
Consumer Decision Making Contest

1997-98 Study Guide

TENNIS RACQUETS

Originally a garden party diversion, tennis has evolved into one of the most well known and popular sports in the world. There are approximately 150,000 tennis courts in the United States alone. Tennis courts can be found in schools, parks, tennis and country clubs, resorts, neighborhoods, and apartment complexes.

Tennis racquets have no official specifications. However, most racquets are about 27 inches long (except for oversized ones) and have strung, oval heads. The variety of racquets is virtually endless. The size, material, and weight of the racquet among other things need to be considered when making a purchase.

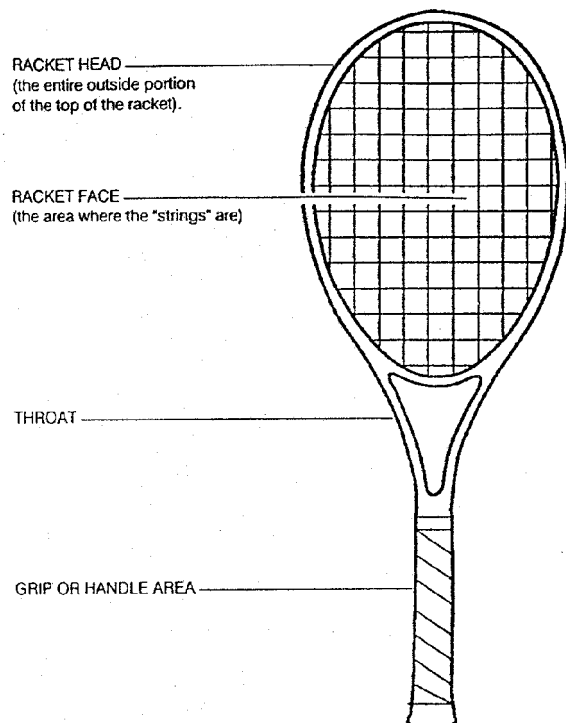


FIGURE 6. *Parts of the racket.*

Source: A Parent's Guide to Coaching Tennis
by Pierce Kelly

Types

Wooden racquets: Constructed of laminated wood, there may be between eight to twelve layers in a wooden racquet. A wooden racquet absorbs the most shock (causing less vibration when the ball is struck) and provides the most "feel" for the player. However, they are becoming increasingly uncommon as newer materials are on the market.

Metal racquets: The metal racquet is quick moving and lasts a long time, but they do transmit shock. Therefore, metal racquets are less stable and vibrate more when the ball is hit. The most common metal used in racquets today is magnesium.

Graphite racquets: These racquets are ideal for people who hit hard and swing through the ball. The drawback is that they are very light and the beginning player may have difficulty maintaining control of their swing.

What to think about

1. What is my skill level? Am I just a beginning player or more advanced?
2. How serious of a player am I? Am I an occasional, recreational player or do I play regularly?
3. How much do I want to invest in my racquet?

Features

Size: There are three main sizes to choose from: standard, mid-size, and oversized. The oversize racquet has a face (the stringed portion of the racquet) which is about 110 square inches or larger. The mid-sized racquet is between 90 and 95 square inches. Anything less than 90 square inches is in the standard category. While an oversized racquet provides more surface area for the ball to be hit with, the racquet does tend to weigh more. The extra weight may cause the racquet to be too heavy or difficult to use.

Weight: There are three weight ranges for tennis racquets:

light	13 - 13 1/4 ounces
medium	13 1/4 - 13 3/4 ounces
heavy	14 - 15 ounces

Heavier racquets require more arm strength. They may be more appropriate for experienced players. Beginners and intermediates should consider a racquet that is best for your size and strength. Many women prefer light racquets and men tend to prefer medium weight racquets. Choose the weight of your racquet carefully. A racquet that is too heavy or light may tire your arm and hamper your game. The wrong weight can even cause a sore arm, wrist or hand.

Flexibility: The flexibility of a racquet has an effect on how it "plays." A knowledgeable salesperson should be able to tell you if a racquet is stiff or flexible. Stiff racquets do not "give" when the ball is hit. They are able to control the ball better but transmit less power. A stiff racquet is also a poor choice for someone who suffers from tennis elbow as the unyielding frame may aggravate the condition. A flexible racquet tends to bend and "fling" the ball off its strings, giving more power and a better serve.

Grip Size: The size of the racquet grip is 4-5 inches in range. Some people measure the lifeline from the tip of the ring finger to the palm of the hand to help determine the size need. Another method to

determine the grip size is gripping the handle. 1/2 inch of the handle should show. Grip is important to fit correctly. Too small of a grip can cause you to clench too tightly, causing your arm to tire. Or, the racquet may turn in your hand and cause the ball not to go where you want it to go.

Strings: Strings are generally made from nylon or gut. More advanced players may prefer gut strings because they can be strung tighter. Gut can be expensive and wear quickly. For beginners and intermediates, nylon strings are ideal. Nylon is less expensive and more durable. Racquets may be purchased unstrung so that you can get them strung with the material of your choice.

You should also consider how tightly the strings are strung. This is called tension and is generally described as pounds of pressure per inch. The tighter the strings are strung, the more surface pressure there is for the ball to come into contact with. The tighter tension means the ball will have more rebound or bounce off the racquet. Looser strings (lower tension) are strung from 40 to 55 pounds. Less tension gives a player more control because the bounce off the racquet is slower. Lower tension gives a player more time to make their shot and is ideal for the newer player. Tighter strings (more tension) are generally for the more advanced player because of the increased speed. High tension racquets can be from strung 60 to 65 pounds. More tension gives a player more strength, but can also cause more vibration. Extra vibration can aggravate tennis elbow.

Cost Range: Prices can range anywhere from \$15 for a prestrung, import model to \$200 dollars or more for fancier racquets. The average price range is anywhere from \$40 to \$100 with many quality racquets at the lower end of the price range.

Other Considerations

Check List for Buying a Racquet ¹

- ✓ Beginners should buy less expensive racquets that have been strung at a factory.
- ✓ A light weight racket with an oversized head is generally better for beginning-level players.
- ✓ Stronger people can buy a stiffer racquet. Weaker people should use a more flexible (whippy) racquet.
- ✓ Select a racquet that has a handle grip comfortable for you.
- ✓ Select a racquet with a grip large enough to allow about a half-inch of space between your fingers and the base of your hands. Most beginners buy racquets that are too small, allowing the racquet to slip in their hands.
- ✓ Seek the help of a tennis expert rather than an ordinary salesperson. The fit of the racquet is very important, since it determines whether the handle will slip in your hand and whether or not you can control the ball.

Storage Tips

As with any piece of equipment, proper storage will add to the life of your racquet. Also, storing it correctly will keep the racquet in good shape and help prevent it from warping.

- ◆ Keep the racquet away from dampness and extreme temperature changes.
- ◆ Use a waterproof cover.
- ◆ Store your racquet on wall pegs or by standing it on its butt end up against a wall.

References:

¹ Bassett, Glenn and William Ota. Tennis Today, West Publishing Company: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1989.

² Kelly, Pierce. A Parents Guide to Coaching Tennis, Betterway Publications, Inc.: Crozet, Virginia, 1991

³ Morgenstern, Carol. Playing the Racquets, Dell Publishing Company: New York, New York, 1980.

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