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Letter to the Editor
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To the Editor

My name is Dave Miley and I am the Director of Development for the International Tennis Federation (ITF) based in our headquarters in London. I am writing regarding the article "Is tennis getting too soft" written by Tom Perotta that appeared in the January 13th edition of the Wall Street Journal.

Whilst welcoming the showcasing of our sport in your publication, the ITF had certain concerns about some of the content which we felt was misleading and did not reflect the situation worldwide in a balanced way. We were particularly concerned about the suggestion through quotes used from parents of children that the use of the slower balls by 10-and-under players will lead to more injuries than a regular yellow ball. It is somewhat disappointing that no medical opinion was referenced and that more positive experiences from some top tennis countries like France, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands were not highlighted. These nations have successfully been implementing a rule eliminating the use of the regular yellow ball for 10-and-under competition over 5 years and it has been accepted by players, coaches and parents as a very positive step. The high performance coaches of these top tennis nations believe that the new rule that came into effect from 1st January has impacted tennis globally, not just from an increase in participation perspective but also from a high performance player development view.

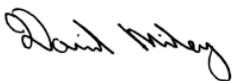
I think it's important that you are aware of the following information which we believe should have been considered in the article:

- No medical evidence or research is known that indicates that playing with a green ball will cause more risk of injury than playing with the yellow ball. The rule change and the use of the slower red, orange and green balls was discussed by the ITF Sports Science and Medicine Commission which is made up of some of the top medical tennis specialists from countries including Spain, France, Australia and the USA. It also included the chief medical doctor from Roland Garros and the Australian Open as well as the ATP and WTA tennis medicine representatives. The commission fully supported the rule change and believed that playing with the slower balls at 10-and-under will not increase the risk of injury, however is likely to reduce the risk of injury for this age group.
- Research carried out by Tennis Australia found that the average point / rally length of 10-and-under players playing with the green ball was not longer than with the yellow ball. They found that the points involved the players playing more often with a variety of tactics including advanced tactics such as approach and volley.
- If tournament organisers have any concerns about increased length of matches when the green ball is used, the option is available within the existing ITF rules to play a match tie break to 10 points to decide the match, instead of a 3rd set. This is one of the ITF guidelines regarding formats / scoring system for this age group.
- The ITF rule change eliminates the use of the yellow ball from 10-and-under competition so that one of the slower balls must be used. All other aspects related to 10-and-under competition (court size, racket size, scoring and match formats) involve guidelines from the ITF for its member nations and tournaments to follow.

- The ITF is aware that the first year of the rule coming into place will involve some children who were previously playing in 10-and-under competition with the yellow ball in 2011 now moving to a green ball or choosing to play in older 12-and-under or 11-and-under age groups. We recognise that the transition period of the next year will create certain challenges, but having seen this change already implemented successfully over the past 5 years by top nations like France, Belgium, Netherlands and Great Britain where it is now accepted and followed for all 10-and-under events, we are confident that it will be successfully implemented in other nations. It is also encouraging to see that many Tennis Federations including USTA, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Japan and Australia have already implemented or commenced plans to implement the rule change in 2012.
- The rule change allows more advanced 10-and-under players to play up to the 11-and-under or 12-and-under age groups (preferably when, as per ITF guidelines, they have demonstrated competency from a technical and tactical point of view and are very successful in the top national events using the green ball).
- The rule change for 10-and-under came about after extensive consultation with all of the major nations over a 10 year period prior to the rule being introduced. Two world seminars were held, one in 2007 and the other in 2008 to which all nations, the ATP and WTA and tennis manufacturers were invited to participate in and the rule change and other aspects related to 10-and-under competition was fully discussed and the proposed rule change received overall support from the participants.
- The rule was also fully supported by the ITF Coaches Commission which comprises high performance player development experts from the most successful tennis nations and by the ITF Junior Competition Committee which is made up of representatives/ experts in junior competition from all regions of the world. The rule change was also supported by the Tennis Industry Association (TIA) and all of the major tennis equipment suppliers.
- The rule was approved by 100 percent majority at the 2010 ITF AGM in Washington but did not come into effect until 2012 which provided for an 18 month lead up period to allow nations / clubs parents and players to be ready for the change.

At a time when the world is trying to encourage more children into sport, we believe it is unfair and inaccurate to imply that over use, particularly with the slower green ball could lead to injuries, unless based on solid factual evidence. Therefore if writing about the rule change for 10-and-under competition in the future in the Wall Street Journal, the ITF would appreciate it if you and Mr Perotta could consider highlighting some of the above points.

Yours faithfully,



Dave Miley
ITF Executive Director, Development