Spring is still a long way off, but when it does come, it brings April showers, May flowers – and lots of tennis players.

If you’re like many athletic directors, the tennis courts aren’t where you spend your time in the off-season. After all, there are plenty of indoor sports and their facilities demanding your attention. But when the weather does warm up and you do make the trek back to your courts, what is the first thing you see?

Cracks. Maybe they’re near the net posts or the fence line. Maybe they’re on the baseline. Maybe they’re spread out in various places around the court. One thing is for sure, though: they’re unsightly and you wish they would go away. So, of course, the question becomes: what is the best way to rid a court of all those cracks?

Unfortunately, there isn’t an easy answer. Cracks are actually a symptom of a problem. They’re not the problem itself. And getting rid of them means understanding the reasons they’re occurring. According to ASBA’s book, Tennis Courts: A Construction and Maintenance Manual,

Cracking conditions may occur either in the base or on the surface of an asphalt tennis court. Cracking may stem from construction or job-site conditions such as improper slope of the courts, inadequate drainage of the site, base movement or poor compaction of the subbase.

ASBA identifies various types of cracking, including:

- **Alligatoring** (a readily identified pattern of interconnected cracks that vary from a faint surface pattern to full depth cracks and loose particles of the surfacing material.),

- **Ravelling or Spalling** (the progressive loss of material in the surface of the asphalt or concrete slab, usually caused by weathering or traffic abrasion on courts with no surface treatment),

- **Reflection Cracks** (which occur in asphalt, asphalt emulsion, or surface overlays, and which reflect a crack pattern in the pavement structure underneath),

- **Shrinkage Cracks** (a random pattern of interconnected cracks, usually forming irregular angles and sharp corners),

- **Structural Cracks** (usually due to failure of the subbase or improper mix design of the asphalt),

- **Upheavals and Depressions** (caused by movements of the sub-base), and

- **Hair-Line Cracks** (usually prevalent over large areas, even entire courts, and caused by a variety of things).

To the untrained eye, many cracks may appear similar when in reality, they have different underlying cases. Furthermore, a court may have multiple types of cracks. A tennis court-specific contractor is the
best judge of the type of crack, the seriousness and the cause. Once those factors have been identified, a treatment can be recommended.

Contractors find that some cracks, such as those that are simply the result of freeze-thaw cycles and not of any serious underlying condition, can be treated with a crack-filling compound. Most tennis court contractors do a fair amount of crack-filling, and as a result, are experienced in doing so. If you elect to do the filling yourself, be sure to use a product recommended specifically for tennis courts; ask a tennis court contractor for recommendations.

For widespread cracking, patented crack repair systems are offered. Tennis court contractors, again, can explain these and can help owners evaluate whether they would be an effective solution.

Different problems require different treatments, and in some cases (particularly those in which the cracks will continue to resurface), a contractor may consider alternatives, including:

- excavation and reconstruction of the court
- pulverization and reconstruction of the court
- use of a sheet good overlay
- use of a slip-sheet overlay
- use of a post-tension concrete overlay
- Placement of an interlocking tile surface over the existing court
- conversion to another surface (including, but not limited to, fast-dry)

Each option has advantages and disadvantages, and can be more or less desirable, given the project itself and the reasons for the cracking. The cost of each will vary.

**Wow, you're thinking. This is way more complicated than I thought.**

The best way to approach cracking tennis facilities is not with tools or construction equipment; it’s with knowledge and an understanding of the various problems that can cause cracks. You do not need to be an expert, but you should spend some time acquainting yourself with the subject. Doing so will allow you to discuss options with your contractor, and to understand them more fully.