



The Hardships of Hard Courts

Hard courts are tougher on the body than any other surface, so players competing regularly on them should take extra care against injury.

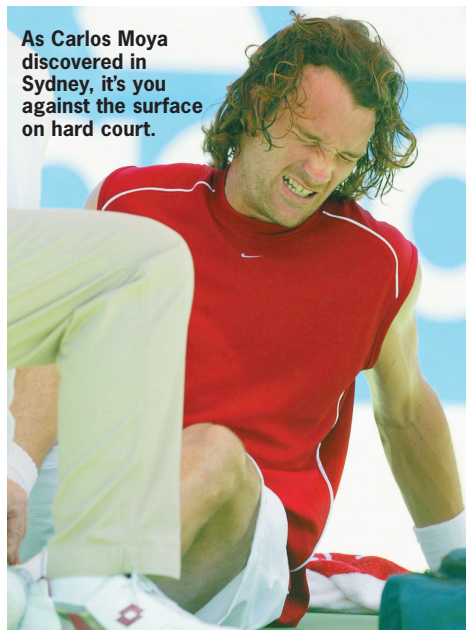
Tennis is unique from other sports, because it is played on such a wide variety of surfaces. In fact, the professional tennis player may compete on up to six different court surfaces each year. That's a lot of different surfaces for the body to prepare for during the tennis season!

This variation in surfaces not only influences the technical component of the game, but also has a significant effect on the physical performance of the athlete. For example, the physical stressors placed on the tennis player when competing on hard courts versus clay courts are dramatically different, due to the innate characteristics of the surfaces and how the body performs on these surfaces.

Within professional tennis, there are documented injury trends which correlate to the type of surface the athlete is playing on. Hard courts are known as the most unforgiving of all tennis court surfaces. The collective factors of lack of court resiliency, constant pounding of the player's body on the hard surface and the fast nature of hard courts is a challenging combination in injury prevention and management.

Hard courts are demanding on joints due to the repetitive stresses on the body against an inflexible surface. *It's you versus the court*, and since the court's not going to give, that means that your body has to! The pounding of joints against the hard surface

As Carlos Moya discovered in Sydney, it's you against the surface on hard court.



can aggravate pre-existing conditions or create new injuries. Common injuries observed with hard court play include wrist sprains, patellar (knee) tendonitis, wrist or shoulder tendonitis, low back dysfunctions, plantar fasciitis and "shin splints", to name a few.

Prevention is the Key

- **Be flexible:** It's essential to perform appropriate stretching exercises before and after your tennis activity. Be sure to target all major muscle groups, specifically focusing on quadriceps, hamstrings, hip flexors, buttock muscles, calves and soles of your feet. Hold each stretch for 30-60 seconds to achieve optimal muscle flexibility.

- **Take time to recover:** Regular therapeutic massage or myotherapy treatments are essential in maximizing

your recovery process. In addition to active stretching, massage will help to keep your muscles in ideal shape.

- **Seek medical advice:** If you're experiencing new or recurrent pain, it's important to have an evaluation by a medical professional, such as a sports medicine physician or physiotherapist. If the injury remains untreated, it is likely to become worse, especially if you play through the injury.

Good luck, and remember, the only inflexible thing about your tennis game should be the court! ●

Healthcare Help

Q: *I recently increased my playing time on hard courts and my feet have been aching at the start of each practice, but the discomfort generally goes away after a while. My feet are also very sore first thing in the morning, when I get out of bed. Could the two issues be related?*

A: Yes these issues could be related. A common injury resulting from hard court play is plantar fasciitis - an overuse injury in which the connective tissue structures on the bottom of the foot become inflamed. This inflammation is caused by overstretching of the plantar fascia over time, which results in micro tears of the structures.

Symptoms of plantar fasciitis include pain and/or tenderness along the arch or bottom of the foot, which is often worse in the

morning. Another common complaint of plantar fasciitis is pain that is worse at the beginning of exercise, and then subsides as the structures begin to warm-up and relax.

Physiotherapy management of plantar fasciitis may consist of several treatment options such as preventative arch taping, soft tissue massage, ice massage, stretching and strengthening exercises for the foot and calf muscles, application of a night splint and assessment for orthotics. In some cases, anti-inflammatory medication may also be prescribed by your physician.

Send your health or fitness related questions to Health & Fitness, Australian Tennis Magazine, LPO Box 1206, Hawksburn, VIC, 3142 or email editor@tennismag.com.au