

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME



BY MARY HELEN SPRECHER

Making tennis courts user-friendly, fun, and safe

A tennis court (or a pickleball court, for that matter) is so flat. So rectangular. So symmetrical. It's easy to think of it as a simple venue that doesn't need much attention. Maybe that's why many courts don't get the care they need—and it shows.

Hard courts (those built using asphalt or concrete and covered with an acrylic coating) make up the bulk of municipal and park installations. And they get a lot of use: lessons, pick-up games, leagues, and even individuals who come in to groove their shots. In order to keep those user groups happy (and safe), here are some measures to take.

ON THE SURFACE

Walk the courts carefully. Look for any irregularities on the surface, including cracks, dips, or places where the surface appears to be uneven. Check also for stains, which might indicate places where rainwater, or overspray from nearby sprinklers, is pooling.

On a regular basis, use a leaf blower or broom to remove debris, including leaves, twigs, seeds, and other matter from the court. (If there are no trash and/or recycling cans near the facility, have them installed and emptied



WHEN PERFORMING MAINTENANCE ON TENNIS COURTS, EXAMINE THE FENCE AROUND THE COURT OR BANK OF COURTS. LOOK FOR SAGGING RAILS, BULGING FABRIC, OR ANY SHARP EDGES.

regularly; it will save you from having to pick up tennis ball cans, water bottles, and other litter).

Check the surface for planarity by flooding the court with water and seeing if puddles form after the rest of the court has dried. (If so, and if the puddles hold enough water to cover a quarter, the surface is considered out of tolerance. A court contractor can level the surface and bring it back to a safe playing condition).

Stains on the court should be addressed by first scrubbing with water, a gentle detergent, and a soft brush. More stubborn or entrenched stains may require power-washing; however, be careful not to damage the acrylic coating on the court surface. A contractor may be the best person to handle this work.

Have a phone number or email address posted so players can notify the office of any concerns regarding the courts (or other athletic facilities). Check on any such reports within 24 hours to ascertain that any conditions will not threaten player safety.

SURFACE CRACKS

One condition that often takes place on asphalt courts is surface cracking. And while cracks can form all over, they may first appear around net posts or fence posts. So, what to do about them? Contact a contractor. Different cracks can signify different problems, and while, in many cases they are simply part of the asphalt's aging process, they can also signify more serious structural concerns. A contractor can determine the underlying cause.

Unfortunately, many maintenance departments (and even some well-meaning players) want to take the simple route of filling the crack. This can cause more problems, particularly if the product being used is not designed for courts, and is then tracked across the surface, creating an unsightly mess that is impossible to remove easily.

ON THE FENCE

Another area to examine is the fence around the court (or a bank of courts). Look for sagging rails, bulging fabric, or any sharp edges. Repairs should be fairly easy, provided there is no structural damage.

Ascertain that grass is not growing around the edges of the fence and impeding drainage of rainwater; regular attention with a string trimmer should be sufficient.

NET EFFECT

Make sure nets are in good condition; nothing makes a court look worse than a net that sags, has holes, or drags on the court surface. Keeping the tension on a net set correctly, and making sure players are not leaning on a net, can keep it straight.

LINING UP

Park departments that do not have designated pickleball facilities are increasingly adding pickleball lines to tennis courts. If you are considering this, consult a contractor who can do the work—and who knows the pickleball lines are of a contrasting color that will not confuse players of either sport.



Tools And Resources

■ If your park does not currently have a working relationship with a knowledgeable court contractor, find one by visiting the American Sports Builders Association website and use the search feature to find someone in your area. A skilled contractor will have a wealth of knowledge about the weather in the area, how it affects sports facilities—and how to address damage to facilities.

■ For comprehensive information on courts, the ASBA publishes *Tennis Courts: A Construction and Maintenance Manual* as well as *Pickleball Courts: Construction & Maintenance Manual*. These books, available in both hard copy and electronic form, contain user-friendly but in-depth information that leads the reader through the decision-making process, as well as the design, construction, and maintenance of courts. Information is available at sportsbuilders.org, and can be found on the right-hand side of the top blue toolbar, under the heading, “Publications.”

Under no condition should tape be put on a court to temporarily delineate playing areas for other sports since tape can stick to the surface and damage the coating (in addition to posing a tripping hazard).

Court problems generally don't happen all at once; however, it's always better (and usually less expensive) to address them early.

MAKING PLAYERS FEEL WELCOME

With regular maintenance, tennis and pickleball facilities can be kept safe and fun to play on; however, with some extra work, a park can create a facility that encourages players to return. And since tennis and pickleball were two of the sports that grew during the pandemic, it pays to keep those players happy and active.

PLACES TO SIT

It doesn't have to be fancy, but having an area where players can wait for a court or watch a match in progress is appreciated. Picnic tables, benches, and similar seating areas can all be used. If it's possible to have these places in a shady location, that's even better.

WATER SOURCES AND ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

With an increasing number of players now bringing their own reusable water bottles, a water source that doubles as a drinking fountain or a water-bottle filler can be useful. Outlets where players can charge their phones are also a convenience; these can also be used by instructors who bring ball machines to the courts.

CHECK THE SURFACE FOR PLANARITY BY FLOODING THE COURT WITH WATER AND SEEING IF PUDDLES FORM AFTER THE REST OF THE COURT HAS DRIED. IF SO, AND IF THE PUDDLES HOLD ENOUGH WATER TO COVER A QUARTER, THE SURFACE IS CONSIDERED OUT OF TOLERANCE.

LIGHTING

If a park is open after sundown, lighting will allow courts to host more play. Quality systems that use LED will be cost-efficient as well as energy-efficient, and eliminate light overspill and glare. They also can be controlled from a remote location. If set on a timer, such systems can be turned to a lower level to provide enough light during non-playing hours to help deter vandalism.

PLAYING BY THE RULES

If there's one thing that bothers court users (whether playing tennis or pickleball), it's people using courts for other purposes, including skating, bicycling, dodgeball, or as a makeshift dog park. Unsanctioned use can damage the surface of the courts; it can also disrupt play.

Posting a sign stating the rules and including a phone number to report problems helps to head off bad behavior. Rules are the prerogative of the park department; however, some suggestions might include the following:

- Note court hours (if applicable).
- Tennis/pickleball footwear (non-marking court shoes) is required.
- Courts are for tennis or pickleball play only; call the park office if interested in other sports.
- Park programming and scheduled play (including lessons, leagues, etc.) have priority.
- No skates, skateboards, bicycles, and dogs are allowed.
- Be considerate and share court time if others are waiting to play.

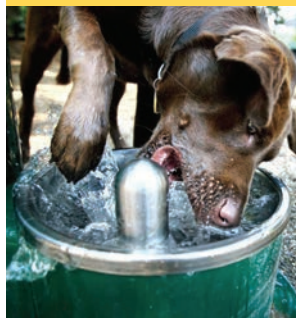
Ask players to be stewards of the courts; help keep them clean and safe by disposing of litter and following all rules. **PRB**



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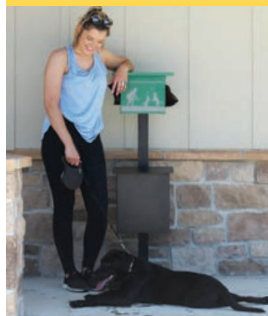
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