

Closing a Clay Tennis Court for the Winter

The time of year in which over half of all US residents and all Canadian residents will need to close their clay courts is quickly approaching us. If done properly, not only will closing the clay courts save both time and money when it is time to reopen the courts in the spring, but it will also extend the lifetime of the tennis court equipment, supplies and accessories. Below is a guideline and some suggestions on closing the courts:

1. Shut down the irrigation system. Perhaps most important and one in which may require outside help or professional experience, is properly shutting down the irrigation system. Whether the clay courts are surface irrigated (sprinklers) or sub-irrigated (hydrocourt or hydrogrid) it is a must to properly shut down the irrigation system. If the courts are surface irrigated, the pressurized system must be shut down and all water needs to be “blown out” before any freezing occurs. This is a must! You do not want to deal with cracked or broken pipes when opening the courts in the spring. The sprinkler heads should be removed and stored inside for the winter. Cap any area in which there is the potential for water to enter the system.

If the courts are sub-irrigated, the “cells” should be drained of all water. The main water line needs to be “blown out”. The valves or float mechanisms should be removed and stored inside. Remove the drain plugs so that any water that accumulates from rain or snow has a way to drain out of the court and boxes. One quick tip before draining the cells: make sure the boxes are marked with the correct water levels. This way, in the spring when the courts are opened you will know what level to fill to. Invest in a white or yellow permanent marker and mark the boxes. Stickers tend to come off over time.

2. Remove the net, roll it up and store it inside. However, before doing so, inspect the net; make sure it is a net that you want to reinstall in the spring. Is the headband starting to tear? Is it time for a new center strap? If so, start making a list of items to purchase over the winter in time for spring. If there are multiple courts to close, mark or identify the net with the court number.

3. Remove the net posts. This can only be done if there were net post sleeves installed during the construction of the courts. It is very important to cap or somehow cover the net post sleeve opening. Measure the sleeve opening and get a plastic cap from Home Depot. Or a simple solution is to duct tape the opening. Just be certain you completely cover the opening and that the tape will thoroughly stick throughout the winter. Could the net posts use a little TLC? Paint the net posts over the winter so they look brand new in the spring. How is the reel? If it is still operational, lubricate it to keep the rust or corrosion away. Remember to label or identify the net posts if there are multiple courts.

4. Pull up the line tapes. If you or your club gets new tapes every spring, pull the line tapes and dispose of the tapes. However, you can attempt to keep the line tapes down and reuse them. The two clear advantages to re-using the line tapes is one, you will save yourself or club money and two, save yourself time. In addition to the time you save installing the line tapes in the spring, you will also save time in that the court(s) can be opened sooner. Locations with a mild winter have had better success keeping the line tapes down as compared to locations that experience extreme temperatures with heavy

freezing and thawing. The best strategy to keep the lines down is to place boards on top of the tapes. Some people also hand roll the tapes when the court is frozen.

5. Store the court equipment, supplies and accessories. This step is self explanatory. As suggested previously, take an inventory of all items and note anything that need to be replaced or fixed. Drain the gas from the roller. Change the oil and lubricate the parts that need it. Hang all the brooms and brushes so that the fibers do not become matted or out of place. Remember to label everything. It makes it a very simple process come spring time.

6. Remove and store the windscreens. It may be slightly difficult and time consuming but it is a must if you want to increase the longevity of the windscreens. A cold, windy and wet winter will damage the windscreens. When removing them, draw a map of the court and label the windscreens.

7. Cover the court with a court cover. What are the benefits of covering the court with a court cover? There are numerous benefits: court covers restrict or lessen the moisture entering the court which reduces the freeze/thaw cycles, the covers reduce erosion, particularly in windy areas, and courts that are covered generally can be opened 2-3 weeks earlier in the spring.

Good Luck! We hope you find this information useful. For more information, please visit our website, www.tennissuppliesandequipment.com.