

Brad Parks

Contributor: Wheel Chair Tennis

Class of 1975

Our next inductee is Brad Parks who displayed extraordinary courage and optimism when faced with incredible adversity at only 18 years old. At the time, he was considered a freestyle skiing prodigy, aspiring to turn pro until tragedy struck at a competitive event in Utah. Flying downhill during a competition, he went airborne and landed incorrectly on the icy surface. The accident left him paralyzed from the hips down. In the wake of this life-changing accident, Brad made a life-changing decision when confronted with the question he asked himself, "What am I going to do now?" In a decision that positively impacted the course of this new life that had just been thrust upon him, he "knew [he] had to make the best of the situation," so he began wondering if you can play tennis in a wheelchair. During his rehab in 1977, he and another wheelchair athlete began conceptualizing the possibilities of wheelchair tennis, and from there Brad Parks created a new sport.

Wheelchair tennis caught the interest of many players seeking an athletic event, and it took off in 1989 when Parks worked with three others to form the National Foundation of Wheelchair Tennis. Together they created a 10-tournament circuit throughout the United States that culminated in a national championship event played in Irvine. Today the Wheelchair Tennis Tour comprises more than 150 tournaments in 41 countries, with \$1.5 million in prize money. Wheelchair tennis is now played in nearly 100 countries. For this remarkable dedication to tennis, Parks is recognized as the pioneer of wheelchair tennis.

The sport was included in the Wheelchair Games in 1987, and then it became a full-medal sport at the Paralympic Games for the first time in Barcelona in 1992, where Parks partnered with the late Randy Snow to win the men's doubles gold medal. In 1988, the International Wheelchair Tennis Federation (IWTF) was formed to govern this growing international sport with Parks as the inaugural president. In 1998, the IWTF was fully integrated into the International Tennis Federation, making it the first disabled sport to achieve such a union on the international level. In 1985, as a result of increased international presence at the US Open, the World Team Cup was started with five nations. Today this prestigious Fed Cup/Davis Cup style team event has been contested by 52 different nations in its 25 year history, and boasts men, women, quadriplegics, and junior competitions.

As an ambassador to the sport, Parks has been honored numerous times. The Brad Parks Award was established by the USTA in 2002 to recognize outstanding contributions to the game of wheelchair tennis. It is housed at the USTA National Tennis Center. Additionally, the International Tennis Federation established The Brad Parks Award in 1993, presented to an individual or organization that has made a significant contribution to wheelchair tennis on an international basis. Brad Parks was also the 2016 recipient of the Philippe Chatrier Award - one of the highest international awards in tennis.

Brad's contributions to tennis include being the inventor and promoter of wheelchair tennis and designing sports wheelchairs. As a player, he was the World No. 1 ranked player from 1980-1989, he is a 3-time major champion in Wheelchair Grand Slams, and he won the Gold Medal in Men's Doubles at the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics.