MOVIN AND GROOVIN: HOW TO SET UP A WHEELCHAIR FOR RECREATIONAL SPORTS

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Many wheelchair users participate in recreational sports and activities. More and more, individuals are able to try various wheelchair sports at the introductory level. Often they use their everyday wheelchairs to do this as dedicated sports wheelchairs are too costly. In this workshop we will review some of the wheelchair modifications that have affected how people with physical disabilities are participating in sports. As well, we will discuss some of the accessories and wheelchair set-up considerations that can enhance participation in these sports.

History of wheelchair sport  Following WWII there were large numbers of injured servicemen and civilians. Sport was introduced as a key part of rehabilitation. Sport for rehabilitation grew into recreational sport and then further developed into competitive sport. Sir Ludwig Guttmann pioneered this approach to rehabilitation and organized a sports competition for wheelchair athletes at Stoke Mandeville in England in 1948, while the Olympic Games were being held in London. This was the origin of the Stoke Mandeville Games, which evolved into the modern Paralympic Games (Cooper, 1990).

Benefits of participation  It is well established that participation in wheelchair sport has many health and lifestyle benefits, at both the individual and societal level. Benefits can include increased strength, improved coordination, and increased endurance (Groah & Lanig, 2000) as well as improved psychological well-being and life satisfaction (McVeigh et al, 2009).

Popular wheelchair sports  A wide range of sports have been adapted to be played by people with various disabilities. There are also several sports that are unique to disabled athletes. Individuals participate at different levels, ranging from recreational to competitive. In addition, many people engage in wheelchair sports informally.

Sport specific wheelchairs  The growth of wheelchair sports has created a demand for the development of wheelchairs for recreational and competition purposes. Specially designed wheelchairs enhance the individual performance of the athlete as well as the caliber of the sport. The growing demand has lead to improved research and development of stronger, lighter materials combined with customized designs to produce better wheelchairs for wheelchair athletes. Wheelchair sport technology has been influenced by other industries and sporting equipment design. In turn, this has contributed to the continued evolution of the design of everyday wheelchairs.

Sport specific solutions  Performance in wheelchair sport is dependent on three variables; the athlete, the wheelchair, and the interaction between the two (Bhanbhani, 2002). As therapists involved with seating and mobility, there is an opportunity to address and contribute at each level. Many sports have specific wheelchair configurations that enhance participation. In working with individual clients it is important to consider the set-up and adaptations that can be made to the everyday wheelchair.

References


**Speaker Bio**

Cheryl Sheffield is an Occupational Therapist with the Seating Service at G.F. Strong Rehab Centre. She has worked in the area of seating and mobility for over 15 years. Over the years she has had the opportunity to work with Para Olympic athletes and recreational athletes to help them set up their seating and mobility systems. cheryl.sheffield@vch.ca

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