

Version of a Near-Perfect Court

(Paraphrased from a brochure by
CHRISTOPHER BRANDA)

"I had the wrong color."

"The court was too slow."

"The court was too fast."

"What a drift!"

"The sides were impossible."

"The court changed speed right in the middle of the game."

"The lines stopped the discs."

"The wax on the court got sticky."

"Couldn't do a thing on that court,"

. . . so say frustrated shufflers.

It is a fact that all courts have many deficiencies. First, there is the effect of the volume change due to temperature. Concrete expands and contracts, and the change in length from winter to summer extremes in temperatures may be as much as 5/16 of an inch for the standard court. Also, many courts develop cracks and level displacements because of this change in weather. Changes in the foundation under the slab occur, due to inadequate drainage, frost, ants removing the sand, etc., thereby tilting the court ever so slightly, which creates a problem in drift.

Types of Concrete in Building Courts

Silica-type sand or limestone sand, which have sharp edges and points should not be used for the topping of courts, for these sharp edges and points scratch the bottom of the discs and greatly increase friction.

It will be noticed that some courts do not become slick even with cleaning and waxing. Generally, the cause for this is a court with sharp edges and points, and this calls for a grinding down and smoothing. An ordinary floor grinder can do this job pretty well in an hour or so per court, unless the court is very bad indeed. A local floor contractor should be able to do the job at comparatively low cost. Another method which has been successfully tried by a number of clubs, is to have the courts sand blasted, in order to obtain a smooth surface.

There is a belief held by many that a smooth-surfaced court produces a suction effect between the disc and the court so that when a disc is shot down the court the so-called suction retards the travel of the disc. This writer has never seen one single court that ever gave any evidence of suction. There are fast courts which are very smooth—also fast courts that are very rough. On a few courts which had a suction effect, it was found that the wax was to blame, because the wax got soft from the heat of the sun, or was applied too thick—or a combination of both.

A New Concept

Given a court with a surface free from sharp edges and points, why is it that some courts are slicker than others, even though the same wax is used? It was found that different materials used as aggregate, (the sand in the top coat) gave varying results.

The first factor in getting a slick court, is to have a surface free from scratching edges or points. No treatment of even the best waxes would help a court with the above condition that took many months of so-called "breaking in", before they became reasonably slick. What is this "breaking in"? Well, it is practically, the smoothing down of these sharp edges and points by playing, and in many cases, plus some laborious grinding down of the surface of the court.

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"Waxes"

There are two kinds of waxes now used for courts. One is the solvent type; the other, the emulsion type. The solvent type waxes are generally in the form of a thin paste and can be further thinned by ordinary paint solvents, including turpentine and mineral spirits. The emulsions look like thin milk, and can be thinned with water.

The solvent waxes are the older type, having been used for years with varying results. It was found by many that better results came by making the paste thinner, either by heat, or by using a solvent. The thinner wax spreads more evenly. It was noticed that spots on the court with a thicker application felt tacky, and had a tendency to provide a bed for particles of dust and sand. Buffing a court after a wax application sometimes improves the slickness, because this evens the coat, and removes excess wax.

The emulsion waxes, because they are thin, can be spread evenly over a court with very little effort, and do not require buffing. In the form of household waxes, these are justly known as self-polishing waxes. They have practically eliminated the solvent waxes for household and industrial floor use. However, the manufacturers of these emulsion waxes for this purpose found that there was some hazard because the floors became too slippery, causing accidents; so now these floor waxes are made with a non-slip ingredient. This is of course not desirable for courts, but a few manufacturers of special waxes for shuffleboard, do provide emulsion waxes without this non-slip ingredient.

Granted that a club used the best wax available, and applies this with discretion and care—what are the results. We all know that a freshly waxed court may be pretty slick, but that it gradually loses this slickness, depending on the amount of play and length of time, so that in a few weeks, or two or three months, further waxing is required. During this time, we have a gradual falling off in the slickness of the court. Further, all shufflers know the great effect of dust and sand on a waxed court. It is common practice to sweep a court before a match, so as to start with a clean court. Undoubtedly, all the dust or sand is not removed, and fine particles remain on the court and become imbedded in the wax, so that in time we have a layer of dusty wax, and a slow court.

Change In Weather

All shufflers have had the experience of playing on a court that seemed fairly slick in the early afternoon, and then as the temperature dropped in the later afternoon, the slickness would change. Or, if playing in the bright sun, and a large cloud came over, the court would change immediately. Or, if the wind changed, and the humidity of the air was affected, the slickness of the court would change immediately. All of the above changes are due to the effect of temperature, or humidity, or both, on the wax. We all know, and have experienced the effect on a court of an almost invisible mist. The point of all this is that wax has many shortcomings, and has been used because there were no alternatives for some time.

To obtain best results from waxing clean courts thoroughly. Use detergent, scrub and wash. Apply thin coat of wax. If the wax is an emulsion (milky liquid that thins with water) this will be just about the right consistency. Emulsion wax can be applied on a slightly damp court. After some weeks of use, the court may indicate (by getting slower) that the wax has somewhat worn off, and the courts need another coat of wax. However, two waxings should be the limit between cleanings.

Glass beads are playing an important role in building and maintaining near-perfect courts, of which I will write later.