

A New Level of Service

The new Professional Racquet Advisor certification focuses on selling and servicing racquets and strings. *By Bob Patterson, Executive Director, USRSA*

I have every issue of U.S. Racquet Stringers Association publications dating back to the very beginning, in 1975. I often look through old issues for industry information of a historical nature, but I also find myself looking at the articles and advertisements and marveling at just how much our industry has changed through the years—and how much remains pretty much the same.

Recently, I was leafing through the issues for anything related to the start of the USRSA Certification program, which led me to the February 1986 edition of *The Stringer's Assistant*. Jill Workman [Fonte], then the executive director, described how the program came about:

"The Tennis Manufacturers Association held a meeting during the January '85 Tennis Industry show at which some manufacturers expressed concern over improperly strung demo frames and warranty claims due to stringer negligence. On three separate occasions after that meeting, I was approached by a manufacturer requesting some sort of certification program for racquet stringers. They wanted the USRSA to insure a minimum level of competence among stringers."

Soon afterward, Jill assembled a committee of industry veterans to develop a test and standards for the Certified Stringer (CS) program, which

was launched in 1986. In 1993, the Certified Racquet Technician program was launched, later renamed the Master Racquet Technician (MRT) program.

Over the decades, there have been few changes to the CS program. Our goal is to recognize individuals with basic levels of stringing and racquet-service competence. While things within the industry have certainly changed over 30 years, those basic skills and competencies remain the benchmark. The MRT designation was created to reward individuals who demonstrate superior technical competence and product knowledge. We've made changes and updates to keep our MRT tests current with the industry.

Now, after careful consideration and input from veterans and others in the industry, we are making some changes that we feel will not only be a better measure of the designations earned, but also benefit our entire industry.

► A New Certification

Starting in January, we will offer a new certification: Professional Racquet Advisor (PRA). A PRA has everything to do with servicing and selling racquets, but the key difference is that for PRA certification, there is no *direct*, or hands-on, involvement with racquet service like there is for a CS or MRT.

To become a PRA, applicants will need to take a written exam administered by our worldwide certification staff. One way to describe the PRA test would be to think of the existing MRT written exam, then remove any questions regarding the actual installation of strings, grips or customization. The PRA test focuses on how strings work, the differences in construction and what that means to players, frame technologies and how to fit a player with the correct frame for their game.

► Who Should Become a PRA?

As the title indicates, a Professional Racquet Advisor will be able to advise players with all things frames and strings. Coaches and teaching professionals should consider the new PRA certification. They may be able to teach the techniques for a perfect cross-court backhand, but if the student is using the wrong frame or has the wrong string



set-up for their game, they will never hit that beautiful backhand as well as they could.

Others who would benefit from the PRA certification include retail or pro-shop staff who are expected to sell frames and racquet service and help customers, but may not actually perform the service themselves.

This new designation will also affect MRTs. Because the PRA exam is essentially a part of the MRT test, PRA certification will now be a prerequisite for those seeking to become an MRT. This will also mean that the written portions of the MRT exam will be abbreviated and contain only the information directly related to racquet service and customization. We will, of course, continue to tweak the content every year to make sure the test is up to date.

Both the PRA and MRT will be required to submit an annual update test on current manufacturers' technologies to show that they are staying abreast of the latest offerings.

With this new PRA certification, we'll be able to bring a new level of qualified, consistent service to players and customers. This is an exciting time for our industry. ■

For more information about USRSA certification programs, including the new Professional Racquet Advisor designation, visit www.usrsa.com.

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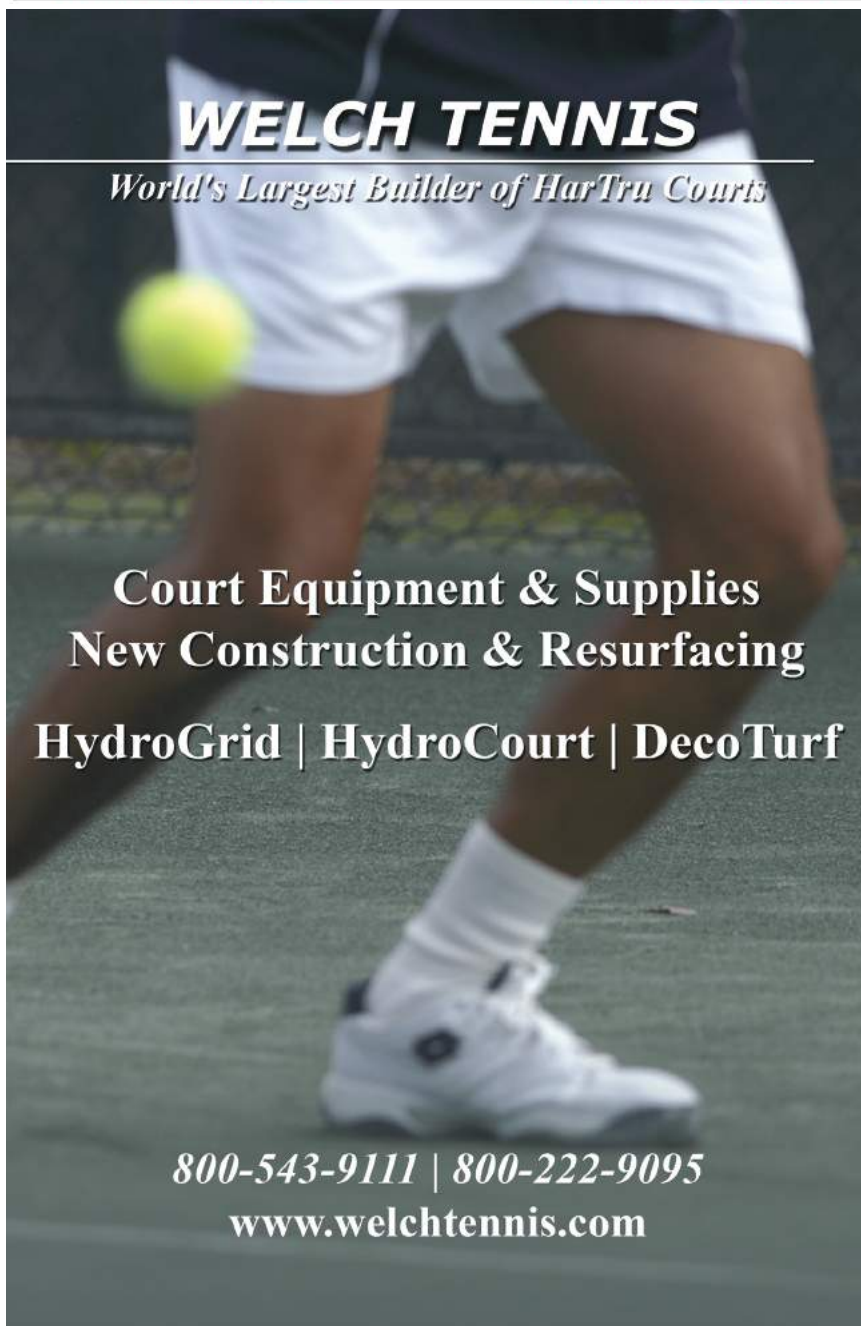
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