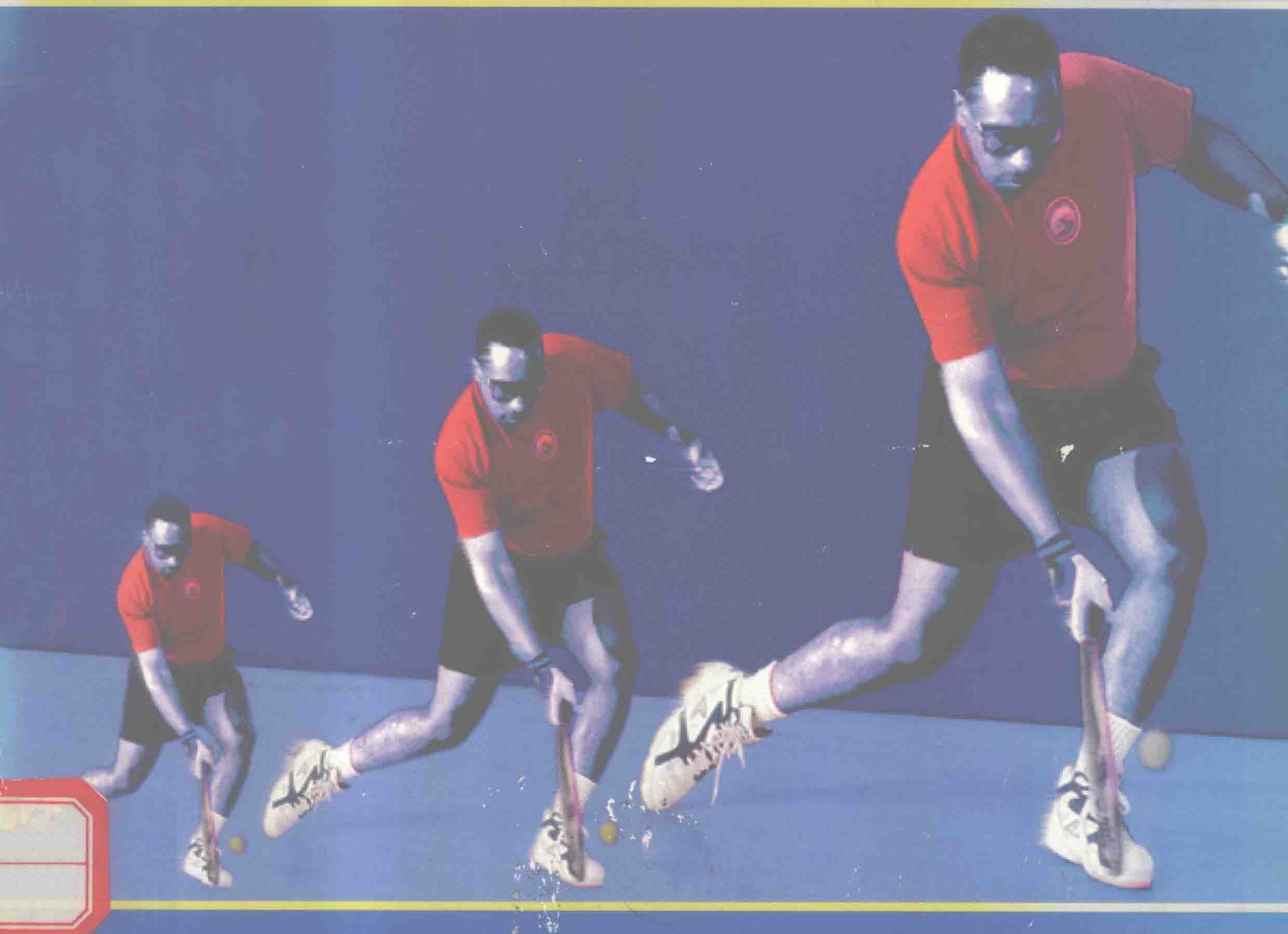


BEGINNING Racquetball

THIRD EDITION



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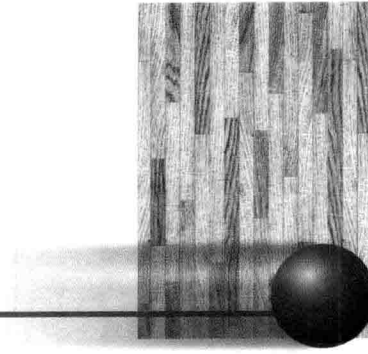
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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 8-89582-297-0

Preface



Beginning Racquetball is designed for the novice and beginning player attempting to develop skills in racquetball. It is also a book that can be used by the more advanced player to review skills and strategy. The text is divided into 11 chapters that deal with the basics of racquetball.

The first two chapters present information on equipment, safety, and resources and a new chapter on preparation for playing the game of racquetball. Chapters 3 thru 5 introduce the preliminaries to the strokes in racquetball, and various offensive and defensive strokes used in playing the game. These are the basic strokes that enable the player to engage in a competitive experience. Chapter 6 provides information on putting the ball into play by serving the ball, and Chapter 7 introduces use of the back wall and the corners of the racquetball court when the ball is in play. Chapters 8 and 9 serve as a culmination of the first seven chapters by providing insight on how to put all the strokes together in a plan of offensive and defensive strategy.

Chapters 10 and 11 complete the overall view of a primer for racquetball. Chapter 10 provides the student with drills for practice. Chapter 11 establishes the basis for the game by introducing the rules and etiquette of racquetball.

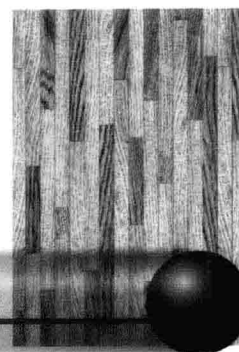
The text is an appropriate introduction to racquetball for the novice player, and it will serve as a guide to enable the novice to develop both physical and mental skills needed to succeed in racquetball. Photographs and illustrations visually present the concept of the game to aid in comprehending the skills of the game. The summary sections entitled Points to Remember and Common Errors and How to Correct Them enhance the learning experience for the player, and the Cues section provides a conceptual view of the game. Overall, the text establishes a solid primer of information and insight for the novice or beginning player.

Acknowledgments

The contributions to this third edition of *Beginning Racquetball* are extensive. Previous editions of the text have been supported with creative ideas, suggestions, and effort from reviewers, models, and illustrator. We personally thank all of you who in some way have permitted us to gain from your knowledge and talents and write a book for the beginning racquetball player that truly allows for skill development and growth.

Models Lisa McLaws and Brad Carter are acknowledged for their demonstrations of racquetball skill and for their contributions and suggestions during the photography sessions. The quality of photographs adds greatly to the overall appearance of the book, and for that we are truly indebted to photographer Eric Risberg. Recognition also is extended to the San Jose Athletic Club in downtown San Jose, California, for allowing the use of its quality facilities for the photograph shoot, and to Brian Mirich, President of Courtesy Sports, Los Altos, California, for his support, insight, and promotion of racquetball, which in turn furthered the development of this book.

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Court, Equipment, Safety, and Resources



Racquetball is played in an enclosed court using the four walls, floor, and ceiling as the playing surface. In areas where a four-wall court cannot be built, one- or three-wall racquetball may be played. The rules and strategy for all these games are similar. This text, however, will concentrate only on the more complex, four-wall game.

The dimensions and markings on the court are as shown in Figure 1.1. Fortunately, the terminology used to describe the court is easily learned: floor, ceiling, front, back, and side walls. The floor lines identify the **service zone** (bounded by the service line and short line), two rectangular areas called **service boxes** and the drive serve lines. The only other mark on the court denotes the **receiving line** for the player returning the serve. The floor surface is also divided into playing areas to define court positioning, as shown in Figure 1.2.

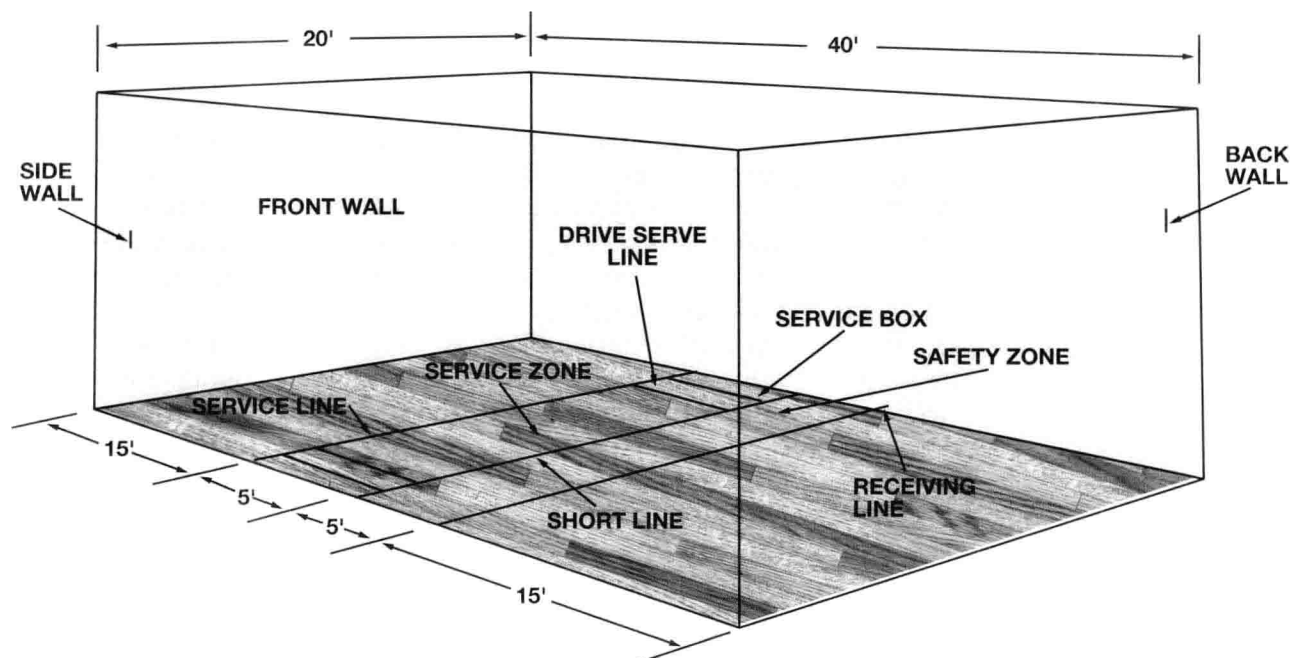


FIGURE 1.1 ● Dimensions and markings on a racquetball court.

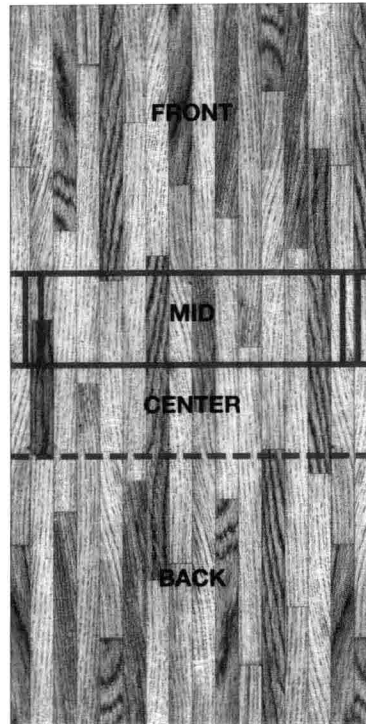


FIGURE 1.2 ● Designated floor areas on the court.

Racquetball was invented in 1949, combining handball and squash into a paddleball game that eventually evolved into racquetball. The game increased in popularity in the 1970s and by the late 1970s and early 1980s it had become one of the fastest growing sports in America. At a point in the mid-1980s racquetball declined in popularity, but by the late 1980s the decline had leveled off, and today the game has nearly 7.5 million participants. Racquetball is played in 88 countries, and including the game as an Olympic sport is a possibility for the future (American Amateur Racquetball Association, Profile & Demographics," in *Racquetball: An Overview*, p. 3).

Brief Overview of the Game

The object of the game of racquetball is to score 15 points before your opponent does (11 points in the third game). Only the serving player scores points. A point is scored when the server's opponent fails to hit the ball to the front wall before the ball touches the floor twice. If the server fails to return the ball to the front wall, the server loses serve. In this way, service (and the opportunity to score) is alternated until one player or team accumulates 15 points (11 points in the third game), and wins the game.

Racquetball may be played with two (singles), three (cut-throat), or four (doubles) players. In singles, one player opposes another player, and in doubles, one two-person team plays another two-person team. In cut-throat, a single server plays against two opponents. When the server loses serve, one of the opponents becomes the server and plays against the remaining two players. Scoring is the same as in singles.

In all games each rally (exchange of hits between opposing players) is begun with a **legal serve**. For the serve to be legal, the server must stand in the service zone, drop the ball to the floor, and strike it on the rebound so it hits the front wall before any other court surface. The front wall rebound may not touch the floor in front of or on the short line. Before the ball hits the floor, it may rebound off one side wall but not off the ceiling, back wall, or both side walls. The return of serve and any other hit, however, may rebound the ball off any surface except the floor before reaching the front wall. Service is changed when the server fails to keep the ball in play or he/she does not serve legally. If the receiver fails to return the ball to the front wall, a point is scored.

Outfitting for Play

Dress

The usual dress for both men and women is a sports shirt or T-shirt and shorts.

Headbands and wristbands aid in absorbing of perspiration around the head and hands and are optional (see Figure 1.3). Shirts will help to absorb body perspiration and must be worn at all times during play. Body perspiration dripping onto the floor of the court presents a potential hazard to cutting and turning associated with footwork.



FIGURE 1.3 ● Racquetball headbands and wristbands.

Shoes

The footwear worn on a racquetball court should be an athletic shoe that supports shifting body weight and lateral movement on the court. Racquetball court shoes are made specifically for players who take the game seriously (see Figure 1.4). A player also can wear tennis shoes or basketball shoes, but they are secondary alternatives to the court shoe. Shoes designed for running should never be used, and dark-soled shoes are also restricted since they mar court surfaces. Technology has produced an ultra-lightweight court shoe that is designed as a $\frac{3}{4}$ top or low-cut shoe.

A court shoe should have excellent traction. Gum rubber soles provide that traction. Shoes should also have a full-length midsole for proper cushioning, ventilation, and lateral support. A reminder for proper footwear includes wearing athletic socks with your court shoe to prevent the foot from sliding in the shoe and creating blisters.

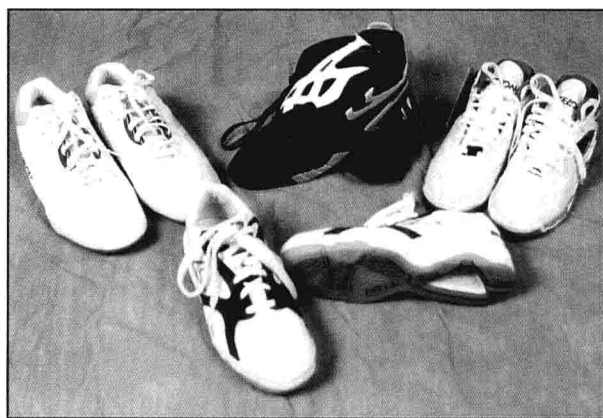


FIGURE 1.4 ● Racquetball court shoes suitable for racquetball.

Gloves

The use of a glove is optional and dependent upon your comfort and need. Many players wear a glove on their racquet hand to help maintain a better grip on the racquet and prevent the racquet from slipping from their hand. Quality gloves will dry soft after use and will provide a firm grip to the racquet. You should look for gloves that provide ventilation and good “feel” to the grip. (See Figure 1.5).



FIGURE 1.5 ● Racquetball gloves.

Protective Eyewear

Protective eyewear designed for racquet sports is required by the rules of racquetball and the reputable management of any court facility. Lensed eyewear is now developed for the player who wears corrective lenses and the player who does not wear glasses. Severe eye damage, including detached retinas and the loss of vision, have followed direct eye hits with either the ball or the racquet. Proper protective eyewear dramatically reduces the possibility of eye injury (see Figure 1.6).



FIGURE 1.6 ● Protective eyewear.

Basic features of protective eyewear requires selecting a lens that is distortion-free and provides peripheral vision. Lenses should be treated to eliminate fogging, and the frame should have shock-resistant nose and forehead padding. A polycarbonate lens resists shattering and is the recommended lens for protective eyewear. Most

eyewear is developed with an anti-fog coating to provide clear vision through the lenses. An accessory to supplement anti-fog is a compound called Leer-Vu that eliminates fogging.

Ball

Specifications for a racquetball ball are determined by the American Amateur Racquetball Association. Balls come in several colors, but most are blue. They are 2 1/4 inches in diameter and weigh 1.5 ounces (see Figure 1.7). When dropped from a 100-inch height, they are supposed to have a rebound of around 70 inches.

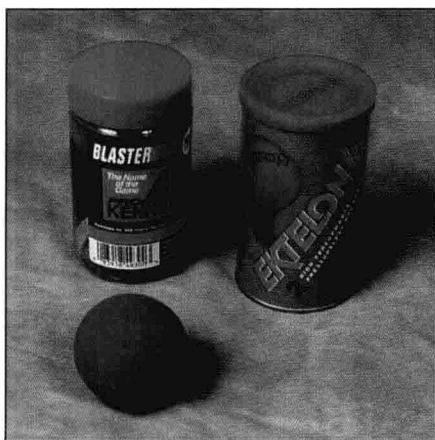


FIGURE 1.7 ● Racquetball balls.

Racquets

The selection of a racquet is dependent upon the style of play, skill level, and amount of money you want to invest. The frame of the racquet is constructed of various materials including aluminum, graphite, fiberglass, and boron. Most racquets are made of graphite or of a composite of materials. These advanced technologies contribute to racquets that have both power and control plus reduced vibration. Aluminum and fiberglass racquets tend to be more flexible, providing more control, whereas graphite and composite racquets tend to be stiffer, which enhances power (see Figure 1.8).

Modern technology has not only developed advanced racquet frames of various composite materials that enhance play, but racquet sizes and shapes have also changed dramatically. Racquets are now produced from midsize to macro oversize. These sizes range from 92 to 101 square inches of racquet face, and are presently



FIGURE 1.8 ● Selection of racquets.

designed in teardrop or quadriform shapes. Racquets should be relatively light because the larger the hitting surface, the more need for the weight of the racquet to be light to maintain the ability to maneuver the racquet. All racquets have a very large “sweet spot” that is usually elongated and covers a larger width than the original conventional racquets. Racquet length ranges from 20 inches to a maximum of 21 inches. As a result of size, shape, string tension and “sweet spot” racquets are assigned a power rating of 1.0 to 3.0, with 1.0 classified as most powerful, 2.0 powerful, and 3.0 moderate.

There are accessories for racquets (see Figure 1.9). As an example, tape can be affixed to the racquet to protect the bumper guards and strings from damage caused by striking the walls. In addition, dampening vibrators are woven through the strings of a racquet to reduce racquet vibration.

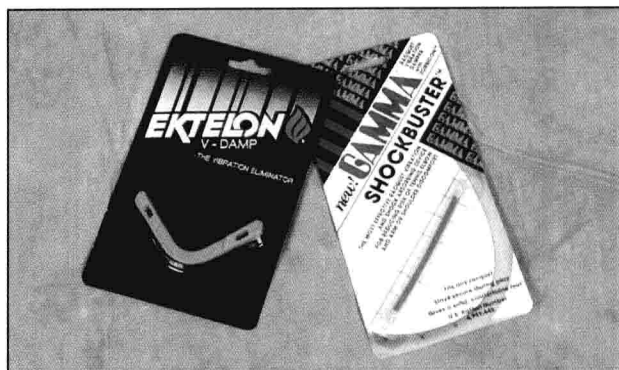


FIGURE 1.9 ● Accessories for racquets.

Grips and Grip Size

As a rule of thumb, the grip size should be smaller than that of a tennis racquet. Grip sizes range from super small to medium. Most experts suggest that when gripping the racquet properly, the middle finger of the racquet hand should just touch the palm at the base of the thumb, to allow for a good wrist snap and racquet control.

Racquet Strings and Tension

Racquets are often already strung when you buy them. When a racquet is strung or restrung, you need to specify the amount of tension. Tension levels are recommended in information accompanying a new racquet, but if you select a tension level, it should range from 25 to 50 pounds. On the average, players opt for a tension level of 25-30 pounds. The less the string tension, the more control a player has and the tighter the racquet is strung, the more the power. The material used to string is usually 15-gauge nylon.

Handle and Tether

Racquet handle grips are made of rubber or leather. Although leather is more expensive if tack-treated, it usually allows you to grip the racquet more securely. When selecting a racquet, look for a handle that dampens vibration and reduces wrist fatigue. The racquet grip has an accessory designed for players who use gloves and players who don't use gloves. These “grippers” provide for a firm grip that enhances the stroke and also serves as a safety feature (see Figure 1.10).

To be legal, each racquet must have a **tether** attached to the handle. The tether is a safety cord

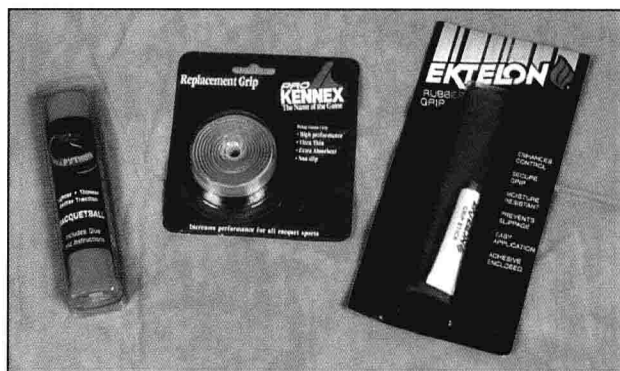


FIGURE 1.10 ● Accessories for racquet grip.

worn on the wrist during play. Replacement tethers may be purchased where racquetball equipment is supplied (see Figure 1.11).

Racquets are easy to care for if you use some common sense. Try not to leave your racquet in the back seat of your car. Extremes in heat or cold will cause the strings to become brittle or break down faster. Keep a cover on the racquet to prevent objects from catching in the strings (see Figure 1.12). If the strings are breaking frequently, insert plastic eyelets where the string wraps around the frame, to protect the strings from wearing on the edge and possibly prevent breaking.



FIGURE 1.11 ● Replacement safety tether.



FIGURE 1.12 ● Bag and cover for racquet.

Safety

Safety During Play

Safety on the court begins when you walk onto the court, put on your protective eyewear, and shut the door to protect against people walking in during play. During play, a racquetball court is safe only if all the players are courteous. This means staying out of your opponent's path to the ball or arm swing. Similarly, no shot is "too good to pass up" if a player is in the path of your swing. There is no excuse for hitting another player with your racquet. If a player is that close to you, your shot could not have been clear (see Figure 1.13).

In addition, learn to play the strokes correctly. Too many players keep their tennis stroke alive in the racquetball court. Wide swings from the shoulder require the room a tennis court provides. There is no place on the racquetball court for this kind of play.

As mentioned, each racquet must have a tether or safety cord attached to it. This tether is worn around the wrist of the racquet hand to prevent the racquet from flying out of the player's hand and injuring someone on the court. This cord must be used at all times.

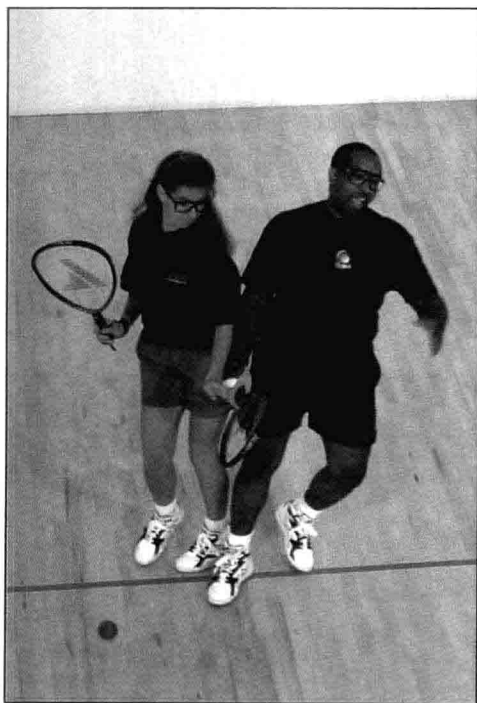


FIGURE 1.13 ● Hitting a ball when your opponent is in the way.

During play you should continually be aware of players' movements on the court. Stay out of the way of the player hitting the ball, and when it is your turn to hit, take your shot only if it is clear. Most balls are hit from the back of the court forward. If you are in front of the ball, DO NOT turn completely around to "see" what is going on behind you in the back court. This not only exposes your chest and abdomen to a hard-hit ball, but it also leaves your face unprotected. Rather, you should angle your body slightly so you can see the back court with your peripheral vision and hold the racquet to protect your face as you look through the strings.

Using the racquet to protect your face from an oncoming ball is an effective safety measure only if the racquet "beats" the ball to the target. Don't rely on your reflexes to get the racquet up in time to protect your face (see Figure 1.14). As a precaution, you can use your racquet as a shield if your face is exposed to the ball's path, and you must always wear your protective eyewear to protect your eyes against the stray shot. This way you can play the game and finish while looking the same way as when you entered the court.

Experienced players will let the ball rebound off the back wall before playing it. This means that a center court position has to be held open for that player to follow the ball. Anticipate the most direct path to the ball that your opponent can take, and keep that court position clear. Racquetball is not a game that allows mental lapses. Each player must know where the ball is at all times, and where the other players are moving.

Should you interfere with your opponent's movement on the court, interfere with completion of that player's swing, or get hit by your opponent's racquet, a **hinder** must be called. A hinder should be called by the offended player in a recreational game and by a referee during tournament play. When a hinder is called, play is stopped and the point is replayed from the serve. Contact does not have to occur for a hinder to be requested. Preferably, play should stop before players or racquets collide, to avoid potential injury (see Figure 1.15).

Safety is a matter of habit and thinking. Protect yourself by wearing protective eyewear, using your racquet as a shield, keeping your tether on your wrist, and closing the door of the court when playing. Anticipate your opponent's position, the path of the ball, and the movement of players on the court. Most important, remember that racquetball is just a game, and one point is not worth risking your well-being or that of your opponent just to make a shot.

Racquetball Injuries

Racquetball as a game can be safe, but, as with all physical activity experiences, injuries do occur. Beginning players' injuries tend to be associated with bruises from being struck by the ball or the opponent's racquet, eye injuries from being struck by the ball, sprained ankles, pulled muscles, tendonitis, and blisters on the hands or feet. Most injuries occur as a result of being in a small, confined space with another person who

No point is worth injuring an opponent.

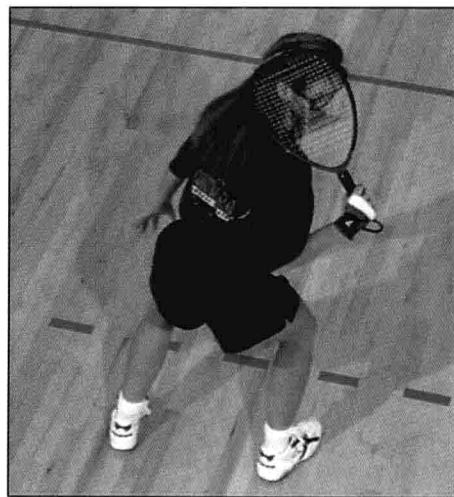


FIGURE 1.14 ● Protecting your face by looking through the racquet strings.



FIGURE 1.15 ● Player not leaving center court to give opponent clear shot off a back wall rebound.

happens to have a racquet in his/her hand. The predictability or unpredictability of an opponent's movement further creates the potential for injury.

Bruises are part of the game, and as long as a hematoma (severe bruising) does not develop, they are minor injuries. Wearing protective clothing such as warm-up pants and top provides some relief from bruises caused by being struck by the ball. Court awareness aids in avoiding being hit by an opponent's racquet. Eye injuries can be serious, and following the safety procedures mentioned is crucial to avoiding this injury. If an eye injury is sustained, medical treatment must be given immediately.

Sprained ankles usually are caused by overextension to hit the ball or by lack of awareness of your opponent's location. Muscle strains or pulls result from the same overextension and improper warm-up and stretching. Tendonitis affecting the elbow usually is caused by too much vibration of the racquet at contact with the ball, extensive play beyond your physical limits, or incorrect mechanics when hitting the ball. Tendonitis also is found in the shoulder, usually caused by poor stroke mechanics or extensive play. These injuries are characterized by inflammation of the elbow or shoulder joint and require rest to heal. Blisters can form on hands and feet. Wearing a racquetball glove and using appropriate shoes designed for court play help to prevent blisters of hands and feet.

Following proper safety procedures will contribute to injury-free participation. If an injury does occur, immediate attention to the injury will hasten recovery.

Resources

A multitude of resources is available in racquetball for your use. The American Amateur Racquetball Association (AARA) is the national association that provides the official rules and publishes a bi-monthly magazine entitled *Racquetball Magazine* for its members. In addition, the AARA has produced two instructional videotapes, entitled *Learn Your Lessons* and *PARI Practice Drills*. The AARA also sanctions age group and various skill level tournaments, sponsors regional associations, trains and certifies players and instructors, and generally promotes racquetball at the grassroots level. One of its noteworthy efforts is the promotion of racquetball for disabled athletes, including those who use a wheelchair and individuals who have visual and hearing impairments. The AARA offers a membership called the Competitive License Application.*

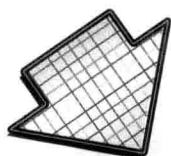
Resources also include professional instruction and coaching. Nearly every college and university offer racquetball as a course for students. In addition, fitness and sports clubs usually have a professional instructor available for lessons, along with a series of racquetball functions that include local tournaments for all ages and skill levels. When taking racquetball lessons, questions you should ask of an instructor include:

- How much individual time will you provide me? (The more individual time, the better.)

*The AARA requires a \$20 fee for a competitive membership and a \$15 charge for the magazine. The address is: AARA, 1685 West Uintah, Colorado Springs, CO 80904-2921.

- What will you teach me? (You need to develop as a player rather than repeat past learning experiences.)
- What kind of teaching credentials do you have? (Anyone can attempt to teach racquetball, but AARA instructor status or teaching credentials associated with racquetball are critical.)

Countless equipment manufacturers support racquetball, contributing to your racquetball development. Ektelon is a good example of a corporation that not only produces excellent equipment but also provides instructional materials on how to play racquetball. Local companies also support development of the game. As an example, in Los Altos, California, the products company Courtesy Sports promotes participation in racquetball by sponsoring competitive teams, tournaments, and workshops.



Points to Remember

- **Do** put on your protective eyewear before entering the court.
- **Do** shut the door to the court before you begin hitting.
- **Do** be courteous to all players on the court.
- **Do** use proper strokes to hit the ball, and avoid swinging wildly.
- **Do** keep the tether of the racquet securely on your wrist.
- **Do** know where the ball is at all times.
- **Do** remember that racquetball is just a GAME!
- **Don't** swing at the ball if your opponent is in the way.
- **Don't** get in the way of another player who is hitting the ball.
- **Don't** turn completely around to see what is going on behind you.

Preparation for Play

2

Although having the proper equipment is necessary to play the game of racquetball, preparing your body is just as important. This means you must spend a few minutes before entering the court to become physically ready to play your best.

The Warm-up

Whenever beginning to exercise, a rule of thumb is “never take your body by surprise.” A **warm-up** to prepare yourself mentally and physically allows your body to shift gears smoothly from inactivity to activity. Without a warm-up the stress of sudden activity can cause your body to rely on reserve energy sources normally used only during emergencies. Using your reserve energy at the start of the exercise can cause you to fatigue more quickly and affect your level of play adversely.

The warm-up should consist of three phases: *relaxation*, *increased heart activity*, and *stretching*. Relaxation is needed to relieve internal stress. The body responds to stress by increasing muscle tension. Tight muscles work in opposition to the free and fluid movement needed for any exercise or sport activity. In addition, any stretching exercises you may do will be more effective if the muscles are relaxed first. To relax, try sitting comfortably with your eyes closed for several minutes. Concentrate only on your breathing, remembering to exhale completely.

The second phase of the warm-up should increase your heart rate. This activity also will speed up the release of the body’s available energy. As a result, at the beginning of the game, the reserve energy stores are not utilized. Playing racquetball will feel more comfortable, and you will not tire as rapidly. Stair-stepping, running in place, and rope-skipping are examples of activities that will increase your heart rate. These activities should be done at low to moderate intensity. Your breathing should increase but never to the point of being out of breath. This phase of the warm-up is finished when you begin to “break a sweat,” usually in 3–5 minutes.