

Proposal on Boosting: "Racket Testing Rule"

September 27, 2015

Dear USATT Rules Committee,

Boosting (and tuning, which is similar) is currently illegal due to rule 2.4.7, which says, "The racket covering shall be used without physical, chemical or other treatment." However, since boosting is not picked up under current racket testing procedures (and I'm told would very expensive to create equipment sensitive enough to do so), we are stuck with an unenforceable rule where we just hope that players aren't taking advantage of this.

What exactly is boosting? Boosting is where you apply an oil such as Paraffin oil under the sponge to expand the sponge to increase its speed and spin. It's considered illegal since you are treating the racket covering. It's similar to speed glue in its application and its effect. However, speed glue was made illegal because of health problems, and boosting generally does not have such problems. Therefore there is no corresponding reason to make most types of boosting illegal.

Since boosting is a big advantage it's widespread. While it's impossible to know the exact numbers, I've watched players boost for years, and watched them teach others. There are articles and postings all over the internet explaining how to boost or tune. Jun Mizutani of Japan even began boycotting ITTF tournaments because of the lack of enforcement - here's an article from Tabletennista on that, "[Jun Mizutani Boycotts ITTF For His Battle Against Illegal Boosters.](#)"

The problem is that since it's illegal, only those willing to cheat can boost, while those who will not cheat are at a large disadvantage. At the moment our sport looks the other way and allows this to continue, essentially relying on the honor system - but that simply doesn't work. And so we honor the cheaters and cheat the honorable ones.

Arguing that honest players should boost because opponents are doing it is the same as telling someone that cheating is okay. You don't know in advance which opponents are boosting, so if you boost, you *are* cheating while your opponent may be playing fair. You also don't want to boost against some players and not others - that would mess up timing as well as requiring two rackets.

Some might argue that since only a few players are complaining, it's not a problem. That's the same argument that was made during the steroids era, when few players complained even though steroid usage was widespread. (The reasons they didn't complain are many, ranging from being steroid users themselves to not wanting to be considered complainers or "rats.")



There is also some hypocrisy written into the current rules as we do allow players to treat their racket covering with racket cleaner.

Here is a proposal that would solve the problem and level the playing field, which I call the Racket Testing Rule. It also resolves the problem of allowing racket coverings to be treated with rubber cleaner, and any other unenforceable restrictions on racket coverings.

Current Rule:

02.04.07: The racket covering shall be used without physical, chemical or other treatment.

Proposed Rule:

02.04.07: The racket covering shall be used without physical, chemical or other treatment, **with leeway such that if there is a racket testing procedure at an event and a racket does not fail that procedure, it shall be considered legal for that event.**

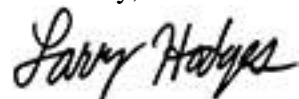
The wording is chosen carefully so that players cannot argue, for example, that speed glue is legal at smaller tournaments where there is no racket testing procedure. The wording is also chosen so that there is no indication that a racket that passes a racket testing procedure cannot be tested again, if the referee has reason to test it again. (A player could treat his racket after the initial testing.) That is why the wording doesn't say, for example, "If a racket passes the racket testing procedure it shall be considered legal for that event," as then a player whose racket has passed could then treat his racket, arguing that the racket has passed the testing procedure and therefore is still legal for the event. However, suggestions on wording are welcome. Once the wording is settled, I believe we should propose this to the ITTF.

There are other possible implications of such a rule. For example, if a racket with frictionless long pips passes the racket testing procedure, is it legal? I would argue that any racket that passes the racket testing procedure should be legal, since we don't want to have unenforceable rules that favor cheaters and handicap honest players.

I see three possibilities. Number three seems the only reasonable option.

1. Ignore the problem, allow rampant cheating by boosting, and handicap those who won't cheat. I don't consider this acceptable.
2. Spend extremely large sums of money on extremely sensitive equipment that'll detect boosting. (It would probably have to be developed for this express purpose.) Unfortunately, this isn't affordable and so isn't feasible.
3. Change the rules, as proposed above.

Sincerely,



Larry Hodges