

Official Message to
Table Tennis Manufacturers
And
National Associations (to distribute to players)

At the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the ITTF it was decided that the ITTF President would send an official message to Manufacturers and National Associations to clarify the situation with regards to the new rule of VOC-free glue, the illegality of any types of additives such as Boosters, Tuners and the like, the minimum friction level for long-pimples rubbers, and the 4mm thickness for rubbers. This is all related to the Racket Testing protocols that are in place and that are being refined to higher standards by 1 January 2009.

1. ITTF Rules

The ITTF has passed some rules relating to Table Tennis Equipment in accordance with the correct and established process. These rules must be implemented as passed by the appropriate authority of the ITTF be it the AGM or the Board of Directors, or the Executive Committee by authority of either of the above mentioned bodies.

The Rules of the ITTF apply to all ITTF events. It is the national associations' choice to implement such rules fully, partially or not at all at the national level. However, it is the duty of the ITTF, its Staff, its Officials and its Committees to fully implement the Rules of the ITTF strictly and consistently.

The ITTF is gradually putting in place all the necessary tools and more sophisticated Racket Control procedures to better control and implement the rules of the ITTF especially as they relate to racket coverings and additives.

2. First Transition Period

Like all new rules there is a transition and "adaptation" period. The ITTF's Board of Directors in Zagreb in 2007 decided to implement the VOC-free glue rule at Junior events as of 1 January 2008. This served as a preparatory phase before the full implementation of the VOC ban on 1 September 2008. During this period many interesting phenomena were noted.

The presence of VOCs was noted even when water-based glues were used. The thickness of racket coverings seemed to systematically exceed the limits of 4mm.

The Enez device used was put to the test and many elements were adapted to further improve and refine the device. In all cases a High Resolution ppb RAE device was used as a back up for Enez.

3. Second and current Transition Period

Based on the 8-month experience at Junior events, the ITTF made some necessary modifications to be ready for the full implementation of the VOC ban.

The ITTF tested the Enez device for accuracy and repeatability at an independent testing and research centre (Applus - C.A.R. Barcelona) and the results show an accuracy and consistency level of more than 99.8% at 1ppm resolution.

5 brands of Boosters and Tuners available on the market were tested and their composition examined. It was found that VOCs were in the compounds and in at least two cases poisonous materials were found. The suppliers were informed and all 5 suppliers have ceased production.

The ITTF decided to racket test at all ITTF events using the current equipment as well as new equipment

Enez is used to detect VOCs, and this is backed up by the RAE instrument.

The RAE can also detect the presence of very low levels of VOC which can be found in Boosters and Tuners.

A new thickness measurement device has been developed by 2 TT manufacturers and is already in use to check thickness of racket coverings.

At the first 2 ITTF events (Women World Cup and Men World Cup) it was observed that “most” players respected the rules and followed the ITTF instructions. However, very quickly some players started adopting measures that contravene the ITTF rules. This is unfortunate as we do have amongst us three categories of players; those that abide fully by the rules and feel victimized, those that contravene the rules unintentionally, and those that knowingly break the rule.

We also have 3 types of TT manufacturers & distributors; those that have agreed to follow the ITTF rules 100%, those that break the ITTF rules unintentionally, and those that secretly break the ITTF rules in a hidden and despicable manner.

4. Current racket testing

At before-the-match test, the racket shall be submitted 20 minutes before the scheduled match.

The racket will be tested for VOCs, and all other racket attributes including strict and consequent implementation of the thickness measurements of the rubber.

If the racket is found illegal (does not meet the ITTF set regulations), the player has to play the match with another racket, which shall be tested immediately AFTER the match.

Every player whose racket fails the racket test after the match is subject to disqualification from the tournament. If the player has already won the match, a loss will be recorded for the same match.

Repeat offenders will be subject to suspension from ITTF events, the period of suspension to be established by the ITTF EC.

5. ITTF's Firm Position as of 1 January 2009

Players

The ITTF will test rackets at all ITTF events. The racket testing protocols will constantly improve in order to be ready to detect all illegal activities. A racket that passes the test today

may not pass the test tomorrow because the testing devices are constantly being upgraded. Players should not worry as long as their racket is legal and meets the ITTF criteria.

The ITTF will test for all elements of the ITTF rules relating to rackets and racket coverings such as flatness, consistency, thickness, glossiness, VOC presence, additives presence (Boosters and Tuners and other additives), stretching of the rubber after approval, etc.

The limit allowable for VOC emissions will be fixed at a much lower tolerance level on the detection devices detecting VOCs.

The Enez device will continue to be used to detect VOCs, in addition new devices will be employed to detect much lower levels of VOCs as well as the presence of other compounds found in additives.

As of 1 July 2009, the ITTF will conduct ONLY AFTER-THE-MATCH racket tests, with punitive consequences for failed tests. There will be the possibility of a pre-match voluntary test according to the Racket Control procedures.

ADVICE TO PLAYERS:

Do not add anything to your racket.

If you suspect the presence of VOCs in your racket covering air it for 72 hours out of the packaging before using (and remove the protective plastic sheet if any).

Use only water-based glues or VOC-free Pressure Sensitive Adhesive sheets (PSA).

Only clean your racket with water, do not use any other substances.

Adding natural substances such as oils, etc., is illegal and shall be detected.

Do not stretch your rubber; you must use the racket covering as it has been approved by the ITTF and as it comes from the producer.

Be very careful with the thickness level of your racket covering. Make sure you do not exceed 4mm including the layer or layers of glue. You should use a thin layer of glue to avoid exceeding the thickness limit. Make sure the surface is flat and does not bulge.

Sometimes the racket covering is too thick from the factory. It is your responsibility not to use it.

Manufacturers and Distributors

The ITTF will be very strict with Manufacturers, Suppliers and Distributors that are on the ITTF's list of Authorized Racket Coverings that still produce illegal materials such a VOC-glues, or any type of additive such as Boosters, Tuners, oils, etc.

The ITTF is extremely disappointed with those manufacturers who are secretly providing illegal substances for their sponsored

players to use. This is totally UNACCEPTABLE and is considered an illegal act and cheating.

Any manufacturer or distributor found producing, selling, or providing any illegal substance to players or coaches will be considered in violation of ITTF rules and will be suspended indefinitely from any ITTF activity, and the authorization to use the ITTF logo will be immediately withdrawn. This measure is according to our discussions with FIT, the Federation of International Table tennis Manufacturers.

The ITTF Executive Committee will also set hefty fees for the re-introduction of any suspended manufacturer or distributor after the suspension period is completed or lifted.

The ITTF will make no exception in this matter and sponsorships, advertising agreements, etc., will all be cancelled immediately and the already paid sums forfeited.

It is a serious offence to sell, procure, be involved in the procurement, give for free or make available any additive to players and coaches.

With this message the ITTF issues a stern warning to ALL manufacturers and distributors to observe and respect the ITTF rules as they are now set.

The ITTF will be very strict with regard to the thickness of the racket coverings. The ITTF Equipment Committee has already alerted several manufacturers from producing maximum thickness racket coverings of 4mm. With the addition of a layer of glue, the racket covering may exceed the allowable thickness. It is therefore recommended that the manufacturers allow for this fact and produce racket coverings below the allowed maximum.

ADVICE TO MANUFACTURERS:

Do not produce any substances that are used as additives by the players after the equipment has been approved by the ITTF.

Do not produce a maximum thickness of 4mm racket covering, please follow the advice of the ITTF's Equipment Committee to allow for the thickness of the glue layers.

Please print the maximum racket covering thickness on the packaging wherever possible.

Do not provide to players and coaches any post-factory additives of any kind.

You can put the rubber under tension at the factory as long as it meets the ITTF specifications and passes the ITTF tests.

Do not stretch or put the rubber in tension AFTER it has been approved.

You can use VOC-containing elements, within the limits allowable in your country, in the production phase of the racket covering as long as you get rid of

all the VOCs before packaging through proper and sufficient airing of the racket covering before packaging and as long as this is done at the factory level and does not violate ITTF rules. This would be considered a production phase.

The final product cannot be different than the product approved by the ITTF.

The ITTF authorisation applies to a racket covering as originally submitted and tested; its subsequent alteration, by a supplier, a player or anyone else, is not permitted.

Changes from the original design will normally not be permitted. However, changes to the text area only may be allowed, and must be confirmed.

When in doubt, please consult the ITTF Equipment Committee.

5.3 National Associations and Coaches

5.3.1 It is the responsibility of National Associations to educate their players in general and their national representatives in particular to respect the ITTF rules at ITTF events.

5.3.2 It is also the responsibility of the national associations to educate their coaches and to ensure that the national coaches do not encourage or advise their players to break the rules.

5.3.3 Coaches should find technical solutions for their players within the rules and regulations of the ITTF and avoid any attempt to circumvent the rules under the guise that other players are breaking the rules.

5.3.4 The ITTF will take very harsh action against any national association that encourages its players and coaches to break the rules.

5.3.5 Coaches who are found to be involved in the use of banned substances will be subject to the same penalties as the players.

6. Conclusion

All new rules have a transition period, an unsettled period and a period of confusion. This is usually coupled by a “testing of the tolerances” by those affected by the rules. Many respect the rules while some try to find advantageous ways around the rules. This is a difficult period and the ITTF is expecting the full cooperation of all concerned in order to quickly reach a settled state in which all are playing on a level playing field. Cheaters will not be tolerated and the ITTF will impose the strictest penalties on those that break the rules.

Please distribute this document as widely as possible.

I am personally very optimistic that this matter will be settled soon with the good will and cooperation of all involved.

Adham Sharara

ITTF President

On behalf of the ITTF Executive Committee & the Equipment Committee in the implementation of ITTF Rules

24 November 2008