

## Get Your Club in Shape for Summer

*Ready for the onslaught of the gotta-get-in-shapers, the summer fitness campers and the new members? Spruce things up using this reference guide.*

*by Mary Helen Sprecher*

The calendar turns to a new month, and suddenly, that thought that was drifting around the back of your mind comes charging to the fore: Only a few short weeks left until everything happens at once.

CardioTennis. Healthy Golf. Beach Body Boot Camp. Warm weather league play and drop-in nights for tennis, racquetball, squash and basketball. Indoor volleyball clinics and badminton nights. Summer fitness programs and sports day camps for kids. Everyone is ready to have a little more free time and to get into shape. That means your facility needs to be in shape, too -- and it's not. Not by a long shot. So how do you get your club ready?

By taking some time to organize, say the professionals. The members of the American Sports Builders Association (whose members design, build and furnish equipment for a variety of athletic facilities) recommend that club owners and managers break out their to-do list by sport. Most club spaces are divided up functionally, and by evaluating what needs to be done in each area, it's easier to prioritize. So take a minute to gather up your floor plans, and then do a walk-through of each area, making notes as you go.

**Cardio Equipment Area, Weight Equipment Room:** Stop, look and listen. Do any machines need cleaning? Repair? Are any making louder-than-normal sounds? Call in repairs on anything that looks (or sounds, or feels) like it might be headed for problems; with the increased use that a change of seasons will bring, minor problems can escalate into major ones. Check out your fitness floor, too. Do you see wrinkles in the carpet? Cracks in mats? Any unevenness in the surface? Remember that your present users may be used to bumps and lumps, and may know how to avoid them, but new users won't. Take the time now to make the changes that will help avoid accidents. In addition, it's the time for steam-cleaning carpets and disinfecting the fitness surfaces. Check all weights, racks, benches and other equipment for safety and stability as well. User safety should always be the priority.

**What's (Not) New?** How can you tell when your club needs touch-ups? It's not easy; in fact, it can be almost impossible to see the imperfections if you're there every day. Sometimes, an entirely new perspective is needed. Bring in a friend, or someone who does not visit often enough to be used to things like scarred flooring, dings in painted walls and so forth, and ask for comments and first impressions. (And don't get defensive when they point out the problems).

"Indoor facilities are sometimes battered, and sprucing up is important," says Alex Levitsky of Global Sports & Tennis Group in Fair Haven, New Jersey. "Cleaning backdrops, replacing light bulbs, adjusting hardware, and replacing worn or broken components are all musts."

Dave Marsden of Boston Tennis Court Construction Company in Hanover, Massachusetts recommends doing a walk-through of locker rooms and reception areas. Pay attention to mechanisms like showerheads, faucets and more. See that soap dispensers are kept full, that paper towels don't run out and that water coolers are available and working properly. Make sure HVAC systems are working well so that the air smells clean, not humid or stale.

What else needs work? Check vending machines by investing a few quarters and pushing a few buttons. Do they dispense the correct products? Give the right change? Or do they reject every dollar bill you try to feed into them? If there are problems, call for a tune-up from the servicing company. Remember that the inability to get a sports drink or a bottle of water may not seem like a big deal to you right now, but to someone who is thirsty from working out, it's going to be downright irritating. Also, see if the current snacks and drinks you're supplying seem popular, or whether it's time for a change.

**For Sale:** Okay, so the pro shop is more of a convenience for members; it's not really a profit center for your club. But make sure it's functioning efficiently and at least supplying the basics that members need, whether that means cans of tennis balls or pairs of sport socks (for those members who forget to pack them) or terrycloth sweatbands. The inventory doesn't need to be extensive or expensive, but it does need to be available for purchase by those who want it.

**Put Order In the Court:** Tennis courts should be kept in good repair. Because indoor courts don't get the natural cleaning provided by rain and wind to their outdoor counterparts, someone should be sweeping them regularly, and periodically hosing them off. If the court really looks worn and lackluster, call in a court contractor and ask about recoating in a different color, which can make the courts 'pop' visually. Not ready for a step that big? There are plenty of other things to be done.

"Adjust tennis nets, backdrops and dividers," adds Marsden. "Replace worn nets. Tune-up your ball machines for group drills and rental activity, and make some flyers promoting ball machine rentals."

**Ball's In Your Court:** Basketball courts and courts for squash and racquetball should be ready for summer clinics and league play. Clean plexiglass doors and windows to remove smudges, fingerprints and more, and make sure all viewing areas are neat and comfortable. Check hardware and make sure all court doors open and close easily, and that latches don't stick. If the court floors are scuffed or have been marked by black-soled shoes, you'll want them cleaned and ready. Just be warned: this may be more than an overnight job, depending upon the severity of the problem.

"While synthetic flooring typically calls for reduced and less intensive maintenance, your hardwood court may require a rescreen and recoat that would call for one to two weeks of downtime," says Sean Adelson of Tarkett Sports in Montreal, Quebec.

Note: Once floors are rehabbed, post signs stating the rules regarding proper footwear, and have your staff make sure the rules are enforced.

Because one facility may serve several purposes during a season, it is imperative to look at the entire court. Check for scuff marks on the wall (which may be the result of lacrosse sticks, roughhousing from children, etc.), damage to the doors and so forth. Light fixtures should be examined and replaced as necessary.

If your basketball goals are retractable or portable, make sure all winding mechanisms or rolling parts are in good working order. Replacing nets is an easy and inexpensive fix that makes a big visual difference. Check the key area of your court carefully; it's the first place that will show wear and tear, and extra maintenance may be needed.

**Gym Class:** Many clubs include gyms with large, high-ceilinged multi-purpose spaces where a variety of activities can take place. Sometimes, the entire area can be given over to one activity, such as a skating

social or a dodge ball tournament, while at other times, different segments of the floor can be used for different types of workouts, such as aerobics, martial arts, jogging, walking and more.

Sean Adelson advises club owners and managers to keep all paperwork relating to the various surfaces in such areas, since "from hardwood to synthetics to rubber, each sports surface provides for unique benefits and calls for a specific maintenance routine. Being well informed on the details of the maintenance guidelines and having a maintenance game plan are the keys to the success of your facility during the busy season. A sports flooring expert who is well versed in a wide range of surfaces can best guide you through the manuals and will be instrumental in helping you maximize the success of your facility."

**Kid Stuff:** If you have a children's play area, take a moment to make sure all furniture and fixtures are in good working order, and ready for the next crowd of kids. Just as with cardio and weight equipment, anything that is showing signs of wear and tear isn't likely to improve with increased usage.

**The Instructions:** Just because your regular members know their way around -- where the tennis courts are, where the yoga studio is, the location of the weight room and how to find the lockers -- doesn't mean your new crowd will. Post appropriate signage.

In addition, says Alex Levitsky, take some time to make sure that everyone (regular members and newbies alike) knows what you have to offer. Spreading the good word can pay dividends.

"Preparation for new programs is informative and promotional too," he notes. "Hang banners and posters advertising the new programs indoors and out, revise your website news to celebrate and publicize upcoming events and prepare handouts (in a green way with recycling). Offer pre-program events to get members excited, and bring in special staff for new programs."

One final note? Keep your to-do list from this year, say builders. It will help you organize your thoughts next season, save you time, and help you run your club more efficiently with each progressive year.

*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 those dealing specifically with indoor recreational surfaces. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the Association, as well as the ASBA's Membership Directory. Info: 866-501-ASBA (2722) or [www.sportsbuilders.org](http://www.sportsbuilders.org)*