

Save clay court line tapes – and facility bucks

by Robert E. Davis, USPTA Master Professional

In areas where alternate freezing and thawing of clay tennis courts occur during winter months, I have for many years used a technique to reduce the annual maintenance costs by extending the life of line tapes.

The key is pegging and nailing – installing full 2-by-2-by-8-inch treated wooden pegs at the intersection of all lines and at the crossing of singles and doubles sidelines under the net. Depending upon the hardness of the peg material, the aluminum nails can be hammered into the wooden pegs easily. If desired, nails can be cut off and tapered on a grinder to reduce the amount of hammering required. The only caution on a subirrigated, fast-dry court installation (HydroCourt) is to limit the depth of the wooden pegs to less than the total thickness of the court top dressing and base material thickness so as to not puncture the court liner.

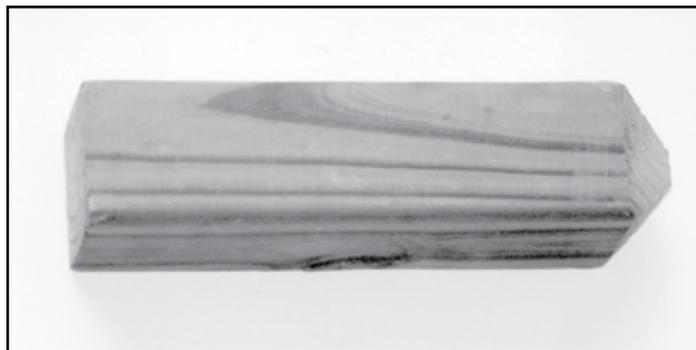
A 2-inch square aluminum net anchor provides for easier reinstallation of the center strap fastener during lengthwise court maintenance. The tapes, nails and pegs can be kept from popping up from underneath ice formation by either applying materials over these items, as suggested by Larry Turville in the October-November 2005 issue of *ADDvantage* magazine, or by using this technique and occasionally walking the lines and pegs or lightly rolling the lines, when favorable conditions permit.

This approach was developed at the NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center, Goddard Tennis Club (Greenbelt, Md.). At the beginning of each tennis season, it saves this club from having to replace 480 feet of line tapes and about 1,984 3-inch aluminum nails on each of eight fast-drying, clay-type courts. The Goddard Tennis Club uses a long, wide board fitted with a handle to walk flat the lines, nails and pegs. At the Cheverly (Md.) Swim & Racquet Club, the tapes are replaced, due to heavy court use, about every third year for six natural clay and two Har-Tru courts.

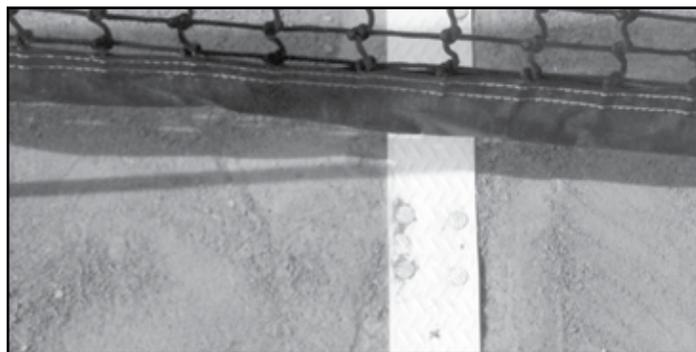
Last year at my home natural-clay court in Upper Marlboro, Md., I replaced my tapes after using only two sets of tapes over 17 tennis seasons! The required 21 pegs were installed and the surrounding surface material compacted, tamped flush, and then double-checked for measurement accuracy.

For ease of installation, I used a 2-foot-long, 2-inch-diameter steel pipe, having been ground sharp on one end, as a coring tool. This was driven into the ground about eight inches using a sledgehammer to

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Wooden line peg



Sideline net peg



2-inch square aluminum anchor

facilitate the removal of clay to help the installation of the pegs. Then, installation of the tapes was done starting at the doubles court corners using a line stretcher pulling about 40 pounds of tension prior to the nailing of the line tapes. Another benefit of this approach is that the short, unsupported length of the line tapes can be pulled straight by sight and nailed without having to chalk the line edges. ♣