

# AskTheExperts



Generally, play on clay courts will put more wear on the strings than play on hard courts.

than 16-gauge multifilament mains with 18-gauge poly crosses. Add to that the racquet head size and string pattern, and you have hundreds—maybe thousands—more variables.

Generally, the main strings do a lot of the work and the cross strings play a supporting role, but that depends greatly on the way the player strikes the ball—it's more the case for heavy topspin swings, and less so for flatter swings. Ultimately, as far as strings go, it is the overall string bed that will have the most effect. The ball is only in contact with the string bed for a few milliseconds, but the effect that has will vary greatly depending on several things.

In the case of which is better, poly/multifilament or multifilament/poly, the answer again is dependent on the player. While using a poly main with a natural gut or multifilament nylon cross is more common, switching them up is a valid choice for some. Roger Federer uses natural gut mains and poly crosses. He likes the feel and response of the gut, but feels that pairing it with a stiffer poly cross tones it down and makes it more controllable. In the case of two diverse strings such as a stiff poly and a soft multifilament, reversing the placement of what is used as a main and cross will change the resulting string-bed stiffness and the performance characteristics.

In the case of using the same string but in different gauges, the results will be far less dramatic, but will still be different—and, again, it all depends on the player as to which is better.

You should also be aware that gauge is a poor way to judge a string, especially for comparison, as gauges are not standardized for string. One company's 16 gauge may actually be thinner than another's 17 gauge, so for comparison purposes, consider the measured diameter of the string rather than gauge. ■

We welcome your questions. Email them to [bob@racquettech.com](mailto:bob@racquettech.com).

## Effects of Clay Courts on String

**Q:** I live in a community with both Har-Tru and hard courts. I've noticed my strings seem to be dirty and wear more on the Har-Tru than the hard courts. Do you have information on why this is?

**A:** Generally, clay-court play will put more wear on strings for several reasons. First and foremost, the ball picks up the grit of the clay court and embeds it in the string, causing more friction and wear on the string material.

In addition, because the clay surface slows play down, longer points are contested on clay. Thus, more balls are hit over the course of a match, which, of course, places more wear on the strings. Clay courts also retain moisture, which is picked up by the balls and makes the impact on the string bed heavier.

Last but not least, some strings—especially natural gut—are more susceptible to moisture.

Other factors such as tension, racquet head size, pattern density and string material also contribute to wear and can add to the effects of clay courts on strings. I hope this helps.

## Hybrid String Questions

*(Editor's Note: We had two similar questions regarding mixing gauges and different strings in hybrids, so we answered both here.)*

**Q:** I had a customer request 16-gauge poly main and 18- or 19-gauge cross of the same string. I was just wondering about the benefits of doing that. What effect would blending gauges have on the string bed?

**Q:** A customer requested a multifilament main and poly cross hybrid. We do a lot of hybrids, but it is usually the other way around. Is his request valid? I can't see the benefit.

**A:** Hybrids are like any string set-up in that it is all personal preference. There are many variables that contribute to how the two strings perform together in a hybrid set-up. Gauge is only one aspect of a string's performance characteristics—the material used and construction matrix must also be considered.

A hybrid with 16-gauge poly mains and 18-gauge multifilament nylon crosses would perform and play much differently