

The Magazine of Professional Racquetball

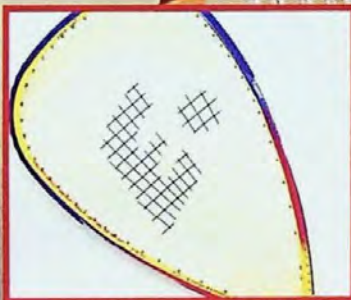
KILLSHOT

Winter 1998

Vol. VII No. 1

Legendary Rivalries:
Cliff Swain
&
Sudsy Monchik

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Instructional
Section!



LONGER!
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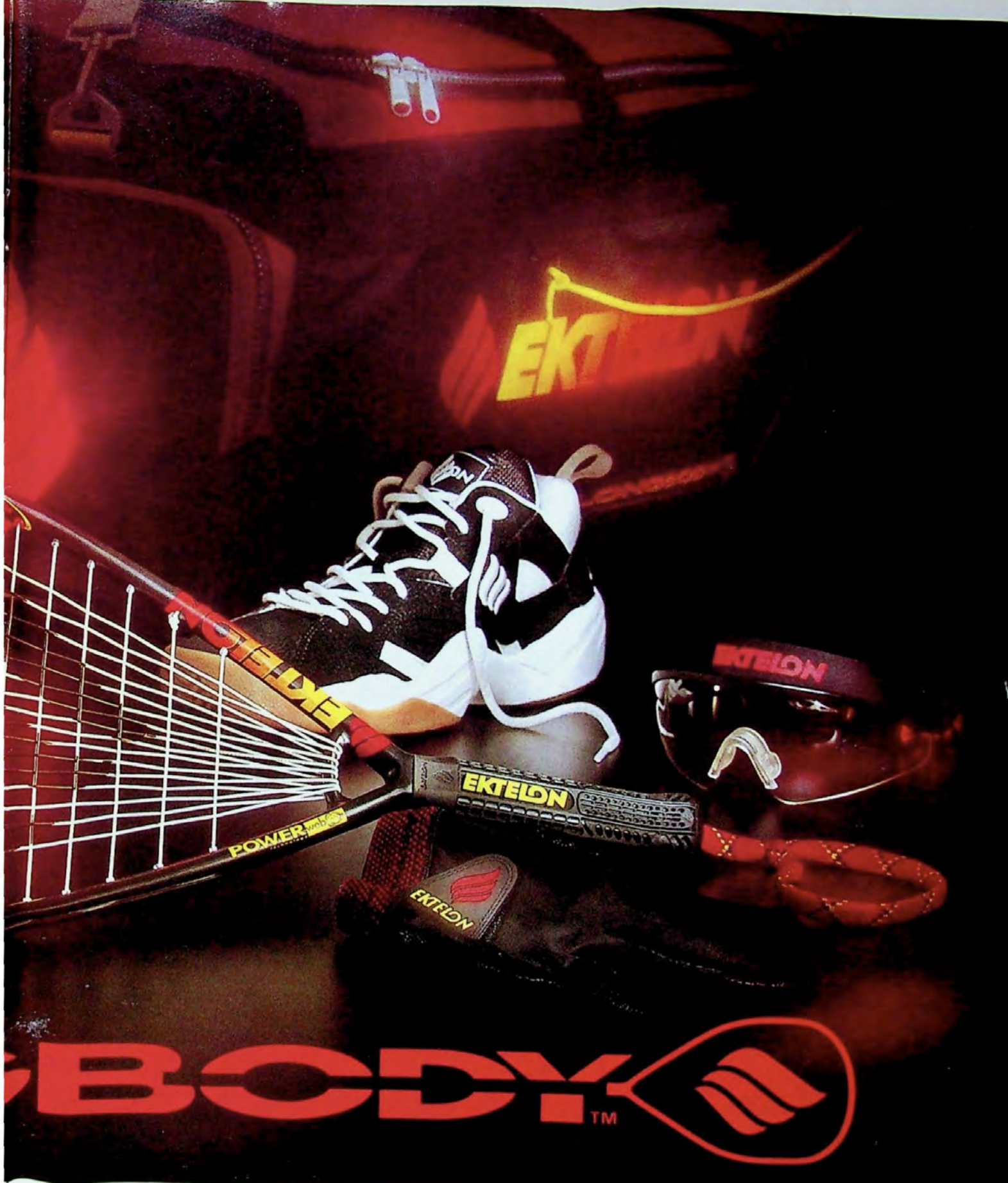
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KILLSHOT

Winter 1998
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Rally!

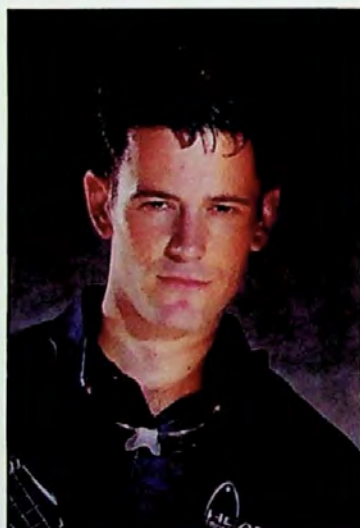
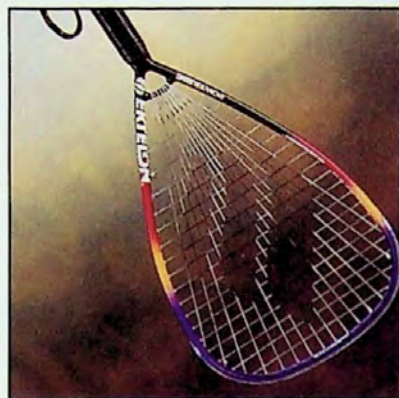
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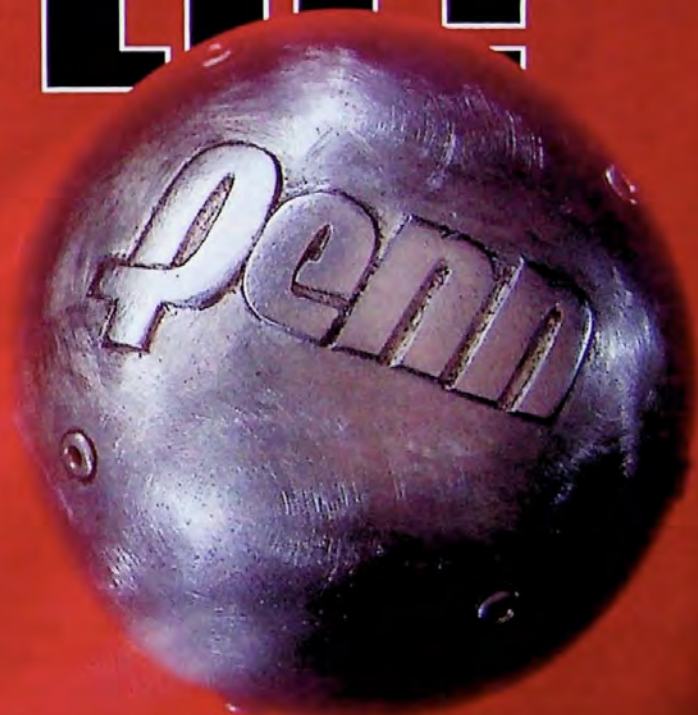
Clockwise from top right:
22" racquets change the
game. Marty Hogan going
for the dynasty. Sudsy
Monchik, Cliff Swain, Leg-
endary Rivals.



The Official Publication of
the International Racquetball
Tour

Cover: A selection of new extended length
racquets.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A PENN BALL BETTER?



To make a Penn ball any more durable, we'd have to change the game as you know it. That's why those who know choose only Penn.



AMERICA'S #1 SELLING BALL.

Playin' the Long Game

Remarkable. Who would have thought that adding a mere inch to the length of the traditional racquetball racquet would have created such an exciting buzz in the game? I know, adding an inch increases centrifugal force and thus creates more power and, so, a faster game. But, by and large, the manufacturers didn't choose to do only that. What they did was go back to square one and re-engineer their racquets from the ground up so that the new frames are not only longer but are also redesigned and balanced to be power machines. They have also managed to keep that other oh so important factor in the equation, weight. Overall the increase in length doesn't come at the expense of excess additional weight.

So, is it a gimmick or not? Well, to be completely honest, I wondered about that myself. After all, the game is at its fastest. The lightweight highend frames were already designed to make the average player hit the ball about a zillion miles per hour. So why does the average weekend racquetball hack need an extra inch of reach and more power? It's really quite simple. It makes the game more fun. And after all, isn't that why we play in the first place?

Knowing that the changes in racquets could be confusing to many players we put together a special feature on what the manufacturers are offering this season in the way of extended length frames. We haven't tried to rate the racquets. We are more of the belief that you need to make your own decision based on the type of game you play and the kind of equipment that suits your physical abilities, temperament, and game style.

What we have tried to do is create a balanced look at what is available from the racquet makers so that you can better arrive at that decision.

Read about what's available (*Longer: The Hot New Extended Length Racquets!* pages 26 to 34) then flip over to the chart on pages 30 and 31 to compare length, materials, weight, hitting area, recommended string tension, and manufacturers suggested retail price.

Ektelon and Head each offer several new models of extended length racquets in varying materials that should fit in every game plan and budget.

E Force offers their unique through-the-handle stringing in a re-engineered configuration for the longer frame.

Spalding, the official racquet of the International Racquetball Tour and Women's International Racquetball Tour has a wide selection available.

Kadai, the new kid on the block, has created a lightweight extended length racquet that should make the industry sit up and take notice.

The other manufacturers have followed suit and the result is a smorgasbord of weights, materials, brands, and prices.

The ball (as they say in another sport) is now in your court. Try out these new extended length racquets. I think you will be pleasantly surprised at the playability (don't bother looking it up), maneuverability, and downright-just-plain fun of the new models. And besides who doesn't want to hit the ball a zillion miles per hour?

--SQ

KILLSHOT

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KILLSHOT is published four times a year by Quertermous and Quertermous, Inc. P.O. Box 8036, Paducah, Kentucky 42002-8036. Offices are located at 2201 Broadway, Suite #1 Paducah, Kentucky 42001. ISSN # 1069-2614 (502) 441-7723

Subscriptions in the U.S. and possessions are \$13.95 for one year, \$25.00 for two years; Canadian subscriptions are \$19.95 for one year; South American subscriptions are \$21.95 for one year; European subscriptions are \$34.95 for one year; Asian subscriptions are \$39.95 for one year. (Foreign subscriptions are due in U.S. funds) Back issues are available on selected issues.

Third-class postage paid at Fort Atkinson Wisconsin. Printed in November, 1997 (Volume 7, Number 1).

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Norm Blum's

Passing Shots

Norm Blum's e mail address is: promonorm@aol.com

WHAT'S THE CALL? - How obsessed is Otto Dietrich, the nationally renowned guru of racquetball rules? His idea of the ultimate romantic fantasy would be a candle light dinner with both he and his companion gazing into a rule book and discussing the sports finer points...Speaking of rules, the new rule where you are now penalized for hitting the ball out of play has sparked a new set of arguments on the court. I hear players debating whether a ball has gone above the out of play line on the back wall...Quick rule reminder from Otto, there is no rule stating that the point is replayed if a player slips on a wet spot during a game. Common courtesy should prevail and the player causing the wet spot should wipe it up.

The pace of professional racquetball has picked up since the eliminating of the linesmen. Now the pros can only shout at one person instead of three...No, I didn't stay up until 2:30 a.m. to watch the US Open last year. Maybe, finally, I'll remember to record the darn thing. But I can never seem to find the VCR instructional booklet.

Who is Robert Jones? He's a vivacious internet writer in most of the racquetball chat rooms. He's worried the sport will go the way of handball and says the game is 28 percent faster than five years ago (causing players to leave the game). He blames the high end racquets for this statistic and is part of the "it-was-more-fun-when-I-was-younger crowd." I have to take an opposing stance to Jones' rhetoric. I feel I'm a typical middle-aged player. I've been playing for years. The last two years I've been playing doubles at lunch time. None of the players in our group hit the ball 100 miles per hour and no one has dropped out because of the velocity of the ball. Just once I'd like someone to come up to me and say 'Norm, I no longer play racquetball because it's simply not as much fun anymore. You just hit the ball too hard and we no longer have the rallies we used to.' ... Okay, back to reality and the speed of the game. Critics say the hard hitting aspect of the game makes it less of a spectator sport. Perhaps. But is there a better, more entertaining rivalry

than Sudsy Monchik-Cliff Swain battles? In more than half the tournaments these two end up in the finals and each match lives up to the hype. It's a classic and one of these days the national media will pick up on this. Can you imagine a Monchik-Swain match on the portable court during spring break at Daytona Beach? The crowd would go berserk and the excitement would cause people to try the sport. Wishful thinking? With the right vision it could happen...A lack of rivalry has prevented Michelle Gould from becoming a racquetball icon. Unfortunately super star Lynn Adams retired prematurely so the match-up between Gould, the rising star and Adams, considered the sports dominant player ever, never materialized. Adams fended off her challenges, defeating the brash Shannon Wright to the point where Wright even became humbled. She dealt with squash legend Heather McKay in a similar fashion. If you recall, McKay was such a dominant squash player that if an opponent reached double figures it counted as a moral victory. She took up racquetball later in life and made an immediate impact, but Adams' youth and talent was even too much for McKay. Michelle has never had that and people have taken her victories for granted...Who is the next Sudsy Monchik? Harvard student and part-time pro Eric Muller says to look out for Jack Huczeck in about 10 years. Muller doesn't see any of the current players overcoming the Monchik-Swain lock on the number one ranking. I predict Sudsy will finish number one at least eight or ten times. The biggest threat he has right now is Cliff. The only names that pop up are John Ellis and Jason Manino. If I had to pick someone who would be a spoiler for Monchik over the course of a year or two, it would be one of those two guys. Jason never wins any points — he doesn't have a big drive serve — his game is based on retrieving and re-killling. That takes a toll on your body, so I would say he's more susceptible to injury. However, Jason truly believes he can be number one, and as Aaron Katz likes to say, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're probably

right." Ellis' belief system is a question mark. Still, he is less likely to be injured than Jason. He does win a lot of easy points. He's got the talent to finish number one and go stroke for stroke with Sudsy, but only time will tell. One thing is for sure, Sudsy will surpass Hogan and Yellen's record of five number one finishes and Cliff's four. I do think he will go through a season where he completely dominates as Swain did in '93-'94

Kersten Hallendar used to pester me about putting her name in my column. That was five years ago and I politely told her winning the First Coast Classic, while good locally, wasn't of great national interest. Today, Hallendar is now a top ten player and has the confidence to match her ability

Open amateur player Curtis Winter no longer puts Marty Hogan on a pedestal. After playing against him in the national doubles championship, Winter went home telling people that Hogan wasn't anything special. While it might be neat to see former pros continue to play as they gracefully age, there's a downside to their previous reputation. Generally the former pros play recreationally while the top amateurs dedicate their free time to the sport and are constantly training. So suddenly it becomes possible for a player like Winter to give Hogan a spanking. Thus that air of greatness becomes clouded. I remember Mike Yellen saying when he retired that was it for him. Why give

some amateur who works out all the time, a chance to beat him then go tell all his buddies? That would tarnish his five straight national titles. "When I walk, I walk," Yellen said...As the new millennium approaches, here's hoping Luke St. Onge will see his Olympic dream come true by the 2004 games.



SUDSY MONCHIK

The Power in the Game. Sudsy Monchik #1 & Cliff Swain #2.

Suds, they call him the Tiger Woods of racquetball. In his lifetime he has achieved every major goal in the game. After dominating junior racquetball, and winning every age group, he skipped amateurs altogether. His first season in the pros he finished 19th. In his second, he became World Champion and never looked back. But as powerful as he is, he also knows that if you can get more from your racquet it's a little less time in the weight room. And that's why he switched to The Catapult. More power when and where you need it. Yeah, like he needs it.

Cliff. They call it the Swain Era. Six years in which he completely dominated the game. It was rare that anyone took games from him much less matches. And remember those 180 Mph serves? Still ripin' em. His play? Well, he's the only guy who's still schooling Suds from time to time. But this four time World Champion isn't just a "take my trophy and go home" kind of player. His input and consultation have always been a great asset to Head and the game. Currently playing with a racquet he helped develop, The Pyramid 190 "G". Fast, powerful and a true winner. Sounds a lot like Cliff.

Catapult Technology: Most racquets, when they hit a ball, flex and lose energy. With Head racquets several factors work together to help harness this power. Catapult's throat area is designed with kick-point action. Like a golf club, to snap back to its original state faster than other racquets. This creates a "launch like" action which accelerates the ball as it leaves your strings. Hit with it just once and you will feel the increase in power.



Pyramid V Design: Head created one of the most unique breakthroughs in racquet cross section design with our Pyramid shape. It creates a consistent flex that minimizes energy loss through the frame. And now we've improved it. The inner wall now conforms to reflect the same shape as the outer wall. This gives the Catapult an additional nine square inches of string bed. The benefit is more surface area for hitting, more string power on each shot and more consistent response from the string bed.

THE CATAPULT



Launch your game with The Catapult®

POWER. Let's not beat around the bush. In racquetball, power is everything. Ours isn't some gentlemanly sport where the combatants sit around and complain about how powerful the racquets have become. On the contrary, if we could give you just a touch more juice so that you could knock off the guy just ahead of you on the ladder we've probably made a friend for life. We're about to make many more lifelong friends.

Introducing the new Catapult Series featuring kick-point technology. At Head, our engineers have developed not just one, but three separate innovations that are incorporated into this new series of racquets. Often one design improvement will lead to others and that's precisely what happened with our new Catapult Series. Kick point technology, Pyramid "V" Construction and "XL" Design. Three new innovations that may soon have you wanting to make friends with one of these powerful new racquets.

THE CATAPULT SERIES:

THE CATAPULT 170 - THE CATAPULT 180 & 180 XL - THE CATAPULT 200 XL - THE PRO XL - THE FURY XL

"XL" Design: In rushing to design extra long racquets our competitors have simply added length without considering the implications. Length = weight. With our obsession to create the lightest frames possible, we have learned how to maximize frame strength without adding weight. This means our XL racquets weigh the same as our conventional length frames. In a strategic move we have also added our length to the bottom of the frame, giving more natural leverage to your shots.

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The hottest gloves in racquetball! And Head makes them. Well thought out designs benefitting from the finest leather and synthetic materials available. Like Pittards® Tackified leather and breathable Lycra®. We've also added unique new elements like rubberized knuckle pads to protect fingers and silicon grip patterns that improve the hold on your handle. And their looks - they're dynamic. But don't just take our word for it. See for yourself.



THE SENSATION - THE CONQUEST - THE EXTREME - THE RADICAL - THE REBEL - THE WEB - THE RENEGADE

SHOES

If you like the look of our gloves, check out our shoes. The Head Anatom Sonic 500 Mid is hot. It's Anatom Fit System® allows your shoe to perform like the human foot. Flexing to allow your shoe to remain in contact with the floor at all times. It's integrated Anatom Midsole made with lightweight Phylon® adds crucial support. It's mesh upper, synthetic toe cap and abrasion resistant gum rubber sole add up to one very attractive shoe.



THE ANATOM XT 500 - THE ANATOM SONIC 500 MID - THE ANATOM SONIC 500

BAGS

Where would we be without them. Most of us virtually live out of one. Kind of like small mobile homes without the wheels. And what makes a great bag? Space and lots of it. Here you go. Large central chambers with plenty of pockets so that dry can be kept separate from wet and vice versa. Holders for water bottles, reinforced floorboards and comfy padded shoulder straps for easy carrying. It's in the bag.



THE LUNCH BAG - THE BOOZY BAG

The Power in the Game.



SHORT SERVES

Mike Boatman
Courtesy Racquetball Magazine



Must be Genetic

Unblinking concentration, picture book form, then smooth follow through. Yep, must be a Hogan. Benjamin Hogan, son of the Master, Marty Hogan shows he's no stranger to a racquetball court. The younger Hogan was caught mid swing at the Racquet Club of Memphis during the Promus Hotels US Open. The older Hogan has seen a few courts himself.

Could it be the beginning of a dynasty?



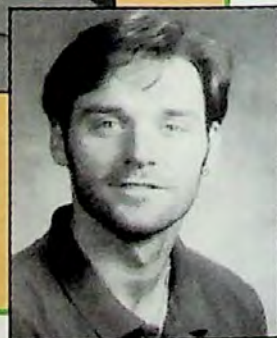
Charlie Palek



Stringing them along?

WIRT touring pro Robin Levine and Michigan's #1 ranked amateur Michael Johnston have signed with Ashaway Racket Strings for an undisclosed amount. Levine's gritty, aggressive style of play has pushed her as high as #2 in the WIRT rankings. "I'd use Ashaway strings even if I weren't sponsored," she says.

Johnston, a power player likes the power generated by Ashaway's SuperKill II string and is impressed by its texture and playability.



Push? No, pull. No, push. Pull. You figure it out.

"Racquetball Drive-Thru" in the Instructional Issue contained an error in the response to the swing mechanics question. It should have read: Don't push your racquet when hitting. Pushing your racquet through a shot will end in disaster. Think of a pulling motion...



Penn Pals

Giving credence to the belief that amateurs want to play like the pros the USRA selected the ProPenn green ball to be the official ball for their National Championships. The green Pro Penn ball was developed to stand up to the rigorous play of the touring pros of the IRT and has met with wide acceptance world wide. "We introduced our green ball into USRA competition during the US Open held in November," said Amy Wishingrad, Penn's National Promo-

tions Manager. "However, Penn's blue ball continues as the official ball of the USRA and is used for many local events"

USRA Tournament Director Margo Daniels and Penn National Sports Promotions Manager Amy Wishingrad show off Penn's green ball. They are joined by Penn Sales Rep Mike Moore, USRA Executive Director Luke St. Onge, and Penn Product Manager Mark Smith

Winner

Enclosed is a letter that you published in **KILLSHOT** Magazine Vol. IV #4. I am writing to update my story. I was released from prison in late May and immediately began playing again. Although I was still under many restrictions, I found time to play the likes of ex-IRT pros Mike Engel and Buz Sawyer, as well as some great local players. After five months I placed first in the Men's Open Division in the 1997 North Carolina USRA Racquetball Championships. It was one goal in a list of many to achieve. My focus is now to compete in the US Open in Memphis. I will try to qualify in the Men's Pro Division and also compete in the Men's 25+.

It's good to be back. Racquetball has been good to me. I am excited to promote the game to another level in North Carolina. Head Racquet Sports believed in me enough to furnish me with equipment when others did not. That support is greatly appreciated. I plan to do some public speaking at tournaments to kids and adults about my mistakes and past experiences.

If I can help just one person from having to go through what I did, then it would be worth it.

Thanks again for your commitment to the sport. I look forward to meeting you at the US Open.

Sincere Regards,
Eddie Alberty



I am writing to express my feelings on what a great job you have done with **KILLSHOT** magazine. I once was ranked #2 in the state of N.C. in 1991. I also competed in many of the semi-pro events offered on the East Coast. I am now an inmate at a Federal Prison Camp in Goldsboro, N.C. I was found guilty of conspiracy to distribute cocaine.

The last two years have not been easy. I came to prison at the age of 21 and I remember of playing National Junior tournaments like it was yesterday. I turned my life over to God and since then prayers have been answered. I have had the opportunity to go into the community to speak to kids at schools. If I could prevent just one kid from having to go through what I had to it would almost be worth it. I will continue to do this once released, at tournaments as well.

I have been fortunate to be able to continue to play racquetball. It is outside and it is 3-walls. The sponsorships are not there any more but I love the game so much it does not matter. I try to teach as often as I can and even though there are not open players here to play it is still competitive. I am presently trying to get the Jaycees to buy a stringer for the prison. The advertisements in **KILLSHOT** have been helpful. We will probably invest in a table-top model because of the lower price which may or may not be affordable still.

Again, I thank you for your dedication and support for racquetball. It is very much appreciated. Although I made some mistakes I plan to go back to racquetball and be successful again. **KILLSHOT** magazine gives me the desire to do so.

(Name withheld by the Editors)
Federal Prison Camp Seymour Johnson
Goldsboro, North Carolina



By Aaron Katz

Outside ^aKatz-eye view Looking in

Top Guns of the Future

Recently I was fortunate enough to instruct at the United States Junior National Team tryouts at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The event was really a combination of tryout and instructional camp. Since I am the first one to voice my opinion when the amateur players' organization does something wrong, I suppose I should be equally quick to speak up when I feel they do something right. I must commend them on the Training Center camps. As part of its status with the United States Olympic Committee, racquetball gets an allotment of time to make use of the facilities at the OTC. The facilities are highly impressive and the atmosphere is great. The one draw back is that the host racquetball facility (the day is spent at a racquetball club since there are no courts at the USOC) is far too small to accommodate the number of participants. Six courts for 44 kids is a bad ratio. As for the quality of our current crop of juniors, there is no where near the depth of talent that there was ten years ago. Still, the top five or six players' skills would match up well with any of the top juniors of the last decade.

Here are my picks for the hottest prospects for years to come. I've mentioned Rocky Carson before in this column. Rocky has all the tools to be a top pro, most noticeably a big forehand with lots of power. Already experimenting with IRT play including a recent upset of Jason Mannino, he should crack the top sixteen his first full year on tour. His talent is different from that of a Monchik or a Swain, so I don't see him ripping through right to the top. Still, I see potential for a solid top eight contender. Ryan Staton is the top dog in the sixteens with

both the physical abilities and the attitude. Shane Vanderson is hitting photons, but being a scratch golfer may prevent him from putting the necessary time into his game. Jack Huzeck and Bart Crawford in the 14's were both very impressive and should have a nice rivalry over the next five years. On the women's side, I didn't see anyone who would have Michelle Gould quaking in her boots, but Brooke Crawford (Bart's older sister) appeared to be the strongest.

The Rivalry is Finally Here

After Sudsy Monchik won his first National Pro Title in 1996, I predicted that 1996-1997 would produce a Cliff Swain and Sudsy Monchik rivalry that would equal that of Marty Hogan and Mike Yellen in the early 1980's. However, Sudsy went wire to wire to win his second title last year. Cliff fell into a distant second, largely from early season losses to Andy Roberts. More recently, a rejuvenated Swain seems to have mastered Roberts. As of this writing Swain and Monchik have played in five straight finals with Monchik holding a narrow 3-2 edge. If it continues that way for the rest of the season, both would go a long way to secure a place in history. Sudsy, who could close in on his third national title at the age of 23 would be in position to surpass the record of five held by both Yellen and Hogan. Cliff holds four, thought by many to have missed an opportunity for a fifth with his short retirement in favor of professional tennis in 1991 or 1992. I stand by my praise of Swain from a couple of years ago and feel that regardless of what Sudsy may be able to accomplish in the future, Cliff's performance confirms his greatness. What separated Hogan and Yellen from the pack is that for 10+ years they both were in the mix for the National Title. Even with Cliff's self-imposed hiatus he is nearing

that level of durability. What's more, Cliff has shown no signs of regressing. No other player has stepped up into that elite group. Unless Roberts is able to heal his numerous wounds, we could be looking at a tremendous Swain - Monchik rivalry for many years to come.

Tennis vs Racquetball

I read some interesting statistics the other day. There are 4.5 million "frequent" racquetball players (defined as playing more than 25 times this year). Further, two thirds of tennis players play on public courts. Since racquetball has virtually no public access, that means the number of people playing racquetball in private clubs is about equal to tennis. Those are encouraging numbers that probably need to be trumpeted to the private club industry at their next trade show. I have never seen a club with more than four courts that doesn't have a full time tennis pro, but as we are painfully aware, a great majority of racquetball clubs with the same number of courts have no pro and no programming. The same study indicated that the number of badminton participants is roughly equal to racquetball (1.5 vs 1.2 million). A recent issue of tennis magazine had an instructional column by Chris Evert on "How to Teach Your Kids Tennis". Among her suggestions was the idea that you take them on a racquetball court, with a Jr. Tennis racquet and have them hit a racquetball. Hmmm, my response is: JUST TEACH THEM RACQUETBALL!



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Monchik, Swain, Gould (and the rest)

Doubles specialists Todd O'Neil and Derek Robinson battled through a tough series pitted against John Ellis & Adam Karp, Jason Mannino & Woody Clouse, and Tony Jelso & Steve Lerner. After three consecutive rounds of five-gamers, they walked away with the prestigious Foxwoods Resort and Casino Super Series Pro Doubles. Tight and Focussed, O'Neil and Robinson proved that they could shoot with the best at the Foxwoods event presented by Mike Coulter at the Las Vegas Sporting House. The event also saw a return to the courts by veteran Bret Harnett.

In singles, it was very clear going into the new season that the Sudsy Monchik vs Cliff Swain final would be a common event. Hands down the best rivalry going today, these two have met in all three singles finals of the season. Based on the ease with which each handles the rest of the IRT, they probably have many more to come. Their first two outings were a trade

out of one-sided victories. Monchik captured New Orleans' Elmwood Summer Cooler in three straight, while Swain returned the favor at Stockton's Coors Light Pro Am. The Riverside Ralph's Pro Am saw Swain battle back from two down only to lose 11-6 in the breaker. These two are so evenly matched that Monchik leads only six to five in game wins over Swain for the season, and only 101 to 97 in total points.

Ellis (the Stockton native now living in Seal Beach, California) plays a fast powerful game and has the potential to go round for round with the top guns. He pushed Monchik to four games in the Elmwood Cooler, and Swain to five in the Ralph's event in Riverside. Still Ellis continue to get exasperatingly close without grabbing the brass ring.

Andy Roberts is certainly no stranger to a number one IRT ranking, but (at least for today) he is not playing the same ball as

Monchik or Swain. Like Ellis, Late into his distinguished career, the Memphis veteran cannot seem to stay free from injury long enough to make a serious attack on Swain or Monchik. In his only semi appearance of the season, Roberts' injury forfeit at Elmwood crushed his hopes in his best showing of the season.

Mannino grabbed everybody's attention last season with a dead run to the number four spot. Often discounted as having a shallow game, Mannino squelched skeptics with a brilliant showing throughout the mid to late season. However, three tournaments into the current season, and Mannino suffered a first round upset at the hands of young Rocky Carson.

At the next level, California's Jelso and New Mexico's Louis Vogel have battled desperately at the gate as Jelso fought to the semis to face Swain in Stockton and Vogel earned a semifinal berth in Riverside against Monchik. While neither has yet



WIRT • IRT • WIRT • IRT • WIRT • IRT

SEMIS

Lerner/Jelso d. Ray/Gonzalez
12-10, 11-9, 11-5

O'Neil/Robinson d. Mannino/Clouse
3-11, 11-8, 8-11, 13-11, 15-13

O'Neil/Robinson

11-9, 11-13, 11-5, 9-11, 11-1

Lerner/Jelso

QUARTERS

Lerner/Jelso d. Filippini/Betran
11-5, 11-6, 11-2

Ray/Gonzalez d. Gelhaus/Bronfeld
11-5, 4-11, 11-8, 13-11

O'Neil/Robinson d. Ellis/Karp
6-11, 11-7, 2-11, 11-2, 12-10

Mannino/Clouse d. Harnett/Muller
11-9, 11-7, 4-11, 11-6

IRT Foxwood Doubles Las Vegas

Sudsy Monchik

11-8, 11-8, 12-14, 6-11, 11-6

Cliff Swain

SEMIS

Monchik d. Vogel
11-9, 11-6, 11-5

Swain d. Ellis
11-9, 8-11, 7-11, 11-3, 11-4

QUARTERS

Monchik d. Clouse
4-11, 11-2, 11-9, 1-11, 12-10

Vogel d. Mulcock

5-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-7

Ellis d. Bronfeld

11-3, 11-8, 11-2

Swain d. Guidry

11-7, 11-3, 11-6

IRT Ralphs Pro Am Riverside

Michelle Gould

11-4, 11-5, 11-2

Cheryl Gudinas

SEMIS

Gould d. Coburn
11-8, 11-6, 11-4

Gudinas d. Paraiso
11-9, 11-8, 2-11, 11-7

QUARTERS

Gould d. Friedman

11-0, 11-3, 11-0

Coburn d. O'Brien

11-3, 11-1, 11-2

Paraiso d. Myers

11-1, 11-0, 11-0

Gudinas d. Galloway

11-2, 11-3, 11-2

WIRT RAD Athletics Pro Am Annapolis



Every IRT final this season has featured Cliff Swain and Sudsy Monchik. Top three photos are Swain & Monchik at the Ralph's event in Riverside. Bottom photo is from the Elmwood Summer Color in New Orleans.

made a semi this season, Woody Clouse and Mike Guidry hold solidly in the top eight with regular showings into the quarters.

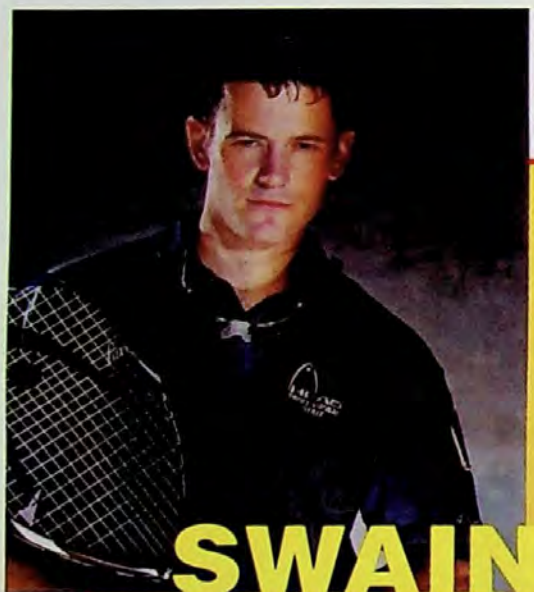
Heading the list of more unfamiliar names to keep an eye on is Mike Green. With round wins in both New Orleans and Riverside, Green made it all the way to his first quarter in Stockton. Journeymen players James Mulcock, Michael Bronfeld, Dan

Fowler, and Adam Karp found consistent early round wins in these three events. Veteran Tim Doyle faces a tough road as he returned to the tour following a couple of years wrestling with injury. While Doyle still has youth, ability and just maybe final health, his return pits him against the top of the heap in the first round - a sobering introduction back to competition.

On the women's side Michelle Gould steamrolled past all contenders with three game-wins in the only event played so far this season. The Rad Athletics event in Annapolis saw good showings from Lynn

Coburn, Jackie Paraiso, and Cheryl Gudinas as well. Chicago's Gudinas has been able to challenge Gould in nearly every recent final. That could be threatened by the determined veteran Paraiso. Realistically, the goal for any WIRT pro should be working toward a solid number two spot from which to mount any possible offensive against Gould. So far, Gudinas has managed to gain the position, and now enjoys a window of opportunity to challenge Gould.

Looking ahead to the rest of the 1997-1998 racquetball season anything at all is possible.



Legendary Rivalries

IRT #1 & #2

Sudsy Monchik & Cliff Swain

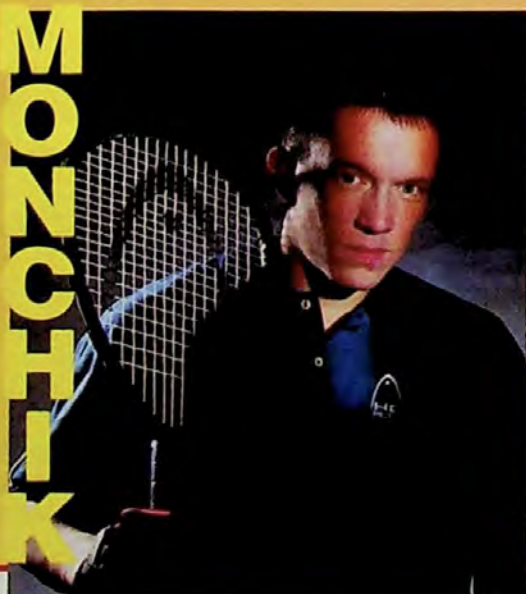
A match between these two is the hottest ticket going. The true students of the game can catch a glimpse of tomorrow's techniques as they watch these Titans.

Contrasting the styles of Swain and Monchik is very difficult since each employs a well-rounded game characterized by a rock-solid command of fundamentals coupled with a flair for innovation and fast, powerful play. Contrasting their manner is much easier. Swain is understated with a serious work ethic. Monchik is a flamboyant showman. Swain gathers his strength from within. Monchik feeds off the crowds' instant connection to him.

Both Swain and Monchik became near-instant sensations from their earliest beginnings on the pro tour. Swain held the world at bay with little consistent threat from the rest of the tour. Monchik grabbed a piece of history

with back to back winning seasons right in the face of Swain's dominance. Monchik keeps getting stronger, but Swain has emerged with a renewed sense of purpose.

Already recognizable as the best rivalry since Hogan and Yellen, this could become the greatest rivalry in the history of the game.



Rankings & Pools

**IRT
Tacki Mac
Bonus Pool**
Jason Mannino
Woody Clouse
Tony Jelso
Adam Karp
Louis Vogel

**IRT
ProPenn Bonus Pool**
Jason Mannino
Mike Ray
Woody Clouse
Adam Karp
Louis Vogel

IRT Top Sixteen

1. Sudsy Monchik
2. Cliff Swain
3. Andy Roberts
4. John Ellis
5. Jason Mannino
6. Mike Guidry
7. Mike Ray
8. Dan Fowler
9. Woody Clouse
10. Tony Jelso
11. Adam Karp
12. Drew Kachtik
13. Louis Vogel
14. Michael Bronfeld
15. Kelly Gelhaus
16. James Mulcock

WIRT Top Sixteen

1. Michelle Gould
2. Cheryl Gudinas
3. Jackie Paraiso
4. Laura Fenton
5. Molly O'Brien
6. Lynne Coburn
7. Marcy Lynch
8. Janet Myers
9. Lydia Hammock
10. Randy Friedman
11. Kersten Hallander
12. Lorraine Galloway
13. Doreen Fowler
14. Kristi VanHees
15. Mindy Hartstein
16. Monique Flaherty





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Holiday Pro-Am Classic
Denver, Colorado

Jan 14-16 Ralph Schomp Automotive Pro-Am
Denver, Colorado

Jan 21-25 Future Cellular • SBBS Pro-Am
Columbus, Ohio

Jan 28-Feb 1 St. Valentine's Day Messerol
Laundry Pro-Am
Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb 4-8 Atlanta Pro-Am
Atlanta, Georgia

Feb 18-22 Foxwoods Pro-Am
Long Island, New York

Feb 25 - March 1 Pichler Pro-Am
Rochester, New York

March 13-15 World Doubles Championships
Pleasanton, California

March 25-29 March Madness Pro-Am
Santa Barbara, California

April 22-26 Foxwoods IRT Pro Nationals
Las Vegas, Nevada

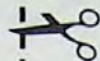
April 29 - May 3 Tony Filippini
Real Estate Pro-Am
San Diego, California

May 6-9 Phoenix Pro-Am
Phoenix, Arizona

May 13-17 Bay 101 IRT World Championships
San Jose, California

June 3-7 Spalding Tournament of Champions
Portland, Oregon





Getting it Done at Crunch Time

By Aaron Katz



"They played the big points better", "boy, he really buckled down at crunch time", "when it gets down to nut-cutting time, he really got the job done", these cliches have survived for generations to describe the feats of athletes in all sports. Michael Jordan, Pete Sampras, Reggie Jackson, Joe Montana, Mike Yellen, and many more have been described this way. What allows these athletes to consistently deliver when the going gets tough? Or more importantly for our purposes - what can we do to help ourselves perform better at those crucial times? How many times have you been up 12-9, only to find yourself in the next instant outside the court pondering a 15-12 defeat? Invariably the questions, "Did I choke?" and "What could I have done differently?", run through your mind. Hopefully, this article sets forth some basic tenants that can be applied to help you play the big points better.

1.

Everybody chokes at some point - deal with it

On many occasions we allow our egos to block reality. We don't want to acknowledge that we got a little tight around the collar when the going got tough, or that we simply let the match slip through our fingers. Rather than dealing with what caused us to choke and correcting it, we create any number of excuses. Here is a news flash - *Everybody chokes!* Sudsy Monchik, Cliff Swain, Andy Roberts, Michelle Gould and the rest of the men and women on the pro tour have all choked matches. The top players have managed to address the reason for their choking. They work to prevent it in the future. Remember, the first step in solving a problem is accepting that there is one. The biggest fallacy in sports is that the "mental game" is a gift that we either

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have or do not have. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The mental game is a skill, just like quickness, forehand, backhand or any other skill. We each have a certain amount of "natural" talent and what we do with that talent is largely up to us. The mental game is a skill that can be developed and improved.

2.

Don't worry about the end result until the end

Success is a natural by-product of consistent focus on each shot within each point. This focus becomes tougher and tougher as we get closer to the end of a game or match. Just like a runner has to focus stride by stride until crossing the finish line, a racquetball player must focus on each shot until the match is over. Don't be fooled by the optimists' club either, thinking about winning is just as bad as thinking about losing. The fact is, if you feel your mind start to drift and focus on the end result, take a time-out or raise your racquet to block those foolish thoughts out of your head. To borrow from Eastern philosophy, the idea is to *Be Here Now*.

3.

Stick to your game plan

Depending on your personality type, you probably either err on the side of aggressiveness or tentativeness when it comes to crunch time. Each of us has to do some soul searching to determine which is our tendency. Often, when I watch the early part of a match, leave, then come back for the breaker, it looks like two different matches and sets of players. Late in the match, both players hit balls to the ceiling that earlier they had been shooting. They give up killshot opportunities to hit more conservative passing shots.

As I move into 'crunch time' in a match, I like repeating to myself, "Be patient, wait for your shot, *Shoot the Ball!*".

4.

Use practice drills to bring skills and confidence to crucial points

Ultimately, we all breakdown at our weakest point. Good players will always be able to identify your Achilles' heel and exploit it. Whatever your weakness is, you must spend some time on the court alone working it out. Not only are the repetitions critical for stroke development, they are also necessary to develop confidence in a weak area. The serve is the only shot that you get to hit often enough during a match to develop without practice time on the court alone. The time alone is also the best time to do your visualization drills. As you are repeating the shot, picture yourself hitting it at different times during the match.

Everybody chokes!

**Sudsy Monchik, Cliff Swain,
Andy Roberts, Michelle Gould
and the rest of the men and women on
the pro tour have all choked matches.**

1. Hit 25 drills with the mind set of 9-9 in the breaker

2. Hit 25 drills with the mind set of winning 12-7 and trying to close out the match

3. Hit 25 drills with the mind set of being down 13-11 and making a run

...Come up with as many match situations as you can and go for it.

5.

No freebies

When the going gets tough, it is time to squeeze your opponent. Dig every ball, take advantage of every opportunity, *Don't Skip!* Remember, your opponent is going through the same mental gyrations that you are. There is nothing that loosens your opponent up more than a couple of free points.

6.

Use off court time to your advantage

In your time off the court, replay your best on-court performances in your head. Play them out in detail as though you are actually watching them on a large screen. Doing this will increase your confidence, and will keep you in a winning frame of mind. You will actually be doing a very important form of mental practice. The more you go through your best performances in detail, the more you are really instructing your body as to the way you want and expect it to perform. If you can't picture yourself doing it right, your body will have a very difficult time acting on it.

Most importantly, evaluate your performance and grow from it. The most fun you will have playing this game is when you are working to improve your existing skills. This applies to mental as well as physical skills. Regard your game as a work in progress that is never quite finished. Remember, preparation is the key to playing the big points like a champ!



Controlling your anxieties before they control you

When you are threatened, your body reacts chemically long before you react to a game situation. Basically, when you are facing an important match or crucial rally, your body may go through the motions that it would if you were in real physical danger. Physiologically, your anxieties cause your hypothalamus to send signals to your pituitary gland by means of hormone secretions. The pituitary then signals the adrenal glands (by the same method) which begins sending out even more hormones like cortisone, adrenaline, epinephrine, and norepinephrine. These bring about the physical responses that go along with anxiety such as a faster pulse, rapid, shallow breathing, etc. As the condition increases, muscles can tense and your perceptions can become less sharp.

Reacting to all of this, you may begin to "overkill" and begin skipping balls. Or even more commonly, you may fall into what scientists call "avoidance". That is, you instinctively begin to avoid difficult or less-practiced shots. You begin to "play it safe", swing too soon, cut off the wrong shots, leave the ball up, and/or keep it in center court. By doing either overkill or avoidance, you take the pressure off your opponent and allow him an opportunity to take control of the match.

Once you recognize that these things are happening, you can consciously cue your body to ease back into its best performance zone. Use time outs to your advantage to get a grip. Instead of lots of self-talk, give yourself a break. Your goal is to let go of the anxiety, you do this by relaxing. If you can manage to laugh at yourself it goes a long way to get you back to where you want to be. Try some deep slow breathing. When your breathing changes, you give your body the cue to back off on the disbursement of the hormones that are triggering the response. If you can maintain deep measured breathing, your muscles, pulse, and other body responses will begin to follow.

More practice drills will work to your advantage here in two ways. First, gaining more solid skills through practicing will minimize the amount of damage that can be done through overkill or avoidance. Second, the confidence that you gain from practice should significantly delay the onset of this type of panic response in the first place.

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Rally!

Understanding the Rally: Playing the Proven System or Playing the Extreme

When the IRT launched the "IRT Certified" designation (to indicate the instructional features reviewed by the IRT Board and found consistent with today's pro game) it became clear that there were two distinct ideas that would sometimes be in conflict. Those contrasting ideas are the accepted "system" for winning racquetball vs the more aggressive style of pro play.

It seems that Charlie Brumfield became obsessed with winning racquetball. Dominating the pro tour of the early 1970's, "Brum" adopted a scientific approach to the game that is still the standard today. Brumfield watched rally after rally, match after match and analyzed just how the game was played. He found just where most of the winning shots really fell, and from that, what was the best way to cover the court. Later, Steve Strandemo picked up Brumfield's work. A top pro during racquetball's heyday, Strandemo considered himself less of a natural athlete than the pros of the day (including a young Marty Hogan), but stayed firmly in the world's top eight by means of a thorough understanding of winning principles. He contributed three significant factors to Brumfield's work. First, Strandemo studied video taped matches to compile statistical data that completely supported Brumfield's findings. Next, he found that the knowledge was just as significant even with the new "Hogan Power Game" and the expanded racquet frame sizes of the mid 1980's. Finally, Strandemo made his understanding of the game public by incorporating it into a very extensive offering of instructional sessions that spanned two decades. Along these same years, many others were discovering on their own some of these basic tenants of the game.

It became essential to understand these basics just to compete at the professional level. The players who had relied entirely on superior athleticism or dramatic weapons found themselves out classed. Clearly Marty Hogan changed the face of racquetball with his hyper aggressive style. But while Hogan became famous for his aggressive totally offensive bravado, he possessed a near-perfect understanding of a conservative scientific style of play. Without it, a veneer of weapons and innovations would have been easily penetrated by the pros of the day. Still, what Hogan found was that if

everybody played by the numbers, it took some calculated risk-taking as a departure from that system to win consistently. Possibly superior to all his other gifts was a perfect sense of timing. About when to play conservatively, and when to unleash his trademark flamboyance on the court.

With Hogan, our attention shifted from smart consistent play to an emphasis on dramatic risk taking. In fact, the dives and consistent kills of the pros still make the best media. The IRT pros play a different game with different motives than regular tournament play. While there are many gifted and accomplished athletes at the top levels of the amateur game, the fact remains that their livelihood does not depend on its outcome. The pros depend entirely on every performance for their paycheck, for their future, and for their day-to-day existence. Because of this, pros lead a more urgent search for an edge. Their livelihood depends on innovation and resiliency. Out of this is born the more aggressive, more offensive weapons, and risks. They have not abandoned smart play, but they have carefully calculated when and how they can push the limits of smart conservative play. They got to be pros because they developed a sound scientific basis for their game, added weapons to push their potential, and then developed the timing to know when to take the risks and go for all out winners.

Here is the key to all this and what must be understood in order to gain the most from the IRT Certified material. The best players understand certain basic truths about the game and are able to rely on playing the numbers for consistent wins over other players of nearly equal ability. They then expand their games to include the extreme techniques used daily by the IRT pros. Most importantly, they develop the understanding, the timing, and the confidence to know when to play by the numbers, and when to take a risk for a winner. The difference in a Sudy Monchik from the rest of the world is his thorough understanding of smart play coupled with his timing for venturing into extreme play. Developing an understanding of the examples here will help you understand the contrasts and get the most from the instruction offered by the best players in the world.





Rally: The Proven System

1 Since statistics show that 90% (slightly less among the pros but still in the neighborhood) of all balls (with two players

of near equal ability) are playable from a floating center zone, your first coverage priority should be to cover this area. (Also roughly 90% of all winners occur farther than fifteen feet from the front wall.) If you cover a floating center that allows you to cover 90% of the shots, you'll win consistently at most levels of the game. If your opponent's shot falls into that 10% that are out of reach from this area, it was a winner - get it out of your head as soon as possible.

2 Take your opponent out of his center zone whenever possible with passes and pinches.

3 You want two bounces before your drives hit the back wall so that your opponent has no set up off the wall.

4 You want your down-the-lines to stay off the side walls, at least until they are well past your opponent.

5 You can often gain an advantage by cutting off the ball and forcing your opponent's movement rather than waiting for a setup that allows your opponent good coverage position if your shot should come up.

6 Cutting off the ball often means hitting from an open stance, higher than a set up. These are poor conditions for a kill, so a higher percentage bet is a good down-the-line or pinch.

7 When you get a set up for a kill, take it.

8 If you miss, miss high. You can sometimes recover from leaving up a ball, you have no chance of recovery from a skip.

9 Most balls are "left-up-balls" (that is they are able to be covered with smart coverage). Play as if all your shots and all your opponent's shots will all be left up.

10 Use cutoffs and smart coverage to pressure your opponent into skipping and leaving setups that you can put away on the next shot.

11 Use your serve to get a weak return that sets you up to close out a three shot rally.

12 Use your return of serve to pressure the server to set you up to close out a four shot rally.

13 Play from a confident comfort zone so that you know when your set up is good enough to shoot the ball.

14 When you have nothing offensive, use ceiling balls to regain control of center court.

15 No matter how good your set up or how perfect your shot, expect your opponent to get it. Your goal is always to get a weaker shot from which you can hit a better shot next time (with a lower margin for error). If your shot is a kill or your opponent errs to end the rally, you have a bonus. Work for weaker and weaker shots from your opponent and stronger and stronger shots for yourself as the rally progresses.



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Rally: *Playing the Extreme*

1

Shoot the ball.

Work on solo practice until you have a confident kill zone...

- ...from an open stance
- ...from a dive (ok, tough to practice)
- ...from any position on the court
- ...from a ball at any level

Also work on transferring power from your legs even when you don't have a good stance. (The trick here is to work on balance, not swinging harder with your arm)

2

Know when you can safely venture out of your coverage zone.

Go for it as long as you're fairly certain you can count on a winner, or when you know you can venture out and hit a shot that affords you time to get back into position. The latter is a safer bet since you can rarely count 100% on a winner.

3

Keep the pressure on.

If you play entirely by the numbers, you will be entirely predictable. Not only will you always know what to do, your opponent will know what you're going to do. Keep changing your habits to keep your opponent guessing. Play the percentages, but go for the long shot occasionally. It keeps your opponent guessing, and it takes the wind out of his sails when it works!

4

Get everything.

If your opponent knows you are unwilling to allow him even his typical 10% kills, he is under a great deal more pressure to perform (which usually means he finds it more difficult to perform).

5

Play smart.

When you're having a clearly bad day, rely on smart play by the conservative rules to get you through. Of course if you don't mind the consequences (possibly a loss) this becomes a great time to go for winners and practice playing out of a slump!

6

Change the rhythm.

If your opponent likes to hit on a regular beat, hit on the half beat.

7

Cut it off.

Get aggressive on the cutoffs including turning a fly cut off into a kill. Short hop a good lob or half lob serve.

8

Rip it.

Rip an overhead down-the-line for a pass when your opponent assumes your going for a ceiling ball.

9

Sometimes Conservative is extreme.

Know the times that accepted conservative wisdom is already very aggressive and shouldn't be abandoned such as serving strategy or service return strategy.

10

Play & practice for wisdom.

Most importantly, play and practice to develop the wisdom to know when you can win by playing conventional wisdom, and when you can win by well-timed ventures into the extreme!



Filling in the Gaps

By Marvin Quertermous
Managing Editor

In the racquetball world of 1998, clubs have downsized at an alarming rate. One of the first staff members to be eliminated is the club pro. While the amateur organization has already started an effort to reverse this trend, the fact remains that many players are finding themselves with no access to reliable help as their game develops. As a result, we have produced a generation of players that love the game and are skilled athletes with fundamental gaps in their development. I began making some notes during my travels, and asked a number of the pro players to do the same. Our idea was to find the common gaps that are developing and offer some ideas to help. With the newly developed stamp of approval from the pro tour, here are the ideas that came from that group.



Shooting

Many players have neglected the solo court time required to perfect a good offensive drive shot. This takes patience and practice in order to develop it for consistent use in a match. Most players have a weaker backhand, so their practice time should include slightly more backhand practice.

Footwork

This is a very common problem. Because so much effort is put into muscling a swing, many players neglect the importance of setting their feet in a way to get the most from a set up. Your footwork should provide stable balance, and allow you to generate power from your legs and torso.

Shot Selection

The most common weakness we identified was a one-dimensional game. A huge number of players have developed a very predictable "straight in" game. That is, all shots are kills, skips, or left up kill attempts that often rip through the center of the court. Unfortunately, they are most often left up and because the player has attempted to hit it as hard as he could, they are also easily playable off the back wall. The remedy is to effectively adopt some "pass - pinch" thinking. The idea is to use passes as tactics to maneuver your opponent into a position where he can be put away with a pinch. If your pass is good enough, you may just get some winners off the passes. But keep your shots out of center court and off the back wall. Shoot to kill if the opportunity presents itself, but do it in such a way that if it stays up (and most will) your shot is still difficult to return or pulls your opponent to the side wall.

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Rallying

Surprisingly, we found many players who are great shooters, but can't rally. They have put in the practice time to perfect shots from a setup, but not in covering the court. These players expect to hit winners and have nothing prepared for their opponents when their shots are covered effectively. They find themselves unable to play from an open stance as is often necessary in an evenly matched rally. The key is to get into the mix and play more matches concentrating on effective movement and court coverage.

Understanding

This is a variation on the rallying theme. While they still haven't invested the time to practice shooting, many players feel that if they could only kill the ball consistently, they would always win. The problem with this thinking is that it only holds true for playing against a weaker opponent. Against an opponent of better or near equal ability, they will be forced into moving in a way that takes away most clear setups. The serve is the only time that a set up is guaranteed. In an ideal world, we would all perfect the skills necessary to shoot the ball from any position, from any height, and from any situation that may take us off balance. In real life, play affords few setups, and without the skills to cover effectively with good weapons other than kill attempts, play becomes very frustrating.

Perception

This skill gap happens with the player that makes the same mistake repeatedly because he hasn't been noticing that it just isn't working. Another lack of perception is the persistence of some players in not watching the ball. There are plenty of other examples, but the bottom line is the need to pay attention to EVERYTHING on the court. Make a conscious note about your opponent's habits, the speed off the walls and other physical quirks about the court, your own inconsistencies on that given day, etc. Racquetball is a game of constant read and adjust. It is a volatile dynamic that demands conscious perception. Learn to read the situation, and use it to your advantage.

Preparation

It is truly amazing how many really good players fail to stretch and warm up for a match. Not only is this a great way to invite injury, but it seriously hampers their playing ability! It's really easy to tell the players that suffer from this gap in their skills since they are the ones that say things like, "I have to play two or three games before I really get started."

The trick is to "get started" before your opponent gets on the court. Be in that "game three mode" when the competition starts. Otherwise, you give an incredible edge to any opponent that is ready to face you. If you choke or leave balls up for the first half hour of play, look at the mental edge (not to mention the point lead) you have given your opponent.

Preparation: Stretch

Really stretch. (Not just a few twists and heel bounces) This requires true patience. Remember, racquetball uses your entire body. Therefore, stretching for racquetball means stretching all muscle groups. Stretch each muscle and hold. Avoid jerky, bouncy movements. Use stretch time as time to center and focus. This is crucial since it readies your muscles and gets you mentally ready at the same time.

Preparation: Hit the Ball

Keep hitting balls until your shots are CONSISTENTLY hitting the way you want them to in a match. You'll be warming your arm and getting a clear mental image of the shots you expect to hit in a match.

Preparation: Break a Sweat

It's tougher to pick up your heart rate and breathing than it is to maintain these things. Get this out of the way before the match starts. Be in the "zone" when the first serve is hit!

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The Hot New
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LONGER

Racquet manufacturers go to great lengths to make '97-'98 the longest season on record

By Mark Henry

The Long Hot Summer, The Long Kiss Good Night, The Longest Yard. See the pattern? Well if you look at this season's new frames, you will definitely notice the characteristic the new models have in common is the extended length.

With racquetball already being played at near supersonic speeds using current racquet technology the power generated by the extended racquets should take it to the next level. Though it's embraced by many as a revolutionary idea, the concept of an elongated racquet is not strictly a new idea. You will recall that a few companies ventured into the very long realm as far back as the 1990 racquetball season. Slightly ahead of its time was the original Spalding *Assault*. Richcraft soon followed suite with the *Pirate*. It is interesting to note that professional players welcomed the long frames immediately. The rules of the IRT (then MPRA) have never precluded the use of 22" frames. Still after a brief trial period, the amateur organization (then AARA) chose to stick to a max 21" frame in sanctioned competition.

This time out, when the idea was revisited in 1996, everyone agreed that the time to unleash the big guns had come. The manufacturers have all fallen in line with the new long frames and the result is a variety of technology and quality that can match virtually every price range. Materials range from graphite to aluminum in weights ranging from 190 grams to 245 grams. The mere addition of length is enough in itself to increase leverage and add power. But rather than rely strictly on the additional length most of the makers have developed new technology that makes the new sticks weapons of pure power.

The question, at this point, isn't whether or not to buy one of the new extended length racquets available this season, but rather which racquet should be chosen? There are so many choices for every price range and every skill level that the selection process can become overwhelming.

Here are the very very long offerings from each manufacturer. The chart on pages 30-31 gives an "at a glance" comparison of all the vital specs.

The list is arranged alphabetically by manufacturer.

E Force

The engineers at San Diego California-based E Force pride themselves on cutting edge technology. Ray Mortvedt, senior engineer, is a tennis and racquetball industry veteran responsible for many improvements in design and performance.

The innovative E Force "Long String Technology" features main strings that run through the racquet handle to produce greater and more efficient power. Among the pros, Tim Doyle and Tony Jelso use E Force frames.

E Force is producing two models this season that utilize the new extended length frames, the *Bedlam* and the *Anarchy*. Both feature the through-the-handle stringing technology that provides 22" main strings

for increased power. The *Bedlam* is a lightweight frame at just 195 grams and features a whopping 107 square inches of hitting area at the full 22 inch length. For the player preferring a heavier racquet, E Force also produces the 220 gram *Anarchy*. It has a 107 square inch hitting area at a length of 22 inches. Both frames are rich with performance features and can be had for \$200 or less.

As Ron Grimes, CEO of E Force sums it up, "Everybody's got an extra inch of racquet with increased centrifugal force and head speed. One thing we've got better is technology to string through the handle. Because our strings go through the handle, our main strings gain an additional eight inches in length. Since we don't have to sacrifice string length or head size we are able to obtain a full 6" handle."

Ektelon

Ektelon predicts the introduction of its "LongBody" racquets into the racquetball arena promises to be one of the most important--even revolutionary--launches ever made in the sport.

According to Scott Winters, Director of Indoor Court Sports at the Bordertown, New Jersey-based company, "Ektelon hasn't just tacked on an inch to the end of our racquets. Rather, we have developed a series of frames that are also perfectly balanced to deliver enhanced performance and comfort for players at all levels. Ektelon LongBody racquets will offer measurable increases of up to 10% more power and 13% more reach, in addition to being kind to your arm."



Innovative technology is the hallmark of the E Force line of racquetball racquets. The development of "through-the-handle" stringing allows for longer mainstrings and, thus, increased power for the player. Two models are available from E Force in the new extended-length design, the *Bedlam* and the *Anarchy*.



Ektelon

Staying consistently in the top ranks in sales over the years, Ektelon is fully supporting the increased racquet dimensions this season with a full line of extended length models. The Power Ring Ultra (left) and the Power Ring Pro (page 26) both feature a ring at the throat for PowerWeb stringing.

Ektelon has unveiled six new racquets this season that feature extended length. They range from the entry level aluminum *Revolution* at \$35.00 to the top-of-the-line graphite *Power Ring Pro* retailing at \$250.00, with entries at every price level between.

The power ring series feature "Power Web" stringing technology that allows the long mains to be wrapped around an inverted ring at the frame throat instead of threaded through the racquet frame. The *Power Ring Pro*, the flagship of Ektelon's fleet, is constructed of 80% graphite and 20% high modulus graphite and weighs-in at 220 grams. It offers a hitting area of 102 square inches and measures out at 21.5 inches.

The *Power Ring Ultra* also utilizes an 80/20 mix of graphite and high modulus graphite. It goes a half inch past the *Power Ring Pro* to a full 22 inches yet is an ultra light, weighing in at only 195 grams. Hitting area is 102 square inches. Both frames retail above the \$200 mark.

A returning favorite from seasons past is the frame designated as the *Fusion*. This year's *Fusion Pro* is an updated version at the new 21.5 inch mark. It is composed of 90% graphite and 10% high modulus graphite. It has a 98 square inch hitting area and weighs 225 grams. Retail price is \$180.00.

A graphite/fiberglass mix makes up the *Turbo Pro*. It offers a full 22 inches

with 104 square inches of hitting area at 210 grams. A graphite/aluminum combination is used for the *Power Stick*. It measures 22 inches, weighs 220 grams and features 102 square inches of hitting area. Rounding out Ektelon's line of extended length racquets is the 22 inch aluminum *Revolution*. It weighs 220 grams and features 102 square inches of hitting area. All three of these frames can be had for under \$100.

Interestingly, the top Ektelon pros are divided among the high end frames as their weapons-of-choice. The top players include Andy Roberts, Drew Kachtik, and Mike Guidry, seasoned veterans of the IRT, as well as the world's two top women's players, Michelle Gould and Cheryl Gudinas.

Racquet Specifications*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Head Size (sq. inches)</i>	<i>Weight (grams)</i>	<i>Length (inches)</i>	<i>String Tension</i>	<i>Retail Price</i>
E Force						
Bedlam	Graphite Composite	107	195	22	35	\$200.00
Anarchy	Graphite Composite	107	220	22	35	\$160.00
Ektelon						
Power Ring Pro	Graphite	102	220	21.5	24-32	\$250.00
Power Ring Ultra	Graphite	102	195	22	24-32	\$225.00
Fusion Pro	Graphite	98	225	21.5	32-38	\$180.00
Turbo Pro	Graphite/Fiberglass	104	210	22	32-38	\$ 90.00
Power Stick	Graphite/Aluminum	102	220	22	32-38	\$ 50.00
Revolution	Aluminum	102	220	22	32-38	\$ 35.00
Gemini						
2001 Head Heavy	Graphite/Carbon	101.5	200	22	27-30	\$189.00
3001 Head Light	Graphite/Carbon	101.5	200	22	27-30	\$189.00
Power Wave Light	Graphite/Carbon	101.5	200	21.5	30	\$199.00
Power Wave Heavy	Graphite/Carbon	101.5	200	21.5	30	\$199.00
Head						
PP 190 GXL	Graphite	103	200	21.75	31-35	\$150.00
PP 220 GXL	Graphite	103	230	21.75	31-35	\$ 80.00
Comp GXL	"Fused"	103	245	21.75	31-35	\$ 40.00

Catapult 180 XL	Graphite	103	190	21.75	33-36	\$200.00
Catapult 200 XL	Graphite	106.5	210	21.75	33-36	\$100.00
Pro XL	"Fused"	106.5	235	21.75	33-36	\$ 50.00
Fury XL	Aluminum	106.5	215	21.75	33-36	\$ 30.00
Kadai						
K 22	Graphite	107	192	22	26-28	\$250.00
Pro Kennex						
Kinetic Diamond 15G Reach	Graphite	102	195	22	28-38	\$250.00
Kinetic Diamond 5G Reach	Graphite	102	195	21.5	28-38	\$225.00
Reactor Diamond Reach	Graphite/Fiberglass	102	195	21.5	28-38	\$ 70.00
Power Fused Diamond Reach	Graphite/Aluminum	102	205	22	28-36	\$ 50.00
Pro Saber Diamond Reach	Aluminum	102	215	21.5	28-36	\$ 25.00
Spalding						
Extreme Pro	Graphite	105	200	22	26-36	\$219.95
Intimidator	Graphite/Fiberglass	105	205	22	26-36	\$129.95
Alliance	Graphite	103	240	21.5	28-36	\$ 49.95
Fury	Aluminum	103	245	21.5	20-30	\$ 34.95
Assault	Aluminum	95	210	21.5	20-30	\$ 23.95
Wilson						
Air Hammer 9.9 Stretch	Graphite	107	175	22	33-38	\$249.95
Energy 9.9 Stretch	Graphite	107	220	22	33-38	\$249.95
Air Hammer 9.1 Stretch	Graphite	107	190	22	33-38	\$ 84.95
Energy 9.1 Stretch	Graphite	107	230	22	33-38	\$ 84.95

*Information is based on materials supplied by the manufacturers. Measurements of weight, length, and hitting area could vary slightly on individual racquets. Values are manufacturers suggested retail prices.

HEAD



Aware of the huge impact the long racquets are already making on the sport, HEAD is producing a complete line of extended length models in a variety of materials in a variety of price ranges. Sudsy Monchik and Cliff Swain, IRT #'s 1 and 2 both win consistently with Head racquets. Monchik uses the Catapult 180XL (above) and Swain uses the 190GXL.

Gemini

Gemini Racquetball bases its ideology on the concept that it is the company that can custom balance a racquet frame to any player's specific needs. The Gemini claim is that once you try a Gemini balanced for your swing, you won't use anything else. Operating out of Richmond, Virginia, Ron Halloran & Company will produce four extended length racquets this season. They

all weigh in at 200 grams and feature a 101.5 inch hitting area. All are produced from a graphite/carbon mix.

Adapted from the original custom balance series, The 2001 and 3001 will be coming in at the max 22" length. Both feature a dense string pattern, and both will retail under \$200. The 2001 features head heavy balance while the 3001 is head light.

Gemini will offer two 21.5 inch frames that utilize "Wavex" technology that gives the frame a "rippled" appearance and

offers unique play characteristics. The *Power Wave Heavy* and the *Power Wave Light* are the two models and offer, as you may have guessed by now, head-heavy or head-light frame balance.

Gemini currently sponsors no touring pros but the company is very proud of its large number of sponsored club pros all around the US.

Head

The philosophy at Head seems to be to provide a racquet for any player at any level of play at any price range. The new extended frames from this company start out at an inexpensive entry level \$20.00 and run up to a high end of \$200.00, in a variety of materials.

Head's Doug Ganim is aware of the huge impact the long racquets have already made on the pro end of the sport and expects a similar reaction as the amateurs follow the trend. "X-tra Long racquets have made a significant impact on the sport. All levels of play can generate more power with these new frames. The key to going "long" is that you also go "light". The reason is that longer frames are more difficult to maneuver in the heat of battle but today's lightweight technology lets players have ultra quick reaction time while enjoying the added power of X-tra Long racquets. Fortunately for Head, we are the clear leader in lightweight technology and have been for several years," says Ganim.

The line at Head measures in just under the 22 inch limit at 21.75 inches and each possesses a large 103 square inch hitting area or a super large 106.5 square inch area.

With the two top players in the world among their Team Head, the Maryland-based company has presented a line for Sudsy Monchik as well as a line for Cliff Swain.

The top of the line is the *Catapult 180 XL*. This is the racquet of #1 ranked Sudsy Monchik and is an extremely light graphite frame. It weighs in at only 190 grams and provides 103 square inches of hitting area. The *Catapult 200 XL* is offered in graphite with 106.5 square inches of hitting area and 210 grams of weight. This *Catapult* is priced at \$100, half the cost of Sudsy's *Catapult 180 XL* at \$200.

Cliff Swain, the IRT's #2 ranked pro, uses the slightly heavier *190 GXL*. Also of graphite construction with a hitting area of 103 square inches, the *190 GXL* still is light at only 200 grams and sells for \$150.00. The *220 GXL*, a 230 gram graphite frame with a hitting area of 103 square inches can be purchased for \$80.00.

Head offers four racquets in the entry level to low price range in the extended length models, two with fused components and two manufactured in aluminum.

The two fused construction models are the *Comp GXL* at 245 grams with a hitting area of 103 square inches, and the *Pro XL* at 235 and 106.5 square inches of hit-

ting area. Each can be had for \$50 or less.

The two aluminum long racquets are the *Fury XL* at 215 grams and 106.5 square inches of hitting area, and the *Demon XL* at 240 grams and 103 square inches of hitting area. Each can be had for \$30 or less.

Kadai

In the late 1980's Cecil Albao created the frenzy over increased power when he introduced a then new company called E Force. After selling the company and taking a brief hiatus from racquetball to concentrate more on his other businesses including Blue Hawaii Sportswear, he's back with a vengeance. An avid player himself, Albao embarked on a quest to produce a 22 inch frame that would meet his own rigorous demands.

"I missed being involved with the manufacturing and marketing aspects of the game. Being removed from it for a few years, I was able to take an objective look

at what racquet engineering and design was lacking. I was also able to develop an innovative approach to marketing that could revolutionize how things are done in the sport," says Albao.

Kadai currently offers one premium racquet in an extended length configuration, the *K 22*. With a huge 107 square inches of hitting area and a light weight high modulus graphite construction, the *K 22* weighs in at a light 192 grams.

While few plans for the young company have been made public, the frames are beginning to pop up nationwide. Kadai has indicated that it is in the process of developing an extensive player sponsorship / partnership arrangement that it claims will be very unique.

Pro Kennex

Pro Kennex offers five extended length racquets this season from a low end recreational racquet at \$25.00 to a high end

Kadai



The new kid on the block with a capital "K", Kadai offers one 22" model this season, the K-22. Building their racquets for power and with a unique system of distribution the company is providing just the innovations that keep the industry lines buzzing.



Spalding

in their Kinetic series that retails for \$250.00. Each new model in the San Diego-based Pro Kennex line features 102 square inches of hitting area.

Leading the list is the high-modulus graphite *Kinetic Diamond 15 Reach*. It weighs in at 195 grams and reaches 22 inches. It is the frame of choice for young IRT star John Ellis.

The *Kinetic Diamond 5G Reach* is also a high modulus graphite racquet weighing in at 195 grams. It is a half-inch shorter than the 15 Reach at 21.5 inches and retails for \$225.00.

Made of a composite blend of 60% high modulus graphite and 40% fiberglass, the *Reactor Diamond Reach* is 21.5 inches long and weighs 195 grams. Retail price is well under \$100.

Pro Kennex is offering two reactional racquets, the graphite/aluminum *Power Fused Diamond Reach* at 22 inches and weighing 205 grams, and the Pro Saber Diamond Reach, a 21.5 inch aluminum racquet that weighs 215 grams. Each of these can be purchased for \$50 or less.

Interesting to note that the Pro Kennex line no longer carries the designation, "Marty Hogan Racquetball" which has been a tradition since its beginning.

Spalding, makers of the Official Racquet of both the IRT and WIRT, offers five extended length models this season in differing price ranges. The top of the line is the new *Extreme Pro*, a graphite, high modulus graphite composite that sells for \$219.95.

Spalding

Manufacturers of the Official Racquet of the IRT and WIRT, Spalding offers five extended length frames designed to provide a long powerful racquet for all players, professional or novice. "This new line is quite bold and exciting, even by racquetball standards. It will definitely appeal to our target audience," says Steve Banks, Spalding Court Sports product manager. And their target audience seems to be players at all skill and economic levels.

The high end in performance and price is the new *Extreme Pro*. Made from 80% graphite and 20% high modulus graphite it weighs in at 200 grams and features 105 square inches of hitting area. The *Extreme Pro* features a head heavy design and retails for about \$220.

The *Intimidator* is an 80% graphite, 20% fiberglass frame that also has a 105 square inch hitting area and measures in at

22 inches. Only slightly heavier than the *Extreme Pro*, the *Intimidator* weighs 205 grams has a head heavy balance, but sells for \$100 less than the *Extreme Pro*.

Offering only slightly less hitting area at 103 square inches, and a 21.5 inch length the 240 gram graphite hybrid *Alliance* is can be purchased for about \$50.

Spalding offers two entry level aluminum racquets at a 21.5 inch length. They are the 103 square inch hitting area *Fury* at 245 grams and the 210 gram *Assault* with a 95 square inch hitting area. The *Assault* has a head-light balance. Each can be found retail for \$35 or less.

Chicopee Massachusetts is home to the company that draws its historic name from a professional baseball player from way back in the early game. Spalding sponsors a long list of top pro players as well as up-and-coming players. The IRT's Jason Mannino, Mike Ray, and Woody Clouse are among the best from the Spalding line.

Wilson

Wilson Racquetball, the racquetball arm of the Chicago-based sporting goods giant has unveiled a new line of 'Stretch' racquets featuring four models in varying weights, all with 107 square inches of hitting area at a 22" length. The ultra light *Air Hammer* series each weighs 190 grams or less and the heavier *Energy* series weighs 220 to 230 grams. Rather than a lengthening of existing technology, each frame has been engineered from the ground up.

The Wilson management team advises great care in choosing a new extended length racquet. "Players should compare all the new longer racquets carefully," cautions Tom Odishoo, Business Director at Wilson, "If a racquet has the same head shape and hitting area as last year's model, but has a slightly longer handle, players should ask a lot of questions about that racquet before they buy it."

The high modulus graphite 9.9 models make up Wilson's high end in both series. The lightweight *Air Hammer 9.9 Stretch* weighs 175 grams. The *Energy 9.9 Stretch* weighs 220 grams. You can get your hands on either one for \$249.95.

The 9.1 models are manufactured from graphite and are a step down from the 9.9 racquets. The *Air Hammer 9.1 Stretch* weighs in at a light 190 grams while the *Energy 9.1 Stretch* tips the scale at 230 grams. Wilson creates a wide gap in terms of price point, offering each of the 9.1 models for well under \$100.

Big Derrick Robinson is at the top of the heap of Wilson's stable of players, with the legendary Lynn Adams at the helm of the promotions end of the business.

So, here is the selection of extended length racquets and the possibilities are endless. The trends of more power and greater reach are becoming the norm and most of the manufacturers have managed to extend frames without compromising weight or maneuverability. And with many varieties available in several different price ranges almost any player at any level can afford to become a shooter. The contagious excitement and explosive power generated by the pros can now be attempted at lower levels.

If you've already had an opportunity to face an opponent who plays with a 22" frame, then you already know the score. In a nutshell, these frames are much more

than just a longer version of existing technology. The manufacturers are to be commended for investing some serious R & D to come up with the advancements we are seeing with the new frames. Most important is the fact that while significantly longer, these racquets have managed to maintain a mass in line with standard frames.

While it's easy to see the advantages of the extra long frames, remember that they will require some break in time before match play. While an extended length will help you make more gets and the larger sweet spot should increase both power and accuracy, the extra inches will take time to work their way into the natural movement on your swing. In order to avoid frustration better put in plenty of solo practice time with your new frame. Racquet prep is more important than ever. As are timing, a smooth motion, follow through, and footwork.

Remember to compare apples to apples in your comparison of the new frames. By this I mean to compare long frames with one another, not one against your current racquet.

These frames will give you noticeable

power advantage, as long as you practice and find yourself playing against someone with a standard frame. Otherwise, with two evenly matched players each using an extra long frame, the new frames will not seriously impact the flow of the game as it is played. Remember, your opponent is doing everything he can to keep you from getting the most from your new frame by keeping the pressure on. Because of this, don't be disappointed when every shot you hit with the new racquets is not a kill. I wouldn't expect any rule changes because of the extra hitting surface. What I would expect is that play becomes more fun.

The added getting power and just added power may not change your objectives on the court or where your setups should be made. It may make the game more fun. Their effect on your enjoyment will be realized immediately.

Since these frames are here to stay, getting an early start with a long frame will serve you well. There are plenty of demos out there to help you find the best of the new frames for your game. Try out the new extended length racquets. You might be amazed at how your game advances!

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Appetizer

In Southern California I often see players playing outdoors. Are there any outdoor pro stops or outdoor pros? How is that game different?

There are no outdoor pro stops, but there has been a desire for some time to try the concept. While there are no outdoor pros, I have won the outdoor national championships for the past two years. The game uses the same rules, minus the ceiling and back wall. Basically, instead of covering a 20 by 40 area, outdoors you have to cover a 20+ by 60+ area. You have to be in better shape, really work on anticipation since there is so much more ground to cover, and move your floating center zone a couple of steps back. It becomes doubly important to get to that floating center, especially after having to go really wide to cover a ball. Wide angles and cross courts are much more important in the outdoor game to try to move your opponent "out the side".

- Tony Jelso
IRT #10

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Entree

Is there a good exercise that will improve my focus and timing?

One "trick" I like to use is to play some practice games with my "off" hand. That is, since I'm a lefty, I like to sometimes play with my right hand. By doing this, I am forced to pay special attention to my own movement in relation to the ball and to my set up position. Since I can't hit the ball as hard, I have to really concentrate on the ball, and on placement and court strategy. Just hitting the ball is a major accomplishment this way, so it really makes me pay especially close attention.

Go for a good solid hit from your comfort zone like you would hit in a warm-up. Work on both backhand and forehand. It will show you just how much of your perception and racquet preparation you take for granted. You will be amazed how much this will sharpen your focus, concentration and timing. Remember to use shuffle steps to get into position and to compensate at the last minute for an error in positioning.

This exercise takes a lot of patience at first since many players have little control of their off hand in the beginning. But if you stay with it, you can really make big gains this way. I recommend playing this way once every couple of weeks if you can get somebody to be patient enough to play this way with you, or working on it by yourself weekly. Bi Rak It (racquets in both hands - no backhands) is another variation on this type of practice. The key is to force yourself to break habits and get back to the very basic elements of the game.

- Mike Ray
IRT #7

Dessert

No matter how much I practice and lift weights to hit the ball harder, when I see Andy Roberts play, I know I'm still not hitting the ball as hard as he does. How does he do it?

The key to hitting the ball hard is timing. Just as in baseball, the big home run hitters may not be any stronger than anybody else on the field. What they do have, just as in racquetball, is better timing. The true secret to hitting the ball harder is timing. You can (and should) practice alone on the court for months on end, but if your timing is off, you still won't be able to execute during a match.

Learn to use your entire body, especially your legs. Use good hip rotation to transfer power to the ball like a prizefighter turning his body into a punch. Actually stride into the ball. You can only do these things if you can manage to get your feet into position. It becomes urgent to get your feet into position and your balance perfect. Really use those short-choppy-shuffle steps to get into position and set up your base.

Lifting weights is great, but on its own it will add surprisingly little to your practical use of power. Practice position and timing and watch the difference on the speed gun.

- Andy Roberts
IRT #3



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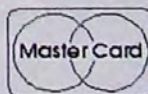
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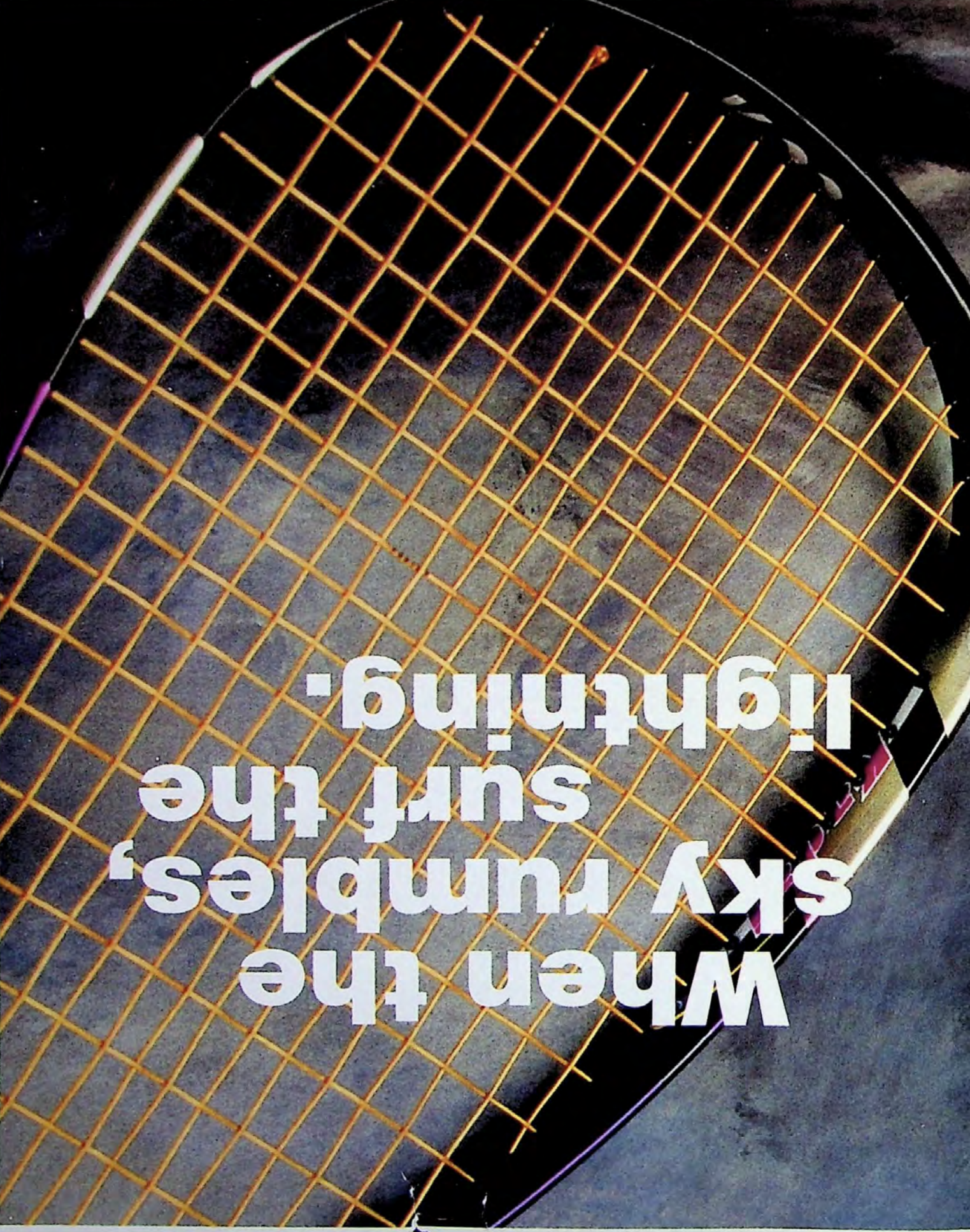
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