will find that they control more points from the first hit. That's what its all about controlling the points. Points lead to games and games lead to matches and matches lead to Ferrari's in the driveway.

Start to take advantage of good serving and returning and you will quickly find yourself controlling the point more often. Give it a Go. If it works for you, you can buy me a beer in the bar. If it doesn't you can buy me a beer in the bar.

Other Resources

French Coaching Manual



Pierre Fusade has written a wheelchair tennis coaches manual in French. This excellent publication will prove a valuable resource in French-speaking countries and is definitely worth a read.

To order copies of this publication please contact Pierre Fusade on: Fusadeplm@aol.com

For a list of wheelchair tennis publications please refer to previous editions of the *ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review*. They are available on the ITF website: www.itfwheelchairtennis.com. Alternatively, you can view the publications available on: www.itfwheelchairtennis.com/asp/itf/orderform.asp

More information

If you would like information on organising wheelchair tennis programmes or coaching wheelchair tennis do not hesitate to call the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Department on ++44 (0)20 8392 4788.

If you know of other coaches who would like to receive wheelchair tennis coaching information please ask them to send their name, address, email and an outline of their coaching experience to mark.bullock@itftennis.com or fax ++ 44 (0)20 8392 4741.

For coaches wanting more information on the NEC Tour, world rankings, player profiles, head to head results please visit the ITF website: www.itfwheelchairtennis.com.

If you want to visit an NEC Tour event please refer to the website, www.itfwheelchairtennis.com for the tournament schedule.

The articles in the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Coaches Review are written by a variety of contributors and the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the ITF.