



What Does a Functional Assessment Look Like in Wheelchair Rugby?

A functional assessment in wheelchair rugby is a practical evaluation of how well an athlete can move, control their body, and perform key actions required in the sport. Rather than focusing on performance outcomes such as speed or strength alone, a functional assessment looks at how an athlete moves and whether they can do so safely and efficiently.

The aim is to identify strengths, limitations, and potential risk factors before progressing to higher-intensity training or performance testing.

Key Areas Assessed

A functional assessment may include observation and testing of:

Posture and Trunk Control:

Assessment of sitting posture, pelvic stability, and the athlete's ability to maintain control during movement and contact.

Upper Limb Mobility and Stability:

Shoulder, elbow, and wrist range of motion, joint control, and stability during pushing and reaching tasks.

Pushing Mechanics:

Evaluation of hand placement, stroke efficiency, symmetry, and control during propulsion, braking, and changes of direction.

Strength and Control in Key Movements:

Ability to perform controlled pushing, pulling, and stabilisation tasks relevant to wheelchair rugby actions.

Balance and Coordination:

Particularly important for athletes with reduced trunk function or asymmetrical impairments.

These assessments help determine whether an athlete is physically prepared for more demanding training such as resistance work, speed development, or repeated high-intensity efforts.

The Importance of a Multidisciplinary Approach

Functional assessment is most effective when carried out in collaboration with other professionals, particularly physiotherapists and wheelchair technicians or seating specialists.

Physiotherapists can assess joint health, muscle imbalances, range of motion, and injury risk, helping to identify limitations that may not be immediately visible during training.

Chair fitting specialists play a vital role in ensuring the athlete's wheelchair setup supports efficient movement, stability, and force production. Factors such as seat height, backrest angle, camber, and strapping can significantly influence performance and injury risk.

By working together, coaches and support staff can ensure that the athlete's physical capabilities and equipment setup are well matched. This collaborative approach allows training to be more effective, reduces the likelihood of overuse injuries, and supports long-term athletic development.

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