

AMERICAN COLLEGIATE TENNIS AND INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (“FAQ”)



**PREPARED BY THE COLLEGIATE COMMITTEE OF
THE UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION (THE “USTA”)
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE INTERCOLLEGIATE TENNIS ASSOCIATION (THE “ITA”)**

There is probably no single area of college tennis that has involved more controversy, emotion, and misunderstandings over the past two decades than the matter of international players. This FAQ sets forth many of the questions that have been raised concerning international players, along with some answers to those questions.¹

1. Is it just my imagination, or are there a lot of international players playing varsity tennis at American colleges and universities?

There are a number of international players playing varsity tennis at American colleges and universities. In 1980, there were only a handful of international players ranked among the top 100 tennis collegians, but by 1990 this number had increased exponentially. In recent years, there have been as many as 60 international players ranked among the top hundred in the ITA rankings. As outlined below in answer to question #9, however, international players comprise only about 12-13% of the players who play varsity tennis at American colleges and universities.

2. Why are there so many international players playing tennis?

The increase in international players is part and parcel of two phenomena: (a) increased globalization (or as author and *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman has described it, a “flatter” world), and (b) the tennis explosion around the world.

The world in general is becoming a much more international place in so many respects. As Friedman has written, “technology and geoeconomics” are “fundamentally reshaping our lives -- much, much more quickly than many people realize.” Everywhere we turn, globalization is evident. International communication

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is becoming instantaneous. Outsourcing is becoming rampant. The ranks of a number of other sports – for example, basketball, golf, soccer, and swimming – are becoming much more international, with no end in sight.

The seismic change in tennis began with the advent of Open Tennis, which led to major investments in player development by tennis federations throughout the world. The results of this global interest in tennis began to surface in the 1980's in the Davis Cup, Fed Cup, the Grand Slam events, and in American college tennis. Smaller countries like Spain and Croatia are making their mark in the international tennis arena. The college tennis landscape is a reflection of what is occurring on the world stage.

In most countries, tennis is one of the two or three most popular sports and attracts the most talented athletes. In the United States, tennis is competing for athletes with a host of other sports, including football, basketball, baseball, and soccer. Despite the enormous physical-fitness and lifetime benefits that tennis offers, it is not listed among the 30 most popular American sports.

3. Why are there so many international players playing varsity tennis at American colleges and universities?

There are several reasons. First, the United States is one of the few countries that offers significant scholarship support for intercollegiate sports. Our combined academic-athletic approach is extremely attractive to international players. There are well over 140 countries with tennis federations actively supporting junior player development. For all of these countries and federations, American college tennis is a natural magnet, offering the best of both worlds -- an American college degree and the opportunity to continue and improve at a high level of tennis.

Second, varsity college coaches are under pressure from their athletic departments and alumni to produce the best tennis teams they can. Their careers depend on it. If bringing in international players can help them achieve their goal, many coaches are going to do it.

Some people, however, think that by going overseas to attract players, college coaches are weakening American tennis programs and contributing to their failure on American campuses. It is far more expensive to scout overseas and bring players in for a visit, etc. than it is to have a home-grown player. With tennis not being a revenue generating sport, it is much easier to drop a program filled with international players than it is to keep funneling money to players who will eventually leave the country. But it should be understood that there are many collegiate coaches who would strongly disagree with this perspective.

It is interesting to note that there is somewhat of a two-way street involved in the international aspects of tennis. While in college tennis the “world” comes to America, many top American junior players now travel to play international tournaments to compete against other top juniors throughout the world. This is not to say that this development is necessarily positive or affordable for American players, but this is a separate discussion.

4. Is bringing in international players the only way that a college coach can have a winning team?

No. It can be done with an all American or nearly all American team. For example, in 2003, the University of Illinois men's team went undefeated, won the NCAA Championship, and won the USTA/ITA National Team Indoor Men's Championship with an all American team. For several years, the Stanford women's team has won NCAA Championships with virtually all American players. Only one team, men or women, has won the NCAA Division I championship with an all-international starting lineup (Baylor men in 2004). Just about every NCAA Division I women's championship team has had close to an all-American starting lineup.

5. Isn't it a bad thing that international players can play on our varsity tennis teams in college?

Actually, it is a good thing on many fronts. In terms of player development, it is ideal to have the strongest field possible competing in collegiate tournaments and collegiate team matches. The better the level of competition, the more the top players will improve. From this perspective, the presence of many outstanding international players adds to the opportunity for the best American players to raise their games. As David Wheaton, Todd Martin, James Blake, Jeff Morrison, Paul Goldstein, the Bryan Brothers, Katrina Adams, Lisa Raymond, Jill Craybas, Laura Granville, and Lilia Osterloh have proven in recent years, this is exactly what happens. Moreover, the chance for Americans to compete on a regular basis against top players their age from continents such as Europe, South America, and Asia provides important verisimilitude for the American collegians who will be facing primarily international competition once on the pro tour. Having international players as teammates and competing against international players also broadens the horizons and enriches the life experiences of American college players.

6. Isn't one of the problems in American college tennis that several international players have been older than American players and/or that the international players have actually been professional players?

These areas have indeed been problems. The ITA has worked closely with the Conferences and the NCAA to initiate NCAA legislation that helps create a more level playing field.

More specifically, NCAA Bylaw #14.2.3.2 (the "one year grace period rule") was enacted by the NCAA in 1995 in order to encourage student athletes to continue their educational path from high school to college, by allowing only a one-year hiatus from their studies without penalty. The intent was also to discourage coaches from recruiting much older and more experienced players who had already had a number of years on the tour. And just this last year, the ITA was the catalyst to further tightening of this NCAA Division I legislation with an amendment that specifies that prospective student athletes must begin full time collegiate enrollment before their twentieth birthday, otherwise they will not be eligible to compete their first year and will also lose some of their eligibility. In addition, the NCAA has become stricter in

enforcing its amateur rules, although there remain limits as to how effectively one can legislate morality.

A few years ago, the NCAA passed legislation that makes any player who has participated in a “professional league” ineligible to compete in college, even if that player has not received payment. It is expected that this will further reduce the number of international players and create an even more level playing field.

7. The NCAA has a “Clearinghouse” for academic eligibility. Why doesn’t it have one for determining amateurism eligibility?

Actually, the NCAA is in the process of developing an “Amateur Clearinghouse” for NCAA Divisions I and II for all sports, including tennis. The NCAA Amateur Clearinghouse will be the processing center for determining the amateurism eligibility for freshman and transfer student-athletes for participation at NCAA Divisions I and II member institutions. Both the prospective student-athlete and the relevant institution will be advised of the prospect’s amateur status prior to his or her participation in intercollegiate athletics at a Division I or II institution.

The NCAA Amateurism Clearinghouse is being created in response to the NCAA membership concerns about amateurism issues related to both international and domestic prospects. According to the NCAA, the Amateurism Clearinghouse will assist in maintaining competitive equity in recruiting and promoting student-athlete well-being. The NCAA believes that a centralized clearinghouse for amateurism issues will ensure that consistent information is gathered for each prospective student-athlete; thus no institution will have an advantage over another based on resources available (such as staffing or funding) to investigate a prospect’s situation. The current plan is to begin the NCAA Amateurism Clearinghouse in the fall of 2006.

8. Why doesn’t the NCAA or a governing body of tennis prohibit or limit the number of international players that can receive scholarships on American collegiate tennis teams?

There could be significant, if not insurmountable, legal hurdles for the NCAA (or any other governing body) to try to prohibit or limit the number of international players that can receive scholarships on American collegiate tennis teams. An early attempt by the NCAA to do this in the 1970’s in track was deemed discriminatory. The USTA could endeavor to have the issue researched more carefully, but it would probably be to no avail. Neither the USTA (the governing body of tennis in the U.S.) nor the ITA (the governing body of varsity college tennis) has jurisdiction to institute such a prohibition or limitation on its own. Moreover, there is every indication from the NCAA that, even if it were legally permissible to do so, it will not impose a cap on the number of international players that may play on American collegiate teams.

There is nothing, however, that prohibits any individual college or university from prohibiting or limiting the number of scholarships offered to international athletes. For example, a college might decide to limit to two the number of international players on each of its men’s and women’s varsity tennis teams. Since most colleges and universities seek to attract international students in order to enrich and diversify

their student bodies, it remains to be seen whether they will limit international athletic scholarships for tennis players.

9. Why doesn't the NCAA close its championships to international players?

Even if this were legally permissible (which is questionable), it may not be the answer. Suggesting that the NCAA close its championships to international tennis players is like saying we should close the US Open to international tennis players or that we should limit the number of international faculty members teaching at American colleges and universities. In this global age, isolationism is probably an inappropriate path.

One prominent American men's varsity tennis coach has likened the situation to the time when U.S. automobile manufacturers had to make changes in response to the wave of Japanese automobiles first imported into the United States in the early 1970's. After there was a lot of complaining and speeches advocating tariffs and protectionism, U.S. car manufacturers improved their products and became very competitive. This coach has suggested that we need to be sure that American junior players are likewise doing everything they can to compete effectively against other players, whatever their background may be.

10. Aren't Americans "losing out" on college playing opportunities and college scholarships because of international players?

The ITA has researched the actual number of international players who are playing college tennis and receiving tennis scholarships. Despite the hyper-inflated figure of over 60% that some have claimed, the true percentage at the NCAA Division I level is under 30%. It is about the same at NCAA Division II, but it is less than 3% at NCAA Division III (which does not allow tennis scholarships). Overall, in NCAA tennis, the percentage of international players is approximately 12%, far less than the percentage used by people in questioning the presence of international players. NCAA research corroborates the findings. Overall, in NCAA Divisions I, II, and III, 15.6 % men and 10.5 % women are categorized as "nonresident alien" in tennis. The breakdown is as follows:

Percentage of Nonresident Aliens in Varsity College Tennis

NCAA Division	Men's Varsity Tennis	Women's Varsity Tennis
Division I	28.4%	21.5%
Division II	22.6%	12.0%
Division III	< 2%	< 2%
Divisions I, II, and III	15.6%	10.5%

Although there is a significant percentage of international players at the very highest levels of the college rankings, there are still many playing and scholarship

opportunities for American collegians. In the USTA Boy's 18s final 2001 rankings, an ITA study showed that all of the top 100 players were either participating in college tennis or undecided on future plans. Admittedly, not every junior was able to get a scholarship, let alone a full scholarship, to the first school on his list, but this would be true even if there were many fewer international players. Fully funded men's college tennis programs are only allowed four and a half scholarships, and it takes at least six players to field a team. Nevertheless, most players were able to attend good schools and received scholarships. On the women's side, with almost twice as many scholarships available (eight), there are actually many scholarships that go unused each year! Accordingly, most junior players who achieve good rankings can play college tennis and receive scholarships.

The issue of college scholarship availability is mainly a men's tennis issue rather than an international player issue. The USTA has advocated that the number of men's and women's varsity tennis scholarships should be eight for men and eight for women. Unfortunately, this suggestion has met with resistance and is complicated by political considerations over which the USTA has no control.

One of the nation's top women's varsity coaches believes that there are not enough qualified American women for scholarships. As she stated, "The logistics of women's NCAA Division I tennis as it relates to scholarships is something that gets overlooked by many people in the U.S. The fact of the matter is that there are approximately 300 schools that offer Division I scholarships. Conservatively, there are 200 endowed schools, which affords about 1,600 total scholarships for women at Division I schools alone (and this is a very conservative estimate at last check). If one carves this up to 400 scholarships per class, there are NOT 400 young American female tennis players per year who play the game to the level required of Division I tennis. Therefore, in order to compete at higher levels, the stronger programs have to look outside our borders for tennis players who can compete at that level."

This coach further stated: "Keep in mind, also, on the women's side; there IS a place for all 400 of these female athletes a scholarship if they chose to take a scholarship. The issue becomes that 'sense of entitlement' that is so prevalent in this era. Many players only want to go to the school of their choice, even they may not be able to compete at a high level, and then they complain that there are no scholarships for them. The reality is, on the women's side, there are plenty of scholarships for just about everyone. Beyond Division I, there are hundreds more scholarships available, and many go unused."

11. Why should U.S. colleges and universities serve as training grounds for other countries' future Olympic, Davis Cup, and Fed Cup stars?

The reality is that very few international collegiate tennis players over the past two decades have gone on to Olympic, Davis Cup, or Fed Cup stardom. Starting in Los Angeles in 1984, no past college player has won an Olympic medal for another country in tennis. In Athens in 2004, there were 2 (of 64) in men's singles from other countries that played for U.S. colleges and 4 others (among the 32 teams) in doubles.

In the 64-player women's singles field there was 1 woman from another country and zero in doubles.

In this year's Davis Cup World Group first round played in March, there were a total of 2 past college players on the rosters for the 15 other countries involved. Of the "next best group" of Davis Cup countries this year, the 8 additional that will be playing in World Group play-off matches in September, there will likely be a total of 7 past college players. So, of the top 25 Davis Cup countries in the world, there are a total of about 9 past college players on their rosters. Also, looking back to 1990, only 3 U.S. losses came from teams with past international college players.

Of the 7 other countries (aside from the US) in Fed Cup World Group I first round matches played in April, there were no past college players on their rosters. Of the 8 countries in World Group II (next best grouping), there was a total of 1 past college player. Looking at past results as far back as 1990, there was not a single college player on a roster for a country that beat the U.S. in a Fed Cup match.

12. Wouldn't our junior players improve if they could practice more with varsity college tennis players?

Yes, they would. In fact, there are plans afoot to make this a reality. Despite past resistance from the NCAA relative to "sport specific legislation," the ITA has been advocating that junior players should be able to practice on college campuses with college players. In the near future, the NCAA may be more open to this approach. In 2004, an NCAA/USCO Joint Task Force was created to protect and expand the opportunities for American student-athletes and coaches to realize the benefits associated with participation in collegiate athletic programs and sports traditionally included in the program for the Olympic Games. Among the anticipated recommendations of the Task Force are that colleges and universities should be able to host events and they should not be limited to college athletes. Another recommendation is that there should be an expansion of the circumstances under which athletes not currently enrolled in a college or university may practice and/or use university facilities with student-athletes and college coaches. By providing junior players with greater opportunities for increased practice and interaction with college players, especially at the local level, we should be able to enhance the quality of the American players that play college tennis.

13. Is the USTA doing anything to develop tennis players and to encourage youngsters to play tennis?

Yes. The USTA is actually doing quite a bit. The USTA has a High Performance program that facilitates the development of its best players. In 2004, the Board of Directors of the USTA adopted a resolution in which it proclaimed that intercollegiate varsity tennis has been, and should continue to be, an essential part of American tennis, that having resilient and competitive intercollegiate varsity tennis programs inherently supports the mission of the USTA, and that the USTA will strongly support and promote intercollegiate varsity tennis in the U.S. In addition, in 2005 the Board approved a new junior-collegiate player development initiative. It will include

additional staff, money, and other resources devoted to the development of junior and college players. The mission of the new initiative is “To provide American players with competition, training and educational opportunities to achieve maximum success at the sectional, national, international, collegiate and professional levels.” The Player Development Managing Director is E. Paul Roetert, and the newly-appointed Junior and Collegiate Competition Senior Director is Bill Ozaki. Finally, the USTA has undertaken a series of initiatives to promote and grow tennis at all levels, including to encourage youngsters to play this great game.