

June 20, 2006

Dear Division III Men's Tennis Coach,

Recently at the NCAA tournament at Mary Washington, there was much discussion concerning the switch in scoring to a 9-point system (where each doubles match counts as a point) from our present, 7-point system. One of the concerns that many of the coaches had was that there was little, if any discussion about this issue during the previous year. This is a major change for us and many feel there should be much discussion before a change could be implemented. There had been a survey sent out by the NCAA that asked both men's and women's coaches about the scoring systems used. Less than 50% of the coaches returned the survey (actually 130 of 318). Subsequently however, the NCAA (using the data from the returned surveys) kept the current women's scoring system in tact and has moved towards changing the men's scoring to that very 9-point system.

In a vote of the 23 head coaches of Division III men's tennis programs present at the 2006 NCAA Championships, 19 voted to keep the present 7-point system. There was a fair amount of discussion as well. Because of this overwhelming vote, we are hoping to re-open the door to discussion about the proposed change and why not to adopt it. It was pointed out that changing the men's scoring was such a major move, that before it happened, there should be "no stone unturned" in the education of why not to change it. And, national involvement from all of us coaches. The fact is that the 7 point system has always been healthy. Actually, there had been discussion at the ITA conventions and NCAA tournaments of changing (this was voted down) the women's scoring to a 7 point system. At some point, the above mentioned survey was sent out and the lead question was 'whether or not to have both men's and women's scoring be the same.' Followed by basically, 'if you answered yes, which system would you prefer for both, the 7 or 9 point system?' Since this was not a men's issue (no real discussion of changing it at previous ITA or NCAA meetings) the survey may not have been taken seriously by many coaches. However, the less than 50% response to the survey may result in a major change for us. This new survey is only being sent to men's coaches. This is important as the question now is, "Do we have to have the same scoring system as the women? We have had a healthy scoring system for years. It should be noted that both Division I men and women have never moved towards a 9 Point System. Never.

Here is a list of some of the reasons to stay with our current 7 Point Scoring System.

*Using the 9 Point Scoring System, how much of a chance does a team have to overcome a 3-0 deficit after doubles?

About 1%.

99% of the time, the team who has a 3-0 lead after doubles wins the match.

These figures were computed from a Division II men's research of approximately 800 matches played, including the NCAA's. In approximately 400 of these matches, one team led 3-0 after doubles. In only 4, did the team behind 3-0 come back to win. This obviously means that doubles (33% of the entire match) rules the matches when a team is up 3-0. Singles compromises 66% of a match and yet a team up 3-0 needs only to win 2 singles matches.

*Are doubles really “emphasized” in the 7 Point Scoring System? Of course they are.

Every doubles team that walks on the court has a say in the outcome of the doubles point.

We have lived with and embraced this exciting format for over a decade. The “doubles point” is fiercely competed for.

However, the current 7 Point System also guarantees that the every singles player who walks on the court for his match still has an impact in the outcome. Using a 9 Point System, in virtually 50% of approximately 800 Division II matches played (when a team leads 3-0 after doubles), the team who is behind has virtually no chance of winning the match when the singles matches begins. Is that what we want?

*How often does a team come back to win the match (under the current 7 point system) after losing the doubles point and falling behind 1-0?

Although the “doubles point” is a huge boost to a team going into singles play, it does not always guarantee victory, as it would seem to do when a team has swept the doubles in the 9 Point System.

*Using the 7-point system, “what about all of those meaningless doubles matches left on to play once teams have won the doubles point? “

Under the 7 Point System, only one doubles match can ever be left on the court, once the “doubles point” has been secured. With the 9-point system, and considering that 1% of the teams that are behind 3-0 ever come back to win the match, there is the possibility that there will be four meaningless singles matches left on to finish, once the winning team wins two singles matches (has the necessary 5 points for victory.) Is that fair?

*Does the scoring system now used (7-point) demean doubles since a team only gets one point for winning two, or all three of the matches?

Not at all. When doubles matches were shortened from 2 out of 3 sets to an 8 game Pro Set, it dramatically changed the time it takes to finish (that was the design-shorten the match). The change in scoring made sense since we were now playing three doubles “sets” in essence. Instead of a possible 2 hour doubles match, the new Pro Set would take, in most cases, no more than 45 minutes to finish. The first team to win two of these “sets” wins a point.

*Which system, 7 or 9 point is more fan friendly? Fans at a current Division III men's tennis match are more likely to stick around after the doubles point has been won or lost because the match is not nearly decided. With the 9 point system, remembering that in a survey that showed 50% of matches have the doubles swept (3-0), the match is all but over. Why should the fans stick around?

*Is the 7 Point System difficult to understand?

It takes two seconds to explain. We have done it for years. This is not a good argument for changing to the 9 Point System.

Final points:

Division I men's and women's tennis (the strongest division overall) both use the 7 point system and have never considered going to a 9 Point system.

.With the 9 Point System, too many meaningless singles matches are left on the court when one team has swept the doubles.

Division III Women have voted not to change to a 7 Point System. That is fine. It does not mean that Division III Men have to change to a 9 Point System. Please be careful in answering the questions in the survey. If you are in favor of keeping our 7 Point Scoring System (as did 19 of 23 head coaches at the NCAA's), you should consider putting an answer of "no" to the question of "do you want both men's and women's scoring systems to be the same?" And then answering "7" when asked what system you prefer. There is no reason that the rules have to be the same for both genders. They are not in many other sports. Please read the survey carefully.

Submitted by,
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