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INDUSTRY-WIDE TENNIS FORUM SHARES THE GOOD NEWS IN THE SPORT

Hilton Head Island, S.C. — The second annual Tennis Industry Association Tennis Forum was held in New York City at the end of August in conjunction with the US Open and shared news about the state of the tennis industry, growth in participation and equipment sales, the latest tennis initiatives and more.

The Tennis Forum, which was presented by Tennis Magazine, took place during the annual Tennis Teachers Conference sponsored by the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA). “We want to share some of the good news in this sport,” said Jeff Williams, group publisher of Tennis Magazine and one of the speakers at the forum.

More than 250 people attending the Forum heard about tennis racquet and ball shipments, the new “Tennis Health Index” that measures the health of the sport in the U.S., the visibility of tennis in the mainstream media, and the inaugural inductees into the new Tennis Industry Hall of Fame. Speakers included USTA President Jane Brown Grimes, Tennis Industry Association (TIA) President Dave Haggerty, and USTA Community Tennis Chief Executive Kurt Kamperman.

Tennis Participation and Sales

Despite a down economy overall, Haggerty said, tennis participation in the U.S. has been increasing. He pointed to a survey from the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, which tracks 114 traditional sports, that shows tennis has had the largest participation increase, 30.6 percent over the last seven years, far ahead of its nearest rival, golf, which saw a 2.4 percent increase over the same period.

Also, Haggerty said, tennis racquet and ball sales have been increasing. According to TIA Census data, total racquet shipments from 2003 through 2007 increased 42 percent, and shipments of youth racquets increased by 80 percent. Quarterly racquet sales in specialty stores also have been increasing.

Tennis ball shipments in the U.S., which traditionally have been considered a measure of tennis activity, said Haggerty, have increased from 113.5 million units in 2003 to 130.6 million through last year. “Despite the economy,” he added, “retail sales of tennis equipment have been holding steady.”

Tennis Health Index

Key in the measure of tennis activity in the U.S. is the new Tennis Health Index (THI), which is a composite index of six measurements from different sources, including various participation studies, tennis ball data and the Court Activity Monitor, which tracks tennis courts booked in the U.S. Using 2003 as the baseline (100), the THI is up 10.8 percent through 2007, to 110.8.

The six measures that make up the Tennis Health Index are:

- USTA/TIA Tennis Participation Phone Survey, which shows that total tennis participation in 2007 exceeded 25 million, the highest since 1999 (the first year of this study) and a 4.6 percent increase since 2003. Frequent players, defined as those playing 21 times or more a year, hit 5.3 million players, up 15.1 percent from 2003.
- National Sporting Goods Association Mail Panel, which indicates that tennis has grown 28 percent since 2003.
- American Sports Data Mail Survey, which shows a 2 percent increase in tennis since 2003.
- Sports Participation Partnership Survey, which shows tennis has increased 16 percent from 2006 to 2007, with the total number of players reaching 16.9 million.
- TIA Ball Shipment Tracker, which shows a 15 percent increase in tennis ball shipments since 2003.
- TIA and USTA Court Activity Monitor, which reports a total of 137 million court-hours were booked and/or used in 2007.

“This is the first year we’ve used this composite index to measure the health of tennis in the U.S., and we’re happy to see continued growth in the sport,” said Kamperman. “This shows that our tennis programs and initiatives are having an effect and getting more people on court, enjoying all the benefits tennis has to offer.”

Tennis Programs

Kamperman cited a growth in participation in a number of USTA programs, including adult tennis leagues, which have grown by 28 percent since 2003. Total participation in league play in 2008 is projected to be near 700,000 players, with registration up 5.2 percent so far this year. Participation in USTA Jr. Team Tennis also is up, by 27 percent since 2004, Kamperman said. Projected participation in 2008 is about 86,000 children, with registration up about 6.4 percent so far this year.

The new QuickStart Tennis format for kids aged 10 and under debuted this past spring and is generating a lot of interest and publicity in mainstream media, said Kamperman. QuickStart Tennis uses court sizes, racquets, balls and scoring all scaled to kids, allowing them to “start playing immediately,” he added. About 1,000 sites now offer the QuickStart Play format, and about 120 permanent 36- and 60-foot QuickStart courts have been installed in the U.S. so far.

“QuickStart Tennis is ideal for kids,” said Kamperman. “It gets kids playing on teams at a young age.”

Tennis Industry Hall of Fame

Also at the TIA Forum, the first inductees into the new Tennis Industry Hall of Fame were announced. Coaching legend Dennis Van der Meer and inventor Howard Head are the first two people to be inducted in the TI Hall of Fame.

“We’ve set the bar very high with our inaugural inductees,” said Haggerty. “Dennis Van der Meer and Howard Head are two titans of tennis, well-deserving of this honor. Dennis’s life work has contributed to the betterment of tennis for those in the industry as well as players worldwide, and Howard was a true visionary who revolutionized both the tennis and ski industries.”

Van der Meer, born in 1933 in what is now Namibia in southern Africa, founded the Professional Tennis Registry (PTR), based in Hilton Head Island, S.C., in 1976 to certify tennis teaching professionals and often is lauded as “the greatest tennis teacher in the world,” having personally taught tens of thousands of recreational players and thousands of tennis teachers, Van der Meer’s influence in the game has touched millions of players. He also has coached world-class players on both the women’s and men’s professional tours.

Howard Head, who was born in 1914 and died in 1991, first transformed the ski industry in the late 1940s when he designed a new type of ski that combined metal, plastic and plywood. In the 1970s, he patented a racquet with a 20 percent larger head, which enlarged the sweetspot and made the game easier for millions of players.

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The Tennis Industry Association, the not-for-profit trade association for tennis, is THE unifying force in the tennis industry whose mission is to promote the growth and economic vitality of tennis by working closely with the USTA and industry partners to develop and implement initiatives to increase tennis participation. Core TIA activities include TIA/USTA Tennis Health Index, Consumer and Trade Research, Growing Tennis System including Tennis Welcome Centers, Cardio Tennis, 50-50 Co-op Program, Quickstart Tennis and TennisConnect.org. For more information, please visit TennisIndustry.org or GrowingTennis.com or call the TIA at 866-686-3036.

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