

# National Adaptive Tennis Unified Tournament

## What is Unified Doubles Tennis?

### Unified Doubles Tennis® Best Practices Resource Guide

**Unified Doubles Definition:** In **Unified** Team Tennis, **doubles** teams composed of players with and without disabilities play together in matches against **doubles** teams of similar ability levels. (Special Olympics). The players with disabilities are typically called athletes, while the players without disabilities are called the Unified Partners.

The goal of Unified Doubles is for the adaptive athletes to achieve their maximum potential in an inclusive setting.

The Unified Partner's role is to keep the rally going and to allow the athlete to play a match. A Unified Partner must be able to play consistently. Unified Partners also assist the athlete with keeping score, reminding them of the court positions and rules, and providing support so the athlete can enjoy the on-court experience. They are ambassadors of the game that model sportsmanship as well as good tennis and social etiquette. Their role is to facilitate a competitive tennis match by selecting appropriate shots that invite both athletes on the court to shine. The Unified Partners are not there to try and win, but to model good behavior and to make the points and match a close contest.

Below are some specific recommendations for the Unified Partners to have a successful experience with their partner athlete:

- A. The Unified Partner has the responsibility of providing a safe and fun environment for all participating athletes.
- B. The athlete is the "star" of the match. The athlete should serve first, unless there is an overriding condition i.e. sun. The majority of points played should feature the skills and effort of the athlete.
- C. Each Unified Partner shares the responsibility to bring out the best tennis and sportsmanship of both athletes before, during, and after match play.
- D. The Unified Partner should ALWAYS play at the level of the athletes on the court. That includes when they are hitting to the other unified partner.
- E. The Unified Partner needs to recognize when the opposing athlete has hit an exceptional return shot, sustained a rally, or made a serve to the best of his/her ability. At that time, the athlete has then earned that point, unless the opposing athlete returns the shot.
- F. In the event that the Unified Partner wins a point by playing above the opposing athlete's skill level, the unified partner shall award an equally meaningful point as soon as play permits.
- G. When at the net, the athlete should be at least one full step or 3-feet from the net. This will allow the Unified Partner a better opportunity to rally with the opposing athlete in a meaningful manner.

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- H. The Unified Partner should not lob the opposing athlete. Shot selection by the unified partner to the opposing athlete, i.e. challenging volley or short lob should always be based on the opposing athlete's skill level to handle such a shot.
- I. Unified Partners should never poach. However, the Unified Partner may encourage and coach his/her athlete to perform such. If the Unified Partner continuously cuts in front of the athlete or takes shots that were the athlete's shot, the athlete will never learn to move to make that shot. Unified Partners should never play a ball that is the athlete's ball. If the athlete misses the ball hitting to the opposing athlete, the Unified Partner shouldn't try to run after the ball to keep the ball in play. If a Unified Partner hits a ball to an athlete and the athlete misses, the Unified Partner can run after the athlete's missed ball to keep the point in play.

### **Additional considerations for Unified Partner/Coach/Spectator Sportsmanship at Competitive Play**

- J. Spectators are encouraged to cheer the performance of all athletes and unified partners. Coaches/Captains should discourage any off-court chatter or cheering that may influence the performance of the athlete and/or unified partner in a negative manner.
- K. Aggressive play is discouraged and should be reported. It will be the full responsibility of the Program/Tournament Director to observe and handle these charges based on a fair and equitable basis using his/her best judgment with the best interest of both athletes being the top priority.
- L. Unified Partners are encouraged to coach his/her athlete during match play regarding shot selection, court position, court movement, etc. They should always follow the rules of tennis and should redirect and coach athletes to do the same.

***“The success of Special Pops Tennis is to fulfill its mission to enrich the lives of each athlete! Our success depends greatly on the judgment of the Unified Partner.”***

***Jim Hamm, Special Pops***

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