

The PAO is on A ROLL!

The first Wheelchair Pickleball Clinic was held on Wednesday, June 21, 2017 at the Abilities Centre (AC) in Whitby, Ontario: a first of its kind. This clinic was the result of 8 months' work by the PAO Wheelchair Pickleball Initiative Committee members: Carol Doughty (Chair), Bruce Doughty (former PAO President), Joseline Sikorski (former PAO President), and Bob Cook-Abbott (former PAO Board Secretary).

This group would like to thank the following people who introduced us to the wheelchair athletes' world and were extremely helpful at all levels:

Mike Frogley, one of the coaches for the Canadian Wheelchair Basketball teams who provided general information and contact names;

Laura Wilson, Executive Director of Ontario Wheelchair Sports Association, who arranged for Committee members to attend a session on how to use the wheelchairs and arranged for us to attend a 2-hour wheelchair tennis class;

Kai Schrameyer, National Coach for Wheelchair Tennis, who offered valuable advice, coaching and teaching. Two members attended a full day Wheelchair Tennis Clinic at York University lead by Kai. Lessons were taught in the gym in wheelchairs and there were theory lessons in class. This day of learning and doing was most valuable. Taking this last course, prepared the two Committee members to apply the skills and theories to wheelchair pickleball because many of the skills, strategies, etc. are the same for both sports.

After familiarizing themselves with the wheelchair sports' world, mainly wheelchair tennis, the Committee approached Stuart McReynolds at the Abilities Centre (AC) in Whitby with the proposal to initiate wheelchair pickleball at the AC by running clinics for wheelchair athletes so that they could join the present pickleball sessions, thus making pickleball an inclusive sport. The mission of the AC is "to enrich the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities through an inclusive environment". After meeting with the AC's staff who were receptive to the idea, we proceeded with setting up clinics and the goal of having the regular pickleball fully integrated by July 1, 2017. This goal was met and starting Wed., July 05, 2017, wheelchair pickleball players can attend the Wednesday 1 – 4 p.m. pickleball sessions along with the regular participants. Arrangements for Mondays 1-4 p. m. can also be arranged.

Two wheelchair athletes attended the clinic and learned the fundamentals of mobility, strategies, strokes, skills, and rules for wheelchair pickleball. Now, these wheelchair athletes and others will be integrated into the regular Pickleball Sessions, convened by Dave Burden; he has been an enthusiastic supporter of this initiative and will continue to help promote and support all players at the AC pickleball sessions.

Jag, a wheelchair athlete said, “[T]hanks to you for introducing me to a sport. It really feels great to be a part of it.”

Kurt, another wheelchair athlete said, “I’ve seen pickleball being played at the Abilities Centre many times. I was always eager to try it out but not sure if I could because I use a wheelchair. I was invited to take part by members of the Pickleball Association of Ontario and they were extremely kind and helpful in teaching me the fundamentals of the game and the slight rule variations when playing in wheelchair. It is very easy to pick up and is extremely fun. This is an amazing sport for people of all abilities and I very much look forward to playing it again.”

When playing wheelchair pickleball, the players are allowed to let the ball bounce twice before hitting it, even from outside of the courts. A team can be made up of an able-bodied player and wheelchair athlete (called Up-and-down) or two wheelchair athletes versus teams made up of the same combinations. Check out the other rules on the USAPA website.

This clinic is just the start of more coaching that will be available to more wheelchair athletes to learn how to play our favourite sport. Let’s welcome them and those who will come as a result of seeing these wheelchair athletes roll along the floor on a pickleball court and the word gets spread that when playing pickleball, we can all have fun, keep fit, and live life together.

Photo

Left to right

Back: Carol Doughty, Dave Burden, Bruce Doughty

Front: Jag Kohli and Kurt Whitehead

Absent: Joseline Sikorski and Bob Cook-Abbott

NOTE: Photo being sent by Bruce Doughty