

INTRODUCTION TO RACQUETBALL 101

Student Retention Material Week #1

SAFETY FIRST!

Welcome to the exciting and action-packed world of racquetball! Whether you're only planning to take this first six weeks of racquetball instruction, or plan to continue on into Introduction to Racquetball 102 and 103, the first six lessons will give you a complete working knowledge of the game of racquetball.

SAFETY (IN RACQUETBALL) IS PRIORITY ONE!

While racquetball is a great deal of fun to play, as in all active sports, elements of danger exist. However, if you follow the safety procedures taught in this first lesson, you'll be able to maximize your enjoyment while reducing any danger to near zero. This leads us to the simple concept of remembering that...

YOUR BODY IS NUMBER ONE!

Because racquetball is a high speed sport, you won't be able to count on your opponents to keep you safe while you play, only you can keep yourself safe. Luckily this isn't difficult to do, and I've written these retention materials to provide you with an additional tool with which to enhance and reinforce that which you'll be learning in class.

There are two types of safety in racquetball ...

**- PASSIVE SAFETY -
and
- ACTIVE SAFETY -**

Passive safety pertains to those procedures to follow in preparing to play, and active safety to those once play begins.

- PASSIVE SAFETY -

I. THE COURT DOOR: A racquetball court door is very heavy and is hung on special hinges which guarantee that it fits tightly when it closes. I doubt that anyone would want to be struck by a court door! Avoiding this is quite easy, as a matter of fact, as easy as learning A-B-C...

- A) If you approach a court, ***and the door is open***, **NEVER** walk right into the court! Take a moment to make sure that you're not going to collide with a player who might be about to exit the court, or is just closing the door.

HINT: It's best to use the door handle and carefully open the door all the way before you enter any court.

- B) Even if it is your turn to use a court, *and the door is closed*, **NEVER** just open a court door and walk in! Be sure to verify that the court is really empty. This is easily accomplished by simply looking into the court through the court door window. There are two possible scenarios: #1 If players are playing, don't interrupt them while the ball is in play. Watch until either a ball bounces twice on the floor, or one of the players fails to hit a good shot (one that leaves their racquet and strikes the front wall without contacting the floor first). When this happens, knock on the court door with your racquet, and then "play elevator", that is, let everyone in the court come out before you enter. #2 If there doesn't *seem* to be anyone in the court when you look in to it, still knock on the door with your racquet to announce your intent to enter. Then wait moment or two so that you are sure that someone isn't inside.

HINT: Many courts have "goody boxes" built into the court walls. The player(s) in may the court may take an extra moment or two to retrieve their possessions from these handy boxes before they exit the court!

- C) If you come to a court door, *and it's partially open*, **DON'T** just step inside, or shove the door all the way open. Don't ever assume that a court is empty! If you push the door open you might injure a child who may have wandered into the court and is in range of the door as it swings inwards. Also, a player within might be just shoving the door closed and, if you're not careful, you might become an innocent victim!

HINT: Always push the door open slowly keeping your hands and body out of the door jam area until the door is all the way open!

**CHILDREN SHOULD BE KEPT AWAY FROM COURT
DOORS & TAUGHT NEVER TO PLAY NEAR THEM!**

II. THE WRIST THONG: When Racquetball was in its infancy, those who invented the sport were primarily ex-handball players who wanted a faster sport to play. For equipment, they simply cut down tennis racquets, and tore the fabric off tennis balls and racquetball was born. The inventors of the sport (primarily Joe Sobek) failed to see a potential danger as they continued to play as they had in the past, switching their racquet from hand to hand. It soon became painfully obvious that as their hands perspired that the leather grips became very slippery and the racquets became difficult to hold onto, as a matter of fact, so difficult that they often had their racquets slip completely out of their hands! Imagine a wooden racquet flying through the air, breaking against a wall then continuing on, flying like jagged sickle! For this reason the WRIST THONG was invented.

The WRIST THONG, the loop of cord that is securely fastened to the base of a racquet, must be slipped over your wrist. The rules state that it must be worn securely. To be sure of this,

put your hand through the loop then spin your racquet until the loop around the wrist is small enough in diameter that it can't slip over your hand. (Please, don't tighten it like a tourniquet!)

It is MANDATORY that you wear your wrist thong (even if you're playing alone!)

III. EYE PROTECTION: The true perfection of human vision is our ability to use our eyes for what is called stereoscopic vision. Our stereoscopic vision is that which give us our acute perception of distance. This in turn permits us to calculate our movements within the three dimensions of our world. One could joke that when the official size of a racquetball was designated, it was made too small. Of course, it is the right size for play, but it is small and soft enough that it can make direct contact with an unprotected eye! If this were to happen, the energy of a fast moving ball would be transmitted hydrostatically into the eye. Because there is a good chance that the soft, fluid-filled eye wouldn't be able to absorb such an impact without extreme damage taking place, we wear eye protection. By the way, when you play racquetball, squash, or even tennis, this type of ball-to-eye contact danger exists.

If you wear adequate eye protection, your eyes may be kept perfectly safe!

INFORMATION: An article was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association titled "The Assessment of Ocular Damage in Racquet Sports". It detailed the success and failure of particular types of eye protection available. This article was the first publication pertaining to the need for eye protection in racquet sports in this prestigious journal. Please heed the advise it gives; wear proper eye protectors while playing!

VI. SHOES AND LACES: Be sure to wear good COURT shoes when you play. Track, aerobic, running even cross-training shoes are not safe enough! A court shoe is designed to offer optimal lateral support to your feet while stopping and turning.

IMPORTANT: Even after your court shoes are on, the potential for injury has not yet been eliminated! If either of your shoe laces are so long that they hang down to the floor when tied, or if they come loose, they may cause you to trip or fall. Also dirty or wet sole can cause falls as well. Be sure you shoes are well tied and the bottoms are clean and dry.

BY THE WAY: We don't wear eye protection because we're going to be watching the ball as it's hit, we wear eye protection just in case, we were to fail to turn away in time, or if we were to fall and in doing so managed to turn towards someone hitting a ball!

- ACTIVE SAFETY -

Active safety involves protecting yourself from the following five dangers

I. BODY-FLOOR CONTACT:

“Falling on the floor quit being fun when I was about six.”

As you move around the court, BODY-FLOOR contact can be minimized by following two simple rules: One: Don't let your feet come too close together. Two: Don't move in a manner which lead to your feet to crossing over one another.

See last page for Clean/
Dry Floor information!

II. BODY-WALL CONTACT:

Reach out, DON'T touch something!

BODY-WALL contact is the simplest to prevent, but in order to learn to avoid it, you may have some unlearning to do! Most of the sports you've played have placed your body and a ball of some variety in close proximity. In baseball for example, except for your "few" at bats, you learned to move in front of the path of the ball and to run forward to meet it. In racquetball, however, you have a racquet in hand and the ball tends to bounce off the walls outward into the court. To move too close to the wall becomes pointless and can be very dangerous. If the ball is rushing towards a wall and you decide to hurry to the ball, the wall will almost certainly become a danger. As soon as you're too close to the wall: One, you may run into it... This is not fun! Two, you may damage your racquet banging it against the wall... This is not a very smart thing to do (either)! As a matter of fact, as soon as you're too close, you've just about guaranteed that you won't hit a good shot, certainly not one as well as one hit from at least one arm's length (plus the racquet) and (a minimum of) one step away from the wall! Just like in class, reach out to hit the ball, try to remember to stay away from it and especially the walls!

III, IV. & V. BODY-BODY, RACQUET-BODY, AND BALL-BODY CONTACT:

These three types of contact can be avoided by using your awareness as to what is going on around you when you play. Fortunately the rules of the game of Racquetball were written in a manner to try to protect you in regard to these types of contact. The American Amateur Racquetball Association, the governing body for racquetball, took all three of these dangers seriously into consideration. They wanted racquetball to be fun to play, not dangerous! So, they put safety first! During play, NO BODY-BODY, BODY-RACQUET, or BALL-BODY contact is allowed. If there is danger of any contact of these varieties, a “HINDER” is called.

The rule of HINDRANCE states that a player on defense MUST allow his opponent: RIGHT-OF-WAY TO THE BALL, ROOM TO SWING, and A STRAIGHT-IN SHOT AT THE FRONT WALL. Now, even though this rule places the responsibility on the player on defense, and the player on offense is the one who is supposed to call any hindrance, in class you were taught how to keep yourself safe and to help your opponent become aware of the

implications of these dangers and work on avoiding them at all cost.

REMEMBER -- Even though it is the player on offense who is supposed to call the hinder, if either player fears contact of any nature, he should call "HINDER!" immediately. **OF COURSE**, -- *although play is supposed to stop*, if you're calling a hinder, make sure to avoid the potential danger. Don't ever count on the other player to keep you safe!

After a hinder call is made, even if debated, the outcome of having made the call is that you will have maintained your safety during play! Especially as a beginner, any time that you feel that play is happening at an uncomfortably fast pace, "CALL A HINDER! " I cannot stress this enough to beginners! Remember, a hinder is a GOOD call to make.

Don't ever feel awkward about making the hinder call, or fearing that you'll hurt someone's feelings because he's in the way! Call the hinder! After it is called, you can try to figure out exactly what went wrong. Once you decide how the hinder took place, you will learn how to avoid that situation the next time it begins to take place.

HOW TO MAINTAIN ACTIVE SAFETY DURING PLAY **Peripheral Awareness P.A. (A Rule of Thumb)**

First and foremost, as you move in the court, you must keep the *front of your body safe*. Of course, as you do, you must also follow the flight of ball until your opponent **starts** his swing. In this way you can eliminate the possibility that you might be run over, hit by the ball or struck by his racquet. If you do this properly, you won't be a hindrance!

NOTE: The way in which to stay safe during play isn't spelled out in the rules of the game, however, once you've learned P.A. in this course, you might think it should be!

The key to following P.A. is to remember that you need to know where your opponent is, where he's going and what he's doing. Therefore, if you want to avoid body, racquet, and ball to body contact, it will make sense to you to follow the path of the ball. After all, what does he want and what is he going after? That's right, he wants the ball! So, if you watch it correctly then you'll know or begin to figure out where your opponent is and what he's doing. And if you know this, then you'll become aware of where the ball may be coming from, how much room you may need to give him to swing. Furthermore, you'll know to move out of his way, should you be standing between him and the ball, or between the ball and the front wall!

Before we can go further into the discussion of P.A., there is a place you have to know about. This place, Center Court (CC), is THE place to be when you play racquetball. CC is an area near the true center of the court just about three to five feet back from the Short Line. Although you shouldn't reference yourself using them, the distance back from the short line is marked by the two short red Five Foot Safety Zone markers on the side walls.

Once you have moved safely into CC, you now have the capability to reach ninety percent of the playable court within two and a half steps! (If you linger in back court after hitting a ball, you may need to take five to ten steps to reach your next shot, and there usually isn't enough time to take this many steps!)

Now, CC is not always in one place. Depending on the flight path of the ball and the route your opponent has chosen to follow to intercept and hit it, the location of CC may vary quite a bit!

Back to Peripheral Awareness!

The first thing you have to do to follow this rule, is to be sure that the front of your body NEVER faces towards the ball as it is being hit. No matter what eye protection you wear, or other protective garb, short of medieval armor, you might wear, you would be risking POTENTIAL PERMANENT INJURY! (Face, chest, or groin should never be facing the line of the ball as it's being hit!)

Remember to keep the front of your body facing the front wall. NEVER turn around towards the ball, even if you “think” your opponent isn't going to hit it! Don't ever compromise your safety!

When you're moving around in the court, you should be paying attention to where the ball is going, by WATCHING IT. Keep your shoulders square to the front wall, and watch the ball with the center of your field of vision. If you watch in this way your ability to see and track objects out of your center of vision (your peripheral vision) will help keep you safe. About the time that a ball is next to you (if it's headed past you), you'll be able to “see” the back wall with your peripheral vision. If your opponent has decided to rush forwards toward the ball, you should have time to get out of the way both of his body and his swing.

Note: If the ball going past you is on an angular path so that it actually would be moving behind you, you must adjust your position to one side or the other as the situation dictates in order to maintain sight of the ball. In doing this, you will have moved to avoid ball-body contact!

Here We Go...

Up to this point all these instructions have explained the concepts you need to understand and follow to maintain your safety during play. By this time, if you have not had time with your instructor to learn Peripheral Awareness, then you will shortly. Peripheral Awareness can keep you safe! You'll know what's happening around you, and be able to adjust to maintain your safety!

And Remember ...

Get together with the other students, play and have fun!

Clean and Dry Floors:

Note:

Be sure that the court you play on is *not slippery* for any reason, be it dust, dirt or dampness.

Ask your club to keep your courts clean, or if necessary clean a court yourself, so that you can be sure that you have safe footing. **NO SLIPPING - NO SLIDING!**

Also, in wet weather be sure to "Stamp-Stamp-Rub-Rub" your shoes on a dry towel to make sure that your shoes are really dry and safe for the court!