

Quad Rugby 101:

An introduction to America's most popular wheelchair game.

If you haven't fallen in love with quad rugby by now, then you haven't been properly introduced to the enthralling game. Also known as wheelchair rugby and murder ball, the sport has become a widely loved game across the world with over 24 countries actively participating. Progressing at such a fast rate, like many other sports, the game takes discipline, hard work, frequent practice, enthusiasm, excitement, and most of all, heart. Whether it's the local team preparing for the next tournament or team U.S.A. practicing diligently for the next Paralympics, quad rugby is making a strong impression across the world.

Knowing everything there is to know about wheelchair rugby is unnecessary to be a fan or follower, but it is quite helpful to understand some of the basics.

Originating in Winnipeg, Canada in 1977, the sport made its way down to Minnesota by 1979 and the first official team in the United States was formed by 1981. By 2000, quad rugby was included in the Sydney Paralympic Games as a full medal sport. The USQRA (United States Quad Rugby Association) is broken up into 8 different sections: Atlantic North, Atlantic South, Heartland North, Heartland South, Mountain East, Mountain West, Pacific North, and Pacific South. At the end of every season, sectionals are held and the top two teams from these tournaments continue onto the USQRA National Division I Championships. Teams that place 3rd and 4th in the sectional compete in the Division II Championships. International Wheelchair Rugby Federation Championships are held every 4 years and the next tournament will be held in the fall of 2010 in Vancouver, B.C.

Although there are no age requirements to become a wheelchair rugby player, the participant must have a disability which affects both the arms and legs. Most players have disabilities due to spina bifida, post-polio syndrome, are a quadriplegic as a result of an accident or have had an amputation. Every player is evaluated for eligibility by a physician or therapist who first determines whether or not the person is capable of playing and then assesses the level a functionality each player's muscles contain. The intensity of the wheelchairs colliding into each other can be very dangerous if the proper functions are unavailable to react. The player's limitations are classified in one of seven categories: 0.5 (being the most limited in hand and arm use), to 3.5 (having much greater function). The maximum point value of four players allowed on the court at one time is 8.0. An example given by the USQRA's official website best explains the break down: $3.0 + 2.0 + 2.0 + 1.0 = 8.0$. For every number represents a player. The USQRA recently added two exceptions, 0.5 points may be taken off a woman's value, and if you have a player over the age of 45 on the court, you can have 8.5 points active.

The game is played with a volleyball that is passed between team members and often carried in laps while players push their wheelchairs around the court. Fellow team members try to block opposing players by slamming their wheelchairs into the opponent's chairs allowing the player with the ball a path to score. The game is broken up into four 8 minute long quarters which is strictly regulated by rules requiring time limits. At each end of the court are cones that mark the goals and "keys" marked off near the goal where only 3 offensive players are allowed in at a time. The player with possession of the ball is allowed 10 seconds total inside the key. In order to score a goal, two of the four wheels of the volleyball carrier's wheelchair must cross the goal line. The players have 15 seconds to advance the ball past half court, 10 seconds to dribble or pass, and 40 seconds total since the moment the ball has been inbound to score or there will be a penalty. Tournaments are held in public basketball courts across the nation and are scheduled through winter months because of the cooler temperatures. Most quadriplegics are unable to sweat below injury, therefore need cooler environments to keep the body temperature low.

Special manual chairs are made to assure safety and stability. There are two types of chairs: offense and defense. Players with higher classification points usually play as offense and those with lower classifications play a key role as defense. The funding alone for one chair can cost well over \$3,000 and are specially made for this game.

The sport itself relies on personal funding from the players and more importantly on sponsors and small donations from people like you. Every player must consider the cost of renting a gym for games and practices, uniforms, traveling expenses, replacement parts for wheelchairs, the wheelchair itself, and much more.

For more information on how to donate, volunteer, find a local event, or just learn more about the game please visit the following site:

The United States Quad Rugby Association official site:
www.quadrugby.com

Or send a check donation payable to USQRA by mail to:

USQRA Contributions
1133 SE 37th Ave
Portland, OR 97214