

RACQUET STRINGING

AN ART OR A SCIENCE?



By Barbara Wyatt

A substitute player joined our tennis group for the third week in a row. At a set break, he asked me, "Would you like to play better tennis?"

"Of course," I told him. What else could I say? "No?"

"Hand me your racquet," he said.

My eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"Trust me," he said. "I understand your swing, your aggressive net play. I know what you need to make it sing."

I handed him my racquet with trepidation. The following day, he returned it with new hybrid strings. This new player was a professional stringer. I was a naïve stringee.

As a 4.0 Level player, I am not sophisticated enough to understand more than to re-string according to my frequency of play per week. Play four times a week; re-string four times a year. (By the way, this is no longer the preferred practice.)

By the end of our warmup, I loved my new hybrid string bed. The balls landed inside the white lines. There was less vibration up my arm. A warm balanced harmonic thwack sang out when the ball hit the sweet spot.

Was this science or was this an art form? My racquet was performing like the winning chantress from the television program "America's Got Talent."

According to the book, *The Physics and Technology of Tennis* by Howard Brody, Rod Cross and Crawford Lindsey: "The life's purpose of a tennis racquet is to change the speed and direction of a tennis ball." The strings, ball, and racquet engage in a mad mix of physics as they stretch, vibrate, twist about, store and release energy. The ball zips away "like vibrating jelly."

This mad mix of physics is taught by the

United States Racquet Stringers Association, which offers certifications for Professional Racquet Advisor (PRA), Certified Stringer (CS), and Master Racquet Technician (MRT). Members use the USRSA database to scientifically sort through more than 1,100 different strings and select a perfect balance of string material, matching stiffness, elasticity, and durability to a client's tennis style.

Racquet stringing is neither science nor an art. It is a craft. Most people can learn it and with care, education and experience, first-class stringers do a better and more consistent job.

Stringing is not merely the installation of the strings, but knowing what strings work best for what person. It's the ability to know when something isn't working. It's the mastery to duplicate that magic mix to perfection—on every court surface, against different opponents, in humid or dry weather, at sea or at high altitudes.

Science provides the consistency so that the racquet, string and tension setting combination provide the same result every time. First-class stringers gather a deep

understanding of your game, strokes, style and then balance those nuances against the calibrated scientific choices.

When should you re-string? That is your decision based on the loss of tension of your racquet's string bed. Do you notice 15 percent loss from the initial stringing? Or is it a 25 percent loss? Test the racquet tension by using a pro shop's racquet diagnostic equipment, ERT 300 Tennis Computer, or the mobile app, RacquetTune. Strings lose their tension at different rates based on time, frequency of play, durability attributes of the string, and style of play.

Choose your stringer carefully ... they can make your game sing.

Barbara Wyatt is a writer, photographer, USTA official and app developer for iKnowTennis!, the mobile app for advanced players, beginners, coaches and professionals to learn and understand tennis rules. She discovered the game of tennis about 10 years ago and is striving to hit the little yellow ball inside the white lines—in both games. She can be reached by e-mail at BarbaraW@iKnowTennis.com.

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