

HOW IT ONCE WAS

Be thankful you are enjoying a game which has been improved immensely over the years. Let's see how it was in 1953 when I began shuffling at age 41. Courts were waxed and ran Okay, but when a cloud covered a sunny court, it would slow down somewhat and it was difficult to adjust to the immediate change.

Possibly the best thing that has happened to the game is the use of GLASS BEADS. This idea may have come from the then downtown Clearwater courts, where beach sand was sprinkled on the courts and scattered with palm fronds. A player could demand sand at any time.

Two big improvements were the establishment of the DRAW SYSTEM and PLAYERS CHANGING COLOR. Formerly, the tournament director would put a top player's name on the chart and he would determine who was to be the opponent. This was called a Seeded Chart, like in tennis. Worse, the chart was seldom posted and it was often suspected directors made changes along the way to help their favorites.

There was no division of amateurs, state amateurs or pros. Everyone was just a player and on a seeded chart beginners would just about always play a far more experienced opponent. We lagged for color and remained on one color for the entire match. In statewide doubles, there was no separation of sexes, except in the Florida State championships. Men and women all played together as they wished. Now, just about anyone can play. Then, in Statewide Singles, only three men and three women (separate brackets) were allowed from each club. Larger clubs had to run elimination tournaments to determine whom to send.

The Florida State championship tournaments were something else again. The women's singles, men's singles, mixed doubles, women's doubles and men's doubles were all played at the same time. The same day! Which meant each competitor had to choose what division he or she wanted to play in. In many cases, players had to place high in district qualifying tournaments, as entries were limited.

But, then, at least one thing was better – WE HAD A REFEREE AT THE HEAD OF THE COURT AND AN UMPIRE AT THE FOOT, PLUS SCOREKEEPERS.

LEW TANSKY

WINNER: 1964 Masters

National Champion: 1969, 1970, 1972

Member: State & National Halls of Fame