

MEMORANDUM

TO: United States Court Tennis Association Members, Clubs, and Professionals
FROM: M. Livingston (USCTA President); D. Laukitis (Vice President); D. Stoker (Vice President & Chair, Rules & Equipment); J. Crowell (Chair, Tournament Policies); A. Kemp (Professional Representative); R. Mueller (Chair, Scheduling)
SUBJECT: Interim Guidelines for Play with Non-Wood Court Tennis Racquets—4/7/22

BACKGROUND

Over the last several months, prototype court tennis racquets made entirely of composite materials have been manufactured by Harrow Sports. In December 2021, a final prototype was made available to professionals and players at US clubs for experimental play and testing, and a limited number of racquets were also circulated internationally. The guidelines set forth in this memo will apply to play during this period while the prototypes are under ongoing review.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

We remind all USCTA members and professionals that under the Laws of Tennis (2000), Article 4:

Racquet frames must be made of wood and designed for the game of tennis and approved by this Association.

Further, on February 24, 2022, the International Handicap Subcommittee (IHSC) of the International Tennis Committee issued the following guidance:

Players who wish to play matches and record results with non-wooden racquets should use the W/Hand (Wrong Hand) handicap available to each player on RTO. You will need to ask your Club Professional to set up a W/Hand handicap for you if you do not already have one. The starting handicap should be the same as your standard current handicap. A separate W/Hand handicap can be added for both singles and doubles. There is no need for players to be given provisional handicaps when using non-wooden racquets.

If you already have a W/Hand handicap:

W/Hand is used for players using their weaker hand, or using oversized racquets or now for non-wood rackets. Players cannot have more than one W/Hand handicap. Therefore some players may need to choose which category they wish to use their W/Hand handicap for. For example, if you currently use W/Hand for an oversize racquet, but now wish to use it for a non-wooden racquet, you will need to ask the Club Professional to amend the handicap to be the same as your current standard handicap.

We remind all tournament organizers that the Laws of Tennis comprise the baseline rules for all American tournaments and where an event's tournament policies are not explicit those policies default to the Laws of Tennis. **As a result, non-wood racquets are not permitted for use in any USCTA-sanctioned tournament.** We also remind clubs and tournament organizers that RTO is a shared international resource and that maintaining the integrity of this system is a

central concern during the review period for any unapproved racquet. **Therefore, at this time, results of handicap matches played with prototype racquets should not be entered into RTO or be used to determine a player's official handicap. Any such results should be entered under the wrong-handed category to distinguish these results from an official handicap.** In addition to protecting the integrity of the official handicaps during the review process, it is our hope that the tracking of unofficial WH handicaps may provide data for this review. Any professional or player who knowingly undermines RTO data via the inappropriate recording of matches played with an unapproved racquet shall be considered in violation of the Laws of Tennis.

It is our sense that sportsmanship requires that players should have access to and use similar equipment in tournament play at all levels. It continues to be within the discretion of each host club to determine whether WH handicaps may be used for competition in events where respective tournament policies are set at the club level. We recommend that during the review period, and particularly while availability of prototype racquets remains limited, that clubs take a cautious approach to allowing these unofficial WH handicaps to be used for club events on the USCTA Fixtures List. Therefore, we request that clubs make clear on all entry forms and/or via direct communication with all entrants if a player is able to enter using an unofficial handicap and to play with an unapproved racquet. In publishing this exception, a host club commits to recording event scores appropriately in RTO in line with handicap type. If a host club does not indicate such an exception at the time of entry, a player from any club should be able to assume that the current Laws of Tennis will dictate any policies not explicitly listed in each respective tournament's policies and guidelines. Where host clubs determine that no unapproved racquets shall be used in events, all participants should be prepared to play with currently approved equipment as a host club's determination is final.

LOOKING AHEAD

We applaud Harrow's interest in our sport and for taking the care to develop a serious prototype that, based on preliminary performance, merits further in-depth testing and consideration for approval by the USCTA for use in official handicaps and tournaments, and corresponding amendment to the current Laws of Tennis. We recognize that the cost, durability of equipment, and the potential risk for common racquet sports injuries (e.g. tennis elbow) with current models are major factors affecting both short and long-term participation in, and enjoyment of, the game for players at all levels. In coming months, in consultation with other governing bodies and constituencies, the USCTA will establish a process to review this and any future prototypes for safety, durability, deviation from currently-approved models, and impact on style of play. An ad hoc committee of the USCTA's standing Rules & Equipment Committee, chaired by Dacre Stoker, will conduct this process and prepare a report for the USCTA Board and membership.

We are keenly aware that approval of non-wood prototypes and amending the current Laws of Tennis would represent a major shift in the traditions of our game. We are committed to a comprehensive and deliberate process that is both respectful of traditions and commensurate with the seriousness of Harrow's attempt to develop a prototype to mirror the specifications of currently approved all-wood racquet models.