

# Interview



Photo: Jorine Juffermans

## Kamal Tahtahi

Kamal Tahtahi (35) is THE institution of Dutch Electric Wheelchair Hockey. He is the leader and thinker of his home team De Pont Rotterdam (current national champion) for almost 2 decades. Since the first unofficial World Games in 1998, Kamal Tahtahi is playing for the Dutch national side, won one World Championship and three European Championships. In the interview with [EWH2014.com](http://EWH2014.com) he talks about his expectations of the upcoming WC, the recipe for success of the Dutch EWH and explains his thoughts about the new classification system.

[EWH2014.com](http://EWH2014.com): Mr. Tahtahi, in less than 70 days the 3rd IWAS Electric Wheelchair Hockey Championships in Munich, Germany, begins. The Germans are well-known for their organizing talent. What is your expectation concerning the organization of the tournament and do you have any special requests as an athlete to the organizing committee?

*Kamal Tahtahi: I expect a very big happening and a very professional organized event. It would be nice to be in an ambiance that makes you feel like a big shot athlete. The way ice-hockey games are presented is nice. But I totally have confidence in the organizing committee. I expect to be smashed away!!!*

[EWH2014.com](http://EWH2014.com): Certainly the Dutch National Team is still preparing for the WC 2014. After the ParaGames in Breda last year, how does your schedule look like until today?

*Kamal Tahtahi: We have been training once a month. About 3 months before the WC the frequency is on full mode, almost every week is a training camp.*

EWH2014.com: The Netherlands are dominating Electric Wheelchair Hockey for years and also have a lot of highly talented players, which never played for the National Team. Anything but winning the title might be a huge disappointment in your country. What is the biggest threat in your opinion that could prevent the Netherlands from winning the championship?

*Kamal Tahtahi: It's true we are a big force in EWH, but for me the original giant gap has been closed by a lot of teams. The last WC in Italy in 2010 this was shown by Germany beating us deservedly in the final. The biggest threat might be the new players in our squad being impressed by the fact they are playing for the national side on such a big stage. On the other hand some of these 'new' players will show the world how talented they are and surprise everyone.*

EWH2014.com: In every game the Dutch team is the undisputed favorite. Actually you can not really win a game, because everybody expects you to win no matter what happens. What do you think about this statement?

*Kamal Tahtahi: Everyone does expect us to win every game, but I never underestimate any opponent. If we are playing our top game we are hard to beat. But as I already said before, for me the gap has been closed by a lot of teams.*

EWH2014.com: The Netherlands are a small country, but has so many good players. What are the causes and where do you see advantages in relation to the other nations?

*Kamal Tahtahi: EWH is being played in our country for about 35 years. The sport is promoted a lot by organizing many activities for the young kids. They get stimulated and excited for the game. At a young age they already are told how important it is to choose a sport. And for the kids that move around daily in an electric wheelchair there really is only one choice.*

*The advantage is the mix of talent and the players with a lot of experience. The younger players are getting better by training with the arrived players. We also know what our potential is and there is a lot of believe/determination.*

EWH2014.com: The IWAS World Championships 2014 will take place in Germany. Four years ago you lost the World Championships final against the upcoming host in a thrilling match 6:7 by Golden Goal. What are your feelings about this game and is the chance to win the WC in Germany a boost for your motivation?

*Kamal Tahtahi: Winning the world title is on top of my 'Bucket List'. The hunger for the title is there, but with caution and respect for all the opponents also. Germany was the righteous winner 4 years ago in the World Championships final. It would be a plus to win the title in the lion's den.*

EWH2014.com: Despite your ambition on the field you always stay calm. You are also regarded as a gentleman player and fair sportsman. How important is this reputation to you?

*Kamal Tahtahi: I'm very proud for being regarded as a gentleman player and fair sportsman. Respect and appreciation for other players is always there. And getting respect from other players who understand the game is very welcomed. Staying calm on the field in any circumstances is very important for me to play my game. To be precise: it has always been part of my game.*

EWH2014.com: You won everything you can win in EWH. What drives you to go on and on and have you ever thought about retiring?

*Kamal Tahtahi: The love of the game!!! When I'm playing I forget everything around me. The day of retirement will come eventually but at the moment I'm not planning to leave 'my game'.*

EWH2014.com: Last question. WC 2014 will be played with a classification system for the first time. Do you think the Dutch team will become weaker of it and what implications does this system have to EWH?

*Kamal Tahtahi: The Dutch team/game won't become weaker but different. The game in general will be totally different and in my opinion not for the better. I'm not against a classification system but not with the current measure tools. You should be classified by looking at your shortcomings because of your disability and not for your skills level.*

*EWH will change quite a bit. Players will drive more with the ball instead of passing the ball around. For the audience it will be less attractive to watch because of this. A lot of teams will be forced to play with only 2 handheld sticks. I also do not understand why most countries have voted for this classification system. All the teams have enough handheld stick players to put on the field, but it's their own choice to play with two blockers in the field. In my opinion it's not fair to force other teams to copy their game. I wish the international committee will have a hard look at the current system and find a fair formula.*



Kamal Tahtahi fights for the ball against Stefan Utz (left) at WC final 2010 in Italy (Photo: Flickr/FIWH)