

Wheelchair Rugby

Originally designed for Para-Athletes with tetraplegia, today the team sport of Wheelchair Rugby is also played by those with other impairments.

Para-Athletes with an eligible impairment are allocated a sport class based on their ability in performing the Wheelchair Rugby skills of ball-handling, such as passing, catching, carrying and dribbling the ball, and wheelchair skills including pushing, starting, stopping, directional changes, tackling and blocking.

Wheelchair Rugby is a mixed sport combining both men and women, although the vast majority of leading players are men. The game is now practised in more than 25 countries.

Classification

In Para-Sport classification provides the structure for fair and equitable competition to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus – the same factors that account for success in sport for able-bodied athletes.

The Para-Sport classification assessment process identifies the eligibility of each Para-Athlete's impairment, and groups them into a sport class according to the degree of activity limitation resulting from their impairment.

Classification is sport-specific as an eligible impairment affects a Para-Athlete's ability to perform in different sports to a different extent. Each Para-Sport has a different classification system.

More information on classification and sport classes is available under 'Classification detail' below.

Qualification – the road to Rio

There are eight qualification slots available at Rio 2016 Paralympics and they can be secured in a number of ways. The winners of the 2014 International Wheelchair Rugby Federation World Championships were awarded a slot, as were four teams via the 2015 zonal championships: European (two), PanAmerican (one) and Asia-Pacific (one). Two more teams can secure a place for the Rio 2016 Paralympics via the IWRF Paralympic Qualification Tournament in 2016. The host country is also allocated one place.



For New Zealand to qualify they must do so through the IWRF Paralympic Qualification Tournament in early 2016.

“The Wheel Blacks are currently ranked 10th internationally and continue to showcase themselves strongly. The team have a long history of punching above their weight on the world stage, and if qualification is successful and the team are chosen to compete at the Rio 2016 Paralympics, then the Games loom as a huge opportunity for the Wheel Blacks team to compete for a medal.”

“The Wheel Blacks competed at the recent IWRF Asia-Oceania Championships in Tokyo finishing behind first placed Japan and second placed Australia. Unfortunately this was not enough to qualify for Rio 2016, however the team have another chance with the final qualifying event taking place in early 2016.”

“The Wheel Blacks have placed against some strong quality teams this year and continue to be motivated to push themselves forward and gain qualification from this final event wherever it is held. The team are striving for selection, to represent our country and supporters.”

Gary McMurray, President, New Zealand Wheelchair Rugby

Rio 2016 Wheelchair Rugby

The Wheelchair Rugby tournament is a mixed competition. Each player is identified as being in one of seven classes ranging from 0.5 to 3.5, depending on their disability (functional characteristics). In general, the 0.5 class includes Para-Athletes with the most severe form of disability and the 3.5 class is for those with the least level of disability or minimal disability (see more below).

In international Wheelchair Rugby the total number of points allowed on court at any time cannot exceed 8.0pts.

The eight teams competing at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games will be divided into two pools of four and then play a round robin format. The top two teams in each pool will advance to the semi-finals and then play a straight elimination tournament with the losing semi-finalists meeting in a bronze medal play-off. The bottom two teams in each pool will then contest a fifth to eighth place classification round of matches.

Medal events: One mixed event.

Where: Carioca Arena 1, Barra da Tijuca.

When: Wednesday 14 September to Sunday 18 September 2016.

More info: www.rio2016.com/en/paralympics/wheelchair-rugby



Paralympics Medals Won 2000 to 2012

1 gold, 1 bronze

GOLD

- Wheelchair Rugby Mixed (Athens 2004) – Dan Buckingham/Stephen Guthrie/Bill Oughton/Timothy Johnson/Geremy Tinker/Jai Waite/Sholto Taylor/Gary McMurray/Curtis Palmer

SILVER

- Wheelchair Rugby Mixed (Sydney 2000) – Paul Leefe/ Bill Oughton/ Stephen Guthrie/Tony Howe/Timothy Johnson/Geremy Tinker/Justin Muschamp/Sholto Taylor/Gary McMurray/Curtis Palmer/Grant Sharman

The Stars of Wheelchair Rugby

Australia is the reigning World and Paralympic champion led by star player Ryley Batt, who at the London 2012 Paralympic Games scored a remarkable 160 goals in the tournament. Canada, led by rising talent, Zak Madell, is another prominent nation in the sport. Chuck Aoki and Daisuke Iezaki are the star names for the powerful USA and Japanese teams.

New Zealand is currently ranked number 10 in the world and key players include Gavin Rolton and Dan Buckingham.

Did you know?

- An indoor sport, Wheelchair Rugby is played on a regulation size basketball court and the game is related to the sports of basketball, handball, ice hockey and rugby.
- The game is divided into eight four-minute quarters with a two-minute break at the end of quarters one and three, and a five-minute break at the end of the second quarter.
- Wheel Blacks regular, Cameron Leslie, is also a distinguished Paralympic swimmer, having won gold medals in the 150m Individual Medley SM4 at both the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Paralympic Games.
- New Zealand is one of only three teams to have won Wheelchair Rugby gold at a Paralympic Games alongside USA and Australia. The Wheel Blacks triumphed 31-29 over Canada at the Athens 2004 Paralympic Games.
- Wheelchair Rugby is a contact sport in which chair-to-chair contact is permitted, but physical contact between players is not allowed.
- The object of the game is to carry the ball over the opposing team's line to score a point. For a goal to count, at least two wheels of the wheelchair must cross the goal line, and the player must have firm control of the ball when they cross it. Teams have 40 seconds of possession time in which to score a goal.

Terminology

Paralympian	A Para-Athlete who has taken part in Paralympic Games.
Roll bars	A device under the footplate to allow it to glide on the floor and prevent the wheelchair from tipping forward.
Murderball	The original name of the sport of Wheelchair Rugby.
Points on the floor	Refers to the total number of classification points allowed on the floor for any Wheelchair Rugby team.
Spin	When a Wheelchair Rugby player strikes an opponent wheelchair at the back part of the wheel causing it to spin horizontally or vertically. Para-Athletes are penalised for unsafe conduct.

Timeline

- 1970s** Wheelchair Rugby was developed in Canada, with the game originally called Murderball due to its aggressive full-contact nature. The game later spread to the USA and Great Britain.
- 1989** The first international Wheelchair Rugby tournament took place.
- 1995** The inaugural Wheelchair Rugby World Championships took place in Switzerland.
- 1996** The sport of Wheelchair Rugby made its debut appearance at the Atlanta 1996 Paralympic Games as a demonstration sport.
- 2000** Wheelchair Rugby became a full medal sport at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games.
- 2012** At the London 2012 Paralympic Games, 96 competitors competed in eight teams to fight for one gold medal.

Classification detail

There are seven different sport classes: 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0 and 3.5. The most significant activity limitation is described in the 0.5 sport class profile.

Sport class 0.5 – Players have significantly limited function in their shoulder, arms and hands, eg, due to tetraplegia. The player would typically catch the ball by tapping it into their lap and throw the ball with a scoop pass. Their main role on the court is as a blocker.

Sport class 1.5 – Players have fair arm function, which makes an excellent blocker. A 1.5 player will also handle the ball on occasion, but typically they show some instability in the wrist, which leads to limited ball security. Some athletes also have asymmetrical arm function, so that they mainly handle the ball with their strong arm only.

Sport class 2.5 – Players have good shoulder stability and arm function and they might have some trunk control. Due to their ability to flex their fingers, they can perform overhead passes, catch the ball with two hands and manoeuvre the wheelchair effectively. In the team they are ball-handlers and fairly fast play-makers.

Sport class 3.5 – Players have good arm and hand function, which makes a major ball-handler in the team. They have some trunk function, which helps them to rapidly accelerate the wheelchair. They will typically have a high and upright sitting position. Also, an athlete with above-knee amputations of both legs and with a loss of fingers and hand surface on both sides may play in this sport class. Players perform controlled one-handed, long-distance passes.

For further details please go to www.paralympics.org.nz or to www.hpsnz.org.nz

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