

ADAPTIVE TENNIS

Serving the Next Boom?

Adaptive Tennis is a huge untapped opportunity for the tennis industry.

BY THE USTA NATIONAL ADAPTIVE TENNIS COMMITTEE

If the sport of tennis were to expand its base to include more programs specifically designed for adaptive athletes with disabilities, the result would be a substantial increase in players, diversity, and business for the industry.

Adaptive tennis players face one or more of the following challenges:

- A neurodevelopmental disability such as autism, Down Syndrome or other intellectual deficit.
- A physical disability such as cystic fibrosis, spinal cord injury or stroke, hearing, sight or orthopedic impairment.
- A social/emotional disability such as PTSD.

In the U.S., about 90 million adults and 14 million children have a neurodevelopmental, physical or emotional disability. According to the International Tennis Federation Global Tennis Report,

in 2021, about 24.8 million (10.8 percent) of the non-disabled population played tennis, while about 60,000 people (.0057 percent) with a disability played the sport. However, about 600,000 adaptive athletes are playing other sports, including water, ski and mountain sports—that's 10 times more than those who play tennis! This large discrepancy represents a huge pool of potential players waiting to be asked to participate.

Data shows athletes with disabilities who play tennis benefit immeasurably. Just like the general population, the fitness and social benefits of tennis produce healthier lives for those with disabilities. The game of tennis leads to self-discovery, increased self-confidence and an enhanced ability to deal with obstacles. The friendships, camaraderie and fun that tennis provides cannot be understated for the adaptive population.

The USTA does not currently offer programs specifically for adaptive players. However, there are more than 350 adaptive tennis programs registered with the USTA that reach about 30,000 adaptive athletes across the country. These programs were founded by those who have a passion for helping people with a disability, and the broader community—families, teachers, local tennis players—are extremely supportive of them. Many have never played tennis themselves, but once they are introduced to the sport through an adaptive program, they become avid players, too.

The USTA can lead the way in serving more players with disabilities by offering play and competitive opportunities. New adaptive coaching pathways, social media recognition and continuing education can further the development of adaptive tennis, resulting in a more diverse tennis-playing population and generating revenue for those in the industry. With more access to tennis for people with disabilities, there will be new income streams through teaching opportunities, court fees, leagues and tournaments designed for the adaptive population, along with retail and equipment sales.

If the USTA made an investment in adaptive tennis by improving access and marketing its health and lifestyle benefits, adaptive tennis could be the next boom in this sport. Reaching just 10 percent of the entire adaptive population would serve about 1 million players! A conservative \$50 in revenue per player (lessons, tournaments and leagues) would result in a robust increase in revenues for the entire industry.

Approximately one-third of the U.S. population lives with a disability, and on any given day, anyone can join this group. Tennis is such a wonderful sport; let's give the adaptive athlete an opportunity to play, creating a win-win situation—for the individual, the growth of the sport and the bottom line. ■

Adaptive programs interested in registering with the USTA and having access to newsletters and grants should visit www.usta.com/adaptivetennis

We welcome your opinions and comments. Email info@tennisindustrymag.com.

