

An Official's View

By Dr. Azmy

A Successful Experiment

A successful 2003 USA Nationals took place in Las Vegas at the Convention Center on December 17- 20. Congratulations should go to the organizers of the tournament, the volunteers, the officials, the players, the coaches, and all those who contributed to it.

We went to the tournament with some apprehension. It was the first time we'd have two controversial rules, the new time-out rule without an umpire, and the new service rule. In fact I have received several emails warning me about the consequences of allowing these rules at this time in the Nationals.

Thanks goes to our players and coaches for adhering to the two rules. The time-out rule went smoothly without much trouble. Some players just came and asked if they could apply it during their matches, just to be on the safe side. The umpires were instructed at the morning briefing that if they are called for a problem with the time-out, all they have to do is go to the table and resume the match immediately. Logically, by the time the umpire is called and arrives at the table, one minute had expired.

As for the service rule, a sheet of paper with a diagram and the text of the new service rule were given to each player at the time of his registration. Umpires were advised to explain to the players the new rule before the start of the match and inform them that it would be enforced.

The 45 minutes allocation for each match made it possible to avoid delays in the schedule. Thanks to the Director and the Chairman and all their crews for the design and the structure of the tournament.

One incident that took place in the men's final attracted the attention of those present. I will try to explain it in detail to help the players, coaches, officials, umpires, and spectators.

Lupulesku's hand hit the table and injured his thumb. It was bleeding, and it tore apart one fourth of the rubber on his racket. The whole matter was handled according to the book.

An injured player (non-bleeding) is allowed a maximum 10 minute injury interval.

3.4.4.3 The referee may allow a suspension of play of the shortest practical duration, and in no circumstances more than 10 minutes, if a player is temporarily incapacitated by an accident, provided that in the opinion of the referee the suspension is not likely to be unduly disadvantageous to the opposing player or pair.

However, if there is any bleeding, there will not be any time limit.

3.4.4.5 If anyone in the playing area is bleeding, play shall be suspended immediately and shall not resume until that person has received medical treatment and all traces of blood have been removed from the playing area.

Fortunately the injury was not that severe. The bleeding did not continue, and was contained in his towel. When I asked Lupulesku if he wanted to be treated medically, his answer was that it was not necessary. When I offered him a bandage, he did not want it for fear it may hinder his grip.

Dealing with the racket, Lupulesku was kind enough to bring to our attention that there may be some blood on it. I examined the racket while it was on the table, and it was quite clear that about one fourth of the rubber was damaged. The racket was deemed unfit to be used. I asked Lupulesku if he had another racket. His answer was "No." I advised him that he could not resume play unless he gets another racket. At that time he asked his practice partner Jasna to bring him another racket. The racket was inspected, and the players were allowed to play a couple points for practice.

3.4.2.2 A racket shall not be replaced during an individual match unless it is accidentally damaged so badly that it cannot be used; if this happens the damaged racket shall be replaced immediately by another which the player has brought with him to the playing area or one which is handed to him in the playing area.

The entire incident was resolved in less than 6 minutes. I timed it from the beginning to the end. During the whole time Coach Norby was screaming right and left about reglueing and the time permitted. I tried to ask him gently to sit down as everything was being handled according to the rules. But he still wanted to argue. I told him to sit down or I would kick him out. He sat down. Then, during the game, while the ball was in play, he came back saying that Jasna was gluing a racket and that she would give it to Lupulesku to continue the match. Something that did not happen and will not happen. At this time I gave him a yellow card.

It is not fair for a coach to interfere with officials while they are performing their duties. Coaches are not there to intimidate the officials for their own ideas. A coaches' responsibilities are to help their players out and on the table at the right intervals. They are not there to coach the umpires or the officials.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the Official/Rules Committee to adopt a resolution asking each player to come to the table with two legal rackets and two distinctly different shirts. It will be wise to include this statement in the entry form.