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October 2004

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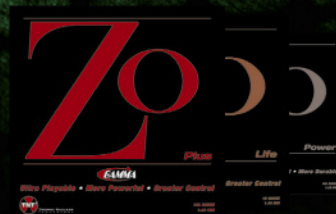
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What Does Tennis Need?

Has anyone noticed that tennis is fun to watch...again? Well, fun for me at least, because I like rallies and lots of running. And these are back!

And this, in spite of all the talk about the fate of tennis being dictated by gargantuan physical specimens pounding the ball at each other with high-speed rocket launchers that only slow-mo instant replay can capture! But in the end, we didn't even need to change the game—it changed itself. How? Why?

In an ace-or-be-aced world, the acer is the winner, and the acee is the loser who has to figure out some other way to compete. Maybe he learns a better return, or a different strategy, or develops a better serve himself. Then someone turns volleying into a science, and then topspin, and then drop shots, and then retrieving, and then tactics. And everyone becomes equal at a new level, and the evolution keeps on churning. Tennis has come full circle back to the baseline. But it is different than the baseline game of old. Now it is composed of impossible retrievals of impossibility accelerated, spinned, and angled shots. This is not your grandmother's baseline game.

One impossibility leads to another. But every now and then, it seems that the whole species of tennis-playing multicellular organisms reaches parity. So even though they are performing seemingly impossible feats of physical prowess, it becomes so booring. But then a mutant player emerges from somewhere deep within the evolutionary primal goo. Players will always figure out another strategy or technique to win. Sometimes that will make the points shorter, sometimes longer. Sometimes it will cause excitement, sometimes somnolence. Sometimes the cycle takes a couple of years, or even a generation. As soon as some 6 year old kid starts winning with a three-handed backhand, the next generation will all be three-handers.

At its essence, tennis is a strange animal. For beginners, it is frustratingly difficult to learn and have fun because rallies can be as rare as flying elephants. But for those players who prevail, the goal then becomes hitting away from the other player to prevent rallies. So when you want rallies, you can't have them, and when you can have them, you don't want them. And if both players don't want them badly enough, the rallies become interminable, because their skills become supremely matched, dictated by the laws of competition which state that for every offense there is a defense and vice versa. It's weird, but it all works itself out.

So, what does tennis as a game need? More of the same, which is never the same!



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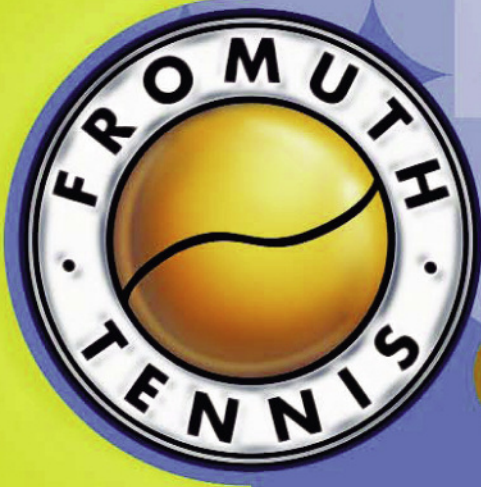
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INDUSTRY NEWS

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Cook Leaves Völkl Tennis; Pearson Named

Industry veteran Sam Cook has been promoted within the Völkl organization to vice president of sales for Völkl Sport America's and Tecnica USA's Winter Divisions. He leaves Völkl Tennis, which he's managed since 1993.

Taking over at Völkl Tennis is Chris Pearson, who is the new vice president and Tennis Division manager of Völkl Sport America. Pearson, an avid tennis player, graduated from Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business in 2003. Pearson competed in three Division III National Team Championships at Swarthmore College from 1991 to 1995.

Cook's new duties include responsibility for sales of Völkl Ski and Snowboard and Tecnica Ski Boots. "Cook's fresh and enthusiastic approach, as well as his analytical and organizational skills, are a welcome addition to the management team in the Winter Divisions," says Mike Noonan, the recently named president of K2 Inc., which recently acquired Völkl Sport America. The change was part of other senior management shifts at Völkl and Tecnica.

Also, Völkl recently promoted Megan Costello to national marketing manager, from marketing coordinator. Costello, who has been with the company for three years, is responsible for all Völkl Tennis marketing activities in the U.S.

Pearson, Costello and National Product and Promotions Manager Sarah Maynard can be contacted at 800-264-4579.

Wilson Ups Commitment to College Tennis, Named Title Sponsor of ITA Regional Championships

Wilson Racquet Sports is expanding its partnership with the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) and will serve as title sponsor of the 2004 ITA Regional Championships this fall. Wilson has also renewed its continuing role as the official tennis ball, racquet and accessory company for the ITA.

In a relationship that has spanned more than three decades, Wilson's new agreement marks the greatest commitment to college tennis in the industry, the company said in a statement. Wilson's current sponsorship includes title sponsor of the 2004 Wilson/ITA Regional Championships, the official ball, racquet and accessory company of the ITA, and ongoing presenter of the Wilson/ITA Coach of the Year Award—which Wilson has supported since 1973.

"The opportunity to expand our partnership and be directly involved in one of the most visible collegiate tennis events, the Wilson/ITA Regional Championships, demonstrates Wilson's commitment to college

tennis, competition and developing athletes," says Jon Muir, director of U.S. marketing and promotions for Wilson.

The Wilson/ITA Regional Championships will host more than 5,000 men and women collegiate tennis players to compete in 80 regional events played on campus sites at the NCAA Division I, II and III, and NAIA levels during the months of September and October. The ITA promotes both the athletic and academic achievements of the collegiate tennis community by administering national and regional championship events and a comprehensive awards program for players and coaches.

"We are delighted to announce Wilson's sponsorship of our regional championships," says David A. Benjamin, executive director of the ITA. "We are very proud of our association with Wilson and are grateful for their generous support of and ongoing commitment to collegiate tennis."

Wilson is also the official tennis ball supplier of the NCAA.



Prince Launches Racquet Selection Wizard

Prince Tennis has launched its Racquet Selection Wizard on its website, www.PrinceTennis.com. The online tool offers players a tailored racquet recommendation guide.

Visitors to the website click on the Racquet Selection Wizard button then answer a series of questions regarding their individual style of play, such as preferred swing style, racquet power level and racquet head size. The online program then comes up with a recommended list of racquets, along with performance features and full specifications.

"We created the Racquet Wizard to provide players with an easy, more exact tool to decide which racquet best suits their game," says Bill Foy, president of Prince Sports USA. "The Wiz-

ard will help tennis players better understand the differences in their playing styles so that they choose the correct racquet. We hope this tool will help players of all abilities reach their playing goals."

The Racquet Selection Wizard correlates specific swing types with Prince performance racquets. PrinceTennis.com visitors who use the tool are first asked to click on their preferred swing style from three options (shorter/slower strokes, moderate/fuller strokes, or longer/faster strokes); then asked to click on their preferred racquet power level (maximum power, blend of power/control, or maximum control); and finally, users choose their ideal racquet head size (midsize/midplus or oversize).

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Babolat Introduces Custom+Hybrid Strings to Give Players a Choice

Babolat recently launched its new Custom + Hybrid stings—in 20-foot lengths—designed to allow players to choose which strings will produce the desired benefits on both the mains and the crosses.

The company says that with Custom + Hybrid strings, players can select the appropriate string for crosses and mains in order to create the combination that best suits their games. For instance, club players who like the feel and comfort of multifilaments, but want more power and a better tension maintenance, can find the answer with VS+ (natural gut) on mains and Xcel Premium+ on crosses. Alternately, big string-breakers who play with heavy topspin would do well with a combination of Pro Hurricane+ and Xcel Premium+ to improve comfort, tension maintenance and durability.

"The Custom + Hybrid range of strings offers a whole new concept of customizing the strings to any player's specific needs," says Eric Babolat, the company's president and CEO. "Players recognize the important advantages that the strings can bring to their game since they are, after all, the only part of the racquet that comes into contact with the ball." The Custom + Hybrid strings consist of Pro Hurricane+ (blue),



VS+ (beige) and Xcel Premium+ (orange). For more information, contact 1-877-316-9435 or visit www.babolat.com.

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Wilson Racquet Sports Expands Global Marketing Staff

Wilson Racquet Sports has expanded its global marketing team, under the direction of Brian Dillman, the vice president of global marketing. New to the team is Scott Rea, Wilson's international tennis ball manager.

Rea, previously the sales and marketing director for Yonex USA and a former teaching pro with more than 10 years of industry sales and marketing experience, will focus on managing and expanding Wilson's tennis ball market share globally from product testing to marketing. He will report to Antoine Ballon, the global marketing director for tennis racquets and tennis balls.

"The addition of this new talent to our team will enable us to focus on the opportunities we see in the global racquet sports market," says Dillman.

PTR Honors State Members of Year

The PTR honored its State Members of the Year during its semiannual meeting in New York on Aug. 28. The recipients are:

Mark Frampton, Ariz.; Ken DeHart, Calif.; Greg Moran, Conn.; Luis Maria Brest, Fla.; Pete Collins, Ga.; Rick Ninete, Hawaii Pacific; Shelley George, Iowa; Doug Lintala, Ill.; Shelly Whitney, Ind.; Ajay Pant, Kan.; Gary Pina, Mass.; Alicia Von Lossberg, Md.; Wayne St. Peter, Maine; Fred Johnson, Mo.; Bill Webster, Mont.; Henry Hostetler, N.C.; Oliver Summers, N.D.; Larry Dillon, N.J.; Craig Witcher, Nev.; Todd Miller, N.Y.; Phil Norton, Ohio; Bill Wissinger, Pa.; Joey Eskridge, S.C.; Curtis Holland, Tenn.; Larry Haugness, Texas; John Raker, Va.; Dan Bonfigli, Vt.; Chris Samuel, Wash.



Speakers to Address Retailer and Facility Operator Concerns

Speakers and seminars at the TIA TennisEXPO in Orlando, Fla., Jan. 17 to 19 will address topics ranging from "Keeping Frequent Players Playing Frequently" to "Selling and Merchandising Soft-Goods," to "Making Money in Retailing," and much more. The Tennis Industry Association's lineup of top talent to help retailers and facility operators with their businesses includes:

- ▶ Jack Groppe of LGE, introducing a new form of tennis for the future, which will focus on fitness;
- ▶ Kerry Roberts of the Bottom Line Seminar Series, speaking on turning vision into profitable reality;
- ▶ Matt Power of Sports Executive Weekly on "Competing in the Internet Era";
- ▶ Kurt Kamperman, USTA chief executive of Community Tennis, who will lead panels and seminars on marketing Tennis Welcome Centers and "Rebuilding Our Parks";
- ▶ Jill Fonte, an industry consultant and a former owner of the USRSA, who will lead a panel and seminar on keeping players playing;
- ▶ Beth Ann Riecke of the Sycamore Hills Golf Club, who will give two seminars on selling and merchandising apparel;
- ▶ Scott Taylor of Taylor Research, who will review the 2004 participation study and present ways to grow the game;
- ▶ Charlie Ruddy of TennisConnect.org, who will introduce a new TIA software product for facility operators.

Other speakers at the TIA Forum on Jan. 17 will be Kamperman, Jim Baugh of the TIA, Victor Taylor of the ATP, Sophie Goldschmidt of the WTA and Jeff Harrison of WTT.

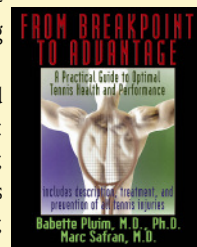
For more information about the TIA TennisEXPO, which will be held concurrent with The Super Show, visit TIAEXPO.com.

New Book for Top Tennis Performance

From *Breakpoint to Advantage: A Practical Guide to Optimal Tennis Health and Performance* is a new book by Babette Plum and Marc Safran that was written to help players reach optimal, injury-free performance, including preventing overuse injuries. Plum, a sports physician and medical director of the Royal Netherlands Lawn Tennis Association, is the editor of the newsletter *Medicine and Science in Tennis* and a contributor to the *IOC Handbook of Sports Medicine and Science: Tennis*. Safran is an orthopedic surgeon in San Francisco specializing in sports medicine and biomechanics.

Topics in the book, which is published by Racquet Tech Publishing, include: injury prevention and rehabilitation; descriptions, symptoms, and treatments for all tennis injuries and ailments; stroke mechanics and injury; training programs for flexibility, balance, stabilization, and strength; proper nutrition for tennis players; equipment selection for health and performance; and more.

To order the book, which retails for \$29.95, contact the USRSA at 760-536-1177, email usras@racquettech.com, or visit www.racquettech.com/store/books_toc.html.



Specialty Store Racquet Performance

January-June 2003 vs. 2004

	Units	Dollars	Ave. Rac. Price
2003	262,793	\$35,864	\$136
2004	291,633	\$38,841	\$133
% Change	11 %	8 %	-2 %

Source: TIA/Sports Marketing Surveys USA

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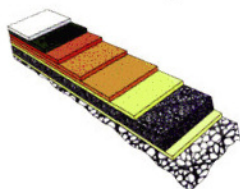


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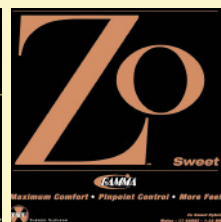
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Gamma Debuts 2 New Strings

Gamma is introducing two new strings for Fall, the Gamma Revelation and the Gamma Zo Sweet. The new Revelation is a multifilament available in 16 and 17 gauge. Gamma says the Live Wire Multifilament Technology, with a new pearl coating, will provide a solid, crisp feel and added string life. The Gamma Zo Sweet is a hybrid featuring 17-gauge Zo monofilament mains combined with TNT2 17 crosses. The manufacturer says the hybrid combination offers more forgiving feel and more control, and will

be easier on a player's arm. For more information, contact 412-323-0335 or www.gammasports.com.



Sharapova Switches To New Prince Shark Frame

Wimbledon singles champion Maria Sharapova has switched to the new Prince Turbo Shark racquet, a frame that Prince says she helped to create.

"Maria has used Prince racquets for over a decade and was an instrumental member of the Shark development team," says Bill Foy, president of Prince Sports USA. "She has such high confidence in switching to the Shark right after her dominating performance at Wimbledon because of her involvement in the overall creation of this racquet. The Shark is designed for players who want a bit more pop in their game without sacrificing control, and Maria herself has referred to it as solid, quiet, powerful and deadly."

"I think tennis players of all abilities are going to benefit from the added performance of the Shark," says the 17-year-old Sharapova. "I have worked closely with Prince's development team to craft the racquet, and I'm thrilled with the results. I'm looking forward to putting the Shark's controlled power into action."

For more information and images of the Shark racquet and Maria Sharapova, visit www.Princeshark.com.



DecoSystems Court Surfaces in 7 US Open Series Events

Seven of the 10 tournaments leading up to the US Open were played at facilities that offer DecoSystems surfaces, DecoTurf and DecoColor, and Pro-DecoTurf has been selected for use at the USTA National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows, N.Y., the site of the US Open since 1978.

The seven venues with DecoSystems courts are RCA Championships, Indianapolis; Tennis Masters Series, Toronto; Rogers Cup, Montreal; Western & Southern Financial Group Masters, Cincinnati; Legg Mason Tennis Classic, Washington, D.C.; Pilot Pen Tennis, New Haven, Conn.; and TD Waterhouse Cup, Long Island, N.Y.

"We're very excited about the new tournament series and the fact that most of the tournaments will be played on our products," says John Graham, managing director of DecoSystems. "It's been a great year for the DecoSystems surfaces. Not only will DecoTurf be a premier surface for this series, but it has also been selected for use at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens."

For more information, visit www.decoturf.com or call 800-DECO 1ST.

USPTA Lessons for Life, Raising Money for Charity, Set for October

USPTA's Lessons for Life will take place throughout the month of October to raise money for various local and national charities, when association members use tennis as a vehicle to help others.

In 2003, USPTA members raised more than \$5 million for charities, including the American Cancer Society, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Tim & Tom Gullikson Foundation, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and many other charities.

Lessons for Life is officially celebrated in October, and Lessons for Life Day is set for Oct. 23. However, USPTA members run fundraisers year-round, in a variety of forms, including tournaments, auctions, clinics and pro-ams.

"By organizing fun on-court and off-court events, USPTA members help their own communities pool their resources to assist the local charities that are most important to them and national organizations that we all admire," says USPTA President David T. Porter.

Lessons for Life became the USPTA's national charitable program in 1999. Since 2002, the amount of money raised for charity has increased considerably, totaling about \$7.5 million in the past two years.




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USTC&TBA to Change Name

The U.S. Tennis Court & Track Builders Association will change its name officially at its December Technical Meeting in New Orleans. The new name will be the American Sports Builders Association.

The board of directors of the USTC&TBA (which soon will adopt the much easier to handle acronym "ASBA") approved the name change at its summer meeting in July. The new name and logo will be available for members' use in December.

The Technical Meeting will be Dec. 3 to 7 at the Astor Crowne Plaza in New Orleans.

Sacramento Capitals Sweep World Team Tennis Post-Season Honors

After leading the Sacramento Capitals to the Western Conference Championship with a league best 13-1 record and a spot in the 2004 World Team Tennis Semifinal Playoffs, first-year player Dmitry Tursunov was named the WTT Pro League Male MVP and the Male Rookie of the Year. He had a 46-31 singles record and 65-40 doubles record.

The Female MVP and Rookie awards also went to a member of the Sacramento pro team, Nicole Vaidisova. She finished the season with a 66-36 record and a No. 1 ranking in women's singles, and had a 59-41 record in doubles.

Also, Sacramento Coach Wayne Bryan, in his third year with WTT, won Coach of the Year honors.

Why Customers Leave

- 1% die
- 3% move
- 5% buy from friends
- 9% prefer the competition
- 14% judge all like businesses due to one bad encounter
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(From a sign at a deli in Fairfield, Conn., supplied by Boar's Head brand deli products.)



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SHORT SETS

> The Sixth Annual USA Team Tennis National Campus Championships will be played March 10 to 12, 2005, at the George E. Barnes Tennis Center in San Diego. It will be the first time the event will be held on the West Coast. The event features coed, nonvarsity club and intramural teams from colleges and universities across the country. For the 2004 event, a record 40 teams from 33 schools participated at the Florida Tennis Center in Daytona Beach.

> The International Tennis Hall of Fame presented two exhibits at the US Open Gallery at this year's US Open. "Courting Favor: Tennis Posters from the Golden Age" and "A Passion for Tennis: Selections from the Albert and Madeleine Ritzberg Tennis Collection" were on view for the two weeks.

> Prince Tennis has re-signed tennis star and French Open finalist Guillermo Coria to an exclusive endorsement deal. Under the agreement, the 22-year-old Argentine will promote and play with Prince's Tour NXGraphite racquet. Specific terms of the deal were not released.



> Renowned tennis coach Robert Lansdorp has signed a deal with Fischer and its U.S. partner, Gamma Sports, to be the official scout for the Fischer Future Team, comprised of top-ranked national players from various countries. Lansdorp also will be an international spokesperson for both brands.

> Prince Sports has partnered with Universal Pictures to promote the new film "Wimbledon," which stars Kirsten Dunst. Prince is the "official racquet of 'Wimbledon,' the movie."

WTA Tour Launches "Real Life" TV Series

The WTA Tour launched a 12-episode TV series in August designed to bring "the off-court passions and lifestyles of women's professional tennis stars closer than ever to fans," the tour announced in a statement. The magazine-style show, sponsored by Dubai Duty Free, will be titled "Dubai Duty Free Presents Real Life on the WTA Tour."

The show, produced by the Tour and KC Productions, will air on The Tennis Channel. The series will also air on Eurosport. Each 30-minute show will feature human-interest stories and behind-the-scenes footage that showcase the entertainment and atmosphere of the world of women's pro tennis.

The initial four episodes, which started airing in August, include footage from Tour events held earlier this year and include features on Serena Williams, Justine Henin-Hardenne, and Maria Sharapova. The TV series is a component of the WTA Tour's commercial partnership with Dubai Duty Free, one of the world's leading airport retailers.



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Ashaway Offers New 17-Gauge Monofilament



Ashaway says its new MonoGut 17 multi-polymer synthetic gut tennis string now offers gut-like playability in a durable monofilament construction. The string's coating lessens string movement and helps to provide bite on the ball, says the manufacturer.

A 17-gauge string, MonoGut 17 is recommended for hard-hitters or players who find hybrids too stiff. It was designed for power players who are looking for a string that is strong enough to stand up to their style of play while providing good feel and control. Ashaway says its new line of strings represents the first synthetic gut on the market to combine resiliency and durability in a single string.

Available in 360-foot (110 M) and 660-foot (200 M) reels, as well as 40-foot (12 M) sets, MonoGut 17 comes in metallic silver. The recommended stringing tension for MonoGut is 10 percent to 15 percent less tension than standard synthetic gut.

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Sales of U.S. Recreational Products Push \$70 Billion

Steady as she goes. That's one way to summarize the U.S. sports products industry, which is nearly \$70 billion at wholesale in size. According to SGMA International's Recreation Market Report, manufacturers' sales of sporting goods equipment, sports apparel, athletic footwear, and recreational transport items in the U.S. totaled \$68.6 billion in 2003—a 0.5 percent increase over 2002.

For sports equipment, sales remained steady—\$17.5 billion in 2003 vs. \$17.4 billion in 2002. The six largest categories of sports equipment are: exercise equipment machines (\$3.80 billion); golf (\$2.42 billion); firearms/hunting (\$1.90 billion); camping (\$1.72 billion); team/institutional (\$1.56 billion); and fishing (\$1.03 billion).

In the exercise equipment category, treadmill sales account for 26.4 percent of that category. Also, sales of elliptical machines increased by 16.7 percent, from \$120 million in 2002 to \$140 million in 2003. After treadmills, the next two largest fitness categories are home gyms (\$305 million) and exercise cycles (\$200 million). Consumer spending for exercise equipment accounts for 81.3 percent of the entire exercise equipment category.

Sports apparel sales fell 2.5 percent in 2003. Despite the slight drop, it is still the largest segment of the sports and recreation industry with sales of \$22.8 billion. Activewear tops had the highest sales—\$12.7 billion in 2003. Other sports apparel items experiencing sales growth were sweatpants, shorts, underwear (male), sports bras, and outerwear.

Athletic footwear sales rose 4.2 percent in 2003. Total sales were \$9.73 billion, compared with \$9.34 billion in 2002. The growth categories in athletic footwear were low performance (up 19.6 percent); tennis (up 16.9 percent); aerobic (up 11.1 percent); basketball (up 6.2 percent); and running (up 2 percent).

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Tired of spending a small fortune installing and maintaining conventional sheet-metal ductwork in your facility? Check out fabric ductwork, which ICA is incorporating into some of its sports facility projects.

ICA says its fabric duct is both cost-effective and operationally efficient. The company says using fabric ducts can save from \$5 to \$8 per linear foot in materials, labor and finishes when compared to sheet metal, in addition to reduced maintenance labor and costs. Other benefits of fabric ducts, says ICA, include:

- ▶ Uniform air distribution—through a continuous series of small openings, rather than the larger diffusers required with conventional ductwork, which must be carefully spaced and separately installed.
- ▶ Breathable fabric—eliminating the risk of condensation and rust.
- ▶ Standard and custom colors, and silk-screening—so there's no painting, and logos or other graphics can be factory silk-screened onto the fabric.
- ▶ Hygienic—machine-washable ducts are easier to clean and maintain.
- ▶ Quiet air delivery—with the non-resonating fabric, creating a quieter playing environment.

ICA says fabric ductwork is easy to assemble and install, and much lighter in weight, further simplifying installation and reducing maintenance and shipping costs. For example, a 60-inch diameter conventional duct can weigh 40 pounds per foot, says ICA, while the equivalent fabric duct weighs less than 5 pounds per foot.

ICA estimates that cost savings (materials, labor, finish) for a 60-foot-long building using fabric ductwork would be \$3,000 to \$4,000, and that for a 360-foot-long building, the savings would be \$18,000 to \$27,800.

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For Continuity, Establish Key Teaching Points for Your Pros

BY JOE DINOFFER

Give me a choice and I stay at Marriott Courtyards. At every location, I feel I am in a familiar place. I know that they'll all have complimentary hot beverages in the lobby. The room décor is similar; the staff is always friendly and helpful. Basically, it is predictable. And predictability is important.

Now let's look at tennis. You join a club. The club has a number of teaching pros. Eventually, you'll speak with all of them about tennis, take lessons from several of them, and get to hear their opinions on your game in drills and practice sessions. The only problem is that, at the vast majority of facilities across the U.S., your experience will be unpredictable, which is the opposite of what makes people feel comfortable.

A QUESTION OF CONTINUITY

The issue is that, as far as instructional programs, most are not continuity-based. Starting in the mid-1970s, Peter Burwash successfully started an entire company on this premise. For 30 years PBI has intensely trained new staff for 30 days before they are allowed to teach a paying lesson. And these are not all new teachers; many are seasoned veterans. The reason? They have a continuity-based teaching program. In other words, just like Marriott, Burwash reasoned that customers want predictability. There may be many ways to teach a forehand, but pick some basics to agree upon and get your whole staff to reinforce those fundamentals.

In fact, Burwash was not alone. Dennis Van der Meer also successfully introduced his "standard method" concept to thousands through the PTR. And, to a large extent, Tennis Corporation of America works hard to train its staff at dozens of clubs as well.

Still, as an industry, continu-

ity-based programs are few and far between. How often have you come up against scenarios similar to these?

▶ A parent sends his daughter to a summer tennis camp at his club. One of the pros emphasizes a particular grip on the serve, right from the start. The girl works on it all summer, then, in the fall, a different instructor at the club changes things completely. To the parent, it appears that time and money have been wasted and, worst of all, the girl is frustrated and thinks she has to learn something over.

▶ A woman plays recreational league tennis and her team has been taking drill sessions with one teaching pro for months. He tells her that, in doubles, the receiver's partner must call the serve and must intently watch the service line for their partner. Then, that pro goes away for the summer. The replacement teacher says something totally different: "Don't watch the service line. Watch the server's partner at the net to be ready in case she is going to poach or hit the ball right at

you." Imagine how the woman feels. For months, she was drilled to focus on one thing and then, all of a sudden, she wonders if she was taught the wrong thing by the first pro and wasted a lot of time and money.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

The good news is that staff training, although it requires a significant amount of effort, is not that complex if you don't get overwhelmed thinking about it. Keep in mind that you are not trying to write a computer-programming manual. You are just trying to establish key points of continuity or agreement on which all staff will base their teaching. It is not about all teaching the same way with the same drills and progressions. It is just about agreeing on certain issues. Here are some steps to get you started:

1. You must become enthusiastic that you are establishing a foundation that will pay big dividends over time.
2. Sit with your existing senior staff and get everyone on the same page that this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.
3. Set up a committee of two or three to break down the game into each stroke and strategy and list all the possible points of contention (i.e., loop or straight-back forehand back-swing recommended for beginners?). The committee makes written recommendations that are then distributed to all concerned for evaluation and comment. Then, a final meeting is set up to discuss any points of contention and to achieve a consensus.



4. Next, put it all clearly in writing, with a date at the top. This guide for staff teaching and training should be fluid and updated at least every quarter. Have one person in charge of the task, and review any possible updates in staff meetings.
5. Find resources (books, videos, articles, etc.) that you all will agree are in line with your guidelines and share them at regular staff meetings.
6. At least once or twice a year have guest speakers at your staff meetings to augment their training. Just make sure in advance that whomever you invite is on the same page as your staff on critical issues.

MAINTAINING THE STANDARDS

If you want to enjoy the benefits of a continuity-based program, you have to invest the time to maintain it. When new teachers are added to your staff, whether in year-round or summer camp positions, training is essential.

Generally speaking, I would recom-

mend an initial one-week training program that includes study and review, along with many hours observing private and group instruction. Then have the new staff member give free lessons and clinics with critique by existing senior professionals. For some of our readers, this will sound reasonable. Others may scoff at the amount of time required to accomplish this level of training. If you are on the fence, trust me. Invest now and benefit later.

Every successful business chain, whether it be Marriott Hotel Corporation or a large high-end department store, trains all staff in a similarly meticulous manner. We're reminded of it on name badges all the time. "John Doe—manager-in-training." School teachers have student teaching requirements to get their degrees. Medical students have months of intense training as "residents" in order to become doctors. If we want to be part of professional programs that excel, we don't have a choice. What are the specific benefits to your tennis program? Here is a handful:

1. Higher retention of students due to more satisfied customers.
2. Fewer managerial worries when a teaching pro has to take off in the middle of a series of lessons due to illness or vacation.
3. Greater improvement among students, leading to increased word-of-mouth advertising.
4. Improved team spirit, retention, and dedication among staff members, since they are part of a program that is committed to excellence.
5. Increased revenues on a facility-wide level since a well-promoted and well-executed continuity-based program leads to increased participation levels and higher player and member retention. ▀



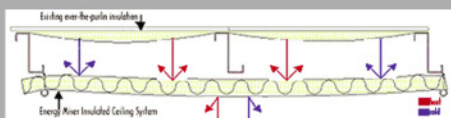
Joe Dinoff is Master Professional for both the PTR and USPTA. He speaks frequently at national and international tennis teacher workshops as a member of both the Head/Penn and Reebok

National Speaker's Bureaus. He is president of Oncourt Offcourt Inc. and has written 16 books and produced more than 30 instructional videos.



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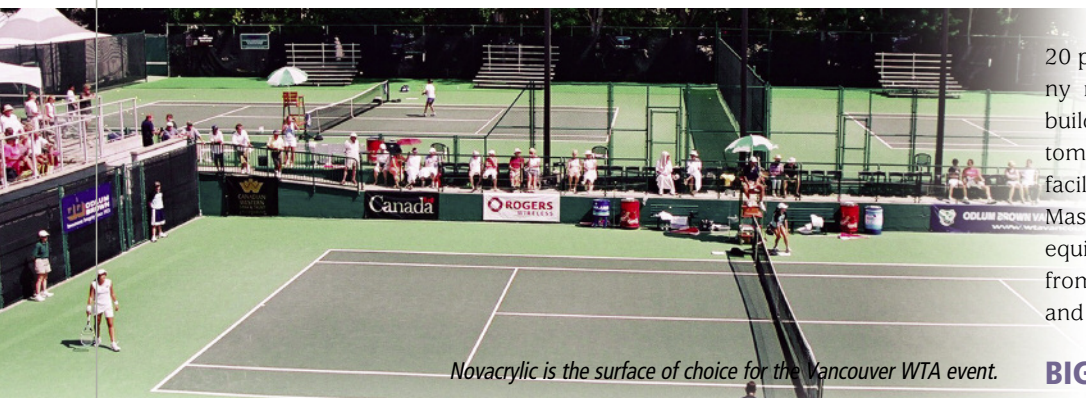
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Nova Sports Makes Its Customers Part of the Family

BY CYNTHIA CANTRELL



Novacrylic is the surface of choice for the Vancouver WTA event.

When Benjamin Righter founded Nova Sports USA with his wife, Ruth, 20 years ago, he set out to produce the highest quality acrylic sport surface in the industry. His legacy, however, is a tight-knit family business operated by his three sons in a manner that has continued to inspire customer loyalty.

A few months after their father's death in August 2003, 47-year-old Bill Righter said he and his twin brother, Rob, reluctantly traveled to a trade meeting in La Jolla, Calif. hosted by the U.S. Tennis Court & Track Builders Association (USTC&TBA). Bill is a board member of the USTC&TBA, as was his father before him.

"So many people came up to us and told stories about our dad. At the time, it was a really tough meeting for Rob and I to get through," recalls Bill, chief financial officer and sales manager at Nova Sports USA. "It wasn't until we were flying home that we were able to sit back and realize how lucky we've been to work for a family business. From that moment, we had no doubt we'd continue to succeed."

Nova Sports USA is one of the leading manufacturers of acrylic recreational coatings in the world. Its Novacrylic sport surfacing systems are 100 percent acrylic, non-hazardous materials used for tennis, basketball, inline hockey, shuffleboard and track surfaces,

jogging trails, playgrounds and walkways. They are designed for indoor and outdoor use, over asphalt or concrete, with pigments that produce rich, vivid colors.

According to Rob Righter, who now serves as president of Nova Sports USA, 90 percent of the company's revenue is generated by the tennis sector. In fact, the Novacrylic tennis surface system has been approved by the ITF for tournament play, classified as category 2, medium play.

With the exception of last year's flat sales (which Rob attributes to the weather and a sluggish economy), Nova Sports USA's annual sales—including projections for 2004—have continually increased between 15 and

20 percent. In March 2001, the company moved from a 12,000-square-foot building in Holliston, Mass., into a customized, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility with twice the space in Milford, Mass., in order to accommodate new equipment to meet growing demand from distributors across the country and overseas.

BIG ON QUALITY CONTROL

Rob admits Novacrylic is "high end," but says owners of private schools, clubs and even residences consider it a worthwhile investment. In addition to word of mouth, customers find Nova Sports USA through trade shows and the company's website, www.novasports.com, which Rob designed in his previous position as marketing director. As a result of the company's online presence, he says, he still gets several calls daily from homeowners looking for a way to fix cracks that local contractors consider too trivial to repair.

"We're tight on quality control," says Rob, noting that one key component in surface longevity is adding texture with high-speed motors during the manufacturing process at the factory.



Brothers Rob, Bill, and Jeff (from left) in the Nova Sports USA factory.

rather than mixing it at the job site. While other surfaces may become slick and fade in color within a few years, Rob says the premium products used in developing Novacrylic will hold up much longer.

Novacrylic comes in 12 colors, ranging from the red and green hues traditionally used on tennis courts to multiple shades of blue and violet. Job costs vary according to region and court conditions, Rob says, but about 90 gallons of Novacrylic are typically required to surface a tennis court with the standard two coats of color.

While Nova Sports USA casts a long shadow in the industry, it remains efficiently run with a 10-person staff that swells to 25 during the busy summer season. Although each employee has a distinct role, Rob says customers appreciate that "someone is always available who can make a decision."

"I have an open cubicle, not an office, and if I hear the phone ringing, I pick it up," he adds. "I hate getting trapped in other companies' voice-mail systems, so we don't have voice-mail. Our customers pay a premium for our products, and along with that comes premium customer service."

RESPONDING TO NEEDS

That responsiveness dates back to the company's earliest days when the third Righter brother, Jeff, became determined to develop a better court surface for a contractor in Louisiana who wanted to improve upon the field-mix. In his role as the company's production manager (which evolved into general manager), Jeff invented the Nova Combination Surface, which provided the same surface thickness with two coats as opposed to the traditional, more costly two coats of filler and one coat of finish. Also in 1984, Jeff created a two-step, elastomeric crack-repair system known as Novacaulk.

Although he is devoting more time to his new business, US Plastic Palettes

and Handling in Hopkinton, Mass., 44-year-old Jeff says he has appreciated being part of the family business, which extends to customers and even competitors.

"Anyone who knew Ben Righter knew that once you did business with him, you were a member of his extended family. The relationships he built were stronger than in any industry I'd ever seen before," says Jeff, noting that Ben's annual fishing trips with employees, customers and competitors alike were legendary.

"He taught me to listen to customers, but also to work alongside competitors. He wouldn't hesitate to pick up the phone and ask a competitor, 'What do you think of

this?' He truly believed that people should work together for the common good."

Although Nova Sports USA is continuing to grow, Rob says it can be difficult to stay competitive during these inflationary times. "We have absorbed much of the increases [of the escalating costs of raw materials] and are running as efficiently as possible," he says. "We will not compromise the quality of our products by reformulating with lower-quality ingredients."

The challenge of running their father's business in his absence can't be ignored either, although the sons still benefit from the expertise of their 66-year-old mother, Ruth, who continues to serve as a director and financial advisor from her home on Cape Cod. They are also looking to the future, when their own children may provide a new generation of leadership for Nova Sports USA.

"It's been a very tough year, but our dad's spirit is still around," Jeff says. "There's not a day we don't feel like he's looking over our shoulders, making sure we're doing things the right way." ▀

For more information about Nova Sports USA and its products, contact 800-USA-NOVA or visit www.novasports.com.



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RETAIL SURVIVAL GUIDE

Tennis shops are facing more and different competition than ever before.

BY MITCH RUSTAD

“Big-box outlets, other specialty shops, the internet, eBay, even the local teaching pro down the street—they all take a bite out of you. Eventually these bites take off a limb.”

The speaker is Chris Gaudreau, owner of Racquet Koop in New Haven, Conn., and bleeding specialty-shop owners throughout the country are probably nodding their heads in agreement.

But specialty tennis retailers have always had to be resilient to survive. And today is certainly no exception. Economic downturns, fluctuating player trends and a long line of hungry competitors make life a constant challenge for even the savviest retailers. But which competitors that Gaudreau mentions above are casting the largest shadows over the specialty retailer? The answers might surprise you.

But first, let's start with the bright side. According to the latest statistics from Sports Marketing Surveys USA, specialty shops are head and shoulders above their traditional competition when it comes to market share for frequent players (see charts on page 24). Specialty shops garner more than 60 percent of racquet sales and lead their competitors in all other major categories—restringing, apparel and shoes. They only trail slightly in a loss-leader category, tennis balls. “Specialty retailers seem to be holding up reasonably well, even in a flat or even declining market,” says Keith Storey, vice president of SMS.

Clearly, for frequent players, specialty shops are the dominant leader when it comes to tennis retail outlets—avid ten-

nis consumers are still securely in their hip pocket. But that brings up one of the thorniest issues currently facing the whole industry, and it has little to do with increasing retail wizardry or beating the competition.

“The specialty stores don't necessarily see their competition as retailers like the big-box stores,” says Sam Cook of Völkl, “because the level of service they're providing, the selection, the customization—all of that means everything to the serious tennis player. The competition is really the fact that there are fewer people buying racquets than 10 years ago.”

Kim Cashman, co-owner of Advantage Yours in Clearwater, Fla., concurs. “We see the trends of consumers as our biggest challenge right now,” she says.

Fewer consumers. Fewer players. Even the most brilliant retailers can't do much about a shaky consumer base, and Cook says the future focus industry-wide needs to be on the big picture—expanding the consumer base and increasing interest in playing the sport.

Welcoming New Players

Certainly there's a lot riding on the ambitions of the industry's Tennis Welcome Center initiative; but the ultimate marketing effectiveness remains to be seen. The industry is being proactive, but will such programs really fill up the courts, and lead to increased sales at the cash register?

“It's our, ‘If you build it, they will come,’ type of thing,” says Cook. “Give people a great tennis experience. But the next

challenge is whether these welcome centers are delivering on the message. Are they up to speed, or just hanging a banner and then dropping the ball?"

Another industry exec says the jury is still out on TWCs. "My biggest thing is there's still not enough reach to people outside the industry," says Bruce Dayton, tennis sales manager for Diadora, "which directly affects the players who are already playing. It's still somewhat of an industry that's not very welcoming to new people. The industry just needs to outreach further, and keep going in the direction they're going right now. But it's a very long process."

Says Kurt Kamperman, chief executive of Community Tennis for the USTA: "The whole purpose behind the welcome centers was to take advantage of the 5 to 6 million people who take up the game each year, but don't stick with it. This should be music to the specialty retailers' ears. We've got a huge number of people that are interested in tennis, we just need to introduce them properly to the game."

However, Cook says many retailers have spotty confidence in the program, as some perceive those marketing programs funneling funds into media and TV advertising, rather than the programs themselves. "There's some skepticism among retailers," says Cook. "But it's definitely the right direction to focus on the health of the sport. That should be and is the priority right now."

One industry insider says taking a proactive, out-of-the-box approach can help determine your own destiny—above and beyond how the TWC fare—and yield more immediate results.

"There are many ways the individual store owner can really help their own cause," says Maria Stefan, president of Ellesse USA, who encourages retailers to be civic-minded, by working closely with park-and-rec leaders and other community organizations to promote the sport, and themselves, to a wider spectrum of consumers. Offer to speak at groups such as Weight Watchers, and pitch the game to groups that may welcome the sport. "Civic organizations and local groups out there are always looking for new activities," says Stefan.

Meanwhile, specialty retailers just keep on keeping on, while casting an especially watchful eye on a few evolving—and increasingly dangerous—culprits.

Auction Action

"The internet is an ongoing challenge; I think it's getting tougher and tougher," says John Swetka, owner of Swetka's Tennis Shop in Mountain View, Calif. "We can hold price with the newest product, but when others start dropping, we have to go with the flow of everybody else."

You Will Survive!

Here's how to fend off the competition.

► **Demos—An Offer They Can't Refuse:** John Swetka, owner of Swetka's Tennis Shop in Mountain View, Calif., offers customers an extremely effective demo program—\$40 down to try racquets for four months—which has been fueled by positive word of mouth in his community for over 20 years. "We've built up a good reputation with this program, so a lot of our racquet sales are through that," says Swetka. "It's enabled us to stay in business and be profitable."

► **Demos, Part II:** "Our demo program kind of commits the customer to us," says Chris Gaudreau, owner of Racquet Koop in New Haven, Conn. For \$15, customers get to try racquets in three- to four-day increments for six weeks, then apply the fee to the purchase price. "That will give us a fighting chance," says Gaudreau. "It works very well, it has definitely put people into the shop. Now people will take time to ask, 'Am I really looking for a racquet?' It separates the 'tryers' from the buyers."

► **Reach Out and Touch:** To sell more footwear, let the customer know they can and should try things on in the store, and spend more time with them, says Bruce Dayton, tennis sales manager for Diadora. "Don't take 15 minutes before you say hello. Get to know your customer, that's the first step to increasing any sales, but especially in footwear—it's more hands-on than any other category."

► **Add Color:** "Forty percent of any apparel buy is color-driven, so if you look at what's happening at fashion in general, color plays a critical role, so include luscious colors, like mangos and teals, to your selection," advises Maria Stefan, president of Ellesse USA. "It helps provide an element of fun, so when you put them on you feel like the clothes are dancing on you when you go out to play."

► **Personal Touches:** Try everything from creating a personalized computer database to showcasing photos of each customer who's purchased a new racquet. "They are excited to be purchasing a new frame, so we make it a little more fun by taking their picture to 'show off' their new purchase," says Cashman. "Our strategy is to continue to make shopping at our store a memorable experience for our customers, so that they will continue to be loyal to us and to spread the word to their friends and family."

► **Offer Everything:** Make your product selection second to none in your area. "We feel we have everything a customer wants," says Swetka. "The latest products, same-day stringing, about 10 sales a year, that we promote them through our 10,000-person mailing list, and we're building up our email list."

► **Get on the Web:** Even if you're not prepared to sell product online, setting up a website is essential in promoting your shop. "Internet sales are certainly increasing, and some specialty retailers are selling on the net as well, so the smart retailers will have an online presence," says Keith Storey of Sports Marketing Surveys USA.

► **Sweat-Proof Your Apparel:** Be sure to include plenty of apparel featuring moisture-management material, such as CoolMax, a poly-based lightweight material, says Stefan. "It's something the consumer really wants," she says.

► **Build Community:** "We're involved because we like tennis, but it certainly helps business," says Gaudreau. "I like playing tennis after work with the same people who buy racquets from me. It's not uncommon for me to take three or four frames home to restring. A lot of people don't want to wait for a restring job or a new racquet. They want immediate gratification, and they get it."

► **Communicate:** Communicate with your customers—via newsletters or email announcements—to let them know when new product comes in. The small pro shops with a close-knit customer base could even invite customers into the store as the new shipments arrive—you can even let them open the boxes. "It's all about creating excitement with your customer base," says Stefan. —M.R.

Chart #1

Frequent Player Purchasing Trends

(Source: Sports Marketing Surveys USA)

Where purchased RACQUET	Late Season 03
Pro/Specialty	63%
Chain Sporting Goods	16%
Internet	12%
Mail Order	8%
Mass Merchant (e.g. Wal-Mart)	1%

Where RESTRUNG racquet	Late Season 03
Pro/Specialty	64%
Home Stringer	19%
Chain Sporting Goods	10%
Other	7%

Where purchased SHOES	Late Season 03
Pro/Specialty	46%
Chain Sporting Goods	31%
Internet	10%
Mail Order	8%
Department Store	3%
Mass Merchant (e.g. Wal-Mart)	2%

Where purchased APPAREL	Late Season 03
Pro/Specialty	48%
Chain Sporting Goods	32%
Department Store	6%
Internet	6%
Mass Merchant (e.g. Wal-Mart)	5%
Mail Order	4%

Where purchased BALLS	Late Season 03
Pro/Specialty	34%
Chain Sporting Goods	33%
Mass Merchant (e.g. Wal-Mart)	25%
Internet	4%
Mail Order	3%
Department Store	2%

"I definitely lose customers to the internet, because people feel they can save a buck," says Gaudreau. "But I also have customers who dislike frames they get off the net, and then want me to exchange it. Generally, I won't do it. But I've converted some of these people into customers, because they see they can get burned."

But traditional internet tennis retailers aren't the only troublesome issue for specialty shops when it comes to the Web. The specter of eBay, the self-described "world's online marketplace," offers thousands of tennis racquets, apparel, shoes, etc., often for bargain-basement prices.

"eBay is probably the No. 1 thorn in the specialty retailer's side right now," says Cook. "By its nature, it's an uncontrolled scenario." Manufacturer's suddenly lose control of their brand image, and because of the global aspect of the internet, international sellers have the potential to offer deals that no one else can match.

"Throw in good exchange rates, and you can suddenly get this great deal," says Cook. "And our stores go ballistic."

Gadreau adds, "eBay always has me worried, because you don't want eBay to be a dumping ground for old racquets. Even stores can dump their product, dirt-cheap. It hurts the market *and* the product."

The general industry buzz is that almost everyone—manufacturers, retailers of all sizes, teaching pros, etc.—is using eBay in one form or another, and its potential is unchecked. "I can certainly see why something like eBay would be a problem for these retailers," says Storey.

Cashman says that while she's generally unfazed by the eBay phenomenon, the manufacturer's own internet sites and local concept stores are the real headache for her. "These directly compete with the products that we sell from them," she says. "This appears as the biggest threat, because the playing field is not level, they have a distinct advantage over us as retailers."

One thing is certain: none of these are likely to go away anytime soon. In the meantime, specialty retailers will do what they do best: offer first-class customer service, offer the best selection of cutting-edge product, and provide a local haven for avid tennis players.

"You have one point of distribution, so bring home the message that you have products that they can't get down the street," says Stefan. "You also have knowledge the others don't have, so there's a reason for them to come and see you. In short, it's about being a specialist." ▶

Chart #2

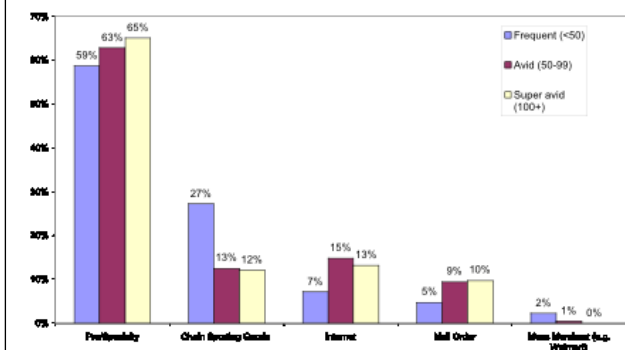
Pro Specialty Sales, 2003 vs. 2002

(Source: Sports Marketing Surveys USA)

Pro Specialty Sales	Late Season 03	Early Season 02
Racquets	63%	62%
Shoes	46%	41%
Apparel	48%	48%
Balls	34%	28%

Chart #3

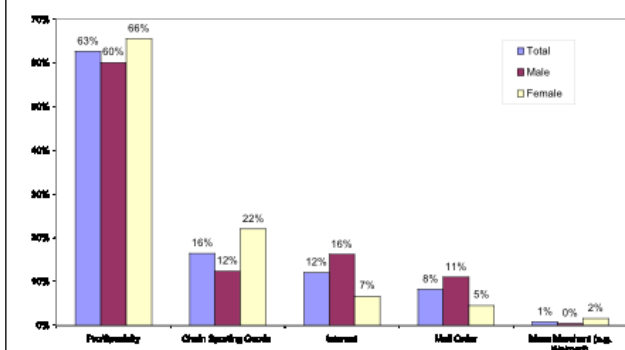
Racquets: Where Purchased by Frequency of Play



(Source: Sports Marketing Surveys USA)

Chart #4

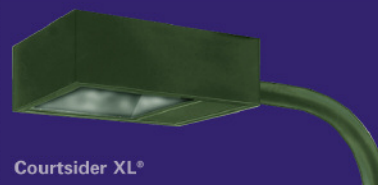
Where Purchased by Gender



(Source: Sports Marketing Surveys USA)



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RIGHT FRAME,

For your customers, the latest offerings cover all the

Racquet manufacturers are keying on all the things that your customers are looking for: more power, more comfort, more maneuverability and more forgiving frames. Here are some of the latest racquets that you should know about.

BY JAMES MARTIN

Head Protector

Tennis elbow is the bane of many players. In fact, some studies have concluded that 60 percent of the recreational tennis population suffers from the debilitating tendonitis. Head feels their pain, and hopes to make it better with the Protector, a new racquet designed specifically for those with tennis elbow.

The theory behind the racquet is simple: Shock transmitted to the arm exacerbates tennis elbow. The way the racquet eliminates the bad vibes is complex. When you hit the ball with the Protector, piezoelectric fibers in the throat produce an electrical output that's transmitted to a microchip embedded in the handle. The chip analyzes the electrical impulse and sends back a counter-vailing vibration to cancel out the shock before it reaches the arm. This process, called EDS, or Electronic Dampening System, produces a rather "dead" sensation on impact and is supposed to reduce stress on the arm.

The Protector will cost \$300 and is available in two head sizes. The mid-plus is 102 square inches, 27.3 inches long, and 10 ounces. It'll appeal to intermediates with medium to longer, slower swings. At 115 square inches and 27.75 inches, the oversize has more power. Sell it to players with short strokes.

800-289-7366 • www.head.com



Head
Protector MP
Protector OS

Fischer Pro Tour FT

What's the hottest trend in racquets? It may be the lighter advanced sticks that most companies have been producing of late. These 10.5- to 11-ounce frames are easier to swing than traditional 11- to 12-ounce advanced-player racquets; they've been particularly popular with strong junior players (think the kid on the varsity team). Fischer's entry into this growing market is the Pro Tour FT. It's an extremely maneuverable frame, thanks to the relatively light weight and head-light balance. Endorsed by Karolina Sprem of Croatia, who upset Venus Williams at Wimbledon this year, the \$180 Pro Tour features Frequency Tuning (metal powder placed at precise locations on the frame to optimize its weight and "tune" the vibration frequencies) and a vibration dampening technology in the handle.

412-323-0335 •

www.gammasports.com

Fischer
Pro Tour FT

RIGHT GAME

the bases.

Wilson n6 and n3

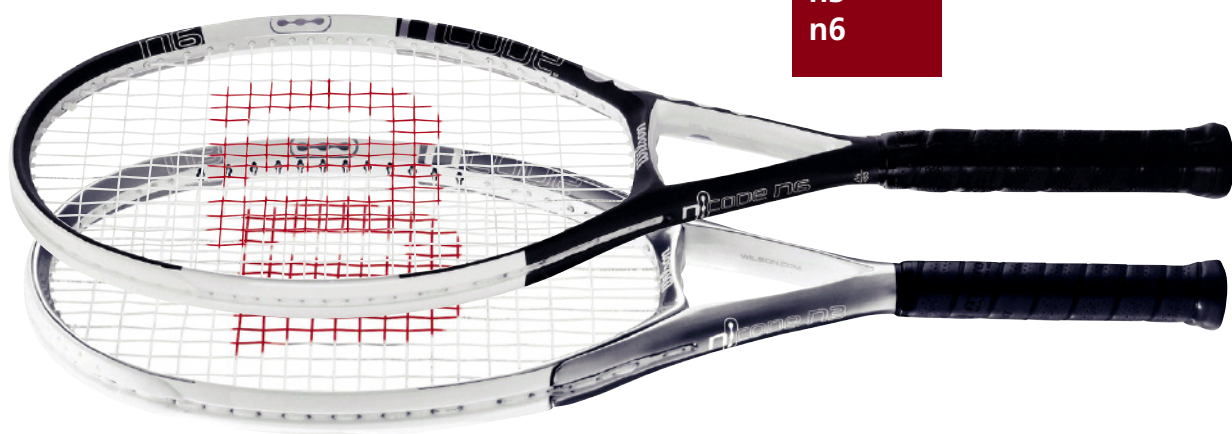
By now you've probably heard that Wilson uses a nanotechnology process to make its new nCode racquets, but you still probably have little idea what the heck it means or how it works. Here's the Cliff's Notes version: Wilson fills the microscopic spaces between the racquet's woven graphite fibers with silicone oxide crystals to increase the frame's stiffness, strength, and stability, as well as to ensure that the racquet plays better, longer.

The n6 is a lightweight racquet that's ideal for fast-swinging club players who prefer a head-heavy balance. It's available in 95- and 110-square-inch head sizes, and at \$179 it's the lowest priced nCode on the market.

Although it's significantly more expensive, the \$259 n3 gives you more bang for your buck—literally. This is a powerful racquet, with a large 115-square-inch head, widebody design, and nZone, large oval channels in the head at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions that allow the grommets, and thus the strings, to move more on impact for a trampoline-like effect. The n3 also has the three-piece Triad design (the head and handle are separated by a vibration-eating yoke) for comfort. The n3 should be popular among mid-level club players who want to add pop to their short strokes.

773-714-6400 • www.wilsonsports.com

Wilson
n3
n6



Völkl Catapult 2 (Generation 2)

The name of Völkl's latest racquet says it all. This is an update of the Catapult 2. What's new? Völkl has added a new spring at the top of the head (complementing the ones at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions) to expand the sweetspot and make an already comfortable racquet feel even more forgiving. The frame is also a little stiffer, for extra pop, and will sell for \$250 versus the original's \$270 price tag. What hasn't changed? Same 115-square-inch head, 27.75-inch length, and 9-ounce weight.

800-264-4579 • www.volkl.com

Völkl
Catapult 2
(Generation 2)



A MODEL YEAR

Tennis shoe makers want your customers to walk away with the best fit.

BY JAMES MARTIN

You know how car nuts make a big deal about the type of tires they have? It makes sense—it's where the rubber meets the road. Same deal with tennis shoes. A good pair of kicks delivers the traction, stability, and comfort players need to cover the court. Here are the season's six most noteworthy models.

For the frugal customer

At \$75 suggested retail, the Adidas Torsion Open is a good buy. Hard-court players will especially appreciate the durable leather upper and the shock absorption in the heel and forefoot. It also has a plastic bar extending from the outsole, under the arch, to the lateral side of the upper to help prevent rollover when you stretch for a shot.

Another excellent value is the Wilson Pro Staff 710, for \$70. It delivers stability, thanks to Stable Wrap, which allows you to lace through the upper, and it comes with a six-month outsole guarantee. Plus, the conservative design should be a hit with the country-club set.

**Adidas
Torsion Open**



**Wilson
Pro Staff 710**



Contact the Manufacturers:

Adidas: 800-448-1796; www.adidas.com

Fila: 410-773-3000; www.fila.com

New Balance: 617-746-2421; www.newbalance.com

Nike: 503-671-6818; www.nike.com

Wilson: 773-714-6400; www.wilsonsports.com

For the fashion-forward crowd

You only need to look at the racy Fila X-Point to know who'll like it—players who want to make a fashion statement on the court. In fact, the streamlined design resembles a running shoe, and therein is the shoe's one drawback. It probably won't offer enough side-to-side stability for the serious player. But if your customer is looking for a hot new look, the \$90 Fila X-Point should be an ace.

**Fila
X-Point**



For the gear head

The new Wilson Crossfire SL is on the cutting edge of shoe design. Rather than use leather for the upper, Wilson decided to go with Schoeller Dynatic, a patented abrasion- and tear-resistant fabric developed as protective wear for motorcyclists. Want more durability? The shoe has a six-month outsole guarantee, too. And Wilson uses its improved cushioning system, DST 3x (three layers of synthetic beads), in the heel for a soft ride. The \$130 Crossfire SL is expensive, but with all these features, it shouldn't be hard to convince your customers that they're getting plenty for their money.

**Wilson
Crossfire SL**



For the customer seeking comfort

If someone walks into your shop looking for a comfortable shoe, the \$110 Nike Air Max Breathe Free II would be an ideal recommendation. The mesh upper is breathable, yet it's also encased in a soft webbing to provide support. And the ride underfoot is plush, thanks to an air bag in the heel and low-profile Zoom air in the forefoot.

**Nike
Air Max
Breathe Free II**



For the hardcore player with a need for speed

New Balance is known for producing comfortable shoes, but the \$85 New Balance CT820 for men and WCT820 for women takes the company in a new direction—ultra light weight. The shoes weigh 12 ounces and 10.1 ounces respectively (based on size 9 men's and size 7 women's). To shed the pounds, New Balance reduced the cushioning in the midsole and used more mesh in the upper, among other things. Net result: The CT/WCT820 hugs the court, for stability, and enables you to get to your shots quicker than ever.

**New Balance
CT820**



RACQUETBALL & SQUASH 2004-2005

Manufacturers accept no limitations when it comes to design.

Nothing compares to the start of a new racquetball or squash season. It's really a one-time deal, since all the companies that produce racquets for these sports launch almost entirely new lines every year, all at once. There are no midseason replacements or add-ons. There is rarely any carryover at the top of the line from last year. And the season is relatively short, so the sales cycle is compressed and the stakes are high.

With just a few competitors—all well-entrenched—the market is small. A blowout year, good or bad, can be a make or break proposition. Inventories are front-ended, and you only get one chance at the big buy-in schedules. Retailers

have a long off-season to dump unsold product, while looking forward to the new. The thirst for ultimate power is never quenched, and dollars will be traded for the promise, hope, or expectation of additional punch on the racquetball and squash courts.

On the other hand, we generally know what is coming: much of the past year's tennis technologies applied to racquetball and squash. But that's not always the case. There are quite often some surprises, and this year is no exception. The new standout non-tennis technologies for r-ball and squash include Ektelon's Double Power Ring, Wilson's Power String Pattern, and E-Force's Dual Cylinder Technology.

The buzz phrase for this season is "Dual Cylinder Technology," which continues E-Force's quest to string every square millimeter of surface area. The frame is composed of two graphite tubes joined at the outside by a graphite bridge. This construction extends all strings (mains and crosses) in "unrestricted free space" to their maximum length (22 inches for the mains and 10.5 inches for the crosses), and hence the name 32.5 MLS (Maximum LongString Technology). The Dual Cylinder Technology also increases torsional stability.

The five Dual Cylinder racquets also include E-Force's other main power advance—Launch Pad Technology (the elimination of the bottom four cross strings for more string deflection). There are two Tyranny racquets—Tyranny 160 (\$255) and Tyranny 175 (\$245)—and three Radium racquets—Radium 150 (\$235), Radium 170 (\$225), and Radium 190 (\$200). The Tyranny racquets are both 108 square inches and the Radium racquets are 107 square inches.



**E-Force
Tyranny 160
Radium 150**



**Ekte
DPR
DPR**

Head Liquidmetal 170 Liquidmetal 180



Head combines its Liquidmetal energy return system (no energy-robbing deformation on impact) with Total Sweet-spot Construction (corrugated frame in the throat for torsional stability), Power Channels (molded vibration-damped string tubes in the throat for greater stiffness, strength, and comfort), and Megablast Technology (suspension system under the bumper guard to create a trampoline effect) to bring one new MegaBlast and three new Liquidmetal racquets this fall.

The Liquidmetal 170, 180, and 190 are all 106 square inches (their nominal unstrung weights are indicated by the model number). SRPs are \$275, \$235, and \$200 respectively. The MegaBlast 195 is a titanium/graphite frame with a 105-square-inch head that retails for \$140.

Wilson nLite nPower



Nanotechnology is the name of the game for Wilson. The secret to the new nCode racquets is in filling the microscopic spaces between graphite fibers with nano-sized particles of silicon oxide crystals. Wilson says this addition strengthens and stiffens the overall matrix for more stability and power. The other innovation from Wilson is Power Strings, which extend the six center mains through a channel that runs the full length of the handle. Longer strings means more power.

There are two nCode racquets. The nLite is the flagship at \$250. It is 150 grams unstrung and 107 square inches. The nPower sells for \$225, weighs 170 grams, and is also 107 square inches. Both feature Power Strings, Power Holes (oversized grommet holes for greater string deflection), and Iso-Zorb (vibration dampening material in the throat).

There are three new racquets in the XT Series: XT:Speed, XT:Tour, and XT:Rok. All feature Power Strings, Power Holes, and Iso-Zorb and sell for \$180, \$150, and \$100 respectively.

Ektelon 2500 2500 Lite

Ektelon is combining all its technologies into its 2005 headliners—the DPR 2500 Lite and DPR 2500. “DPR” stands for “Double Power Ring,” and that new technology is combined with three other technologies: Direct Contact (no drilled holes or grommets), PowerLock (molding and locking two frame halves together into one, creating molded string holes and, says Ektelon, additional frame strength and stiffness), and Triple Threat (with weighting at 2, 6, and 10 o’clock for stability). With DPR, the main strings wrap around two Power Rings in the handle, increasing string length and thus power. Both racquets are 106 square inches. The DPR Lite weighs in at 270 grams and the 2500 at 190 grams.

Ektelon’s performance-price-point racquet is the AirDrive, a 104-square-inch Triple Threat retailing for \$100.

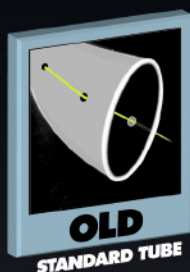
Harrow T4 T5



Harrow Sports’ new T4 and T5, the latest additions to the Torment Series, aim to combine stiffness and feel into a power/comfort package. The evenly balanced T4 is 170 grams and is targeted to those with a faster swing speed seeking control. The head-light balance of the T5, combined with its 190-gram weight, is designed for the control player looking for additional pace. Both racquets are 102 square inches and retail for \$155 and \$135 respectively.

NEW DUAL-CYLINDER TECHNOLOGY

TOTALLY NEW. COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.



**FRAME MADE
FROM TWO SUPER
POWERFUL TUBES
(INSTEAD OF JUST ONE)
CONNECTED BY
STABILIZER
BRIDGE**



**INCLUDES E-FORCE'S
EXCLUSIVE PATENTED
LONGSTRING® ADVANTAGE**

**Longest Mainstrings—
22" LongString®**

The mains extend unrestricted in free space 22" from the outer edge of the racquet tip all the through the handle.



**Longer
Cross-Strings—10.5"**

Crosses extend unrestricted in free space a full 10.5" to the outside edges of the frame.

The new E-Force Radium and Tyranny are made in a radical new way — from two hand-laid carbon graphite tubes (instead of one) joined at the outside by a graphite bridge, creating a deep channel on the inner frame.

**INCREDIBLY
STABLE FRAME**



These tubes are structurally stronger. Combining the two strong tubes with the Stabilizer Bridge creates an amazingly stable frame/hitting surface.

**LONGEST
STRINGS**



The deep inner channel plus strings through the handle allow every string to be the longest possible unrestricted in free space. *The longest strings, plus maximum frame stability, create greater stringbed deflection and incredible power.*

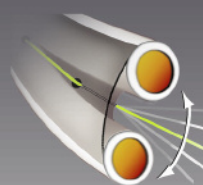
**INCREDIBLY STABLE FRAME +
MORE STRINGBED DEFLECTION**



**INCREDIBLY
STABLE
FRAME**

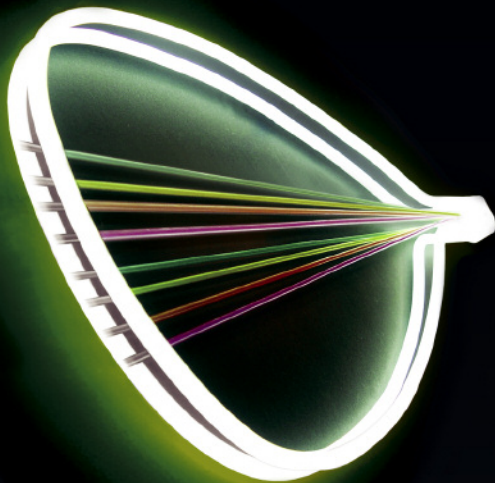


**LONGEST
STRINGS
POSSIBLE**



**MORE STRINGBED
DEFLECTION,
MORE POWER**

A performance breakthrough never before seen. Longest strings and increased frame stability result in devastating new power advantages.

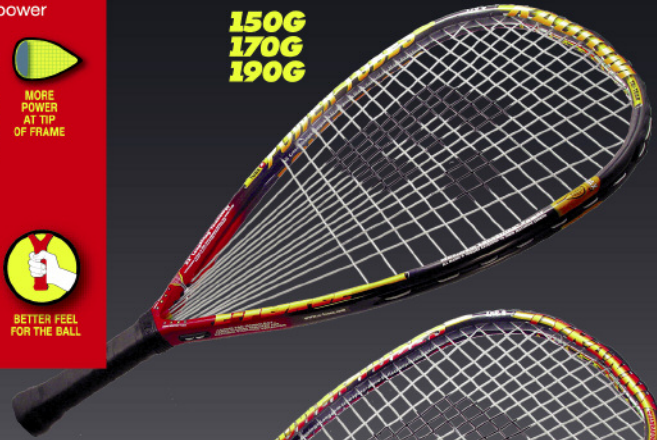


- POWER TUBE A
- STABILIZER BRIDGE
- POWER TUBE B

PATENT PENDING

**NEW
RADIUM
TRI-TEAR**

**150G
170G
190G**



**160G
175G**

**NEW
TYRANNY
QUADRAFORM**



E-FORCE

www.e-force.com

MORE POWER, MORE CONTROL, BIGGER KILL ZONE, MORE TOUCH

MORE POWER from Longer Strings

The longer the strings, the greater the stringbed deflection and the greater the power. The combination of new Dual-Cylinder Technology with exclusive patented E-Force LongString Technology creates the longest strings possible by allowing every string to extend unrestricted in free space to the outside edge of the frame. The strings cannot be longer.



ELIMINATES UNWANTED TWIST/DISTORTION

MORE POWER from Reduced Frame Twist/Distortion

The combination of two strong tubes – spanned by the Stabilizer Bridge – creates an amazingly solid structure. This reduces distortion and twisting in unwanted ways at ball impact. More energy is transmitted to the ball – for more power.

BIGGER KILL ZONE

Because the strings are longer – and the frame is more stable – the kill zone is much bigger.



NEW KILL ZONE

OLD KILL ZONE

MORE POWER AT TIP

For the first time in racquetball history, mains and crosses extend unrestricted in free space to the outside edges of the corners of the frame.



MORE POWER AT TIP OF FRAME



MORE CONTROL

The Stabilizer Bridge holds the two tubes in position so that the frame does not twist or distort. Pinches. Kills. Passing shots. The ball goes where you want it to go.

BETTER TOUCH

By eliminating twisting and distortion, Dual Cylinder Technology prevents the transfer of erroneous vibration signals through the handle. You play with more touch, increased confidence.



BETTER FEEL FOR THE BALL

LONGEST STRINGS = AND MORE POWER

E-FORCE HAS THE LONGEST STRINGS*

	E-Force	Longest Competitor	E-Force Advantage
Longest Mainstring*	22"	16"	37% Longer
8 Center Mainstrings*	172"	121"	34% Longer
Cross-Strings (Longest possible – crosses extend from outside edge to outside edge of frame.)			

* strings unrestricted in free space

NEW RACQUETBALL RACQUETS 2004-2005

Model	Headsize (in. ²)	Headsize (cm ²)	Length (in.)	Weight (gm)	Balance (cm)	Balance (in.)	Swingweight (kgxcm ²)	Pattern (MxC)	SRP
E-FORCE								800-4 E FORCE • www.e-force.com	
Tyranny 160	108	697	22	195	28.75	11.32	136	14x18	\$255
Tyranny 175	108	697	22	205	28.50	11.22	136	14x18	\$245
Radium 150	107	690	22	182	28.25	11.12	127	14x18	\$235
Radium 170	107	690	22	198	28.25	11.12	135	14x18	\$225
Radium 190	107	690	22	212	28.75	11.32	144	14x18	\$200
EKTELON								800-283-6647 • www.ektelon.com	
DPR 2500	106	684	22	206	28.25	11.12	142	16x19	\$260
DPR 2500 Lite	106	684	22	194	30.00	11.81	141	16x19	\$260
AirDrive	104	671	22	191	29.50	11.61	139	14x20	\$100
HARROW								800-541-2905 • www.harrowsports.com	
T4	102	658	22	183	29.25	11.52	134	16x19	\$155
T5	102	658	22	198	29.00	11.42	144	16x19	\$135
HEAD								800-289-7366 • www.head.com	
Liquidmetal 170	106	684	22	177	30.50	12.01	132	16x16	\$275
Liquidmetal 180	106	684	22	191	30.25	11.91	142	16x16	\$235
Liquidmetal 190	106	684	22	205	29.75	11.71	149	16x16	\$200
MegaBlast 195	105	677	22	207	30.50	12.01	152	16x18	\$140
WILSON								773-714-6400 • www.wilsonsports.com	
nLite	107	690	22	170	31.00	12.20	134	14x18	\$250
nPower	107	690	22	186	30.75	12.11	145	14x18	\$225
XT Speed	107	690	22	174	31.00	12.20	138	14x18	\$180
XT Tour	107	690	22	185	31.00	12.20	145	14x18	\$150
XT ROK	107	690	22	205	29.25	11.52	153	14x18	\$100

NEW SQUASH RACQUETS 2004-2005

Model	Headsize (in. ²)	Headsize (cm ²)	Length (in.)	Weight (gm)	Balance (cm)	Balance (in.)	Flex (RDC)	Swingweight (kg xcm ²)	Pattern (MxC)	SRP
BLACK KNIGHT								800-535-3300 • www.bksquash.com		
Magnum 140	81	523	27	164	36.75	14.47	65	195	14x19	\$130
Shox 80 (SQ-8880)	74	478	27	160	37.00	14.57	37	188	14x19	\$120
Shox 50 (SQ-8850)	74	478	27	159	37.25	14.67	36	191	14x19	\$110
Sharif Khan Ti 145	78	500	27	167	37.00	14.57	33	200	14x19	\$100
DUNLOP								800-277-8000 • www.dunlopsports.com		
Custom (Hot Melt — black/silver)	81	525	27	182	33.00	12.99	45	195	16x18	\$160
C-Max Titanium (Hot Melt)	81	525	27	151	36.75	14.47	45	180	16x19	\$110
Black Max Titanium 510	81	525	27	150	38.50	15.16	54	192	16x19	\$100
HARROW								800-541-2905 • www.harrowsports.com		
Velocity	77	497	27	145	36.50	14.37	58	173	14x21	\$175
Iceberg	75	484	27	164	36.00	14.17	53	192	14x19	\$125
HEAD								800-289-7366 • www.head.com		
Liquidmetal 120	73	471	27	136	37.75	14.86	50	172	12x17	\$220
Liquidmetal 140	72	465	27	148	38.00	14.96	56	186	14x18	\$200
i.x140	74	477	27	151	37.00	14.57	64	183	12x17	\$170
PRINCE								800-283-6647 • www.princetennis.com		
More Approach	70	452	27	155	38.50	15.16	56	196	16x16	\$230
AirStick 130	74	477	27	142	37.50	14.76	57	177	16x17	\$115
AirLaunch 140	74	477	27	155	36.50	14.37	60	186	12x18	\$100
TECNIFIBRE								877-332-0825 • www.tecnifibre.com		
Carboflex 130	79	510	27	159	38.25	15.06	41	199	14x18	\$160
Suprem 130	75	484	27	157	39.00	15.35	49	204	14x19	\$160
Carboflex 140	79	510	27	159	38.25	15.06	41	201	14x18	\$150
Carbiothane 140	80	516	27	156	37.25	14.67	46	190	14x19	\$150
Expert D.Ti Power	80	516	27	171	37.00	14.57	56	202	14x19	\$100
WILSON								773-714-6400 • www.wilsonsports.com		
Triad 130 (T130)	77	497	27	156	37.75	14.86	n/a	190	12x18	\$200
Triad 145 (T145)	77	497	27	158	38.50	15.16	n/a	195	12x18	\$180
Hyper Hammer 110	77	497	27	144	38.00	14.96	50	184	12x18	\$167
Hyper Prostaff Tour	73	471	27	164	35.50	13.98	55	187	14x18	\$140
Hyper Prostaff 155	70	452	27	161	35.75	14.07	51	193	14x17	\$130

*All racquets tested on a Babolat RDC and weighed with strings.

INTRODUCING



Extends main string length increasing power level to **2500!**



Main strings wrap around two Power Rings in the throat creating Ektelon's most powerful racquet ever!



DPR 2500 Lite
Ultra Lightweight 170g

DPR 2500
Traditionally Weighted 190g

 **EKTELON**
PLAY WITH FIRE™

www.ektelon.com

IRF
International
Racquetball Federation
OFFICIAL RACQUET



The World's Most Efficient Tennis Racquet...Sort Of

BY ROD CROSS

On May 17 this year, I built and tested the world's most energy-efficient tennis racquet. It's 100 percent efficient. Maybe only 99 percent, but inventors are allowed to brag a bit. All of the energy I generate during the swing goes into my arm and racquet. When I hit the ball with this new racquet, ALL of that energy goes into the ball, and NONE of the energy is left over in my arm or in my racquet. My arm stops dead on impact and so does the racquet, while the ball comes off the racquet with ALL of the energy that was previously in my arm and racquet. How good is that?

THE FOLLOW-THROUGH "PROBLEM"

The problem with all previous racquets ever built is the "follow-through." When a player hits the ball as fast as possible, the arm follows through and so does the racquet. The ball picks up a certain amount of energy from the racquet, but a lot of the energy generated in the original wind-up and swing is retained in the player's arm and in the racquet. That's a huge waste of energy.

A lot of work is done when a player winds up to send down a fast first serve. The legs push up on the body, the hips rotate the trunk, the trunk rotates the shoulder, the shoulder rotates the upper arm, the upper arm rotates the forearm, the forearm rotates the racquet, then the wrist gives the racquet a final flick just before it wacks the ball. At each step along the chain, the racquet builds up speed at the expense of the previous links in the chain. Energy gets transferred along the chain as each segment comes to a stop and transfers its energy to the next segment. Just before impact, all of the energy is in the forearm and the racquet, because the hips, torso and upper arm have all finished their job and have stopped rotating. What happens next is a disaster in terms of the flow of energy. The racquet hits the

ball, the ball picks up a bit of energy out of the racquet, and then comes the follow-through. Someone who knew nothing about tennis might think that the primary objective was to smash the racquet into the shins as fast as possible.

Suppose one designed a racquet that completed the chain of events in the following way: Just before the racquet hits the ball, the upper arm comes to a complete stop and transfers all its energy to the forearm. Then the forearm comes to a complete stop and transfers all its energy to the racquet. Then the racquet comes to a complete stop and transfers all its energy to the ball. That way, there is no energy wasted. It all ends up in the ball. That is exactly how I managed to construct the world's most energy-efficient tennis racquet.

HOW WAS IT DONE?

Getting all the energy out of the racquet into the ball

The first problem was to get all the energy out of a racquet and into a ball. That was the easy part. I did that a few years ago and have a working model on my desktop as an executive toy. The racquet swings like a pendulum about an axis through the handle until it strikes a ball hanging in its way. The racquet comes to a complete stop and trans-

fers all its energy to the ball. The ball swings away from the racquet, but it is mounted on a piece of string so it swings back onto the racquet and transfers all its energy back to the racquet. You can buy something similar in executive toy shops where a row of balls suspended on string strike each other. It's called Newton's Cradle.

The balls in Newton's cradle are all the same mass. That's the secret of how it works the way it does. If one ball was heavier than the other, and the heavy ball was swung to one side, the heavy ball would "follow through" after it collided with a light ball. My racquet and ball version works the same way, provided the effective mass of the racquet at the impact point is equal to the mass of the ball. The effective mass is not the same as the actual mass. Effective mass is less than actual mass, especially near the tip of a racquet where the effective mass of a real racquet is about the same as the actual mass of a real ball (57 gm) (See *The Physics and Technology of Tennis* for further explanation).

Getting all the energy out of the arm into the racquet

The next, and biggest, problem in designing the perfect racquet is getting all of the energy out of the arm and into the racquet.

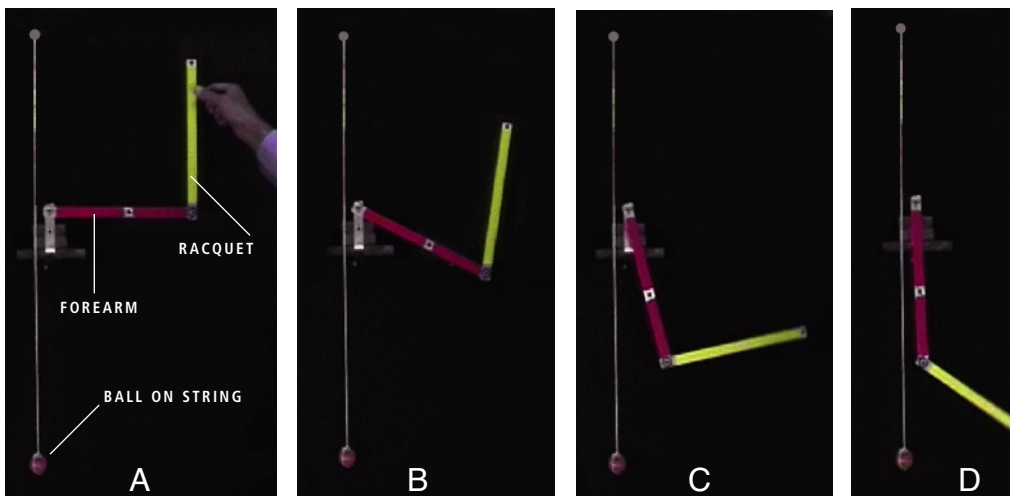


Figure 1. The forearm comes to a complete stop (E) as the racquet reaches maximum speed. The racquet comes to a complete stop (F) as the ball reaches maximum speed.

One part of this problem is getting a good match between the player's arm and the weight and swingweight of the racquet. Another problem is getting the player to swing the racquet using the right technique. This problem has been examined in regards to the golf swing. A golf club is swung in almost exactly the same way as a double pendulum. A simple pendulum has a fixed pivot point at the top and a mass that swings to and fro underneath. If you attach another simple pendulum to the bottom of the first one, you have a double pendulum. A golf club acts like the pendulum at the bottom and the player's arms act like the pendulum at the top. Instead of swinging to-and-fro in a regular fashion, a golfer just has one giant swing starting with the club above the head and ending with the club striking a ball.

One might think that as the club hits the ball, both the club and the player's arms are swinging at maximum possible speed. In fact, what actually happens is that the arms slow down as the club picks up speed. The arms don't come to a complete stop but they definitely slow down before the club hits the ball. It's not that the player deliberately does this or is even aware that he or she is doing it. The fact is, the club rotates at such a high speed that it pushes backwards on the hands and forces the arms to slow down. The same thing happens when a batter swings a bat or a tennis player swings a racquet or when a double pendulum is pulled aside and released.

The physics of all this is very tricky. It helps to imagine that the motion of the racquet is due to two separate parts. One part is pure rotation of the racquet about its balance point. That is the part that causes the handle to push backward on the hand and

slow down the forearm. The other part of the motion is its forward motion. The racquet doesn't just spin in mid air around its balance point. It also accelerates forward because the player pushes it forward. Newton's third law of tennis says that the handle will push back on the player, but the main push backward arises from high-speed rotation of the racquet.

I analyzed a high-speed, slow-motion video of a top college player serving at top speed. Just before impact his racquet reaches top speed and his forearm slows down. The forearm slows down just before impact but it doesn't come to a complete stop before impact.

I therefore made a simple double pendulum out of two aluminum bars to investigate a bit further. I used a digital video camera to record the results and found out three things. First, if the bottom pendulum is about half the weight of the top pendulum, the slowing down effect is so strong that the top pendulum not only comes to a stop, but it reverses direction while the bottom pendulum is still gathering speed. Second, if the top pendulum is about six times heavier than the bottom pendulum, then the top pendulum slows down but it doesn't come to a stop. And third, if the top pendulum is about four times heavier than the bottom pendulum, then the top pendulum comes to a complete stop just as the bottom pendulum reaches the bottom of its swing where it is travelling at maximum speed.

THE SOLUTION

We have here a solution to the follow-through problem. If the racquet is too light, the forearm slows down a bit before impact but it doesn't come to a stop during the

swing and it follows through after the racquet strikes the ball. If the racquet is heavy enough then the forearm will come to a complete stop just as the racquet is about to strike the ball, in which case all of the energy generated by the player is in the racquet and there is nothing remaining in the player's arm (Figure 1E). At that point, the racquet strikes the ball and all of the energy in the racquet is transferred to the ball if the impact point is just right.

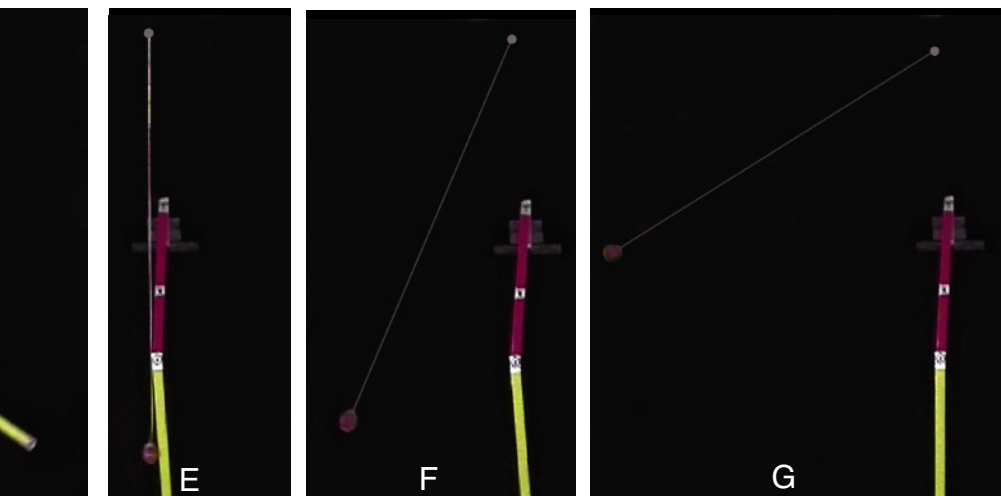
The prototype racquet that I made can be seen at work in a short video clip at racquettech.com. Some segments from that video are shown in Figure 1.

BACK TO REALITY

There are a couple of hitches in all of this. An adult forearm has a mass of about 1600 gm. In order to get all the energy out of the forearm into the racquet, one needs a racquet mass of about 400 gm, in which case the ball needs to be around 100 gm. Currently, balls are about 57 gm. That's a problem unless the rules change.

The other hitch is that even if a 100 gm ball was allowed, it would end up travelling at a lower speed than a 57 gm ball, despite having more energy than the lighter ball. A 100 gm ball travelling at say 40 m/s has a kinetic energy of 80.0 Joules. A 57 gm ball travelling at 40 m/s has a kinetic energy of 45.6 Joules. If two balls are travelling at the same speed, the heavier ball has more energy than the light ball. The kinetic energy of a ball is calculated by taking half its mass and multiplying by its speed squared. There is therefore no guarantee that a heavier ball with more energy will travel any faster than a light ball with less energy. Even if a 100 percent energy-efficient racquet can be constructed, the extra energy in the ball that results will be gained at the expense of a decrease in ball speed. This is what happens whenever a heavy object collides with a light object. If the light object is made a bit heavier, it will gain more energy during the collision but it will end up travelling slower.

So, where does that leave us? It leaves us with three options. You can use a heavier ball if you want more energy in the ball, but the ball will come off the racquet at a lower speed. Or you can use a lighter ball if you want the ball to come off the racquet faster, but it will have less energy. Or you can stick with what you've got, which is about as good as it gets. ▀



complete stop sending all its energy to the ball (e,f,g).

Your Equipment Hotline

STRINGMETER READINGS

Q HAVING READ *The Physics and Technology of Tennis*, I came to appreciate how much the actual tension of a string job can vary from the reference tension. To measure this for myself, I bought a Stringmeter, which I understood from your publications to be a cheap and accurate way of measuring string tension. When I got it, I found that every racquet I tested had string tensions of 40 pounds or lower.

At first, I thought this was an amazing indication of how much tension evaporates over time. But my confidence in the Stringmeter was shattered when I used it to measure string tension before, during, and after stringing my own racquet. I discovered that a string pulled to 60 pounds on my machine measured only 45 pounds on the Stringmeter. To figure out whether the error was in my stringing machine or the Stringmeter, I hung a racquet from a rafter, suspended various weights on a

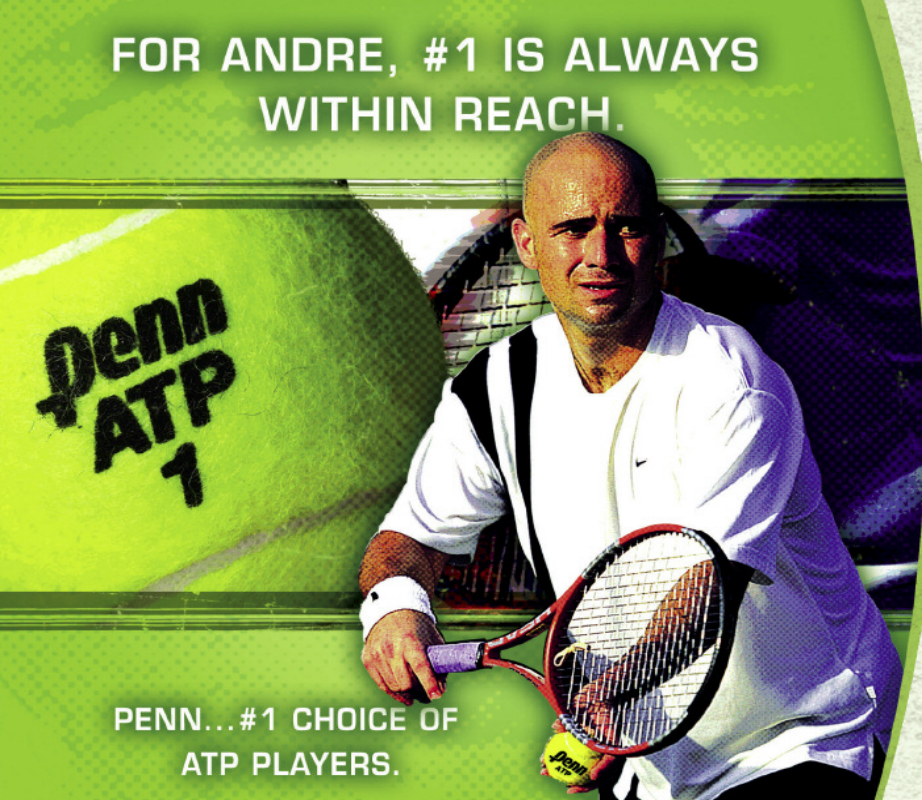
string, then clamped it off and measured tension with the Stringmeter. I assumed that a string with 50 pounds hanging from it would be tensioned to 50 pounds. But the Stringmeter only read 38 pounds. I contacted Stringmeter, and they replied that the Stringmeter only measures relative tension, not actual tension.

I bought the Stringmeter under the assumption that it measured actual tension, based on an article on your website "Measuring String Tension: How to Measure String Tension and What It Means," by Rod Cross, and in *The Physics and Technology of Tennis*. Can you help me sort this out?

A FIRST, THERE ARE THREE SEPARATE scales on a Stringmeter. Each is calibrated to a different situation. There are separate pound and kilogram scales for a strung racquet and a "stringers free string scale." It is the latter that must be used to measure a tensioned string that is not in a stringbed. Each scale is calibrated differently

depending on the circumstances of the string. Not using this scale is the most likely culprit. Also, according to Dr. Cross, the Stringmeter is calibrated to be accurate actual tension for nylon string only. (It is good as a relative measurement for other strings.) He also lists other common errors for using the device, including not adjusting the arrow to the correct diameter, reading the wrong units scale, or not rotating the Stringmeter far enough. There could also be something wrong with the technique used in measuring the string with the hanging weight.

In our experience, Stringmeter readings are best used in reference to previous Stringmeter readings. In other words, we recommend measuring tension immediately after a racquet is strung and then re-measuring the tension every few hours of play to see how much tension has been lost from when it was originally strung. In our testing, we find that a racquet strung at 60 pounds will never read 60 pounds on a Stringmeter right after it comes off the machine because a



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significant amount of tension loss occurs during the stringing process. Then, we find that another 10 percent, on average, is lost within the first 24 hours. Then, more tension is lost gradually over time and with play. This is why the strung racquets you tested showed such "low" readings. Cross strings will measure even lower. When you tension a cross string to 60 pounds, you are not just stretching a string to tension, but also pulling against the friction generated at each weave. Therefore you don't actually elongate the crosses as much.

Finally, keep in mind when using the Stringmeter that there are many factors that influence the tension of strings in a strung racquet. For an in-depth explanation of these factors, see our Study Guide for Certified Stringer and Master Racquet Technician tests, which can be found on our website at <http://www.racquettech.com/certification/studyguide.html>. The type of machine used, the stringer's technique, the string's construction, and the density of the stringbed are just a few of these factors, as well as the rate of tension loss. So, we don't recommend using a Stringmeter to check the accuracy of a

stringing machine. Rather, we recommend using it to measure tension loss.

One other good use for a Stringmeter is to verify the stringer's consistency. If you string the same racquet with the same string on the same machine using the same technique twice, the resulting Stringmeter reading should be the same for both string jobs. If you get different readings, then something must have been different between the two string jobs.

E-FORCE TORRENT SHORT SIDE

Q I HAVE TWO E-FORCE TORRENT racquetball racquets that came in unstrung. There is no identification that says "SS" on the plastic guard on the short side of the frame, as I was led to expect by the stringing instructions in the Stringer's Digest. I know that both tie offs have to be on the same side. How do I know which side to start on? I noticed that the first bottom grommet hole is about 1/8" lower on the one side than the other same side. Can this determine the SS?

A ON THE TORRENT, the bumper guard is clearly shorter on the "short side" of the racquet. Also, the short side of the

bumper guard corresponds with the side of the frame with the lower 1T grommet hole.

TENSION LOSS ON WILSON ROLLERS RACQUETS

Q I HAVE SOME TECHNICAL questions about stringing Wilson racquets with Rollers. The Stringer's Digest, and directions on the throat, state that the tension on the crosses must be less than that of the mains. My concern is whether this tension differential will equalize over time when stringing these racquets one-piece.

A TENSION CREEP FROM THE HIGHER tension strings to those at a lower tension is pretty minimal in this case: by the second cross, you've effectively turned 360 degrees (four times 90 degrees), so the friction and the tension of adjacent strings combine to just about eliminate this type of tension loss.

—Greg Raven

We welcome your questions. Please send them to Racquet Sports Industry, 330 Main St., Vista, CA, 92084; fax: 760-536-1171; email: greg@racquettech.com.

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Readers' Know-How in Action

RAVEL-FREE RACQUETBALL REGRIPPING

Some racquetball players have a chronic problem keeping the grip from unwinding at the butt end. The butt end is a critical area because these players hold the racquet on the lower part of the handle for additional wrist action. Couple this with frequent changes in hand position during play, and the replacement grip can unravel.

Here's what I do for a lasting grip replacement:

- ▶ Remove the old grip as normal.
- ▶ Use a heat gun to soften the old glue.
- ▶ Remove all glue residue from the handle by hand until it is spotless.
- ▶ Use light sandpaper or a Scotch-Brite pad to roughen the surface.
- ▶ Apply rubber cement on the handle area, and let it dry for about 30 minutes. This is key to the success of the replacement.
- ▶ Install a new replacement grip, using staples as illustrated in the Stringer's Digest.

E-force String & Grip Sample Pack (3 strings & 3 grips) to:
Frank Spadavecchia, MRT
Lynbrook, NY

NON-SLIP EKTELON REGRIPPING

New Ektelon MORE Performance racquetball racquets have a staple in the butt end of the grip, creating a point at which the grip can wear. The more you play and the swetier your hands are, the more likely it is that the grip will come undone and move around. To prevent this, I wrap double-sided tape around the butt end, middle, and top of the handle, underneath new replacement grips. My grips have not moved since.

E-force String & Grip Sample Pack (3 strings & 3 grips) to:
Mark Schantzer
Reinholds, PA

REPLACING SLIP-ON RACQUETBALL GRIPS

Installing slip-on rubber replacement handles is a routine task that can become a major chore. Although some are replaced with very little effort, others can be a real

challenge. With larger 3-7/8-inch grips, it can be tough just to get them started. Trying to slide a rubber grip over an existing rubber build-up is enough to try anyone's patience, especially considering how stiff and inflexible most new replacement slide-on grips are.

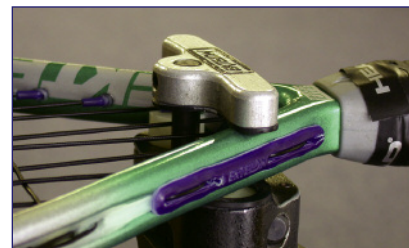
The trick I've found is to use a heat gun to soften the new replacement slide-on grip slightly before starting the installation procedure. Then, apply glue to the handle and the inside of the grip. Use the heat gun again until you feel that the new slide-on grip has become workable, and rotate it onto the handle until it is completely on. Hold the racquet in one position to allow the excess glue to drain for a minute or two. After the glue cures, dress the grip as needed.

E-force String & Grip Sample Pack (3 strings & 3 grips) to:
Frank Spadavecchia MRT
Lynbrook, NY

MOUNTING RACQUETBALL FRAMES

In our tennis shop, we do a lot of racquetball stringing on an Ektelon Model H. For some time I encountered a problem mounting racquetball racquets on this machine because many of them have long stringbeds and a thin profile in the throat area. Sliding the towers far enough apart to mount the racquet allows the post of the hold-down clamp to bottom out on the throat stock of the machine. With the clamp applying inadequate pressure against the throat of the frame, the frame can move when you are pulling the last two crosses.

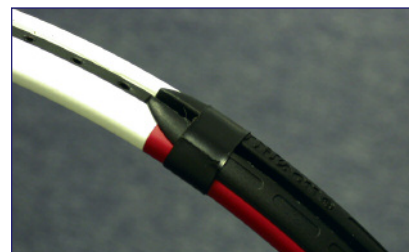
My solution is to mount the frame on the machine backward. By flipping the frame



around in the mounting system, the hold-down clamp at the "throat" end of the machine is able to secure the top of the racquet where the frame is thicker, and at the "head" end of the machine it doesn't matter if the hold-down clamp post protrudes well below the underside of the tower. No more frame movement during stringing.

E-force String & Grip Sample Pack (3 strings & 3 grips) to:
Fred McWilliams, CS
Arlington, TX

GROMMET STRIP HOLD DOWN



When putting a new grommet strip on tennis or racquetball racquets, I sometimes use "finishing" tape to hold down the end of the bumper guard, which tends to pull up as you install the grommet strip(s). It's easy to remove the finishing tape when you are done.

5 sets of Gamma Synthetic Gut 16 with WearGuard to
Jon Miller
Battle Creek, MI

—Greg Raven ▶

Tips and Techniques submitted since 1993 by USRSA members, and appearing in this column, have all been gathered into a single volume of the Stringer's Digest—Racquet Service Techniques which is a benefit of USRSA membership. Submit tips to: Greg Raven, USRSA, 330 Main St., Vista, CA 92084; or email greg@racquettech.com.

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Head MegaBlast 16

Head MegaBlast is a new high-end racquetball string that comes standard in all Liquidmetal and MegaBlast racquetball racquets. It is the choice of five-time Pro World Champion Sidsy Monchik as well as dozens of top touring professionals.

MegaBlast features a multifilament center core with co-polymer braided multifilament wraps, and slightly textured carbon co-polymer coating. Head tells us this combination produces a string with highly elastic "snap-back," which delivers maximum power. They claim the new coating delivers added durability and less string movement.

MegaBlast is designed for racquetball players looking for increased power and feel.

It's available in 16 in black only and is priced from \$8 for coils of 40 feet. For more information or to order, contact Head at 800-289-7366, or visit www.head.com.

IN THE LAB

We tested the 16-gauge MegaBlast. The coil measured 40'8". The diameter measured 1.29-1.31 mm prior to stringing, and 1.21-1.23 mm after stringing. We recorded a stringbed stiffness of 41 RDC units immediately after stringing at 35 pounds in an Ektelon Strobe Lite 95 (14 x 17 pattern) on a constant-pull machine.

After 24 hours (no playing), stringbed stiffness measured 35 RDC units, representing a 15 percent tension loss. Our control string, Prince Synthetic Gut Original Gold 16, measured 23 RDC units immediately after stringing and 20 RDC units after 24 hours, representing a 13 percent tension loss. MegaBlast added 10 grams to the weight of our unstrung frame.

The string was tested for five weeks by 37 USRSA playtesters. These are blind tests, with playtesters receiving unmarked strings in unmarked packages. Average number of hours playtested was 21.4.

Head MegaBlast is easy to install, and knots were not a problem. MegaBlast's thin gauge and the



unstrung softness of the string make it a nice string to work with, even though you might have to trim the end before finishing to negotiate blocked holes. Not surprisingly, its unstrung flexibility is great for getting the string through the "power channels" on the newer Head racquetball racquets.

Two playtesters broke the sample during stringing, seven reported problems with coil memory, one reported problems tying knots, and two reported friction burn.

ON THE COURT

Overall, our playtest team was impressed with Head MegaBlast. They gave it above average scores in almost every category. Playability, Durability, Power, Control, Touch/Feel, and Comfort all received above average marks. This really demonstrates that MegaBlast is a solid all-around performer. Most strings have to give something up to score well in other categories, but MegaBlast doesn't seem to have had to do that. Playtesters also gave it top marks in Holding Tension, a category in which it placed second overall of all racquetball strings we've ever playtested (first place is another Head racquetball string: Intellistring 17). Its high scores in Holding Tension were also reflected in our lab-testing. A week after installing it in our test racquet, it still had a higher stringbed stiffness than our test racquet when freshly strung with our control string. So, it's not just durable in terms of not breaking, but it continues to feel solid longer than other strings as well. Five players broke the string during playtesting, one each after 7, 9, 12, 16, and 30 hours.

EASE OF STRINGING

(compared to other strings)

Number of testers who said it was:

much easier	0
somewhat easier	9
about as easy	19
not quite as easy	7
not nearly as easy	1

OVERALL PLAYABILITY

(compared to string played most often)

Number of testers who said it was:

much better	0
somewhat better	6
about as playable	22
not quite as playable	8
not nearly as playable	0

OVERALL DURABILITY

(compared to other strings of similar gauge)

Number of testers who said it was:

much better	4
somewhat better	11
about as durable	20
not quite as durable	1
not nearly as durable	1

RATING AVERAGES

From 1 to 5 (best)

Playability	3.7
Durability	3.7
Power	3.5
Control	3.5
Comfort	3.6
Touch/Feel	3.3
Holding Tension	3.3
Resistance to Movement	2.9

“ This string had lots of power to it. It seemed a little stiff, but only took a couple of hours of play to adjust. I would recommend this string. ”

Male using XT 165 Wilson strung at 35 pounds LO (Forten 18)

“ Very good string. ”

Male using Wilson Triad 150 strung at 30 pounds LO (Wilson Killshot 17)

“ I really like this string. There was an adjustment time required by changing string. ”

Male using Head Megablast 175 strung at 32 pounds (Ashaway Superkill II 16 & 17)

“ It was an especially responsive string. What it may have lacked in ‘pop’ it made up for in control. I would carry this in my pro shop. ”

Female using Bedlam Stun 190 strung at 32 pounds CP (Platinum E-Force 17)

“ Strings moved in the sweetspot up to half the distance between the strings. I feel this is due to the slightly slick surface of the string. I would use this string again. ”

Male using Ektelon More Dominant strung at 31 pounds LO (Forten Boss 16)

“ I really liked the feel of this string when restrung compared to other times the racquet was restrung with other string. It seemed to play very solid and vibration free, which often isn't the case when I get a racquet restrung. Also, I tend to like notching, provided string

doesn't break too fast. I did not play long enough on this string to know for sure, but I do think notching was just beginning to happen. ”

Male using Ektelon Fusion strung at 34 pounds CP (Prince Lightning XX 16)

“ Overall a good string (aside from the color). I wasn't expecting the power I got from this string. ”

Male using E-Force Judgement Stun 175 strung at 35 pounds LO (Ashaway Superkill 17/17)

“ The string plays well. I like the slight amount of texture. Helps with ‘splat’ shots and ‘cut’ serves. ”

Male using Wilson Triad 170 strung at 28 pounds LO (Wilson NXT 16)

“ After 40+ hours, strings show almost no signs of wear, just some slight movement in the mains. The coating on this string makes it very easy to string. For the past three years I have used a 17/18 gauge string. This is a bit thicker than what I am used to. I would love to try this in a thinner gauge. ”

Male using Head MegaBlast strung at

38 pounds (Head Intellistring 17/18)

“ For a multifilament string, it played quite stiff. I was waiting for it to loosen up and stretch out so it would get more elastic. It didn't. It had good pop on the ball and the strings didn't slide around too much, but I wanted a little more life on the ball. Maybe lower tensions on this string. ”

Male using E-Force 165 Judgement strung at 36 pounds LO (Ashaway Superkill 17/17)

For the rest of the tester comments, USRSA members can visit RacquetTECH.com.

(Strings normally used by testers are indicated in parentheses.)

CONCLUSION

Any racquetball player seeking a string with virtually no weaknesses should check out Head MegaBlast: It offers balanced performance across the board, with above-average scores in all the important categories. It takes a long time to break and even more importantly, it holds tension well through that whole time. It's easy to install and it offers above average Power, Control, Touch/Feel, and Comfort. If you think that Head MegaBlast might be for you, fill out the coupon to get a free set to try.

—Greg Raven

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Date	Event	Location
4-5	USPTA Certification	Hempstead, NY
6-7	PTR Certification	Gainesville, FL
6-7	PTR Certification	Duluth, GA
6-7	USPTA Certification	Mequon, WI
6-7	USPTA Certification	Brnswick, ME
6-7	USPTA Certification	Grenada, MS
6-7	USPTA Certification	Charleston, SC
11-12	PTR Certification	Flushing, NY
13-14	PTR Certification	Medford, NJ
13-14	USPTA Certification	Pebble Beach, CA
13-14	USPTA Certification	Eugene, OR
14-15	USPTA Certification	Atlanta, GA
15-16	USPTA Certification	Houston, TX
19-21	PTR Certification	San Jose, CA
20-21	PTR Certification	Miami, FL
20-21	USPTA Certification	Big Raids, MI
20-21	USPTA Certification	San Diego, CA
20-21	USPTA Certification	Asheville, NC
21-22	USPTA Certification	Denver, CO
26-27	USPTA Certification	Honolulu, HI
26-27	USPTA Certification	Gastonia, NC

December

Date	Event	Location
3-4	USPTA Certification	Minneapolis, MN
4-5	USPTA Certification	St. Louis, MO
4-5	USPTA Certification	Nashville, TN
4-5	USPTA Certification	Hilton Head, SC
6-7	PTR Certification	Lexington, SC
9-10	USPTA Certification	Flushing, NY
11-12	USPTA Certification	Gulfport, MS
11-12	USPTA Certification	San Antonio, TX
13-14	USPTA Certification	Houston, TX



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USRSA Review in the October 2001 issue of *Racquet Tech*

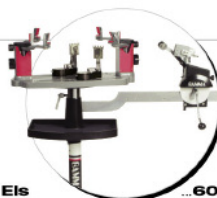
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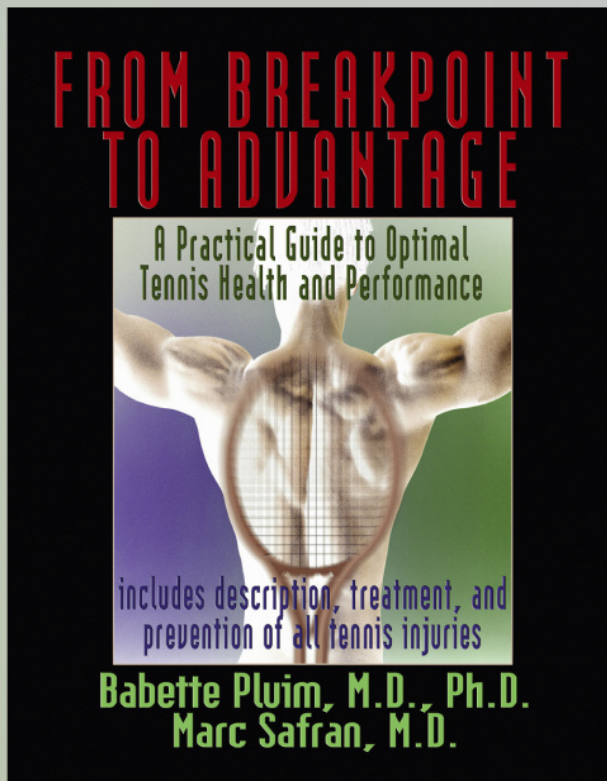
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Babette Pluim is a sports physician and medical director of the Royal Netherlands Lawn Tennis Association. She is the editor of the newsletter *Medicine and Science in Tennis*, a coeditor of *Tennis Medicine for Tennis Coaches*, and a contributor to the *IOC Handbook of Sports Medicine and Science: Tennis*. **Marc Safran** is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine and biomechanics. He is the coauthor of *Instructions for Sports Medicine Patients* and *The Spiral Manual of Sports Medicine*. He lives in San Francisco, California.

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Vive la Différence!

Looking to widen tennis' appeal? Just don't take away the very things that give the sport its identity.

BY CHRIS NICHOLSON

Let's eliminate ad scoring from tennis. And while we're rewriting the rulebook, let's rid the game of that 15-30-40 nonsense and count like normal people. And we should change the ranking system. Then let's raise the net, eliminate the let, stop at three sets and paint the lines blue.

Why? Because the American public simply cannot understand tennis.

That's the underlying contention of many well-meaning advocates for change in this game. Almost every time voices in tennis are given a chance to spout opinions on the state of the sport (such as I'm doing now), we find ourselves awash in ideas about how change will generate more interest from the common folk.

After almost a decade in tennis publishing, I've become weary of hearing the myriad suggestions on how rule modifications would transform the public's desire to watch our game. Yes, tennis would benefit from building a stronger fan base. But I've begun to wonder why the first solutions that so many tennis insiders reach for involve rule changes. The reason has become clear: Tennis has an identity crisis.

We see that tennis is not as popular as baseball, hockey, football, etc. And some of us think that the way to amend that is to make tennis more like those sports. We claim that tennis' scoring method is too hard to follow; the length of matches is too unpredictable; the lack of teams is an obstacle to marketing.

But these are the things that help give tennis its identity.

Anyone who even idly observes American marketing knows that much of it involves capitalizing on trends, on imitating other entities that are already popular. Such strategy can often return

"Every sport has its oddities. These idiosyncrasies do not detract from their sports; they're the aspects that help define the games.

Tennis has these defining traits, too."

some modest gains. But it does so at the expense of diluting the distinctiveness of the product.

We must stop believing that the grass is greener on the other courts. Are we so unoriginal that we can't find a way to make tennis more appealing without stripping it of its character? Especially when we do so only because we think the common fan can't understand it? Let's give American sports fans at least some credit for their intelligence.

Tennis has a confusing scoring system? So does football. Six points for this, three for that, two for yet something else. And while the clock's not even running, teams get to score another point—or two points, depending on how they go about it.

Tennis has an incomprehensible ranking system? Who wants to explain the rationale of college football rankings to me?

Every sport has its oddities. In baseball, games can last two hours or five, and star pitchers play only once every

five days. In basketball, teams are allowed to make the final two minutes of a game last 15 by deliberately slapping each other. In hockey, aside from the goalie, each player is on the ice for barely a third of the contest. A golfer may move a twig on the green, but not on the fairway.

These idiosyncrasies do not detract from their sports; they're the aspects that help define the games. Tennis has these defining traits too, and we should celebrate them as the things that make our sport unique.

Embrace ad scoring; winning by two means you have to be decisively better. Embrace variable game-lengths; you never know when you might be in store for a classic, epic battle. Embrace the puzzling scoring system as the intriguing, historic mystery that it is.

Embrace tennis' identity.

You want to turn more people into tennis fans? Bravo. Kudos. Good for you. But don't do it by *changing* tennis. Do it by selling the uniqueness of the game. People are smart; when they're interested, they will learn.

Not all change is bad. Pressurized balls, the women's tour and the Open Era attest to that. Evolution is natural and necessary, and it can revitalize a sport. But be wary with change. Misplaced, it may dilute tennis into a game that everyone understands, but that no one loves. ■



Freelance writer Chris Nicholson is a contributing editor for *RSI*, former senior editor at *USTA Magazine*, and former assistant editor at *Tennis* magazine.

We welcome your opinions. Please email comments to rsi@racquetTECH.com or fax them to 760-536-1171.



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