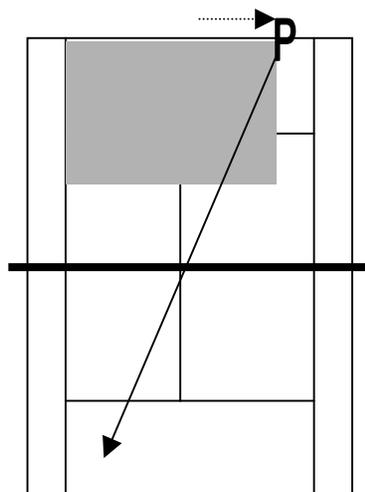


## The “Wheel-around” Forehand

Just like the able-bodied game, wheelchair tennis has evolved in the last 10 years. Players are less content to stay far back and circle until the opponent makes a mistake. They are taking the ball earlier, with one bounce being preferred in many situations. Power is invading the game. Domination is becoming the rule.

### The Situation

One of the key ways a player can dominate is to take advantage whenever an opportunity presents itself. A weaker ball in the centre of the court (or even a little to the backhand side) is one such opportunity. If a player has a stronger forehand (and most do), it makes sense to use the forehand as much as possible. In the able bodied game this is called a “Run-around” or “off” forehand. The situation is where a player is in a position that would normally require a backhand. Instead, the player “runs-around” their backhand and uses their stronger forehand. The shot is often hit “inside-out”.



**Player runs around backhand and hits a forehand "inside-out".**

**Player can potentially use their forehand for all balls landing in the shaded area.**

Top wheelchair players use this tactic as well and every aspiring tournament player should have this shot in their repertoire. In wheelchair tennis, I call it the “wheel-around” forehand.

### **The Challenge ...**

The challenge in the wheelchair game, is that it takes good mobility to move around the backhand and position well enough to perform a good forehand. Wheeling around and hitting a shot that would be worse than the original backhand would have been is of little use. The challenge is even greater when the player is coming from the forehand side of the court.

### **The Advantage ...**

The advantage is that, by being able to use their stronger forehand on 75% of the court (depending on how fast the ball is received), a player can pressure an opponent more.

### **Learning progressions**

Here are some suggested steps that have been used successfully to help players master the wheel-around forehand. To help players with their decision-making and problem solving, it is good to set shots into a context. If players can recognize a common situation that the shot occurs in, they can use it more often, and more successfully. Let's imagine a frequently encountered situation that would present a good opportunity to use this shot (situation represents two right-handed players):

#### **Situation:**

*"The player is in a forehand to forehand crosscourt rally. The opponent has hit a weaker ball into the centre of the court. The player could come across and hit a backhand however, they choose to wheel-around and hit a strong forehand inside out to the opponent's backhand."*

#### **Step #1: Decision-making:**

The first step required teaches the player to identify the right time to use the shot. By deciding quickly if it is the appropriate time, the player can prepare early. The coach can have the player call out cue words to identify the right time. The right time in this case consists of two key characteristics:

- (a) Will the ball land close enough to the player in the court to be able to wheel-around it? A marker can be placed on the court to indicate if the ball is too far (anything to the backhand side of the marker), or close enough (anything inside the marker). To train the decision, the player can call out "Yes" if they anticipate the ball will land inside the marker.
- (b) Will the ball be slow enough to allow the player to wheel-around it? The same procedure is used for the speed of the shot. The player should call "Yes" if a wheel-around forehand is possible, "no" if it is not.

Having the player call out the decision word allows the coach to observe *when* the decision is being made. For example, if the player cannot call the word before the ball bounces on their side, it may indicate they are not focussed on judging the ball. Progress the player from deciding before the bounce to before the ball comes over the net.

## Step #2: Motor Pattern:

Once the player can quickly select the right time to apply the shot, the next step is to help them feel the correct movement. There are three quick mobility movements that need to be performed in rapid sequence:



(a) Wheel quickly past the intended point of impact (indicated by the ball-tube in the photo). Speed is important, so push strongly. (see photo #1)

(b) Once past the intended point of impact, grab hard on the wheels and 'brake'. (also see photo #1)



(c) Pivot on the spot by pulling on the left wheel with the non-racquet hand, and pushing on the other wheel with the racquet hand (both at the same time). This will put you in a position to hit the forehand. (see photo #2).

## Step #3: Tactical Objective

The third step is to challenge the opponent with the shot. An inside-out forehand to the opponent's backhand is a good option. The player can wait for the opponent's response and place it to the open forehand corner or move into the net and intercept with a volley to the open court. For variety, players should also learn how to send the wheel-around forehand to the opponent's forehand corner. These shot sequences can create a devastating pattern.

## Conclusion

To dominate play, it is important for a player to be able to use their strong forehand from many positions on the court. The technique of the wheel-around forehand gives a player the tools to do just that. Remember, it is important to teach shots in a tactical situation so the technique will be integrated more easily into match play.