

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

By Will Carlin



It's that time of year again. League play is over, tournaments have slowed down, and people are once again starting to avoid wearing their goggles. When wearing protective eye wear is not enforced, many squash players—even in the United States—are reluctant to wear them.

Why do people refuse to wear eyeguards when over the past few years more top pros have gotten hit in the eye than ever before in squash's history, when the rate of eye injuries in squash continues to rise, and when this magazine has published half a dozen articles on the horrors of squash eye injuries?

Okay, I admit it, this is personal. As many of you know, my squash career was shortened by getting hit in the eye with a ball. I was number one in the US, had won the Nationals and had played on the US team. And then I got hit.

I suffered a torn and detached retina, which led to two major physical surgeries—each followed by having eyes taped shut for more than a week while in agonizing pain, dozens of laser surgeries, and nearly two years of enforced time off. Total cost? Well over \$50,000. And when I returned, I was never again the same player.

Recently, I got a letter from a man named Gordon Cavanaugh, and his experience is even more horrific than mine. A 4.5 player, Cavanaugh was playing one of his regular opponents when he got a direct shot to an unprotected eye. His eye exploded. In ophthalmology terms, he experienced a "global rupture."

When a global rupture is greater than 2mm, the eye must be removed, because fluids leaking from the rupture often cause an auto-immune response that creates blindness in the non-injured eye. Gordon's rupture was 14mm. Miraculously, through some cutting edge procedures (and five very painful operations), he did not lose the eye, but

he is legally blind in the eye for good.

So, back to the question: in the face of evidence like this, why do people resist wearing them?

First, we all are wired to minimize the chances of anything bad happening to us as individuals. Overall, this is a good thing (we might never go to work if we actually worried about all the things that happen to people every day), but it means that we also don't act rationally in the face of risky behavior. Let's face it: not wearing goggles is irrational.

Second, we mimic those we admire. When Jack Nicklaus won his last Masters, he used a new, strangely shaped putter. In the week that immediately followed, sales of that putter amounted to over \$200,000. Touring squash pros and far too many teaching pros don't wear eyeguards.

Finally, we don't like it when rules are not applied universally. "If they don't need to follow it, why do I?" Conversely, when rules are enforced globally, people obey. Buckling one's seat belt on a plane, for example, is done by everyone—from captain and flight attendants to passengers—and there is nearly universal compliance.

So, what do we do? Here are 10 ways to get protective eyewear worn, starting at the local level and working our way to the international.

1. Wear protective eyewear every time you step on the court, including practice. 'Nuff said.

2. Refuse to play against players who don't wear them. It is almost always the fault of the person who gets hit, so why should you be saddled with that kind of guilt?

3. Get your club to ensure that your teaching pro wears and gets others to wear eyeguards. The recent influx of foreign pros has been great for the game...and terrible for the wearing of

protective eyewear. It is unacceptable for a teaching pro in the US to be setting a bad example and clubs should penalize those who flout the rules.

4. Local associations should follow the lead of MSRA NY and institute team losses when any member of the team does not wear eyeguards during a match.

5. The USSRA should make the wearing of eyeguards part of the teaching pro certification process.

6. The USSRA should continue its efforts to encourage the WSF to require eyeguards in junior tournament play worldwide.

7. The USSRA should pressure the WSF to enforce eyeguards at all levels of world championships. There is a rumor circulating that the USSRA is considering allowing members of the adult national teams to forego goggles during international competition—this terrible idea should be put to rest immediately.

8. The USSRA should get back to its requirement that pros wear goggles when playing in the US Open. In fact, they should work with the PSA to mandate protective eyewear for all pro tournaments in the United States.

9. The PSA and WSF should mandate protective eyewear for all tournament play, regardless of the country where the tournament is held. For the pros, a grandfather clause probably is needed, but—as with helmets in ice hockey—it only would take a few years for nearly everyone to wear them.

10. The PSA and WSF should embark on a public service campaign with top pros to get out the word that eyeguard use is now part of the game—just like racecar drivers do with seat belts.

Imagine if all these were put into place—we might all be ensured of seeing clearly for the rest of our squash-playing days.