



by Don (Butch) Steponchev

OFFICIATING OF WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Don (Butch) Steponchev is the Secretary, of the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) Technical Commission. Senior Referee of IWBF, he was President of Canadian Wheelchair Basketball Association (CWBA).

This article will attempt to explain the major differences between the official basketball rules of FIBA and those of the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF).

The game of wheelchair basketball is played under the jurisdiction of the IWBF and is based upon the rules determined by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA).

The IWBF recognizes and acknowledges the support of FIBA in our continued development of the sport.

The major differences are related to:

1. **The chair**
2. **Player classification**
3. **Point count of participating players**
4. **Dribble rule**
5. **Alternating process**
6. **Technical fouls by a player**
7. **Substitutions**
8. **Act of shooting**
9. **Leaving the court without permission**
10. **Contact situations**
11. **Three-second rule**
12. **Principle of verticality**

1. The chair. It is the officials' responsibility to ensure the wheelchair meets the specific dimensions for a legal wheelchair, because the chair is considered to be part of the player. Contravention of these rules will result in the wheelchair being banned from the game. Specific measurements include: cushions, footrests, maximum height of the chair, dimension of the large wheels, the anti-tip castor(s), handrims, no steering devices, brakes or gears are allowed and tyres that may mark the floor are not allowed.

2. Player classification. Player classifications are determined by the Player Classification Commission of IWBF and shall have point values as follows: 1.0, 1.5,

2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5, 4.0 and 4.5. A lower point count identifies the player with a higher level of disability and the higher point count identifies the player with a lower level of disability. The point counts in between represent varying levels of disability as determined by the Commission.

3. Point count of participating players. At no time in a game shall a team have players participating whose total points exceed the 14-point limit. If, at any time during a game, a team exceeds the 14-point limit, a technical foul will be charged to the coach with a correction in the lineup to be made at the same time. Player cards are maintained by the table officials to verify the players' classifications and total point count.

4. Dribble rule. A dribble is made when a player, having gained control of a live ball on the court pushes his wheelchair and dribbles the ball simultaneously or alternately pushes the wheelchair and dribbles the ball. The ball shall be placed on the lap while pushing the wheelchair and one or two pushes shall be followed by one or more dribbles; or use both of the above sequences alternately. A double dribble violation is not possible. If a



player pushes on his wheels more than twice while holding the ball on his lap without again putting the ball to the floor, passing, shooting or coasting, it is a violation for progressing with the ball.

5. Alternating process. Each period begins with a tap-off (jump ball). The team not gaining control of the ball following the tap-off will start the alternating process. On all ensuing throw-ins, the ball will be taken to the nearest free throw line extended or the centre line opposite the score table, depending on where the infraction had occurred.

6. Technical fouls by a player. The more significant technical foul infractions by wheelchair players involve leaving the court; raising out of the wheelchair; raising both rear wheels off the floor; taking the foot/feet off the foot rests; using any part of the lower limb(s) as an aid to stopping or changing the direction of the chair and using a wheelchair that contravenes the definition of chairs, all with the intention to gain an unfair advantage.

7. Substitutions. Substitutions for a free-throw shooter, or in a non-shooting event, are dictated by the total point count limitation. All FIBA regulations apply but the 14-point maximum classification rule must be adhered. In the event where the free-throw shooting team makes a multiple substitution in order to maintain the 14-point limitation, then the opponents may also make a multiple substitution in order to be able to match up and not be put in an unfair advantage situation.

8. Act of shooting. IWBF rules define the act of shooting to include the act of cocking or to "cock". By definition this means, "To position the shooting hand(s) so that the palm is almost fully or partially turned upwards when preparing to throw or release the ball towards the basket". The significance in this is to recognize that players of differing abilities shoot, or release the ball in different ways. As an example, a lower point player may shoot the ball in a "scoop" fashion (underhanded) as compared to a higher classification player shooting the ball in the more traditional way.

9. Leaving the court without permission. Players leaving the court occurs more often in wheelchair basketball than in running basketball. A technical foul shall only be assessed when the player tries to gain an unfair advantage. If an offensive player violates the rule for the first time, the official shall call an infraction (loss of possession of the ball) and warn the captain of the offending team. The warning applies to the entire team for the remainder of the game and results in a technical foul being assessed upon the next violation. If the defending team violates the rule, the warning is given at the end of that phase of play. Each subsequent violation is a technical foul. Incidental leaving of the court shall not be penalized.

10. Contact situations. FIBA principles of contact are administered within the following definitions: 1. A player's path. 2. Defence must be seen to be "covering the path" of the offensive player. 3. Principle of "time and distance for legal position" is strictly enforced.

Experienced wheelchair officials will not allow the noise of contact to affect the judgement of what constitutes a foul and what is considered to be incidental contact.

11. Three-second rule. Because of the wheelchairs' size, players are often held by opponents in attempting to delay their departure. In situations such as this, the officials are authorized to withhold the violation call while the player is attempting to leave and at times, the defensive player may be called for a foul because of holding with his wheelchair. The more significant difference in the three-second rule is that an offensive player may not be positioned in the restricted area prior to the presentation of the ball to the thrower-in while in an out-of-bounds throw-in situation. Should this occur, an immediate violation will be called on the team in possession for the throw-in.

12. Principle of verticality. Each player has the right to the space (cylinder) on court occupied by his wheelchair and his torso when in the upright seated position. When in the act of shooting, a defensive player reaches through the shooter's cylinder and causes contact resulting from hand, body or wheelchair contact on the shooter, it will result in a foul being assessed.

One of the more common misconceptions is players are incapable of regaining their position in the chair once they have been dislodged through contact. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only in limited cases are the players not able to establish themselves back in the chair. Under no circumstances are the officials to assist with repositioning a player.

If a player does fall from the chair and is in direct relationship to the play, the officials are authorized to blow the play dead and allow for repositioning of the athlete. If, however, a fallen player is not directly involved in the play, the officials shall withhold their whistle until the play has been completed.

A few of the more interesting dynamics in the development of the wheelchair game have included the increase in the size of the large wheels to 69 cm; the advent of the three-wheeled chairs; allowing all players, not only those with more severe disabilities, to strap themselves to the chair; and the addition of anti-tip castors to prevent players from falling backwards onto the playing surface.

To further illustrate the extent to which the wheelchair game has progressed, a sub-committee of the Technical Commission is reviewing a proposal from the Brazilian Federation of Wheelchair Basketball to modify the dribble rule to more closely reflect the FIBA and worldwide definition. Should this proposal be adopted by the Congress, it would have a significant impact on the game of wheelchair basketball.

Should additional information on rule books, videos and interpretations be required, please feel free to contact me at: Don (Butch) Steponchev, Secretary Technical Commission, 258 Willoughby Crescent, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7H 4W7 or e-mail: don.steponchev@shaw.ca