

National Guidelines

for Mixed Runner and Wheeler Participation in Track

Wheelchair Track and Field USA

National Governing Body of Wheelchair Sports, USA

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INTRODUCTION

Wheelchair racing has existed for more than 50 years at the local, national, and international levels and is currently experiencing an increase in participation on high school track teams and local youth track clubs. Though wheelchair racing athletes (wheelers) have competed at the high-school level for more than two decades, there are no nationally accepted rules concerning scoring their performances or regarding mixing runners and wheelers in track heats when appropriate. The following guidelines address these issues.

1. **Can wheelers and runners participate in mixed heats?** Yes. If there is only one wheeler present, then combining the runners and wheelers into a mixed heat is desirable. In such a mixed heat, the runners are competing against each other and the wheeler is competing against his/her own time.
2. **Do runners and wheelers compete against each other?** No. Running and wheeling are two separate disciplines. Athletes compete autonomously within their respective disciplines for times and scoring even if they are in a mixed heat..
3. **What if there are multiple wheelers and only one runner?** If there is only one runner present, then combining the runners and wheelers into a mixed heat is desirable. In such a mixed heat, the wheelers are competing against each other and the runner is competing against his/her own time.
4. **Is mixing heats safe?** Yes. If the wheeler can control his/her chair around the track, follow verbal commands, and all the runners can control themselves around the track, then the presence of the wheeler does not represent a safety concern.
5. **Should mixed heats occur at regional, sectional, state or national meets?** This will have to be decided by the meet director. The mixing of heats should occur during pre-season and regular-season meets.
6. **How do wheelers start the 800 meters and longer distance events in mixed heats?** Wheelers should start in an outside lane or behind the runners.

7. **How do wheelers pass runners or runners pass wheelers?** The same USATF track rules apply. The racing wheelchair is simply an extension of the athlete's body. Neither wheelers nor runners may impede any athlete while passing or being passed.
8. **When can a wheeler-only heat be run?** If there are two same-sex wheelers entered in an event, for example the 200 meters, then a separate-but-equal 200-meter wheelchair heat should be contested. Same sex wheelers should compete in an open class. In the future a disability classification system will be implemented. Filling out the wheeler heat with runners is a meet director option.
9. **Do male wheelers compete against female wheelers?** No. Male and female athletes possess physiological differences that translate into different performance abilities. As such, the same gender considerations that apply to coed sport participation as defined by Title IX apply. See Women's Sports Foundation (www.womenssportsfoundation.org) for more on coed participation in sports.
10. **How are wheelers awarded school points?** Wheelers should receive points for their performances just as runners do. Wheelers and runners are scored within their respective disciplines. Any relevant school or state scoring rules limiting the number of events in which an athlete can compete and score should also apply. Equal access to uniforms, school letters and other benefits and recognition afforded able-bodied athletes should be provided.
11. **What is a wheelchair?** A wheelchair is an adaptive tool that allows an athlete with a lower-extremity mobility impairment to participate and compete in a variety of sports. Ambulation is exchanged for wheelchair propulsion. In wheelchair sports, the wheelchair is an extension of the athlete's body. The specifications of a racing wheelchair are found in the Wheelchair Track and Field USA (WTFUSA) official rules at www.wsusa.org under "sports."
12. **Does a racing wheelchair void a track's warranty policy?** No. Although many track warranty policies do not allow for the use of "wheeled vehicles" on their surface, this rule applies to mechanical vehicles and not those deemed by the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA, as "assistive devices."
13. **Who governs wheelchair track rules?** The national governing body is Wheelchair Track and Field USA (WTFUSA), which is a 501c3 non profit. WTFUSA is also the track and field sport committee of Wheelchair Sports, USA. USATF recognizes WTFUSA as the official entity in the United States that oversees competitive wheelchair track competition.
14. **Are students who use wheelchairs afforded rights under the law?** Yes. Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act to guarantee that students have the right to benefit from all aspects of their

educational programs and services, including athletic programs. In addition many states have laws that guarantee these rights as well.

- a. Under the federal law, it is prohibited discrimination to exclude students from participation in athletic programs due to their disability. Students who use wheelchairs must be provided meaningful ways to participate and to benefit from school athletic programs. The law also requires that their participation be integrated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent possible.
- b. It is discriminatory to assume that students with disabilities do not have the physical skills or cannot develop the skills to participate on track teams due to inferior physical strength or other physical capabilities. It is similarly discriminatory to require student with a disability to pass a strenuous physical examination prior to participating on a school's team if the exam is different from the one which able-bodied students receive.

15. Does coaching wheelchair athletes demand significant additional training?

No. Wheelchair athletes are just like able-bodied athletes. They possess a range of physical and cognitive skills that will affect how coachable they are. Developing the skills to wheel is the same as, for instance, developing the skills to effectively throw the discus or javelin. Each coach must determine if any issues beyond the physical disability need to be taken into consideration when an athlete desires to participate.

16. Where can coaches and athletic departments receive additional training and certifications in wheelchair racing? Contact WSUSA for information on continuing education opportunities in wheelchair sports.



www.wsusa.org