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SAPRISING PEOPLE

# Ready, Set, Roll!



By *Patricia Slawek*

**Ever played wheelchair basketball? If you imagine it as a leisurely pursuit, you couldn't be more wrong. It's a spectacular, high-intensity sport, as SAP colleague Markus Bucher explains.**

It's Saturday, and a basketball game in Heidelberg-Kirchheim is in full swing. The ball is slowly moving on the edge of the basketball hoop but doesn't make its way into the net. A long pass finds a player on the midcourt line. In a flash, before the opposing defense can get back in position, the forwards are attacking their opponent's basket: Right there at the heart of the action is SAP's Markus Bucher.

What we're seeing is a classic fast break – but with one key difference. In this game, all the players are in wheelchairs. If you thought wheelchair basketball was a leisurely, gentle sport, then you've never watched it live. First-time spectators are often alarmed by the speed at which the players cover the court and by the bangs and crashes that ring out as wheelchairs collide.

Today, Markus Bucher, a senior developer in the Intelligent Enterprise Group, can't imagine playing basketball without a wheelchair. But that

wasn't always the case. When he was aged 16, Markus was already a keen player of "normal" basketball, but a meniscus injury he suffered as an adult led him to try the wheelchair version. He doesn't have a disability himself, but he very soon realized that, for him, this Paralympic sport is much more than just a substitute.

*Pictures: Markus and Rolling Chocolate (click to enlarge)*



### From substitute to passion

Markus has vivid memories of his first forays into the sport: "Everything was different. Speed had always been a crucial aspect of my game, but it was suddenly the most frequent reason for me ending up on the floor. I tipped my wheelchair right over more than once. Controlling the speed of the wheelchair and following the game at the same time is incredibly challenging."

The players race back and forth across the court and are not afraid of crashing into each other. That's what fascinates Markus. He needed months of training before he could keep up with the others: "It's hard to describe what a great feeling it was when, after all that work and effort, I finally shot my first basket." Markus has been playing for the Rolling Chocolate in the second wheelchair basketball league in Germany ever since and is now the team's coach and chairperson.

### Who's to say what's "normal" anyway?

What Markus loves most about wheelchair basketball is the mix of people who play it: "Wheelchair basketball is the inclusion sport *par excellence*. Our team members include people with, and without, disabilities, men and women, youngsters and older adults." To make teams as evenly matched as possible, a points system is used to grade players' mobility. Degrees of physical ability are rated on a scale of 1 (severely disabled) to 4.5 (without constraints), and the total number of points for each team must not exceed 14.5.

Thanks to this points system, you get game matchups that wouldn't happen in other sports. One particular highlight for Markus was a game he played against Mareike Miller, who was German wheelchair basketball

#### 5 FACTS ABOUT MARKUS

**Can't live without:** Sport and Fritz-Cola

**Favorite saying:** You are never too old, to learn something

**Favorite book:** Night Watch by Sergej Lukianenko

**On my "bucket list":** actually nothing.

**Favorite travel destination:** campsite at Erlichesee in Rheinhausen/Oberhausen

champion in 2013 and won Olympic gold with the German national team at London 2012. “Mareike was part of an all-women’s team,” he remembers, “we had absolutely no chance against them. They did not beat us with brute strength, but with their excellent technique. It was unbelievable!”

Markus and Mareike are adamant about one thing. Wheelchair basketball is a sport like any other. In an [interview](#) with German radio station *Deutschlandfunk*, Mareike said, “We always struggle when people talk about “normal” basketball because, for us, wheelchair basketball *is* normal. And who’s to say what’s “normal” anyway?”

### **Special treatment? No, thanks!**

As a coach, Markus often sees how the supposed weaknesses of individual team players become a strength. “It’s not about who shoots the most baskets; it is about getting a result together. And it often happens that the best players don’t actually shoot any baskets at all.”

Luka (24) uses a wheelchair and has been playing wheelchair basketball for ten years. He emphasizes another aspect that is as central to his sport as to any other: Wheelchair basketball is competitive. “For me, it makes no difference whether someone can walk or not. That’s not something I focus on. Anyway, we have the points system to make the games fair.” Special treatment is completely out of place when these athletes take to the court.



### **Give it a go!**

Markus invites anyone interested in experiencing the sport to visit the Rolling Chocolate team in Heidelberg. For him, the important thing is to keep a positive attitude during the game; a trait which is also important in the workplace. “On the basketball court, the wheelchair isn’t seen as a burden or a disability; it’s a piece of sports equipment you use to discover your limits and go beyond them.” He sees parallels between his sporting passion and his job, too. “Sticking together and accepting each other as we are is part of our culture at SAP. As a team, we always ask: How are you? Who are you? What is your role? OK, let’s go! It’s a pleasant, down-to-earth approach, and I like it!”

#### USEFUL LINKS

- [www.rolling-chocolate.de](http://www.rolling-chocolate.de) (German)
- [www.rdbl.de](http://www.rdbl.de) (German)