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New Path to Improve the Health of the Tennis Industry

Working closely with industry partners, manufacturers and associations, the Tennis Industry Association is leading the way to a healthy future for the industry and the sport.

NEW YORK, NY (Sept. 1, 2009) — While the world’s best tennis players are competing in New York at the 2009 US Open, the Tennis Industry Association—the not-for-profit trade association for tennis whose mission is to promote the growth and economic vitality of the sport—is charting a new and innovative path to improve the health of tennis and the industry in the U.S. That new path involves focusing on a number of key areas that are impacting the tennis industry in new and challenging ways, say industry leaders.

“The TIA has been a key organization in supporting participation efforts of the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA), and from that standpoint, our sport has been in a strong position of growth,” says TIA President Jon Muir. “But we also need to more clearly define and understand how we can further support growth as an industry. With everyone working together, we have the opportunity now to build both a stronger industry and a stronger sport.”

Recently, through a series of “summit” meetings, the TIA has been defining a roadmap that will further support the unified growth of the tennis industry and allow for a simple communication approach designed to further engage new and rejoining players to get on the path to becoming frequent players. “This will certainly not be easy or show an immediate impact, but our focus is to keep positioning our industry and the sport for where we want to be in the future,” Muir adds.

Many top officials in the tennis industry already credit this unified approach with the USTA for leading to major gains in recreational tennis participation. For instance, the latest measure of participation health, the just-released Tennis Health Index, shows an 18.1 percent gain over the last six years. Published by the TIA and USTA, the Tennis Health Index includes three participation surveys that use different methodologies, combined with measures of ball shipments and court activity, to provide a more accurate view of the state of tennis participation in the U.S.

“The Tennis Health Index is a great indicator that our industry’s collective efforts are having a positive impact and getting more people on the court,” says Kurt Kamperman, the USTA’s chief executive of Community Tennis.

Importantly, that collective effort has already caught the attention of many sports-industry watchers. “I’ve never heard of any sport coming together, top to bottom, with such unity, ever,” says Mike May, the longtime director of communications for the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. “There’s no one who studies sports more than I do, and the united aspect of tennis at all levels is unprecedented. What tennis has done is a model for other sports to follow.”

“While the many brands and organizations in our industry may compete in the marketplace on different levels, we know that everyone benefits when we work together for the sport and industry as a whole,” says Muir, who also is the worldwide general manager of Wilson Racquet Sports. “We all know we must elevate our focus on the economic health of tennis and support ways to increase sales of both hard and soft goods, facility and lesson revenues, event growth, and ongoing infrastructure investments in court building and maintenance.”

The TIA’s path to improve the health of the tennis industry includes:

* Improving the economic impact of the entire tennis industry for *all* stakeholders—tennis manufacturers, teaching professionals, pro tours, facilities, court construction, sponsorships, professional events, media and more—all of which

affect the tennis economy. The TIA's goal, says Executive Director Jolyn de Boer, is to better define the total "tennis economic impact" and to develop ways to stimulate the tennis economy in all sectors for short- and long-term growth. The TIA is working on establishing economic benchmarks "in the form of a new study—an all-encompassing 'TIA Economic Index'—that will examine the full picture of the industry, in every area," she adds.

* Creating a simple consumer website portal that will serve as an entry point into our sport and a central "clearinghouse" for the mainstream audience to learn about how to get started in tennis. PlayTennis.com is in development and will be supported by a powerful database of over 20,000 places to play throughout the U.S., developed through the GrowingTennis System. PlayTennis.com also will contain links and easy-to-use search for finding programs and formats (such as QuickStart Tennis), lessons from certified teaching pros, leagues, retailers, pro events, and other resources and information that can put a new or rejoining player on the path to becoming a frequent player. For all industry stakeholders, PlayTennis.com will be a simple, neutral communications vehicle to fuel awareness of how to get into the sport and play more.

* Ensuring consistent and clear messaging for the sport both in the mainstream and within the industry itself. "The goal is to increase tennis awareness among consumers and communicate the benefits of the sport and how people can easily start playing the game," says de Boer. "PlayTennis.com will certainly be the primary focus, but other key elements will include consistent messaging and general updates within our industry, so everyone is focused in the same direction, as well as mainstream messaging that on-air tennis commentators can utilize to further fuel awareness and growth of our sport."

* Increasing the number of "frequent" tennis players. While there are nearly 27 million players in the U.S., which is the highest number in 15 years, it is the 5.6 million frequent players who play 21 or more times a year that are the core of the tennis market and the primary revenue drivers for equipment, clothing, lessons, leagues, court time, memberships, etc. The TIA and USTA are focused on accelerating frequent-player growth, since they are the economic engine that drives all parts of the industry.

* Focusing on the growth of equipment and soft-good sales in the industry. "Ensuring that our industry grows from a product and sales perspective is of course an ongoing focus," says Muir. "That's one of the reasons we all came together to create the 'Racket Up, America!' campaign." The campaign includes a sweepstakes in which consumers who buy a racquet can register for a chance to serve for \$1 million and win other prizes (visit playtennis.com/million for more information). "This campaign is basically a first step, but the TIA will be consulting more closely with retailers to discuss future initiatives and other opportunities that can have a positive impact at retail."

* Creating and promoting a "careers in tennis" initiative, in addition to helping raise the profile of tennis teaching pros. "We want to attract young people to this business in all sectors, and we're developing a Careers in Tennis initiative designed to do that," says de Boer. "Also, we're working with the Professional Tennis Registry and the U.S. Professional Tennis Association to raise the profile of the teaching profession and emphasize the need for 'certified' pros at facilities."

* Connecting tennis providers and retailers to players. While there are several applications in the industry that impact this area, the TIA has helped developed "TennisConnect" to provide facilities, retailers, and local tennis associations with a software tool to help them manage their businesses more efficiently and keep in touch with players. By allowing players greater access to scheduling and other time-saving features, it can impact more frequent play..

"This is a critical and aggressive agenda for the industry and the sport," says de Boer. "It's a huge undertaking and all of us in the TIA realize it won't happen overnight. But importantly, we're all working together to chart a profitable and growing future for our sport, and to have more people than ever playing tennis."

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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 U.S. Tennis Association 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, GrowingTennis System™ including Tennis Welcome Centers, Cardio Tennis, 50-50 Co-op Program, QuickStart Tennis and TennisConnect.org. For more information, visit TennisIndustry.org or GrowingTennis.com or call the TIA at 866-686-3036 or email info@tennisindustry.org.