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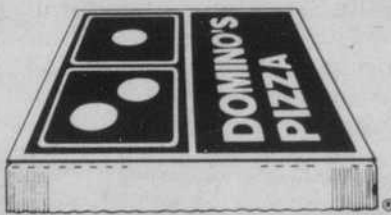


Photo by Michael Clapp

A graphite Prince tennis racket will set the buyer back \$210, while the Prince Classic goes for \$55.

New racket sizes, materials beckon recreational players

An estimated 1,000 University students are dusting off their rackets, buying tennis balls at the bookstore for \$1.99, skipping classes and crowding the courts.

But some players may discover a few surprises — warped racket heads, cracked frames, outdated junior models or patchy grips.

The following is a guide to help recreational tennis players select the best racket for their money.

The first step in choosing a racket is to know the three basic materials: **wood**, traditional but least popular **metal**, which has been on the tennis market for 10 years; and **graphite**, soaring in sales for three years now, according to Randy Cuddeback, Willow Creek Racquet Club president.

Unlike the wood rackets that get scraped or broken on the court, metal rackets are durable and give the player additional power, Cuddeback says.

But they also vibrate tremendously, he says, and this is where the graphite made of "space age" material has the advantage.

Graphite has the feel of a wood racket that many players desire but weighs much less. The reduced weight combined with graphite's better shock absorption puts less strain on the arm and that may help ten-

nis elbow or arthritis, he says.

"Graphite rackets are quicker and easier to maneuver at the net," he says.

But Steve Brouillard, owner of Mr. Tennis, says a graphite racket is not necessarily lighter than a metal racket.

He says buyers should consider two important words before they make a final decision: **stiffness** — how much a racket bends when the ball hits the head; and **balance** — how much the racket head weighs.

By Melissa Martin

The stiffer the racket, the quicker the ball comes off the strings, he says.

"A baseline player might prefer more weight in the head," Cuddeback says. Brouillard agrees and adds that a server and volleyer might go with a lighter head.

Brouillard says the bottom line is for a tennis player to try as many of the 150 rackets on the market today as possible. His store has 80 demos available for buyers to try for a month.

"We charge a \$20 fee if they decide not to buy a racket," he says.

But for Cuddeback, just as important is knowing head sizes.

These include: **conven-**

tional, such as a standard wood racket or a Head Professional; **oversize**, such as the Prince series; and **midsize**, such as a Kennix Silver Ace.

"The trend now is toward the midsize," Brouillard says. Among midsize users are Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova — both go with Yonex — and John McEnroe, who uses a Dunlop, according to Brouillard.

But the oversize is a slightly new phenomenon, Cuddeback says, developed and patented by Howard Head. Kennex manufacturers the Prince line for the inventor, who has a monopoly on racket head sizes between 85 and 130 square inches.

All manufacturers who produce rackets that fall in this range must pay royalties to Head, a Wilson representative in Chicago says.

"You have to buy a more expensive racket for the money," Cuddeback says of Wilson. And Brouillard considers Wilson more of a G.I. Joe's or Fred Meyer type of a racket.

But University women's tennis coach Nancy Osborne, who uses the Wilson Ultra — a regular head graphite — says Wilson has been around a lot longer than Prince.

"It gives me a lot of control. It's a little bit stiffer in the

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