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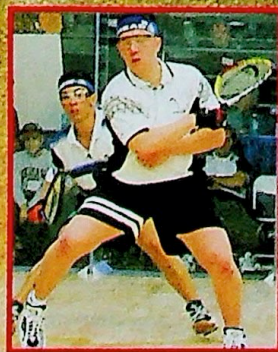
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Vol. VII No. 2

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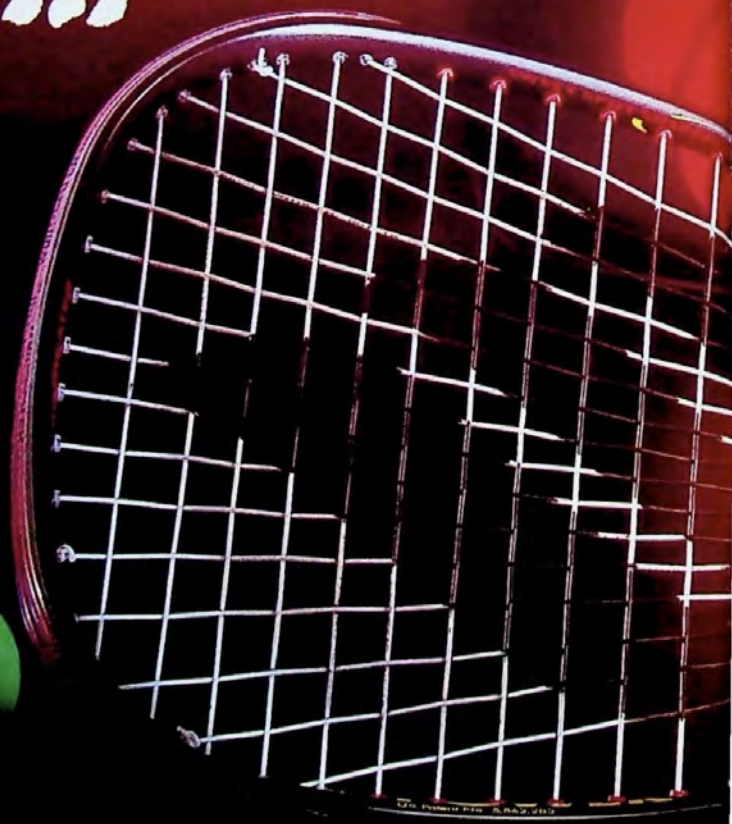
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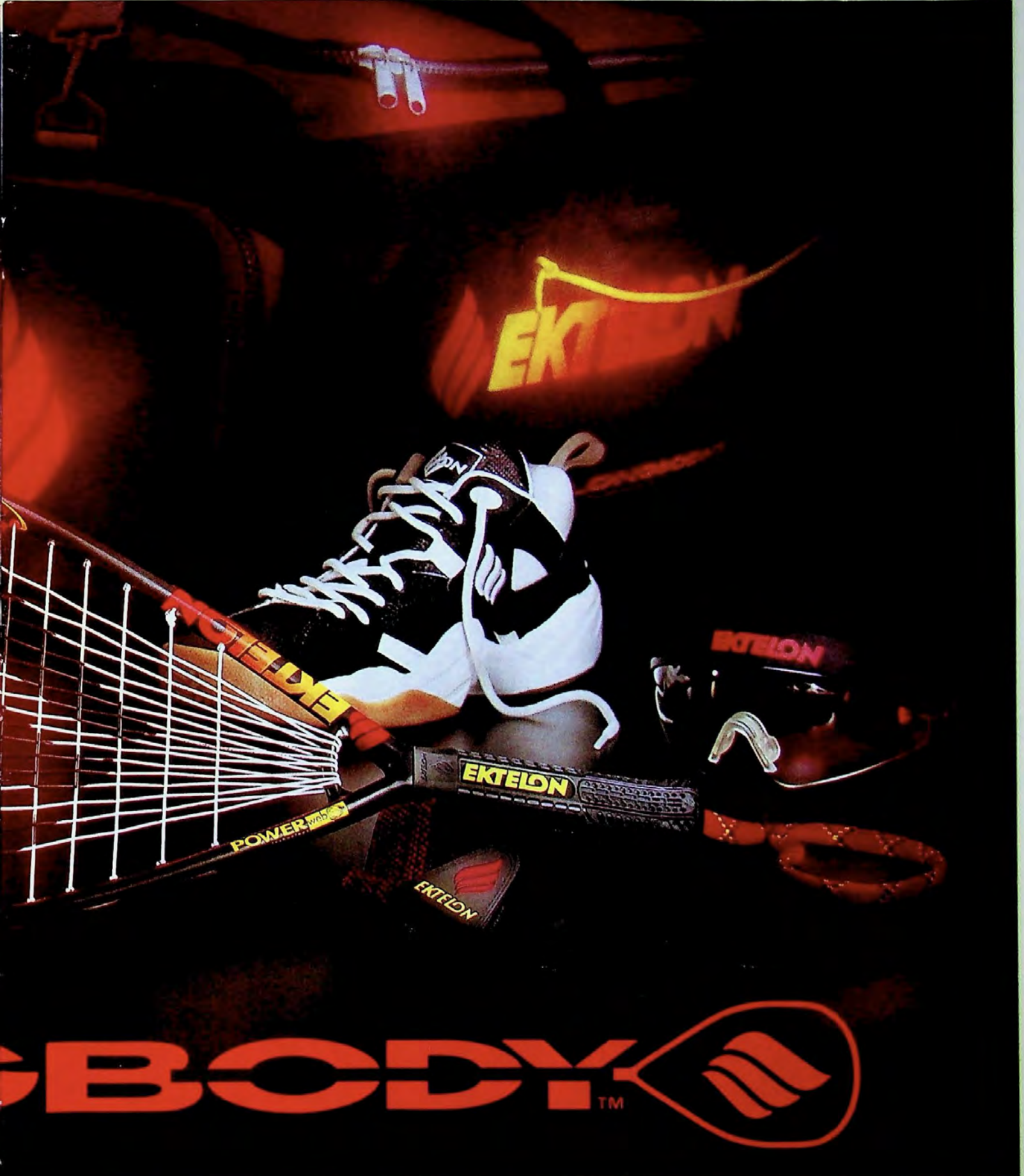
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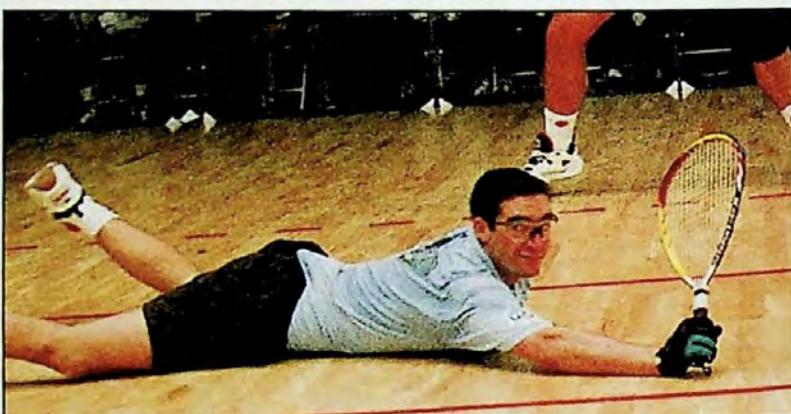
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Cover
Cliff Swain serving
at the U.S. Open.
Photo by Vicki Hughes

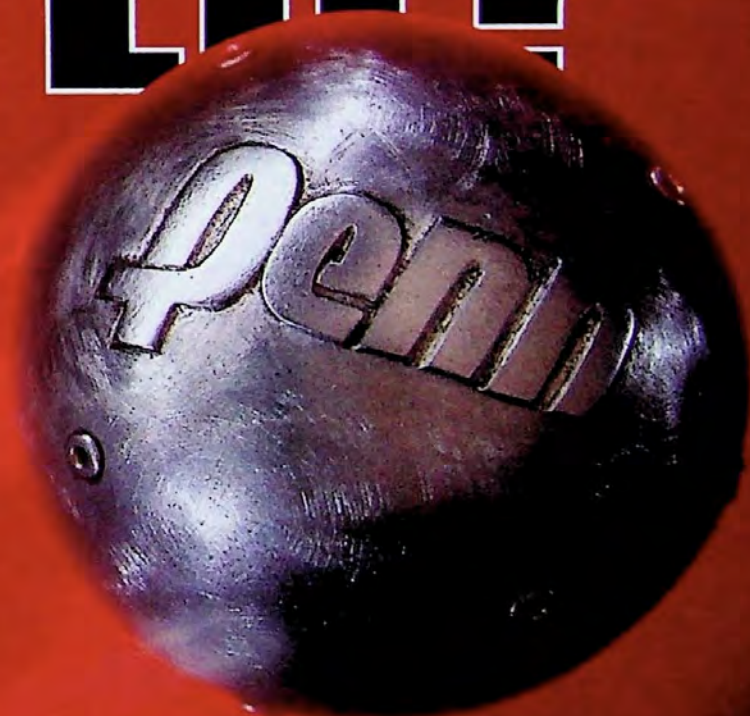


Clockwise from top left:
Sudsy & Swain trying to
occupy the same floor
space. Adam Karp cover-
ing the court. John
Ellis backhand. Jackie
Paraiso concentration.



The Official Publication of the International
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Racquetball Tour

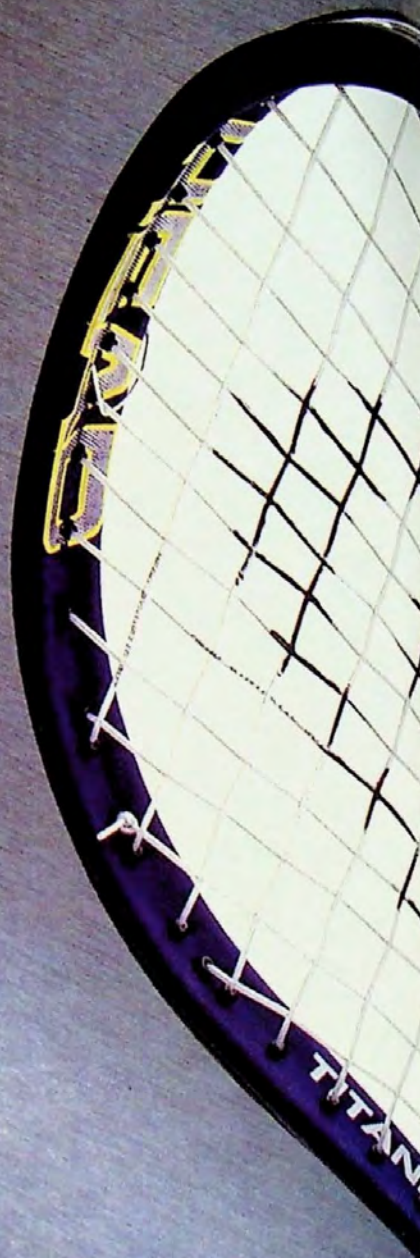
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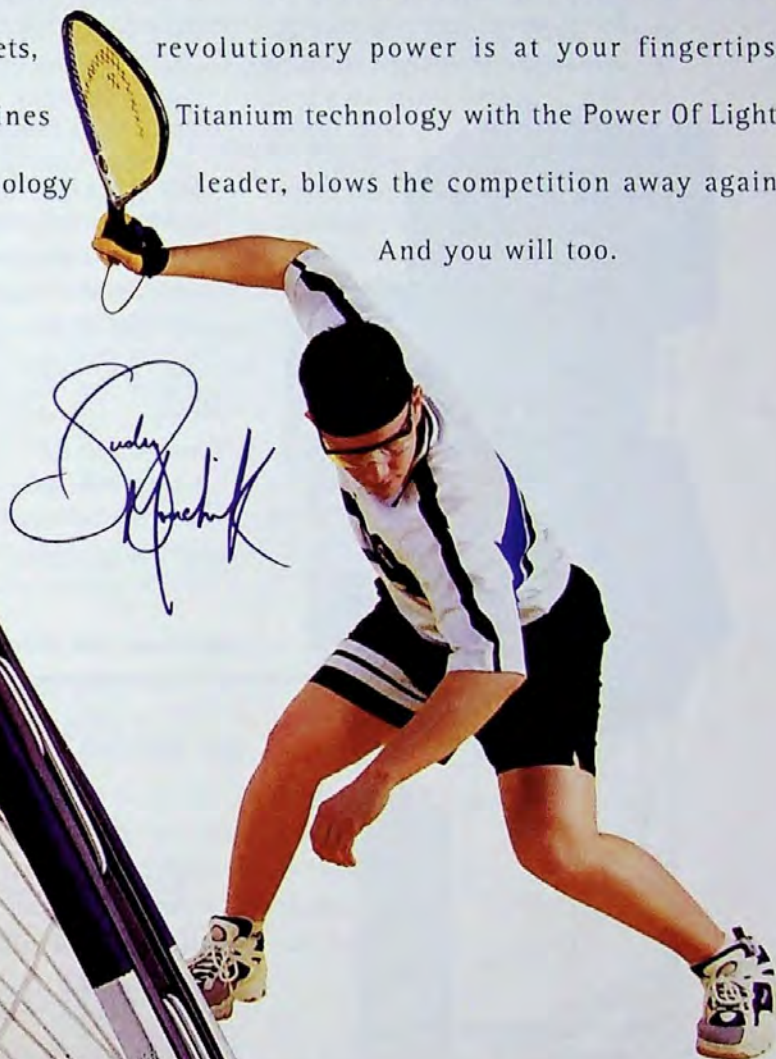
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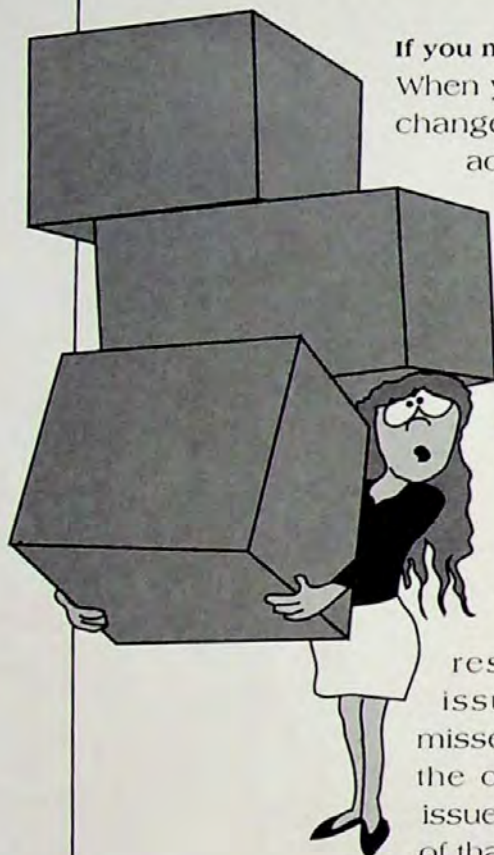


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Editorial Comments

Where'd ya get that racquet?

Once there was a time when you just couldn't get racquetball stuff. Remember? Especially if you lived somewhere out of the metropolitan areas, racquetball gear was almost a semi-precious commodity. In those days any equipment you could purchase was a find not unlike discovering a new planet in a distant galaxy.

Those days are gone. Now the racquetball player, even in the outer reaches of the U.S. and Canada, has a wide array of sources and choices from which to get his/her gear. Many clubs and sports facilities have excellent pro shops that carry the latest equipment from introductory level to professional quality at prices that will match with most any budget. Along with your purchase you can also get some good advice for your game thrown into the deal.

For the enthusiast who wants to save a few bucks, the mail-order sports suppliers have a vast assortment of every piece of equipment imaginable and excel in customer service and satisfaction. A word of warning, though, when dealing with a mail order supplier, choose one with a good reputation.

You will be safe in sticking with Pacific Sports Warehouse in California, Holabird Sports in Baltimore, Samuels Tennisport in Cincinnati, Play Pro in Pennsylvania, or RPM Distributors in California. We've dealt with all of these distributors and have no hesitation in recommending any of them. They are courteous, quick, and deliver what they promise. I wish we could say the same about all the mail order houses. But the sad fact is in racquetball with some companies you buy at your own risk.

The manufacturers are customer friendly too. Call them and they will clue you in on where to see and buy their products. Ektelon, Head, E-Force all can be reached by telephone or on-line for the latest updates in their racquetball lines.

And now Kadaai is trying something revolutionary - giving racquetball players the ability to buy high end racquets direct. This is a unique concept in racquetball and one that is sure to be met with open arms.

Whatever your preference in purchasing equipment, Sporting Goods Dealer, Club Pro Shop, Mail Order Sports Supplier, Direct from the Manufacturer, or Discount Store, for the first time racquetball players have the convenience of choosing their own destiny. Kind of nice, isn't it?

--SQ

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SHORT SERVES



Vicki Hughes

When Worlds Collide

IRT #1 Cliff Swain and IRT #2 Sudsy Monchik have been battling it out over the last couple of seasons to see who would occupy the #1 spot. Here they prove that it's not only impossible for both to be number one, it's also impossible for them both to occupy the same floor space at the same time.

We think Einstein did some work on these same principles.

Future Tour Star?

Our own Norm Blum's daughter Rachel has received some sports attention of her own recently by competing in the Punt, Pass, & Kick competition. She was the winner for the Jacksonville Jaguars in the eight & nine year-old division. She ended up 18th in the nation. She wants to start playing racquetball when she isn't competing in soccer, basketball, and baseball.

Watch out, Michelle.





Wilson signs Swain

IRT #1 ranked Cliff Swain has signed an agreement with Wilson Racquet Sports to endorse its racquets, shoes, gloves, strings, grips, and bags. Swain was born and raised in the Boston area and is the son of an avid handball player. Picking up racquetball at age 13, Swain won a Junior National title and has been Pro National Champion four times. The lefty, known for his powerful serve and mental toughness, left racquetball in '91 - '92 to pursue a career in competitive tennis. He came back to his court roots in '93 and immediately claimed top player status. Since that time he has maintained a #1 or #2 ranking.

When is a Catapult not a Catapult?

Because of a mix-up with photos and identification, a wrong photo accompanied the article on the 22" racquets (**KILLSHOT** Winter 98 Longer). The real Head Catapult 180, pictured above right, is the racquet **S u d s y** Monchik has been using this season.



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Swain is still King of the Road as he increases his lead on the pack.

By Mark Henry

While most of the past two seasons of professional racquetball have been a two horse race between Sudsy Monchik and Cliff Swain, few would have guessed that Swain would return to prominence in 1998 with such a commanding performance. In fact while Swain has earned tremendous respect for his domination of the sport in the 90's like no other in the past twenty years, many recognized Monchik as unstoppable as the newest heir to the throne. Instead, in contrast to Swain's famous

understated style and calm intensity, his assault on the tour for the bulk of the 1997 - 1998 season has been violent and dramatic and has landed him securely in the number one position.

Among the other front runners of the season, California's John Ellis has begun posting the kind of wins that have been predicted for him for the past four seasons. Veteran Andy Roberts (rumored to be on the verge of retirement from full-time touring) also showed he still has what

it takes as he became only the fourth player to post an event win for this season. Derek Robinson, Brian Istace, and Rocky Carson, also displayed flashes of brilliance with big upset wins in recent events. Coming off the ten mid season events that make or break professional careers (Chicago's Woodfield Halloween Classic, Memphis' Promus Hotels U.S. Open, Boston's Foxwoods Pro-AM, Denver's nearly back-to-back APH Service Company Holiday Pro-Am Classic and Ralph Schomp Automotive Pro-AM,



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The Columbus Pro-Am, Lincoln's Laundry Land Pro-Am Presented by US West, Greenbrook New Jersey's Foxwoods Pro-Am, and

Rochester's Piehler Pro-Am) the titans of the IRT have now established their positions as they head into the all important four late season events.

Chicago* Hal-

efforts that have kept them among the elite of the sport to good finishes in Chicago.

The biggest event in the sport, the Promus Hotels U.S. Open proved even bigger and better in 1997.

Gaining prominence as a "must" for serious racquet heads, the Memphis-based

ex-travaganza provided unequalled pro action, tremendous amateur competition, a trade show that represents a who's who of the industry, parties, food, and all the festivities and hoopla you can fit into five days.

Playing from a round of 64, the pro draw in Memphis provides some unique opportunities for players to distinguish themselves. Rising to the occasion, Adam Karp, Eric Muller, and Veteran Woody Clouse all

blasted their way through stiff competition to ride upsets straight into the quarters. Jason Mannino broke from an early season slump to play his trademark get and gun game into the same round.

Other top dogs Roberts, Ellis, and Monchik posted fantastic showings to move into the semi's. But the best rivalry going, Swain vs Monchik gave capacity crowds and a national television audience on ESPN2 the match-up they wanted. This time out, the action was typically furious, but Swain never allowed the younger Monchik an opportunity to get in the match. In a surprisingly quick three games, the most prestigious trophy in the sport went home with Cliff Swain.

The Ridge Athletic Club in Boston was the host for the Foxwoods Pro-Am and home town boy Cliff Swain held his turf with an impressive string of victories once he survived a five game marathon against Guidry. Guidry was able to knock Swain out of the competition at this event last season and, for a while, it appeared he might repeat the victory.

Mike Ray showed some glimpses of greatness

SEMIS

Swain d. Fowler
11-6, 11-8, 11-2
Ray d. Monchik
11-3, 11-1, 11-4

IRT Boston Foxwood Pro-Am

Cliff Swain

5-11, 11-4, 11-4, 11-4

Mike Ray

QUARTERS

Swain d. Guidry
5-11, 11-3, 9-11, 11-2, 12-10
Fowler d. Ellis
11-7, 11-3, 2-11, 11-6
Ray d. Roberts
6-11, 11-8, 11-1, 11-5
Monchik d. Mannino
Win by Forfeit - Injury

SEMIS

Monchik d. Ellis
11-7, 11-7, 11-9
Swain d. Roberts
8-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-5

Cliff Swain

11-6, 11-2, 11-3

Sudsy Monchik

QUARTERS

Monchik d. Clouse
11-6, 11-7, 11-6
Ellis d. Mannino
11-9, 11-8, 2-11, 8-11, 12-10
Roberts d. Karp
11-1, 11-8, 11-9
Swain d. Muller
11-5, 11-7, 11-2

IRT Memphis US Open

loween tradition would go down as the beginning of Swain's return to prominence. In a comeback from two games down, Swain posted what would be the first in a string of finals victories for the season. His precision and intensity reminded fans of the "young-and-hungry" Swain of the 1980's. The veteran entered the event with the confidence of a seasoned champion coupled with a renewed spirit. Chi-town fans made no mistake, the master is back and reclaiming lost ground in a big hurry.

With wins over big Tony Jelso and Mike Ceresia, Canada's Brian Istace drew crowd attention as well. Journeymen players Mike Guidry and Dan Fowler rode solid



Above: Sudsy Monchik battles John Ellis.
Far left: Mike Ray

Cliff Swain

11-2, 11-6, 10-12, 10-12, 11-8

Sudsy Monchik

SEMIS

Swain d. Ellis
5-11, 11-8, 11-8, 12-10
Monchik d. Mannino
11-4, 11-4, 9-11, 11-8

QUARTERS

Swain d. Karp
15-13, 11-5, 12-10
Ellis d. Gelhaus
11-5, 4-11, 11-4, 11-4
Mannino d. Roberts
11-9, 11-8, 11-4
Monchik d. Jelso
11-4, 11-4, 9-11, 11-8

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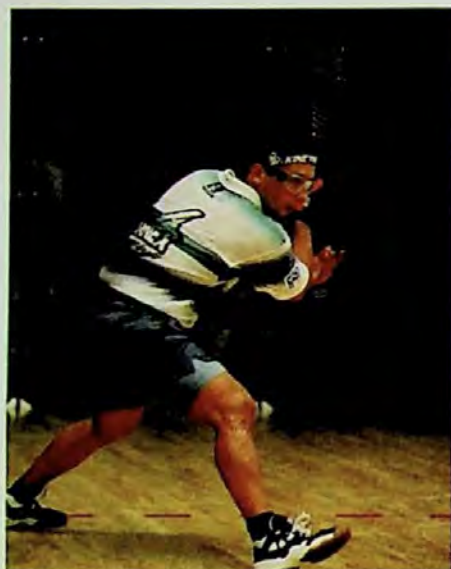
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that so characterized his play from the early and mid '90's. He put together a list of wins that included victories against #3 Roberts and #2 Monchik.



Vicki Hughes

Denver's Lakewood Athletic Club was home to the APH Service Company Holiday Pro-Am. Swain held on to surface with his fourth victory in as many outings. The real threat to Swain's domination came in the final as Monchik took games three and four with 12-10 victories. Swain was able to come back in the tie breaker 11-8 to hold on to the win.

Both Ray and Guidry were knocked out in the early rounds, putting a slightly different spin on how the rest of the tournament played out.

A victory hungry Ellis was the story at the Ralph

John Ellis

1-11, 11-8, 11-7, 12-10

Sudsy Monchik

SEMIS

Ellis d. Swain
8-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-1, 11-9

Monchik d. Roberts
11-6, 15-13, 11-6

QUARTERS

Swain d. Karp
8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 13-11

Ellis d. Guidry
11-5, 11-7, 2-11, 11-6

Roberts d. Fowler
11-9, 12-10, 11-6

Monchik d. Ray
11-4, 11-8, 8-11, 9-11, 11-7

IRT Denver Ralph Schomp Automotive US West Pro-Am

John Ellis

7-11, 12-10, 11-3, 11-4

Derek Robinson

SEMIS

Ellis d. Swain
17-15, 11-7, 11-4

Robinson d. Guidry
11-5, 11-9, 4-11, 11-8

QUARTERS

Swain d. Karp
11-5, 11-4, 11-7

Ellis d. Mannino
11-8, 6-11, 3-11, 11-4, 11-1

Guidry d. Roberts
10-12, 11-0, 13-11, 12-10

Robinson d. Fowler
11-7, 11-0, 5-11, 7-11, 11-6

IRT Columbus Pro-Am

Vicki Hughes



Top left: John Ellis. Center: Adam Karp and Andy Roberts. Top right: Derek Robinson. Right: Dan Fowler.

Schomp Automotive Pro-Am. A part of the US West "racquetball is better here" series the Denver event always promises some surprises. Ellis was the surprise, coming back from a two game deficit to eliminate Swain in the semifinals and from one-game down to defeat Monchik in the final.

Rocky Carson came into this tournament full throttle and got past Jason Mannino in four games in the early rounds but was then eliminated by Adam Karp in four.

Evidently, Ellis liked the idea of winning the Ralph Schomp Automotive Pro-Am in Denver enough to

repeat the accomplishment. The Columbus Pro-Am at the Continental Athletic Club in Columbus, Ohio was the scene of Ellis' second of back to back pro stop victories. He was able to knock the wind out of Swain's sails with a first game 17-15 marathon and Swain never recovered. He took the next two decisively to get into the final.

Meanwhile in the lower bracket Derek Robinson was making some noise of his own by eliminating Monchik in the early rounds. He then went on



to defeat Dan Fowler in a five game bout that looked like it could go either way. His next obstacle was Guidry who he eliminated in four. This tournament was one of those rare events without either Swain or Monchik still alive in the final.

It was tempting to suggest that Cliff Swain "cleaned-up" at the Laundry Land Pro-Am. At any rate, he got back on a winning track. It was also tempting to say there



was no Suds, and without Monchik in the bottom bracket things shaped-up somewhat differently. Sports Courts in Lincoln, Nebraska, hosted the Laundry Land Pro-Am, another event in the US West "racquetball is better here" series.

Cliff Swain	
11-2, 2-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-8	
John Ellis	
11-2, 2-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-8	
SEMIS	
Swain d. Roberts	11-2, 8-11, 11-4, 11-2
Ellis d. Mannino	11-9, 11-1, 11-8
QUARTERS	
Swain d. Guidry	11-4, 11-9, 11-8
Roberts d. Vogel	11-3, 12-14, 11-8, 11-7
Ellis d. Gelhaus	11-6, 11-0, 11-2
Mannino d. Bronfeld	7-11, 11-9, 11-3, 11-5
IRT Lincoln Laundry Land Pro-Am	

Above: Jason Mannino and John Ellis.
Below: Sudsy Monchik



Swain was back in winning form but Ellis wasn't ready to be rolled over easily. Swain had to come back from a two game deficit to win games four and five and the tournament.

Mannino had some trouble putting away Eric Muller and Michael Bronfeld took him to four games before Ellis defeated him in three. The other semi pitted Swain against Roberts who took Swain to four games after battling Vogel for four, and Robinson for five.

Kelly Gelhaus came back against Ray after being down two games to advance to the quarters. But Ellis, who never lost a game until the final against Swain defeated him in a quick three, even dishing out a doughnut.

Swain stayed true to form at the Foxwoods Pro-Am at the King George Racquet Club in Greenbrook, New Jersey. He managed to dispense all challengers in three until he met head-to-head with Monchik in the final. There he took one loss (11-13) before coming back with two more wins to claim the first place check.

Monchik advanced by beating Ellis in the semifinals and Guidry in the quarters. Ellis looked like he might repeat his performances in Denver or Columbus winning all matches in three until meeting-up with Monchik.

Swain's road to the winner's circle came at the expense of Roberts in the semi's and Fowler in the quarters. Roberts also looked like he might be putting together a winning effort, defeating Ray in three in the quarters before butting heads with Swain.

Roberts built on his success at Greenbrook to claim victory at the Piehler Motors Pro-Am at the Penfield Racquet & Fitness Club in Rochester,

IRT Greenbrook Foxwoods Pro-Am

SEMIS

Swain d. Roberts
11-5, 11-4, 11-6
Monchik d. Ellis
11-2, 11-2, 11-6

Cliff Swain

11-2, 11-13, 11-8, 11-8

Sudsy Monchik

QUARTERS

Swain d. Fowler
11-8, 11-7, 11-7
Roberts d. Ray
11-4, 11-6, 11-2
Ellis d. Mannino
11-6, 11-8, 11-10
Monchik d. Guidry
12-10, 11-1, 11-9

New York. It was a hard fought road for Roberts, with Robinson taking him to four games, Vogel battling for four and Mannino managing to hang tough for five before falling to Roberts' power play. The final was the only three game match of the tournament for Roberts with the exception of his win in the round of 32's.

Ellis was playing at a winning pace, again not losing a game until he met Roberts in the final. His path took in Ray in the Semi's and Fowler in the quarters. Ray made it into the final by winning against Jelso in the sixteens and then with one game each in the quarters, Monchik took an injury forfeit.

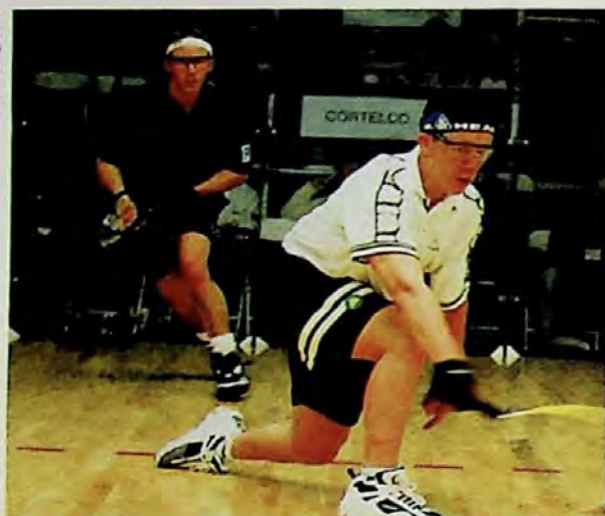
It was an impressive win for Roberts, who is beginning to make comments about

Andy Roberts	
11-8, 11-2, 11-6	
John Ellis	
11-8, 11-2, 11-6	
SEMIS	
Roberts d. Mannino	11-9, 11-9, 7-11, 6-11, 12-10
Ellis d. Ray	11-9, 11-3, 11-9
QUARTERS	
Mannino d. Swain	11-3, 11-0, 9-11, 11-6
Roberts d. Vogel	11-2, 10-12, 11-8, 12-10
Ellis d. Fowler	11-4, 11-5, 11-4
Ray d. Monchik	7-11, 11-2, Injury
IRT Rochester Piehler Motors Pro-Am	



Below: Sudsy Monchik and Woody Clouse. Below center: Sudsy Monchik.

Vicki Hughes



Michael Boatman



a possible retirement. If he can continue to put together wins like this, he could still be around for a long time.

The tour rolled to its next stop at the March Madness Pro-Am. The Goleta Valley Athletic Club in Santa Barbara, California hosted this event that again saw Swain rise to his normal spot at tourney's end. Swain didn't coast to this victory. After three-game wins over Gonzalez and Karp in the sixteens and quarters he met-up with Mannino in the semifinals for a real battle. This contest went five games with Swain taking the tie breaker 11-8.

Gelhaus took Monchik to five games in the lower bracket with Monchik coming back from two straight losses to win the last two games. Robinson took Roberts out of the action with a four game defeat in the round of sixteens. He also took Fowler out in four before Monchik defeated him in three games in the semifinals.

Monchik won the first game in the final and was ahead 7-5 in the second before an injury forfeit gave Swain the victory.

Guidry and Clouse battled in a five-game see-saw match

Left: The portable court in use at the Promus Hotels U.S. Open in Memphis.

Cliff Swain

7-11, 5-7, Injury

Sudsy Monchik

SEMIS

Swain d. Mannino
10-12, 11-7, 11-7, 9-11, 11-8
Monchik d. Robinson
11-4, 11-5, 11-7

QUARTERS

Swain d. Karp
11-5, 11-4, 11-5
Mannino d. Guidry
7-11, 11-9, 12-10, 11-8
Robinson d. Fowler
6-11, 11-8, 11-3, 12-10
Monchik d. Gelhaus
11-4, 5-11, 9-11, 11-5, 11-1

IRT Santa Barbara March Madness Pro-Am

with Guidry taking the final two games and handing Clouse one doughnut.

As the tour keeps driving toward the season's all-important end games (The Nationals in Las Vegas in late April, and the Tournament of Champions in Portland, in June) Swain has increased his lead enough to assure himself of the season-end number one ranking. The "once-and-future king of racquetball", Swain has reinforced the opinion of those who regard him as the greatest in the history of the game. Swain has managed to once again rise to the occasion. His recapture of a solid number one position stands as proof of his ability to constantly focus his training and rekindle his amazing intensity to gain the ground he had lost the previous two seasons to prodigy Sudsy Monchik.

The season saw many of the top eight plagued with minor injuries. The grueling travel schedule necessary to play nearly back-to-back events allowed no basic recovery time from match play, much less time for recovery from the sprains, strains, bumps and bruises that are a part of professional racquetball. Logically, all this is much tougher on the players who consistently make it to late rounds, since they simply have more "work days" in their schedule than other players. Still the return of Swain to top form and top intensity has provided an opportunity to see greatness in action. It will also, I suspect, spur on the driving hunger that took Monchik straight to the top from his earliest beginnings on the tour. At any rate, with Swain and Monchik at one and two, the real winner is anyone who can grab an opportunity to see this rivalry first hand!



Shoot For The Stars

Ceiling Ball "Do's & Don't's"



No matter how long you've been playing, no matter what your level of play, no matter what weapons you unleash with precision, you will still hit ceiling balls. Ceiling balls are an unavoidable component of the rally. Sure, with the ongoing trend of the past two decades toward a more aggressive, more offensive game style, they are not as common to a rally as in previous days when using the ceiling was just one more component of a very strategic, controlled game. Still, ceiling balls find their way into rallies, from friendly club matches to the IRT. They still have a place in the game, and should be used wisely, and executed with timing and purpose.

Since you'll need the ceiling ball as just one more arrow in your quiver, here are some important things to remember as you shoot for the stars.

Do this

1 Do hit ceiling balls with accuracy and precision. Your shots should hit the ceiling just before the front wall, making the resulting ball most playable by your opponent from deep court. Your goal is to keep them on the back wall, especially in the corners. Your ceilings that fall short for set ups or come off the back wall as plums are no good to you.

2 Do hit ceiling balls with a purpose. Go to the ceiling because you need to change the momentum or the pace. Use ceiling balls to buy time, to kick your opponent out of center, or because your opponent is weak from deep court. Don't just hit them because they seem the thing to do.

3 Whenever you go to the ceiling, seize the opportunity to gain center court. Never waste a ceiling ball by hitting it well and just standing and watching from outside your ideal coverage zone.

4 Do keep ceiling balls in mind as a way out of an awkward situation. Having to take a ball too high to drive, trouble with balance or setup, or offensive shots just not working are good times to go to the ceiling.

Don't do this

1 Don't ever think your opponent won't return them. Your opponent's percentage on the return is extremely high, so gain what advantage you can for his next shot.

2 Don't ever stop moving. Ceiling balls slow the pace. That means buying you precious time, not giving you a rest to sit back on your heels and relax.

3 Don't ever sacrifice an offensive opportunity to go to the ceiling. If you can consistently hit offensively from high balls, do it. Keep the pressure on instead of giving up momentum by going to the ceiling.

4 Don't ever let your ceiling balls become setups for your opponent. While overshadowed by more effective offensive weapons today, the ceiling ball is still an important weapon when executed with timing and precision. Never give your opponent a set up off your ceiling balls.

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CONCEPT TRAINING

ANTICIPATION!

Concept:

To maximize court coverage, use anticipation to its fullest advantage.

The first time on the court, it becomes clear that anticipation plays a big roll in racquetball. At first, that means just learning where the ball will come into play off the walls. With progress, anticipation means learning to read an opponent to determine how he is likely to move and to make choices. Unfortunately, that is where most players stop developing their anticipation skills.

Effectively using anticipation as the pros do - as an offensive tool - means consciously evaluating each situation. They do this by mentally breaking the game down into "segments" of play. (See diagram) Seeing the game in terms of these three shot segments makes the information manageable. The idea is to gain advantage with each segment of play until your opponent no longer has an opportunity to return the ball.

At this point, anticipation becomes a weapon. For any given segment, you will have to anticipate your opponent's options before he is faced with them. As you hit your shots, you already have in mind your opponent's options off the shot you hit. You can weigh out your options and the odds, and make conscious choices for your own coverage after you make your shot based on calculation rather than by the seat-of-your-pants.

Breaking the rallies into segments, then going through the thought process ahead of your opponent so that you make smart choices will increase your effectiveness on-court tremendously. You will be amazed how this simple organization of thinking as opposed to moving on gut instinct will improve your game. Before you ever hit the ball, know what your opponent might do from the shot you give him and be ready. Anticipation may become your greatest weapon!

3 Three Part Game Segment

1. Opponent's Shot
2. Your Return
3. Opponent's Options

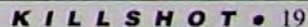
2 Two Part Game Segment

- Occurs when you serve
1. Your Serve
 2. Opponent's Options

10 Things to Remember in Center Court

4 Perfect Lateral Movement - Once in the center, your opponent will try to pass you. Perfect your ability to move efficiently from side to side to cover would-be passes.

10 Watch Your Opponent - Use your peripheral vision from a half turn to keep an eye on your opponent. Nothing will take away your advantage quicker than keeping your eyes set on the front wall.



Strategy!

Advanced, Intermediate, or Beginning Players can improve their games with a good strategy.

By Ed Turner & Woody Clouse

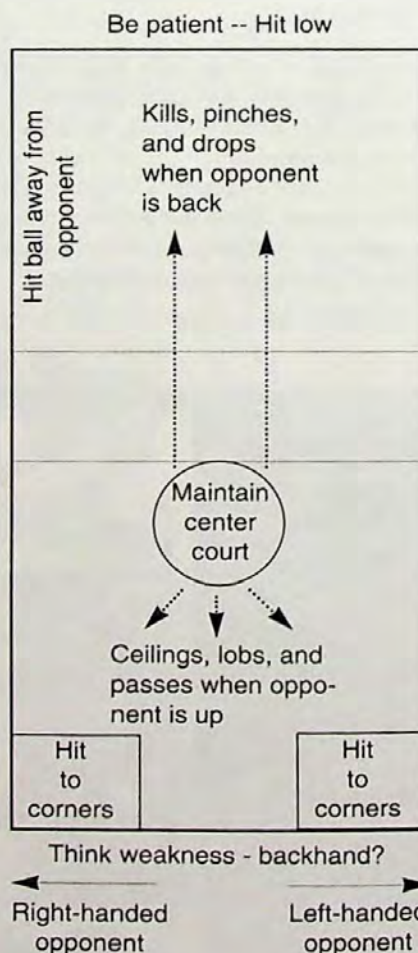
Whether you are an advanced, intermediate, or beginning player, the following strategies will help you improve your play.

These five elementary strategies focus on the basic principles of racquetball play.

1.

Control Center Court.

A major strategy for all players is to control center court, the oval 15 feet wide and 8 to 10 feet deep just



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behind the short line. From this position you have an equal chance of reaching all portions of the court. You will then have offensive rather than defensive shot selection. Fight to stay in this oval on all shots.

2.

Hit to Your Opponent's Weakness

Hitting the ball to your opponent's weakness is one of the most important strategies in the game. Generally this means picking on your opponent's backhand. But don't assume this to be the case; at the upper levels of play the backhand is likely a player's best stroke.

3.

Hit Away From Your Opponent

Another almost obvious strategy is to "hit it where they ain't". Hit pinch shots, kills, and drop shots when your opponent is in backcourt and hit passing shots and ceiling shots when your opponent is in center court. Hit to the right side of the court if your opponent is in the left side and vice versa. Constantly keep your opponent on the run and make his or her shots more difficult to execute.

4.

Shoot for the Corners

Hit most shots into the back corners, in particular the backhand corner. The corners are the farthest back you can pin your opponent. Returns must travel a greater dis-

tance, giving your opponent the greatest opportunity for error. Also, the corners make swinging very difficult. In addition, the strange angles and rebounds that come out of the corners make life more challenging for your opponent.

5.

Be Patient and Play the Ball Low

Let the ball drop low rather than rushing and playing it high. The lower you play the ball, the lower it will hit the front wall and the more difficult it will be for your opponent to return. Remember, if you play the ball too low to the floor, your chance for error increases. You want to hit the ball low but within your comfort zone.



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Problems Self-Diagnosis

Game in a slump? Knowing your deficiencies is your first step toward making changes or finding the best help for your game. Before you seek out a teacher or enlist the assistance of a more accomplished player you know, get an idea of where your problems lie. Most problems will fall into one of these categories:

Strategy and movement. (Things like anticipation, reading your opponent, court positioning, shot selection, etc.)

Basic skills. (Things like racquet prep, follow through, footwork, body mechanics, etc.)

Conditioning. (Running out of steam, stiff muscles, etc.)

Mental Toughness. (Choking, easily intimidated, overkill, avoidance, etc.)

Preparation. (Lack of sleep, poorly hydrated, hungry, stomach too full, etc.)

Equipment. (Abused shoes or racquet, poorly strung or over-strung racquet, scratched eye guards, etc.)

Hint: many of the pros have a checklist for each of these areas that they use each week to assess their needs. That helps determine the best use of preparation time. Constantly correcting deficiencies on the list also helps build confidence in each area of their games.

Knowing where you need help will make your questions more effective and your perception of your game and your goals clearer.

Snacking Guidelines

Like to snack? That's one habit that may not be so bad after all. Research shows and most nutrition gurus agree that small balanced meals keep your metabolism up and your nutritional needs met most effectively. Also, snacking can keep you from becoming so hungry that you're inclined "pig out" when you do eat. Some snacking tips:

- 1) Balance your snacks as mini meals for maximum efficiency.
- 2) Pre plan including portions so that you don't overload by snacking right out of a box or other container.
- 3) You need plenty of fresh fruits each day, but remember that by themselves they may cause your blood sugar to spike then dip causing hunger an hour or so after eating them. Add some grain products, low fat cheese, or something else that burns more slowly to avoid the spike and dip.
- 4) Use snacks throughout the day, but stay clear in the late evening hours. Snacking after dinner increases your body's likelihood of storing fat, and disrupts sleep patterns.



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When to stretch?

Stretching has a dual purpose in racquetball, it prevents injury, and greatly improves performance. Still, it may be the most neglected aspect of training. There is really no bad time to stretch, as long as you take care to do it gently. If your muscles are cold, they are not very pliable and any stretching should be kept to a minimum and done very cautiously and carefully. (Imagine stretching cold chewing gum vs. stretching warm gum. Your muscles have much the same tendency to "snap" when cold and to stretch when warm as the gum does.) The ideal times to stretch are during breaks in the action in a match, and at the end of a match. For pre-match stretching, gently warm the muscle tissue first - maybe on a bike, treadmill or rowing machine. No matter when you stretch, do firm continuous movements avoid jerky or bouncing movements. Your best allies at the club in building a good stretching program are qualified personal trainers, licensed massage therapists and (if your club has the luxury), physical therapists.

How much can visualization really help?

Sportswriters and especially those who write instructionals know the value of visualizing play with the mind's eye. When the strategic aspects of their games seemed to improve during times off the court when editing instructional material, **KILLSHOT** editors became curious. In an informal polling of **KILLSHOT** writers, teachers who write instructionals for state newsletters, and top teaching pros who put their ideas in writing for handouts and other teaching materials, the trend was the same. The detailed visualization of court positioning, movement, and shot selection necessary for composing articles had a positive effect on on-court choices. In addition, most questioned reported less indecision and hesitation, which seemed to translate into improved confidence and faster reaction times.



Bottom line, it seems that seeing the movement with the mind's eye is extremely valuable. (We've all heard of the example of visualization with basketball free throw shooting.) What can be gained from this by the reader of instructional material is to assimilate the material into your game by visualizing the concepts from instructional pieces before you take it to the court.

Look to the Grip

Finding your shots consistently skipping or hitting high on the front wall? OK, there's probably several million reasons why that might be happening. But one easy thing to check is your grip. Especially if you play with a glove, (and 99% of all players do) you may not have noticed how worn your grip has become, allowing you to slip with each stroke. According to John Boudman, one of the sport's foremost racquet experts, "We can put the most exotic string on the planet in your racquet, but if your grip is too worn, it won't do a lot of good. The rubber replacement grips everybody loves are great, but if the ridges become worn down, it's time for a new one"

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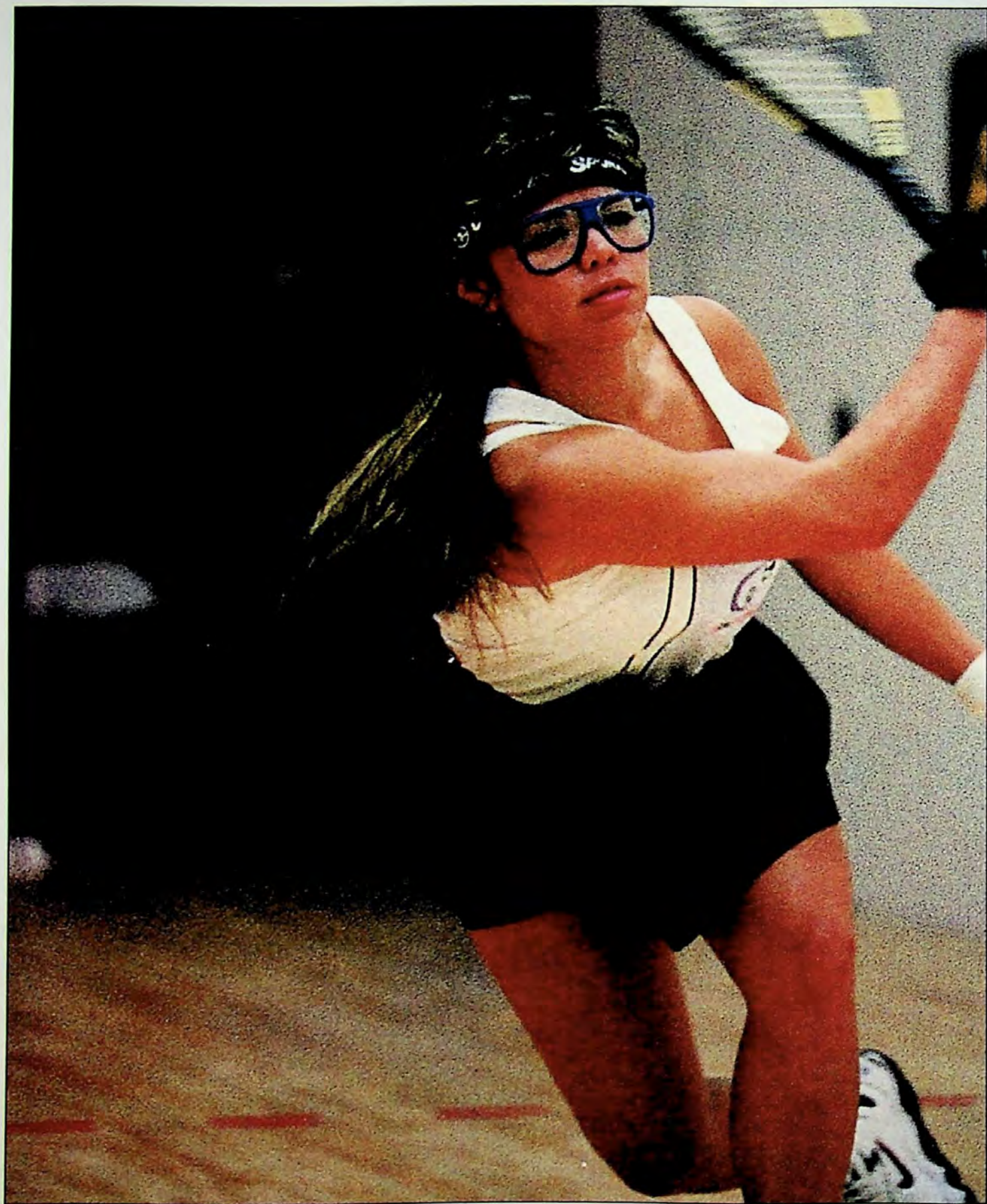
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DANGER! WOMEN PLAYING

Michelle Gould
doesn't let up.
Jackie Paraiso,
Cheryl Gudinas,
and Laura
Fenton
battle hard
for the other
top spots.

Vicki Hughes



Michelle Gould is still queen of the road with the WIRT, still able to take all challengers and easily bulldoze them aside. At this point, no threat to her secure hold on #1 can be seen in the pack of players below Gould in the rankings. Maybe the biggest news so far this season is that Marci Drexler took a game from Gould 11-4 in the quarterfinal round in the Metro New York City Open. All of Gould's other matches have been three game affairs with her complete domination of women's racquetball never in question.

Michelle Gould, left, shows no signs of easing-up as the season progresses. In the last three WIRT events she has lost only one game.

Opposite:
Jackie Paraiso has taken up the gauntlet as the player most likely to threaten Gould's strangle hold on #1. Her smooth persistence has resulted in her climbing to a #2 ranking.

their respective paces and Paraiso has crowded Gudinas out of her #2 spot. Fenton is hot on her heels at #4. The

real scrapping seems to be shaping up within that pack and anything can happen as the WIRT competitors brace themselves for the season ending contests this spring and summer.

The feisty Drexler continues to play her patented brand of racquetball but, unfortunately, generally plays into a Gould match-up before the late rounds. Lynne Coburn, a tour mainstay, can't quite get past Fenton but the contests usually go four or, in the case of the Metro Open, five grueling games.

Kersten Hallander took Gudinas to a five-game match at the Metro Open but

Michelle Gould

11-7, 11-5, 11-7

Jackie Paraiso

QUARTERS

Gould d. Drexler
11-9, 4-11, 11-6, 11-3
Fenton d. Coburn
11-9, 11-5, 9-11, 5-11, 11-9
Gudinas d. Hallander
7-11, 11-3, 2-11, 11-9, 11-5
Paraiso d. Galloway
11-3, 11-4, 11-6

Jackie Paraiso, back on the tour with a vengeance, is the one contender who seems to give Michelle Gould the most trouble. Paraiso did a little steamrolling of her own at the same tournament by winning in three straight against Lorraine Galloway and then against the ever competitive Cheryl Gudinas.

Gudinas has been the thorn in Gould's side until recently but Paraiso and Laura Fenton have picked up

SEMIS

Gould d. Fenton
11-5, 11-5, 12-10
Paraiso d. Gudinas
11-9, 11-8, 11-5

WIRT New York Metro NYC Open



Cheryl Gudinas, far left, has slipped from #2 to #3 this season but is keeping constant pressure on #2 Jackie Paraiso. Here she battles the always dangerous Caryn McKinney in the quarterfinals of the Promus Hotels U.S. Open in Memphis. Gudinas took the match in four.

The appearance of Caryn McKinney in Memphis is always a treat and she knocked out Kersten Hallander and Lydia Hammock before tying-in to Gudinas for a four game battle. Gudinas stopped her before moving on to meet Paraiso.

Drexler and Fenton tangled in quarterfinals action in a gritty five game match that see-sawed until Drexler took control in game five. Randy Friedman knocked Myers out of the running in three games but ran head on into an unyielding Gould who moved easily into the next round. Chris Evon got past Galloway, rather handily, in three but was not ready for a determined Paraiso in the next round.

It will be interesting to see how the rankings play out at the end of this season. Will Paraiso pose a real threat to Gould as the season closes?

Will Gudinas be content with a number three spot behind Paraiso and Gould, or will she attempt to crowd Paraiso out to regain her number two status?

Will Fenton finish at the wire with a burst of energy threatening Gudinas' hold on number three, or maybe even Paraiso's spot at number two?

With the WIRT anything is possible and anything can happen.

Michelle Gould

11-4, 11-3, 11-2

Laura Fenton

SEMIS

Gould d. O'Brien
11-4, 11-6, 11-7

Fenton d. Paraiso
5-11, 11-2, 12-10, 1-11, 12-10

QUARTERS

Gould d. Fowler
11-7, 11-2, 11-2

O'Brien d. Payne
11-3, 11-4, 11-6

Fenton d. Coburn
11-6, 4-11, 11-7, 12-10

Paraiso d. Drexler
11-6, 5-11, 11-1, 11-8

Molly O'Brien played into the semi-finals where she was stopped cold by Gould. The action in the quarterfinal matches was primarily between Fenton and Coburn who battled it out in four, and Paraiso and Drexler, another four game bout.

Doreen Fowler won a tough five game decision against #8 Janet Myers in the early rounds but couldn't hold on to the momentum against Gould in the quarterfinals.

Earlier this season, there were no surprises at the Promus Hotels US Open in Memphis, except maybe the Elvis impersonator. The crowd, hungry for pro racquetball in this first class tournament, saw Gould breeze through the pack in straight threes, dishing out several doughnuts along the way.

Paraiso didn't appear to have any problems, either, until she locked horns with Gudinas in the semi's. She took care of Gudinas and took Gould to 10-12 before Gould really turned on the steam to win the next two, 11-5, 11-4.

Michelle Gould

12-10, 11-5, 11-4

Jackie Paraiso

SEMIS

Gould d. Drexler
11-8, 11-8, 11-4

Paraiso d. Gudinas
11-7, 6-11, 11-4, 11-5

QUARTERS

Gould d. Friedman
11-6, 11-0, 11-7

Drexler d. Fenton

5-11, 11-7, 11-5, 8-11, 11-7

Paraiso d. Evon

11-4, 11-8, 11-3

Gudinas d. McKinney

11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 11-5

WIRT Memphis US Open

couldn't hold out against her. Lorraine Galloway won her first match by forfeit but was knocked out of the competition by Paraiso in three games. Fenton held her ground against Coburn in a five-game match-up and won the opportunity to meet Gould in the semifinals.

The Roanoke pro stop was, again, business as usual for Gould as she gave up as much as seven points only twice in the contest. Fenton and Paraiso battled hard for a spot in the final and Fenton prevailed in this meeting that could have been the match of the tournament. The result was Fenton the victor after five games, two of which went to 12-10

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Feet First

Every athlete has different motivating tools. Sudsy Monchik uses his feet. Sudsy writes motivational messages to himself on the toes of his shoes. "Get" on one shoe and "It" on the other was seen at one tournament. "Play" and "Hard" were two of his more memorable words of wisdom.

Olympic Fever

Maybe I'm getting more sentimental but watching Picabo Street winning a gold medal and then calling Mom from Japan with the results was a teary-eyed moment in our household. After viewing the emotion one hopes United States Racquetball Association's executive director Luke St. Onge can fulfill his dream. Luke has put a lifetime effort into making racquetball an Olympic sport during the summer games. Racquetball is set for the Pan American Games and then it is more politicking time for Luke and the gang. If it happens watch for an influx of young players to take up the game.

Olympian Effort

Speaking of Olympian type performances, North Carolina's Janet Watts deserves national attention. How many women in their forties and the mother of four kids are ranked in the top 10 of a sport at that level? Only Janet. If my job responsibility was to garner publicity for the sport of racquetball I would focus on Janet. Her story has all the elements that would attract coverage from national publications like *People* or *Sports Illustrated*. If Nike were looking for an athlete that was not a national figure for its "Yes I Can" advertising campaign, who would better fit that role than Janet?

Internet Woes

Jacksonville's Mary Lyons gets frustrated when she searches the web and looks at racquetball sites. Lyons (a national doubles champion and one of the most respected teachers in the sport) says misinformation is prevalent. According to

Lyons, there are a lot of people giving instructional tips and advice on racquets that are just not qualified. Unfortunately, there is no way of stopping them. "I'll notice Otto [Detrich] will go on there and correct things pertaining to rules and Linda Mojer [USRA media director] will correct any major misinformation transmissions but basically people just like to spout an opinion whether it is right or wrong. I just get so frustrated with all the babbling that I don't look at it very often.", says Lyons.

Potpourri

Cliff Swain now represents Wilson and when he didn't win a couple of tournaments, colleagues from his former company, HEAD made a few comments. "Cliff, how could you lose your HEAD?" asked Team HEAD representative Mike Davern. Cliff has gotten the last laugh. He's clearly on his way to retaining the No. 1 ranking. If the truth be known Cliff would win with any of the top racquets...As a middle-aged amateur, I recently changed racquets and, yes, it does make a difference. If you believe you are playing better and it makes you feel good isn't that why you make the purchase in the first place? The high tech racquets seem to compensate for technique deficiencies...Few would argue against Michelle Gould's being the best female player of all time. She might also be the toughest. In a tournament this season, down 11-10, Michelle took a racquet in the mouth while playing Cheryl Gudinas. Michelle was charged with an avoidable hinder but went on to win the match although she required six stitches...In 1997 Jackie Paraiso was

the first player in two years to defeat Michelle...Stringing tip of the month: "The lighter the frame the better the maneuverability — but what about power? In theory, a light frame is more maneuverable, but adds less mass to the equation. Many of today's racquets keep weight off, but transfer some of the existing mass toward the head (head heavy frames). Head heavy frames allow a racquet with less mass to act like a hammer and still hit the ball hard." There will be a quiz on that in the next issue...Racquetball hall-of-famer Jo Kenyon is retiring from the sport due to a hip injury. She'll play recreational doubles as she is able...Have you ever heard of a memorial tournament for a player angering a family? Apparently the organizer of one tournament didn't contact the player's family and ran a tournament in which none of the monies went to charity. How crass...If tournament directors don't allow one hour and fifteen minutes for each match and leave a court or two open every few hours the tournament will definitely run behind...Looks like John Ellis is beginning to reach his professional potential. This season he won two consecutive pro stops...Personal plug dept. My daughter,

Rachel, was the Punt, Pass & Kick winner for the Jacksonville Jaguars in the eight & nine year old division. She ended up 18th in the nation. She wants to start playing racquetball in her spare time when she isn't competing in soccer, basketball and baseball...Hope you got a chance to view some of the racquetball on television that aired on ESPN 2 recently. The event was broadcast at a reasonable time and better publicized than events in the past. If the viewing numbers are good and ESPN receives feedback from the racquetball public then who knows what can happen...Whatever happened to Steve Strandemo, racquetball's premier

clinician?



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Spreadsheet

IRT Rankings

1. Cliff Swain
2. Sudsy Monchik
3. Andy Roberts
4. John Ellis
5. Jason Mannino
6. Mike Guidry
7. Dan Fowler
8. Mike Ray
9. Kelly Gelhaus
10. Adam Karp
11. Tony Jelso
12. Louis Vogel
13. Michael Bronfeld
14. Woody Clouse
15. Derek Robinson
16. James Mulcock
17. Doug Eagle
18. Ruben Gonzalez
19. Joe Paraiso
20. Darrin Schenck

WIRT Rankings

1. Michelle Gould
2. Jackie Paraiso
3. Cheryl Gudinas
4. Lauara Fenton
5. Lynne Coburn
6. Randy Friedman
7. Molly O'Brien
8. Marci Drexler
9. Janet Myers
10. Lorraine Galloway
10. Kersten Hallander
10. Lydia Hammock
13. Doreen Fowler
14. Kristi Van Hees
15. Mindy Hartstein
16. Caryn McKinney
17. Chris Evon
17. Kim Machiran
19. Phyllis Morris
20. MoniqueFlaherty

How the Pro Ranking System Works

Players receive points for the round in which they finish at each event plus one bonus point for each game they win. Points remain in the system for one year from the date of the tournament before dropping off, and at that time may be replaced by the following year's event.

Points for each round are:

Qualifying loss:	5 points
Round of 64 loss:	10 points
Round of 32 loss:	20 points
Round of 16 loss:	50 points
Quarterfinals loss:	80 points
Semi-finals loss:	110 points
Finals loss:	150 points
Event Win:	185 points

Participation in Satellite events (Pro Division) are rewarded with:

Round of 16 loss:	1 point
Quarterfinals loss:	3 points
Semi-finals loss:	5 points
Finals loss:	7 points
Win:	9 points

(Players ranked in the top 10 do not receive points in IRT Satellite events.)

Bonus Pools

Foxwood Resort & Casino Super Series

Foxwoods, the official resort & casino of the IRT sponsors a three tournament Super Series.

1. Cliff Swain
2. Jason Mannino
3. Sudsy Monchik
- 4T. Derek Robinson
- 4T. Todd O'Neil

Tacki Mac Grip

The official grip of the IRT.

1. Cliff Swain
2. John Ellis
3. Jason Mannino
4. Mike Ray

Ektelon NFS Footwear

The official shoe of the IRT.

1. Andy Roberts
2. Mike Guidry
3. Dan Fowler
4. Kelly Gelhaus

Pro Penn Glove

The official glove of the IRT.

1. Jason Mannino
2. Mike Ray
3. James Mulcock
4. Woody Clouse

Taking Care of Business

TOB

Industry news and announcements

Clean, New Look

Penn, the makers of America's #1 selling ball, has upgraded the label on both their Ultra Blue model and the green ProPenn racquetball.

The new label for the Ultra Blue ball will carry the tag line, "America's #1 Selling Ball", and will highlight its continued status as the standard in amateur play.

The new ProPenn label will feature a richer, bolder look that coincides with the premium status of the ball. It will incorporate the IRT logo to emphasize Penn's official ball status of the pro tour.

To accommodate increased international demand the new label will include wording in Spanish and French on the reverse of the container.



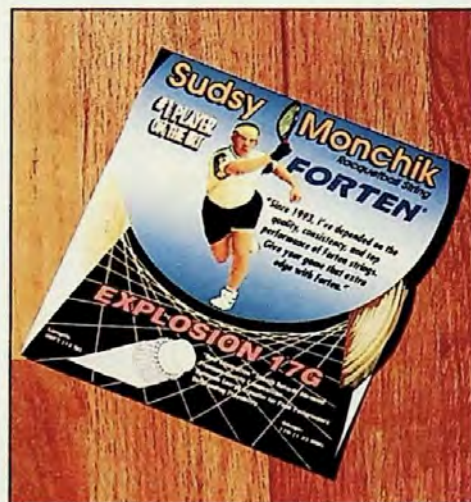
Penn's new packaging for the ProPenn and the Ultra Blue ball has been redesigned and includes tri-lingual label information.

Whole Lotta Suds

Forten Corporation has dressed up packaging for their Explosion and Blast lines of racquetball string with an action shot of Sudsy Monchik and his name the largest type on the label. A quote from Monchik is also included: "Since 1993, I've depended on the quality, consistency, and top performance of Forten strings. Give your game that extra edge with Forten." Forten Corporation's on-line catalog can be viewed at: <http://www.forten.com>.

Wash & Wear

Black Knight, long known for high quality products including Action Eyes eye guards and a complete line of squash racquets, produces the Buckskin glove that can be washed and reused a number of times. This wash & wear feature should be a welcomed innovation to racquetball players frustrated with trying to keep gloves in top playing shape without the normal inconveniences of leather care.



Forten Corporation's new Sudsy Monchik string features the pro's name prominently displayed above an action shot on the label.

"racquetball's better here"

US West Communications has teamed up with the International Racquetball Tour to present four tour events this season.

IRT events in Denver, Lincoln, Phoenix, and Portland will all be presented by US West as part of their new "racquetball's better here" promotion. A bonus pool will be ranked from these events with the winner awarded the "racquetball's better here"/US West Cup following the Portland Tournament of Champions.

The communications giant, headquartered in Denver, Colorado provides integrated, one-stop communication solutions to more than twenty-five million customers in fourteen western and mid-western states.



Kadai ICBM Titanium racquet. The new trend in technology combines the strength and lightweight durability of Titanium and Graphite.

promises to combine the futuristic technology to blend power, strength, and speed into the frame.

The Kadai ICBM will be available this spring.

Canadian Racquetball Association Chooses Ektelon

Ektelon's Power Pro ball has been selected as the official racquet ball of the Canadian Racquetball Association.

The green ball, which Ektelon promotes as slightly livelier and lighter than most other balls on the market, will be sold and distributed throughout all the provinces in Canada.

The Future is Light and Strong

The sleek, lightweight strength of Titanium is making an explosive appearance in racquetball, ushering in an era of futuristic technology and components.

Ektelon, Head, and Kadai have all announced new models that use Titanium and Graphite in ways to capitalize on the strength of the materials while keeping the racquets lightweight.

Ektelon has announced the introduction of three new LongBody racquets that will be constructed using Titanium, two power Ring Titanium models and the Rip-Stick Titanium racquet. These are all scheduled for release this spring.

Head has introduced a complete line of Titanium/Graphite composite racquets that will be led by the Ti175XL, an extra long powerful racquet that features frame strength without sacrificing a light weight. The entire Head line will be available this spring.

Kadai is producing the ICBM, a lightweight 22" racquet that will utilize a composite blend of Titanium and Graphite and

Unique New Blend

Ashaway Racket Strings has introduced *Killfire XL*, a new hybrid racquetball string designed especially for powerful players who normally experience chronic string breakage.

Kevlar main strings provide durability and notch resistance while resilient, multi-stranded monofilament cross strings provide playability and power. This unique combination gives the power player playability and durability.

Ashaway, of Ashaway Rhode Island manufactures exclusively in the United States and is known for bringing technical innovations into string production, including the first use of Kevlar fiber in tennis strings.

Combining tough, braided Kevlar main strings with multi-stranded monofilament crosses, Ashaway's *Killfire XL* strings are designed for power players who are frequent string breakers.



Totally Rad

Rad eyewear has introduced a new line of eye guards featuring the All Sports Safety Vision System. These eye guards provide 100% ultraviolet protection in safety lenses featuring 2.5mm shatterproof polycarbonate construction with maximum light reduction and refraction.

The nylon or polycarbonate frames come with a choice of three interchangeable lenses. All models are anti-fog and scratch treated.

String Machine Buyer's Guide Available

The United States Racquet Stringers Association has recently published the *String Machine Buyer's Guide*. Twenty-one professional stringing machines are evaluated and reviewed in this new guide designed to help prospective purchasers of stringing machines choose the best machine for his/her needs.

The USRSA evaluates each machine's ability to support a racquet during stringing, and to tension and clamp the string adequately. The guide also includes the USRSA's evaluation of each machine's ease of use and overall quality. The guide is available for \$14.95 for USRSA members; \$24.95 for non members by contacting the USRSA, PO Box 40, Del Mar, CA 92014 (619) 481-3545 or USRSA@aol.com.



KILLSHOT cafe

Entree

One of my regular opponents from my home club has an annoying habit of "running around" for a forehand instead of relying on his weak backhand. I've suggested that he stop since he will never allow his backhand to develop while doing this, but he seems content to play that way. What's even more frustrating is that his forehand is so good, he nearly always puts it away. It's so good in fact that he is a solid open player. Not only is it frustrating to play him, but I spend a lot of time clearing for his shots in a way that ruins my movement for playing anybody that uses a normal backhand. What should I do?

There are some things you can do, however I would question whether he truly is a solid open player if he does this consistently. More likely this guy is more like a B player who uses a strong weapon (his forehand) and some sneaky manipulation (getting you to clear in a way that leaves a lot of open court) in a way to win above his level. He is proba-

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bly able to hold his own at the open level only with players that do not exploit his weaknesses and because his forehand is so good, especially when given the added advantage of clearing an opponent right out of contention. With these tactics, he will defeat some players that are more advanced than he is.

If you are serious about developing a solid game, you should limit how often you play this guy. If you are preparing for a tournament, avoid him completely. Playing his way will increase your anxiety and reinforce bad habits.

Hitting shot after shot to what should be his backhand expecting him to begin trying to use a backhand will rarely accomplish anything. Move on. When he flat rolls a forehand from this position, remember, this is what he does best - he will get in a few.

Practice your backhand to make it an even match for his forehand. Level the field by working the forehand side and by hitting shots to his backhand that hug the wall and minimize his ability to "run around them"

Most importantly, capitalize on his weakness. Obviously, this kind of movement has plenty of weaknesses, otherwise, all the pros and top teachers would be using it, and this guy would be on the IRT. His flaw will be the difficulty he will have defending the other side of the court after any of his "run around" forehands pop up. Your game plan has to be to make it difficult for him to set up for a forehand. If he manages to get behind it for a forehand, you want your shot to still be awkward for a setup. Time your shot so that he has to take it shoulder high or tight to the back wall. When he does the run around but leaves up the ball, go for the winner. Drive tight to the opposite wall or pinch so that it kicks out to the other side of the court.

Take control so this guy will be forced to develop a backhand!

-Mike Ray IRT #8

Dessert

What are the best things I can do to prepare for a tournament?

Preparation for a tournament depends on the amount of time you have to work. On the IRT, we have plenty of time to prepare for the season opener, and much less time between events as the season goes on. If you play a lot of leagues and tournaments, you may find yourself in the same boat. If time is limited, build your game in the off season, then use your time to work on trouble spots as the pace picks up. You'll get a lot of mileage from coming into the opening of the season strong, rather than limping in and trying to build momentum.

Some things you can do if a tournament is approaching: 1) Work on cardio conditioning. It will serve you well when the going gets tough. 2) Hit plenty of balls. Get in some match play, but as the event gets closer, opt for more and more solo time to build confidence into your shots. 3) Stretch. Stretch all the time, then stretch some more. 4) check out the courts at the club where the event is going to be played.

Here's a typical pro "trick": Keep two or three identical pairs of shoes on hand. Rotate through them as you play and practice. As a tournament heats up, you'll have a fresh pair of broken in shoes ready. That becomes very important since as you sweat, the moisture ads weight to the shoe as it is collected in the absorbent material.

Jason Mannino, IRT #5



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By Aaron Katz

Outside ^aKatz-eye Looking in view

Thank You, and Good-bye

Cliff Swain's overtaking of Sudsy Monchik for the number one spot will surely secure his place in the annals of racquetball history. If he finishes the season number one (which appears to be almost a certainty), he will be the first player to ever relinquish the year-end-top-ranking and then regain it in a later year. For those historians who will cite Hogan's 1989 national title, that was the year the tour was cancelled after only four tournaments. The tour symbolically crowned Hogan (who had accumulated the most points throughout four tournaments) as its national champ. From a financial standpoint, Cliff's timing could not have been better. With his Head contract up one month after the Promus Hotels US Open (the tournament at which he regained the #1 ranking), his leverage greatly increased. Prior to the event, rumors were swirling about his possible "defection". His signing with Wilson confirmed those rumors. Having Cliff and Sudsy playing for different manufacturers should intensify the rivalry even more - as those two will no doubt battle it out for years to come.

Late Bloom-ers

Mark Bloom, after many years of anonymity in the junior ranks, proved to be a force in his final year in the eighteens. After winning Junior Olympics (his first ever junior national singles title), he showed it was no fluke by advancing to the finals of the Junior World Championships before losing to junior phenom Rocky Carson. Carson (who has been pegged by many as the next IRT star) has had an odd start on tour. Although he has three impressive wins over the IRT number five Jason Mannino, he is without other significant wins and has been a no show at most of

the events. Hopefully, for his sake, he is postponing his full-time status until he gets some college under his belt. On the Pro side of things another late bloomer came out of nowhere with an appearance in the finals of the pro event in Columbus, Ohio. With victories over Sudsy Monchik, Dan Fowler and Mike Guidry, Derrick Robinson advanced to his first pro final before falling to John Ellis. Not only was it Robinson's first final, but also just the second time in his less-than-auspicious career that he advanced past the second round of an IRT event. That should definitely provide hope for other tour journeymen.

The News #3

John Ellis appears to have taken Andy Roberts place as the divider separating Cliff and Sudsy from the rest of the tour. In fact, with recent wins over both Swain and Monchik, Ellis may be taking a shot at challenging the top two. John has had his most consistent season ever, posting two wins and one final. In fact, he failed only once to advance to the semifinals. Maturity and mental toughness have made all the difference when combined with his consistently great physical ability.

Free Advice

The IRT should start tournaments on Friday and end with a Monday night final. Starting on Friday would allow more young players to stay in school or maintain a job while they are trying to break through and a Monday night final would draw more non-racquetball players to the sport since that is a highly trafficked evening for most clubs. With only a few players (three to five at most) able to make a living solely from playing, it is unrealistic to expect even the cream of the junior and intercollegiate crop to sacrifice their education for a shot at the tour.

The USRA has to get more involved

in clubs. Unfortunately, our sport has little or no life outside the private club industry. For the most part, only private clubs (including YMCA and JCC systems), military bases, and universities have courts. There is virtually no public access to courts other than in California and Florida. If the club industry does not re-embrace us, we will become handball, a fun fringe sport with some diehard participants. There seems to be a tendency to follow tennis and golf from a promotional standpoint. Those sports have focussed their promotional efforts on public access. Racquetball must win the clubs back if it expects the tour or the Olympic movement to have any significant impact on the game. It should be an easy sell to clubs since racquetball players consistently show up in marketing data as the most valuable of club members in terms of profitability and in terms of longevity.

Confused

The two most perplexing promotions going on right now are the USRA's solicitation of funds for the portable court and the recent move towards collecting used racquets for the inner city. Why in the world should members donate to the portable court fund? Does this really have any impact on the growth of our sport, or is it just a way to underwrite one of the biggest expenses of the US Open. For that matter, what is portable about this court? My understanding is that it takes days to put up and tear apart and is prohibitively costly to transport. It is very nice that people have donated money, but it really appears to be a bit of a boondoggle. As for the "inner city" movement, I am a big proponent of increasing sports participation in the inner city. But let's be realistic,

our sport does not have the infrastructure to support any "growth" within the inner city. Our sport has limited resources with which to work, let's make sure that when we are using these resources there is some rhyme or reason.



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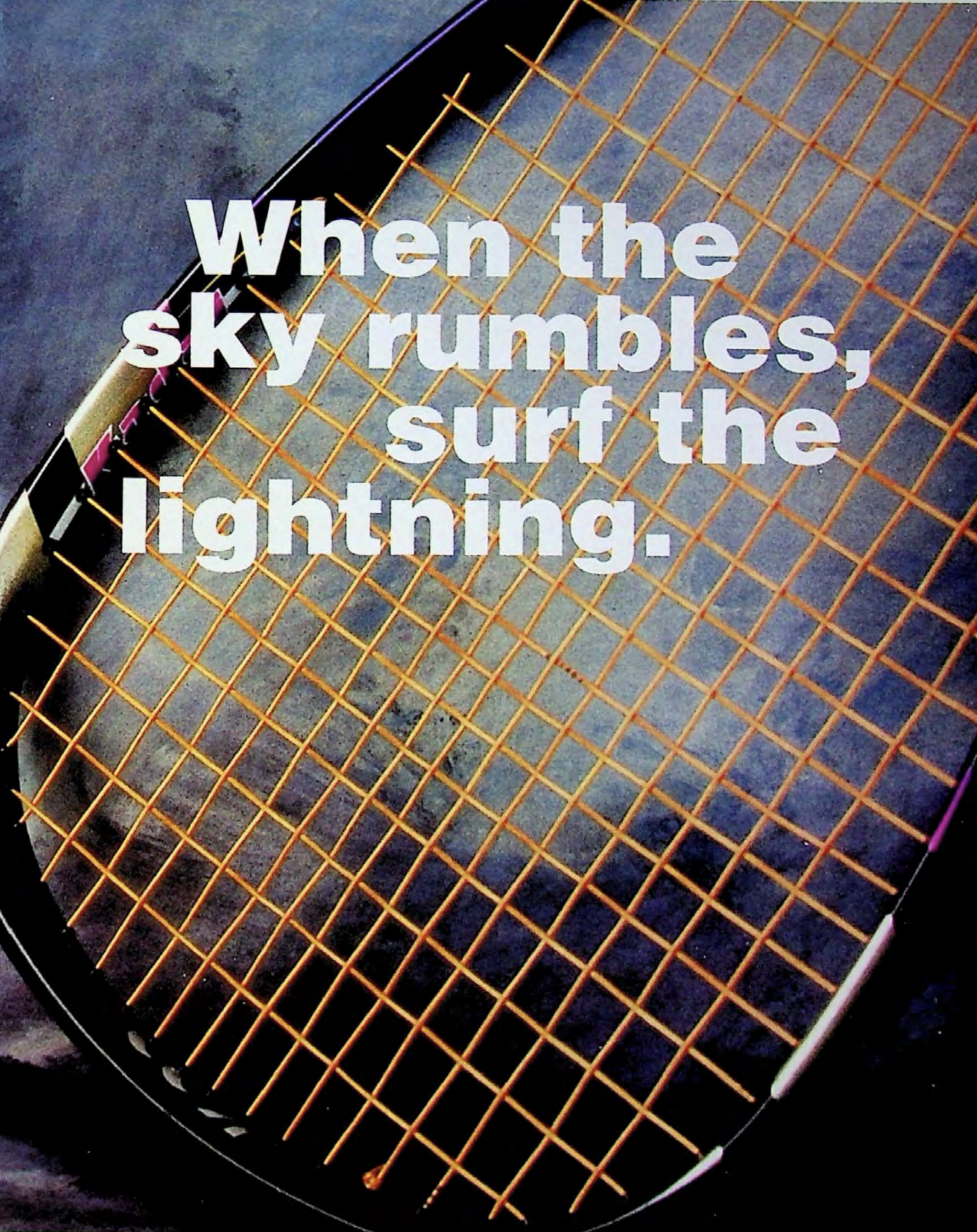
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