



Photo courtesy of Sportstline, Inc., Villanova, PA

Help Your Courts Spring Forward

It's that time again. Your players, who have spent their time inside - either playing on indoor courts or just plain hibernating - are finally making their return to the great outdoors. At the same time, you have clinics, camps and Cardio Tennis revving up. How do you get your courts in shape for the playing season?

Easy, say those who build or maintain courts. First, figure out what you can do to make your courts look their best. After a winter of inactivity (not to mention inclement weather), they're probably not in tip-top shape.

Look Around

The first thing to do, says Pat Hanssen of Lee Tennis Products in Charlottesville, Virginia, is to make an inventory of the court itself. Don't jump right in and start working on the nearest project; take some time to figure out what needs to be done, then prioritize according to what is going to matter most to players.

by Mary Helen Sprecher

Mary Helen has been the technical writer for the American Sports Builders Association for more than 20 years, and has written articles on a variety of athletic facilities, including tennis courts, track and field facilities, athletic fields, stadiums, indoor wellness centers and more. She is a contributing editor to Racquet Sports Industry Magazine, and works as a newspaper reporter in Baltimore, Maryland, as well as a freelance writer.

"The first things tennis players notice when they walk on a court are the condition of the court surface and the condition of the basic amenities, namely court seating, water coolers, court organizers, nets and wind-screens," says Hanssen. "For teaching professionals, my single strongest recommendation to address the condition of the court surface is to make sure that a good maintenance routine is established and adhered to from the very first day the season starts. Spending 6-8 hours with your maintenance staff at the beginning of the season to make sure they are fully trained and equipped to do the job correctly will pay tremendous dividends once the season gets busy. Consult with your contractor or the manufacturer regarding the best maintenance routine for your situation."

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What Needs Fixing?

"Use the start of the tennis season to assess the court seating, court organizers, water coolers, windscreens and nets," says Hanssen. "Some of these units may no longer function and need to be replaced. To avoid player dissatisfaction, this should be addressed before it gets extremely busy. If you do not have the budget to replace everything, consider on which courts you can place the older equipment so that it is less noticeable and less inconvenient to players. Lastly, walk your courts at least once a week, as this will allow you to spy problems before they begin to inconvenience customers."

Touch It Up

The storms of winter can leave a court looking beat up and tired. "Rejuvenate it by cleaning and refurbishing", say Dave Marsden and Bruce Mahler of the Hanover, Massachusetts-based Boston Tennis Court Construction Company. For asphalt or concrete courts, "Pressure wash dirt and stains, but be careful to not remove acrylic coatings from the surface. Light detergents are okay to use in most cases, but experiment in a corner first."

The Net Effect

"An inexpensive but attractive quick fix is to remove old nets, spray a coat or two of rust-resistant paint onto the posts (usually black or green), and install a new net," note Marsden and Mahler. "This is easily handled by club staff." (Note: A net that is worn, damaged, drooping, or has other problems, should be replaced. You may be surprised at the way it brightens up the court and adds to the overall aesthetic).

Marsden and Mahler also advise pros to check the condition of clay court grooming equipment, including drag brooms, line sweepers and rollers, and to repair or replace them as necessary.

Windscreen

If the windscreen has been taken down for winter, put it back up neatly, and make sure it is hanging straight. Repair or replace any damaged attachments and hardware. If any screens are frayed or torn or have holes, replace them immediately, since the run in the fabric will only continue to get worse, and will ruin the look of the facility.

On the Surface

It's not uncommon to see cracks in hard courts, particularly in climates where the freeze-thaw cycle goes on for several months. Cracks may be seen in any place on the court, from baseline to net-line, as well as around the posts, along the fenceline and more.

While the first instinct is often to patch or fill a crack, court builders warn pros not to include that particular problem in the do-it-yourself list. Sometimes, a simple crack can be just that - a simple crack. Other times, however, it can be a symptom of a more serious problem. A court contractor can examine the cracking, diagnose the problem and recommend a solution.

"Aesthetics of the court and the surrounding areas are something a pro should address," says Matt Hale of Halecon, Inc. in Bridgewater, New Jersey. "Once there is a question about the structural



Photo courtesy of Pro-Sport Construction, Inc., Devon, PA

Power washing is a great way to give new life to a dirty or stained hard-court. However, this should be done by a qualified person with experience using a power washer. Surface cleaning machines connected to a power washer offer excellent results with minimal risk of damage to the court. Owners should be very careful allowing persons to power wash with a handheld wand as many courts are damaged and the final results can be very inconsistent.

soundness of the court (cracks, drainage problems, heaved footings, etc.) a qualified contractor must be brought in to conduct an evaluation."

Something else to leave to the experts? Application of new color coating to a court surface, according to Mahler and Marsden. "Unless the pro or maintenance staff has experience in applying new color coatings, that job should be left to a qualified tennis court contractor. Lack of familiarity with application tools, mixing and distribution methods, or the effects that weather can have could quite possibly lead to big problems."

Soft Touch

"A soft court, made of fast drying granular material, should be opened for the season after careful preparation", says Tracy Lynch of Lee Tennis Court Products. Lynch notes that clubs can open their soft courts earlier in the Spring if they take certain jobs in-house, including "patching of low areas, such as baselines and service lines, in the late Fall so that the low areas have a chance to bond better and not get torn up early in the season." Lynch also recommends that clubs pull up court lines during the winter months, and roll the surface throughout the down time in order to allow the courts to be ready sooner for Spring play.

"There are, however," says Lynch, "a few 'don't try this at home' jobs regarding soft courts. The club should allow the contractor to do the following: application of new (surface) material, installation of line tapes, any curb repairs, fence repairs, or irrigation line repairs, and laser lifts to courts."

Once those soft courts are ready, players will be waiting at the gate.

What Else?

Walk the fence line of the court and look for snags, sharp edges, or spots where the fence fabric bulges or the rails droop. Check gates to make sure they swing open without dragging the court surface.

A neat, well tended fence will enhance the look of the facility. (A fence contractor can be called in to make any repairs the staff does not want to attempt.)

If courts are lit, check all lamps and make sure they are still working. Repair switches and other hardware as necessary. You'll be amazed what good lighting can do to show off your facility.

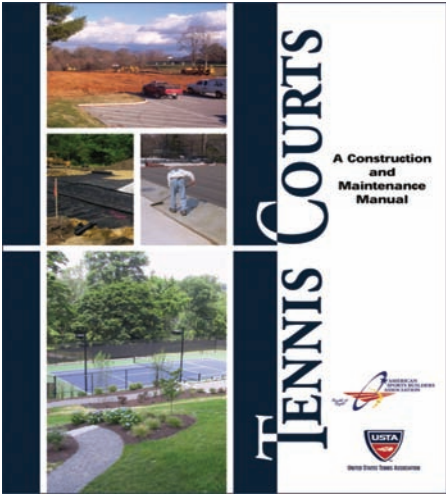
Inspect all landscaping and replant as necessary. Use native and non-invasive vegetation, as well as plantings that are appropriate to the soil, as well as to the amount of sunlight and water.

There's a definite science to getting your courts ready for playing season. Fortunately, it's not rocket science. It's easy

to do, and if you keep on top of it, you'll find that your courts are player-ready sooner and will stay that way longer.

"The best way to keep your courts in top playing condition over the long run is to begin with an understanding of how the court is constructed, followed by an understanding of the requirements for daily, periodic and annual maintenance," says Ed Montecalvo of Lee Tennis Products. "You should have a conversation with the manufacturer and/or the contractor for an assessment of your courts. Remember, every tennis court has a life cycle and it is important to know where your courts are in their life cycle. Your builder can differentiate between what your staff is able to handle and what is best left to them."

Note: The American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) is a non-profit association helping designers, builders, owners, operators and users understand quality sports facility construction. The ASBA sponsors informative meetings and publishes newsletters, books and technical construction guidelines for athletic facilities including tennis courts. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the Association, as well as the ASBA's Membership Directory. For more information, call 866-501-ASBA (2722) or visit www.sportsbuilders.org



The American Sports Builders Association publishes *Tennis Courts: A Construction and Maintenance Manual*. It includes information on tennis court planning and design, surface selection, construction, accessories and amenities, maintenance and repair, rules, governing body information and more. To get one, visit www.sportsbuilders.org

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