

# GAME ON

Disability Tennis Performance Pathway



# WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

**The LTA is the national governing body for tennis in Britain. Our vision is to open up tennis, and we are on a mission to make it more relevant, accessible, welcoming, and enjoyable for everyone.**

As a sport, we focus on making tennis accessible to all, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or disability. Central to this plan is ensuring that disabled people can access and enjoy tennis without any barriers. “Open for All”, the LTA’s disability tennis plan, is a key part of the LTA’s wider inclusion strategy and provides greater focus on achieving our ambition to continue being a world leader in opening up tennis to disabled people.

We want to support a player pathway, across multiple impairment types, which effectively engages and transitions players throughout the tennis journey, so we have a rich group of players from different backgrounds achieving their full potential.

To achieve this ambition, we work closely with our LTA County and Island Associations, home nations of Tennis Scotland and Tennis Wales, tennis venues, and our tennis workforce to open up the sport. We provide a combination of support packages, including grant funding, tennis equipment, training, and advice on how to help more players with an impairment access tennis in their own way.







## CONTENTS

About This Guide	4
Wheelchair Tennis Pathway	5
Deaf Tennis Pathway	10
Learning Disability (LD) Tennis Pathway	14
Visually Impaired (VI) Tennis Pathway	19
Competitions	22
Development and Performance Squads	24
Our Game, Our Court	26
Useful Contacts	27



Wheelchair Tennis now provides elite performance career opportunities where there is over 150 international competitions as part of the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Tour; this includes the Grand Slams. You may have seen some of our elite players competing at these events, or even more recently at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, where four of our top players – Alfie Hewitt OBE, Gordon Reid OBE, Jordanne Whiley MBE and Lucy Shuker BEM enjoyed medal success. As we progress towards Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028, our vision is to remain a leading nation for wheelchair player development and consistently win more Major Titles (e.g., Grand Slams/ Paralympic Medals) across all divisions.”

Erik Koers, Head of Wheelchair Performance Pathway

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE



## THE PLAYER PATHWAY

This booklet is a resource for disabled players and our tennis workforce, which aims to describe the different impairment specific tennis pathways in tennis.

For coaches, it will support them to identify disabled players who show talent and guide them towards the next steps to ensure their players maximise their full potential.

We would like to raise awareness of the opportunities to play, compete and develop within the formats of Wheelchair Tennis, Learning Disability Tennis, Deaf Tennis and Visually Impaired (VI) Tennis, Although the LTA supports other adaptive formats of tennis, only these have a clear pathway to ITF sanctioned competition.



“

The LTA also supports players in achieving international success through our Visually Impaired (VI), Learning Disability (LD), and Deaf Tennis performance programmes. Great Britain is one of the leading nations across all three impairments, having won gold medals at the VIRTUS Global Games (LD), IBTA World Championships (VI), and Deaf World Championships (Deaf). Opportunities for GB players to compete at an international level continue to increase, with players participating in the inaugural 2023 Australian Open People with Intellectual Impairments and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Finals.”

Sophie Hall, Disability Competitions Manager



# WHEELCHAIR TENNIS PATHWAY

## THE GAME

Wheelchair tennis is the most professional and integrative of all Paralympic sports; anyone can play recreationally, but to play in international competitions and be considered for the Wheelchair Performance Pathway, you must have an eligible physical impairment which falls under one of the seven eligible physical impairment groups.

Note: Classification is governed by the International Tennis Federation. For more information and if you are interested in being classified for the sport, please contact: [wchclassification@itftennis.com](mailto:wchclassification@itftennis.com)

Ataxia (e.g., Cerebral Palsy, traumatic brain injury, stroke, and multiple sclerosis)

Athetosis (e.g., Cerebral Palsy, traumatic brain injury and stroke)

Impaired Muscle Power (e.g., Spinal Cord Injury)

Impaired Passive Range of Movement (e.g., Joint immobilisation or similar trauma)

Hypertonia (e.g., Cerebral Palsy)

Leg Length Difference (e.g., Congenital, or traumatic disturbance of limb growth)

Limb Deficiency (e.g., Amputation due to cancer)



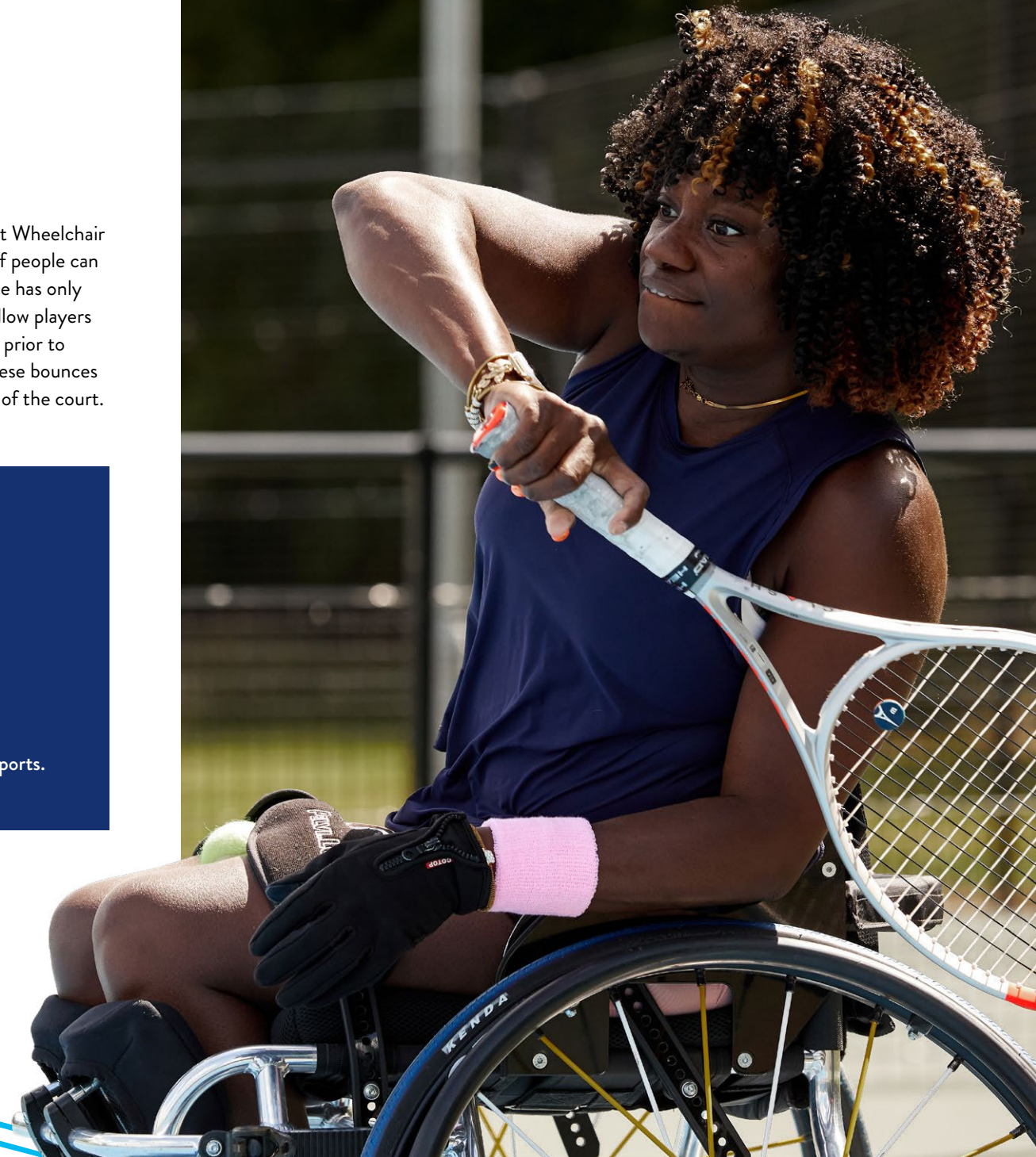
## THE GAME (CONTINUED)

There are two divisions in Wheelchair Tennis – **open and quad**. In the open division there are men's and women's competitions. The quad division is mixed gender and is for those with a more complex impairment affecting three or more limbs.

One of the great things about Wheelchair Tennis is that a broad range of people can excel. This format of the game has only one rule change which is to allow players up to two bounces of the ball prior to hitting it. Only the first of these bounces has to be within the confines of the court.

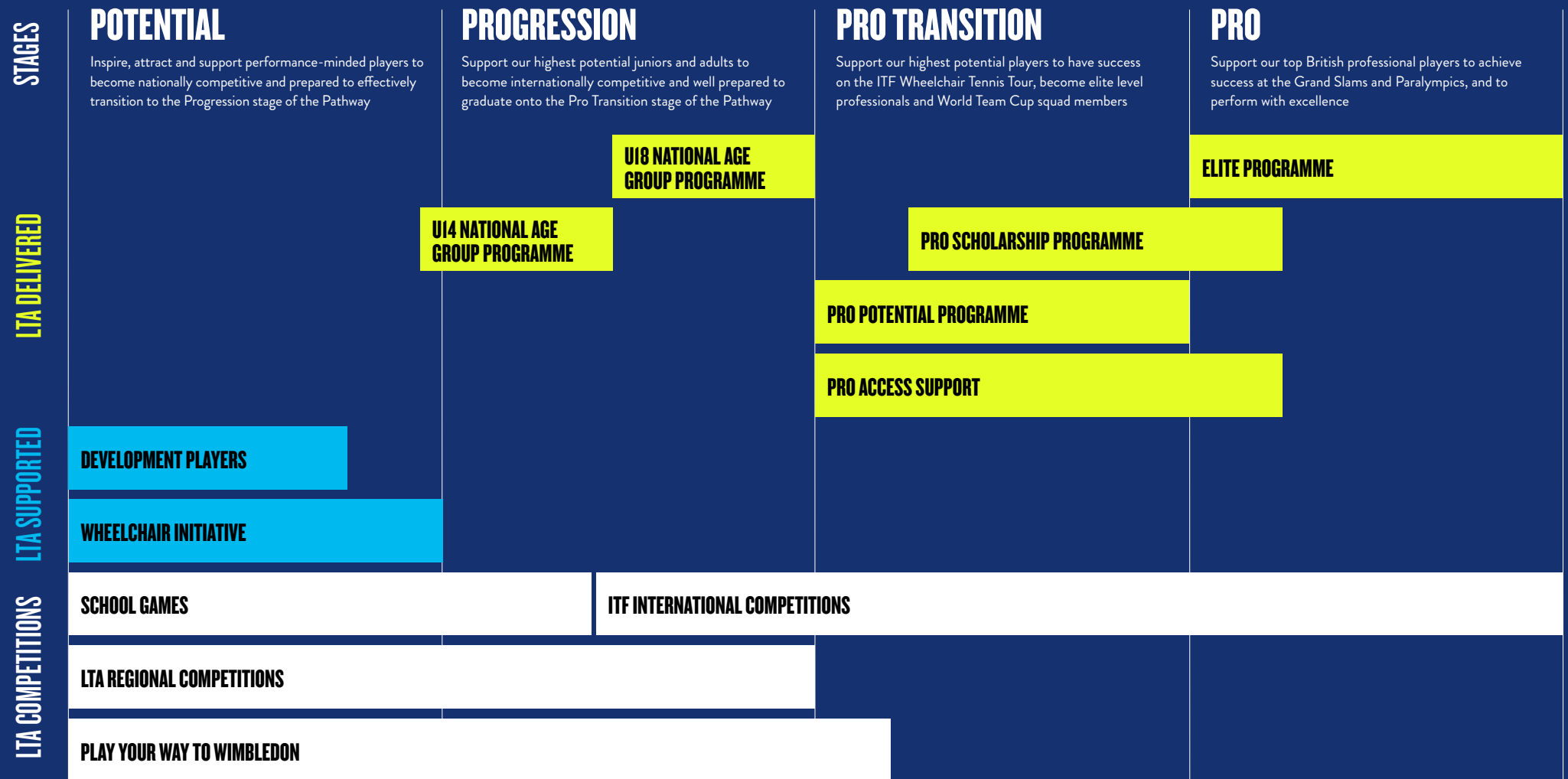
Athletes that typically perform well at the elite level are people with the following personal and physical attributes:

- Love for the sport
- Showcase passion
- Display high levels of mental toughness
- Have a development and performance mindset
- Who retain some or full trunk function
- With prior competitive tennis experience
- With experience in other wheelchair or para-based sports.





# WHEELCHAIR PERFORMANCE PATHWAY (WCPP)



## GET INVOLVED

You can play at any accessible tennis venue including tennis clubs, indoor tennis centres, parks, community, and other leisure facilities.

To find specific Wheelchair Tennis sessions near you please visit our [wheelchair tennis page](#) and use the 'find a venue' interactive map. To connect with Wheelchair Tennis community, please visit [Wheelchair Tennis GB](#).

## COMPETITIONS

If you want to compete against other Wheelchair Tennis players the LTA supports and hosts regional, national, and international wheelchair tournaments, details of which can be found on the [LTA competitions webpage](#).

You can also compete in non-wheelchair specific tournaments. For more information, please speak to your coach or the [LTA Disability Competitions](#) team.



## DEVELOPING TALENT

The LTA wants to attract, engage, develop, and nurture players of all ages who have the will to win, talent and aspirations to be a champion. We have several routes for players to enter the Wheelchair Performance Pathway, the first being the **LTA's Wheelchair Tennis Initiative days**. These days are designed to provide inspirational experiences where you will have the opportunity to showcase your potential and be spotted by the LTA's Wheelchair Performance Pathways Team. Following the Wheelchair Tennis Initiative, we'll recommend the best route for your development:

1. To continue locally in inclusive or impairment specific sessions, or;
2. Invited to a Wheelchair Performance Pathway Selection Camp which is your opportunity to meet and play with other players and be considered for selection onto the Wheelchair Performance Pathway.

If you are unable to attend one of the LTA's Wheelchair Tennis Initiatives, but feel you have what it takes to go all the way, please get in touch with the **LTA Disability team**.

For information please visit the LTA's **Wheelchair Tennis Initiative page**.



## CURRENT PLAYERS

### ALFIE HEWETT

Career high international ranking:  
Singles #1, Doubles #1

### GORDON REID

Career high international ranking:  
Singles #1, Doubles #1

### ANDY LAPTHORNE (QUAD)

Career high international ranking:  
Singles #1, Doubles #1

### LUCY SHUKER

Career high international ranking:  
Singles #5, Doubles #3

### CORNELIA OOSTHUIZEN

Career high international ranking:  
Singles #19, Doubles #17

### BEN BARTRAM

Career high international ranking:  
Junior Singles #1 and Singles #16,  
Doubles #14



“

I got into Wheelchair Tennis after going to watch Wimbledon when I was about 9 years old and was lucky to meet some of the players. It really is a great sport, and as well as the Paralympic, one of the best things about it is being able to play at the Grand Slams and play alongside the top non-wheelchair players – that’s something unique to tennis.”

Andy Lapthorne,  
16x Grand Slam Champion and 3x Paralympics medalist

## COACH ZONE



For players to develop as athletes and progress onto the international stage, it is critical players learn and develop the following fundamentals and qualities:

- Push Technique
- Movement Patterns
- Chair Positioning
- Good skill around striking the ball
- Good hand eye co-ordination and can maintain a rally of 4+ shots
- Good mobility skills

If you coach a player with a physical impairment who has good fundamentals and qualities, please get in touch.

Additionally, if you are interested in increasing your knowledge of different skills and drills, you can do so by accessing our **Dartfish Channel**.

# DEAF TENNIS PATHWAY

## THE GAME

**Deaf Tennis has a long history in Britain and no rule changes to the game are needed.**

You can play against other deaf tennis players and alongside or against hearing opponents, friends and family.

In Deaf Tennis competitions, the removal of hearing aids or turning off of cochlear implants is required to ensure an equal playing field.





## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO PLAY

If you have hearing loss of **55 decibels or less** in your best ear and a passion for tennis, you could be considered for our development and performance programmes.

## GET INVOLVED

You can play at any tennis venue including tennis clubs, indoor tennis centres, parks, community, and other leisure facilities.

To find specific Deaf Tennis sessions near you please contact the [LTA Disability team](#) or join the [Deaf Tennis online community](#).

## COMPETITIONS

If you want to compete against other deaf tennis players, the LTA hosts the annual National Deaf Tennis Finals which is open to players of all ages and abilities. Details of this tournament can be found on the [LTA Competitions page](#).

You can also compete in hearing tournaments, which are all inclusive for competitors who are deaf or hard of hearing.

For more information, please speak to your coach or the LTA.





## DEVELOPING TALENT

The LTA wants to nurture players with talent so they can fulfil their potential. If you show talent for tennis, you should be identified by your coach and referred to the LTA disability competitions team. Following an assessment, we'll recommend the best route for your development which may include either of the following.

### DEVELOPMENT SQUAD:

The LTA GB Development Squad is a selection of players who in future we would look to progress into the National Squad, with an overall aim to try and achieve international success.

### NATIONAL SQUAD:

The LTA GB National Squad is a selection of players with the highest potential for international success. We would have an expectation of commitment to competition, training opportunities and a want to improve to be the one of top players in International Deaf Tennis.

By joining our performance programme players may receive the opportunity to compete in international events including the Deaflympics, European and World Deaf Tennis Championships

If you feel you have talent or you believe a player does, please get in touch with the **Disability Competitions team**.



## CURRENT PLAYERS

### PHOEBE SUTHERS

**Runner-Up:** Women's Singles –  
2023 Australian Open Deaf and  
Hard of Hearing Finals

**Runner-Up:** Women's Doubles –  
2023 Australian Open Deaf and  
Hard of Hearing Finals

**Gold:** Junior Mixed Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

**Silver:** Mixed Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

**Bronze:** Girls' Singles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

### ESAH HAYAT

**Semi-Finalist:** Men's Doubles –  
2023 Australian Open Deaf and  
Hard of Hearing Finals

**Gold:** Junior Mixed Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

**Silver:** Men's Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

**Silver:** Boy's Singles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

### LEWIS FLETCHER

**Silver:** Men's Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

**Silver:** Mixed Doubles –  
2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships

## COACH ZONE



If you coach a deaf tennis player who has some of the qualities below, please get in touch:

- Good hand-eye co-ordination and can maintain a rally of a couple of shots
- Competes in local and/or county level competitions
- Part of any performance squad organised by the LTA.



# LEARNING DISABILITY (LD) TENNIS PATHWAY

## THE GAME

Mencap defines a learning disability (LD) as “a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities which affects someone for their whole life.”

Individuals with a learning disability can play tennis with no changes to the rules. The game can also be adapted according to a player’s ability level; for example, by playing on a smaller court or using low compression balls.





## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO PLAY

You can play Learning Disability (LD) tennis if you have a learning disability which may include but is not limited to: Down's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Asperger's Syndrome.

Currently to be considered for our performance and developments squads and to compete in LD specific regional and national tournaments a player needs to have an **intelligence quotient (IQ) of 75 or less**. For international competition the LTA Performance programme follow Virtus Classification. This follows the following criteria:

CLASSIFICATION	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
<b>II1</b> Intellectual disability	An IQ score of 75 or lower; and; Learning Disability onset before age 18.
<b>II2</b> Significant intellectual disability (this group is currently restricted to athletes with Down syndrome)	A formal diagnosis of Trisomy 21 or Translocation Down syndrome; For safety, athletes must not have symptomatic Atlantoaxial Instability (AAI)
<b>II3 (NEW)</b> High Functioning Autism	An IQ score of above 75, OR a diagnosis of no intellectual disability, and; A formal diagnosis of Autism or ASD

All players within the II1 and II2 classifications are able to compete within LTA Learning Disability Regional and National competitions. As the II-3 is a new category, work is currently being completed to understand how to integrate this within our GB Performance and Competition structure. If you believe you may be eligible with the II3 classification, please contact [Disability.Competitions@LTA.org.uk](mailto:Disability.Competitions@LTA.org.uk)

Special Olympics and Virtus Sport organise international competitions for players and intellectual impairment but have different rules; Special Olympics is aimed at players competing on a development level where as Virtus events are focused on performance. For further information please see their websites ([see page 27](#)).



## GET INVOLVED

You can play at any tennis venue including tennis clubs, indoor tennis centres, parks, community, and other leisure facilities. To find specific LD sessions near you please contact the [LTA Disability team](#).



## COMPETITIONS

If you want to compete against other LD tennis players, the LTA supports and hosts regional, national, and international tournaments. Details of these tournaments can be found on the [LTA Competitions page](#).

You can also compete in non-disabled tennis tournaments. For more information, please speak to your coach or the LTA. The LTA can also help provide additional support to players through a reasonable adjustment letter.

## REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT

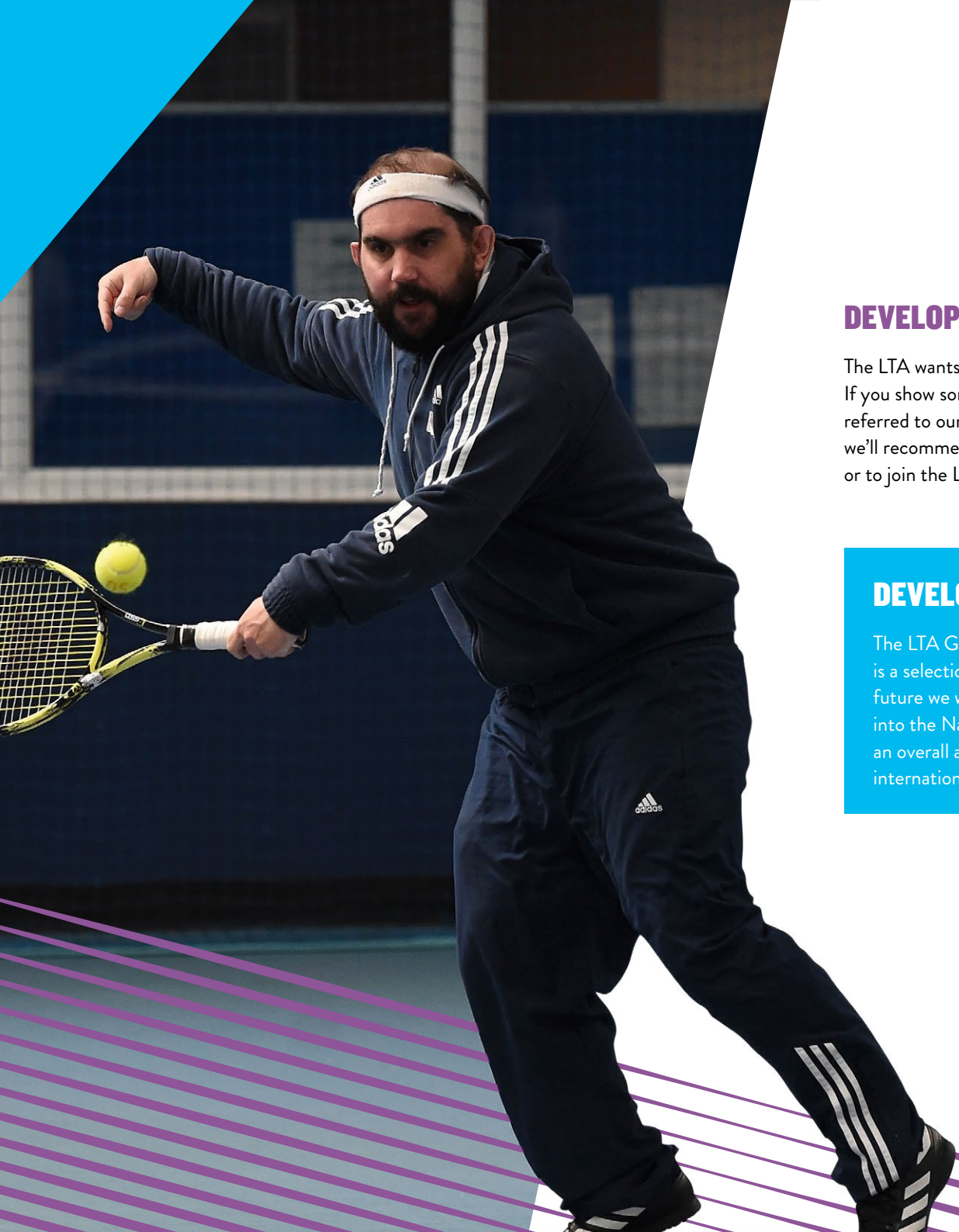
If you believe a player may need some additional support within non-disabled competition, everyone has a right to request reasonable adjustments. This can be:

- providing extra help or
- making changes to the way in which we provide services to make them as accessible as possible.

If there is something we could do to make your tennis experience better, you can request a

“Reasonable adjustments” letter from the LTA through the [LTA Support Centre](#). This letter can be used when entering events, however we ask that this is done in advance rather than when you arrive at a tournament.





## DEVELOPING TALENT

The LTA wants to nurture players with talent so they can fulfil their potential. If you show some talent for tennis, you should be identified by your coach and referred to our LTA Disability Competitions team. Following an assessment, we'll recommend the best route for your development: to continue locally for now or to join the LTA's GB performance programme in one of the followings squads:

### DEVELOPMENT SQUAD:

The LTA GB Development Squad is a selection of players who in future we would look to progress into the National Squad, with an overall aim to try and achieve international success.

### NATIONAL SQUAD:

The LTA GB National Squad is a selection of players with the highest potential for international success. We would have an expectation of commitment to competition, training opportunities and a want to improve to be the one of top players in International LD tennis.

Both squads are organised by experienced coaches who run camps each year to develop the skills of players.

If you feel you have talent or you believe a player does, please get in touch with the [LTA Disability Competitions team](#).

## CURRENT PLAYERS

### ANNA MCBRIDE

**Winner:** Women's Singles – 2023 Australian Open People with Intellectual Impairments Finals

**Winner:** Women's Doubles – 2023 Australian Open People with Intellectual Impairments Finals

**Gold:** Women's ii1 Singles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Gold:** Mixed ii1 Doubles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Silver:** Women's ii1 Team Event - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

### FABRICE HIGGINS

**Runner-Up:** Men's Singles – 2023 Australian Open People with Intellectual Impairments Finals

**Runner-Up:** Men's Doubles – 2023 Australian Open People with Intellectual Impairments Finals

**Gold:** Men's ii1 Doubles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Gold:** Men's ii1 Team Event - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Silver:** Men's ii1 Singles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

### DOMINIC IANNOTTI

**Gold:** Men's ii1 Doubles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Gold:** Men's ii1 Team Event - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Gold:** Mixed ii1 Doubles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games

**Bronze:** Men's ii1 Singles - 2023 Virtus World Global Games



## COACH ZONE



If you coach a player with a learning disability who has some of the qualities below, please get in touch:

- Skill around striking the ball
- Good hand-eye co-ordination
- Can maintain a rally of several shots.



# VISUALLY IMPAIRED (VI) TENNIS PATHWAY

## THE GAME

The game of tennis was first adapted to be played by blind and partially sighted people in Japan in 1984 and has quickly grown in popularity.

Visually Impaired (VI) tennis is for blind (classified as a B1 player) or partially sighted people (dependent on the level of sight loss they are classified in the spectrum between B2-B5). The game is adapted using a smaller court, with a lower net and using an audible ball so players can hear it bounce and being hit. Depending on an individuals' sight level they may have up to three bounces of the ball before they must return it back to their opponent.

Players in the B1 classification have additional adaptations during competition. The key lines on the court are tactile to help players establish the size of the court. Additionally, B1 players are required to patch their eyes and wear a regulation eye shade during competition.



# VI TENNIS CATEGORIES



## B1

This category encompasses individuals who have no light perception in either eye up to light perception but are unable to recognize shapes at any distance or in any direction. During competitive play, players must wear blindfolds to ensure an equal level playing ground.

## B2 & B3

Both of these categories involve a low level of usable partial vision, those in the B3 category will be able to see more than those graded as B2.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO PLAY

Domestically, VI tennis uses British Blind Sport's [classification rules](#).

In order to compete at an international level, players must meet International Blind Tennis Association's (IBTA) classification rules. For more information on this please visit [Classification — International Blind Tennis Association \(ibtatennis.org\)](#).

## B4

This is a good level of partial sight. Anyone with more than roughly 25% of normal vision is likely to be too sighted for this category.

## B5

This category used to be referred to as B4+ and has no top limit.



## GET INVOLVED

You can play at any tennis venue including tennis clubs, indoor tennis centres, parks, community, and other leisure facilities.

To find specific VI tennis sessions near you please visit our [Visually Impaired tennis page](#) and use the 'find a venue' interactive map. To connect with VI tennis community, please visit [VI Tennis UK](#).

## COMPETITIONS

If you want to compete against other blind or partially sighted players the LTA supports and hosts regional and national tournaments across the UK where our top players are supported to attend IBTA World Championship events.

## DEVELOPING TALENT

The LTA wants to nurture players with talent so they can fulfil their potential. If you show some talent for tennis, you should be identified by your coach and referred to our LTA Disability Competitions team. Following an assessment, we'll recommend the best route for your development: to continue locally for now or to join the LTA's GB performance programme. The national squad is organised by experienced coaches who run camps each year to develop the skills of players.

If you feel you have talent or you believe a player does, please get in touch with the **Disability Competitions team**.

## COACH ZONE



If you are a coach of a blind or partially sighted player who has some of the qualities below, please get in touch:

- Some skill around striking the ball
- Good spatial awareness, partially with tracking the ball
- Can maintain a rally of several shots (ability to return the ball if a B1 player).





# COMPETITIONS

**The LTA supports and organises a range of competitions across all impairment groups, from beginner to elite level. We would also encourage players to take up the many competitive opportunities that the LTA, Counties and venues, provides.**

Competitions are a great way to challenge yourself against others. Players who'd like to develop their skills and progress along the pathway should compete regularly and make the most of local, regional and national competitions.

For those who play wheelchair tennis, you could even become a full-time professional athlete and compete around the world on the ITF wheelchair tennis tour – if you've got the confidence, talent and determination!

For more information and to see a full list of the competitions on offer please visit the [Disability Tennis Competitions calendar](#).



# WORLD STAGE





# DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE PROGRAMMES

## SELECTION

Our disability performance programmes are regularly on the lookout for talented individuals through a selection of activities which include:

- Weekly and monthly impairment venue sessions within our LTA Open Court disability tennis programme and through disability inclusive programmes
- Workforce and venues highlighting talent to County and Island Associations and the LTA Disability team
- Regional and national disability events in partnership with National Disability Sport Organisations
- LTA national and regional tournaments
- County championship impairment specific events
- LTA and Dan Maskell Tennis Trust impairment specific camps throughout the year

If you meet our selection criteria, we will invite you to join the appropriate level performance squad training camps where you will receive advice from our national coaches on all aspects of your game.





## WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO EXCEL IN TENNIS?

Becoming a performance player doesn't happen overnight, but if you have the following then you could be on your way:

- Talent
- Mental toughness and dedication
- Physical fitness
- An ability to set goals – planning ahead and regularly reviewing progress
- A supportive network – family/guardians, friends and coaches

Whatever your level of play, we want you to be the best you can be. For those with the hunger for success and the determination to win, the opportunity to represent Great Britain on the world stage is there.

### COACH ZONE



Our squads and training camps are not just for the players, we are also keen to develop coaches' skills too.

If you would like to know more about our performance pathways and how you might get involved, please do get in touch. We'd love to hear from you and support your learning and development as a coach through our mentoring programmes.





**Open Court**  
Disability Tennis

# OUR GAME, OUR COURT

## LTA OPEN COURT PROGRAMME

The LTA, strongly supported by Sport England and the LTA Tennis Foundation, leads on a sector leading programme that provides opportunities for disabled people to play and compete in tennis. The programme supports venues across England, Scotland and Wales to offer both impairment specific and disability inclusive sessions to give disabled people greater choice to play tennis in their own way.

The LTA provides venues with support and advice, training to improve disability confidence, adaptive equipment and sometimes grant funding to support with opening up opportunities for disabled people to play and compete regularly.

Tennis is a fully inclusive sport, and we want to encourage disabled people to play in their own way. However, many of our venues host and deliver impairment specific programmes that feed into our four-impairment specific pathways; Wheelchair, Deaf, Learning Disability and Visually Impaired.

We support programmes in most major cities across England, Scotland and Wales and the programme is constantly expanding into new locations, with a focus on increasing local playing and competitive opportunities.





# USEFUL CONTACTS

[www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)

[www.ukssport.gov.uk](http://www.ukssport.gov.uk)

[www.itftennis.com/wheelchair](http://www.itftennis.com/wheelchair)

[www.paralympics.org.uk](http://www.paralympics.org.uk)

[www.wheelpower.org.uk](http://www.wheelpower.org.uk)

[www.ukdeafsport.org.uk](http://www.ukdeafsport.org.uk)

[www.deaflympics.com](http://www.deaflympics.com)

[sportexceluk.org](http://sportexceluk.org)

[www.virtus.sport](http://www.virtus.sport)

[www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk](http://www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk)

[www.mixedabilitysports.org](http://www.mixedabilitysports.org)

[www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk)

[www.ibta-takei.com](http://www.ibta-takei.com)



“

Champions keep playing until they get it right.”

Billie Jean King



Other accessible formats will be available on the [LTA website](#) and on request.