



racquetball

Mike
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Wallpaper shot a good weapon

Mike Yellen, a Southfield native, is a member of the Ekelon-sponsored professional racquetball team. He is currently among the top-ranked players on the pro tour. His column on racquetball will appear periodically in the Observer & Eccentric sports pages.

The wallpaper ball — it's one of the most racquet-twisting, knuckle-scraping experiences in racquetball. When your opponent is on the receiving end, it's great. But when you are, it's pure frustration.

A wallpaper ball can be simply defined as a shot that travels very close to the side wall on the way to the back wall. There is nothing simple about this shot, however, regardless of which side of it you're on.

The wallpaper ball can travel toward the back wall at any height. Usually it comes off the front wall at a perfectly acceptable height and pace that, if placed a couple of inches closer to center court, would make it a plum. But a player has only about a one-in-five chance of making a decent return of a wallpaper ball.

IT MAY BE slow or it may be high, but the ball is so close to the side wall that it allows no room for error in a player's swing.

Often, a player faced with a wallpaper shot will try to hit it too hard, hoping to overcome the ball's contrariness by blasting it off the wall. Even if he hits the ball (which seldom happens), the player can't hope to control his shot under such difficult circumstances. The result is an easy return for his opponent.

Another aggravating characteristic of the wallpaper shot is its unpredictability. The ball may hug the wall all the way into the backcourt, then, just as you are about to hit it, knock the wall slightly and jump out.

This kind of behavior can send you up the wall, but you can improve your chances of a decent return if you keep your cool.

YOU DON'T HAVE to change shots for a wallpaper return, just attitude. When you see the ball sliding back along the wall, it should be a signal to switch into low gear.

Make up your mind that you are going to hit a ceiling ball, because any attempt at an offensive return will probably get you into trouble.

Also realize that you will not have a full swing because the wall is going to be in the way. Position yourself far away enough from the wall so that if the ball does jump out you will be able to handle it.

Think of your racquet as a big spatula.

la and try to scoop the ball off the wall and up to the ceiling instead of trying to hit it. Quadriform- or modified-quadriform-shaped racquets work best on this particular shot because their heads are flatter and, therefore, slide better along the side wall.

More important than the shape of the racquet is the emphasis on control in your stroke.

ALTHOUGH THE WALLPAPER ball is easy to describe, it is difficult to execute. It may be the hardest shot to make in racquetball, so you'll have to put in extra practice time.

That's the bad news about the wallpaper shot. The good news is that it can put your opponent in a very difficult position.

You can't hit wallpaper shots with the frequency of your other shots, but you can improve your chances for this point-winner with proper attention to your down-the-line drives.

You don't have to be right against the side wall to have your shot rebound close to it, although closer is better. Even a crosscourt pass can come off the front wall as wallpaper. It's a question of how it goes into the front wall.

Unfortunately, I can't tell you how to hit the ball so that it comes off the front wall as wallpaper every time. The angles will change, depending where you are on the court. The only way to become acquainted with them is through practice and play.

INCORPORATING MORE down-the-line drives into your game strategy will increase your chances of hitting a wallpaper ball, and a familiarity with this shot can't hurt your game, especially in service returns.

Just concentrate on putting the ball as low and close to the side wall as possible. If it comes off as a low pass, fine. If it comes off as wallpaper, so much the better.

Alternate your down-the-line drives with crosscourt drives just to keep your opponent off-balance. These shots will work either backhand or forehand and should be executed with the normal backhand or forehand stroke.

As with any passing shot, you want to be careful that you don't put so much angle on the ball that it comes off the side wall into center court, giving your opponent an easy return.

In summary, the most important point to remember is to keep your head and control of your racquet regardless of which end of a wallpaper ball you're on.

When returning wallpaper, play it safe and hit a ceiling ball. On offense, go for it. You may get lucky and, with wallpaper, luck can be the difference between success and failure.

St. Mary's tops Spring Arbor

David Jones, a sophomore guard from Ann Arbor, scored 18 points Saturday to pace Orchard Lake St. Mary's College to a 71-57 win over Spring Arbor College. The win boosted coach Tim Domke's OLSM crew to 14-6.

Craig Blackwell scored 13 points for the winners, and 6-foot-7 Mark Sulek had 11 points and 19 rebounds.

Reno Taylor scored 20 points for Spring Arbor, and Dean Lorkwood had 16.

OLSM led at halftime, 34-27. Siena Heights comes to Orchard Lake for a 4 p.m. game on Thursday.

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bowling

Red
Poulin

Bowling secret? Stringing strikes

Bowling is a game of togetherness. Stringing strikes or combining games for high scores is the secret to a successful game.

Jerry Weaver is one who is well aware of this secret. Out at Country Lanes in Farmington Hills, Weaver strung together 11-straight strikes for a 290 game in the Thursday St. Paul's Men's League. In the first frame, the 154-average bowler left a 10 pin and easily picked up the spare.

Word got around the lanes quickly because Friday night Dave Tarbet started stringing strikes in the Westlake Mixed League. After the flurry finished, Tarbet had a 278 game and a 747 series.

And, in the Country Girls League, Eileen Day assembled a few strikes and got a 249.

AT SOUTHFIELD'S Drakeshire Lanes, Maureen Burns and Dallas Foster heard about the "stringing strikes" secret. Burns had a 269, and Foster rolled a 259 in the Lads and Lassies League.

In the Heartstone Mixed League, Rich McNair decided to get a better look at his game. Instead of wearing his contact lenses, McNair put on his glasses and rolled games of 223, 207 and 248 for a 678.

AT NORTH HILL Lanes in Rochester, a couple of guys in the Friday Nighters' League must have some kind of competition going.

Steve Golding and Bernie Yarbrough each started with seven-straight strikes. But it was Golding who eventually came out on top as he made a spare, then continued to strike the rest of the way for a 276. He also had

games of 234 and 236 for a 716 series.

Yarbrough finished with a 257 and a 624 series.

Bob Whitwell combined a 222, 223 and 253 for a 698 series, while Brian Beirkamp had games of 199, 247 and 202 for a 648. Gary Lallair was close to Beirkamp with a 205, 239 and 203 for a 647.

In the Wednesday Night Bill Fox Classic League, Dennis Dean started stringing strikes for a 278 and 695 series. Vic Church had a 256 game and beat Dean on totals with a 698. Dave Kistia had a 252.

Marianne Scott stayed right up there with the men as she shot a 258 in the Tuesday Rochester Women's League. Scott finished with a fine 612 series.

AT WEST BLOOMFIELD Lanes, a husband-and-wife team delivered quite a one-two punch Friday night. Steve and Debbie Gawlik were right on the mark. Steve had a 277, while Debbie rolled a 226.

PLUMB HOLLOW LANES in Southfield was hot last week. It was teamwork all the way as the five-member group — Tim Major, Greg Krogo, Gary Piasceki, Chuck Mallon and Gino Miot — called Lane Tax Service shot a 1009 team game Monday night.

On Wednesday, it was the women's turn. Debbie Stanbury, a 127-average bowler, had a 461 series. Teammate Vicki Crawford, who has a 147 average, belted out a 560 series including games of 193 and 210.

Ruth Anne Crawford (145 average) helped out with a 177 and 173 for a 560 series.

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