

Hitting/Practice Walls

Introduction

One of the ideas raised at the AGM, courtesy of David Hopkins, was to provide a hitting wall for the purposes of practicing.

At the December 2022 Committee Meeting, it was agreed that I would investigate the costs of providing such a facility in order to better understand how it could potentially fit in with our current investment plans.

Current Practice Facilities

Whilst we have had rebound walls and nets in the past, at present, the club's facilities for practising on one's own are limited.

There is good court availability in order to book a court to practice serving.

A ball machine is available in the equipment hut for member's use. This was purchased over ten years ago and would cost £2,850 to purchase the equivalent model today. In June 2021, a notice was sent to club members reminding them of its availability. It noted that in order to gain access to the hut, it was best to schedule the machine's use when a coach is at the club or arrange for the temporary loan of a key from Paul Foster. The ball machine is used by some individuals and occasionally by the coaches, but it amounts to less than once per week.



I have noted Ken Dickens warming up by playing against the club house bar storage wall, but, given the limited wall space, it is not suitable as a practice wall for the majority.

Location

In order to practice, there needs to be an even surface to play on that broadly replicates a court's surface, so that the ball balances evenly. For that reason, most practice walls are located on the rear or side of a court, so that the court is used as the playing surface.

None of our courts have an extended run off to the back of the court, so on health and safety grounds, it would not be appropriate to locate any form of practice wall at the back of any of our courts. The side of the courts adjacent to the service box pose less of an issue on health and safety grounds, because players tend not to run into the fence at that location. Hence, the court benches are alongside the fence adjacent to the service box. The photos below are examples of two hitting "walls" located in that position on the court.



When regularly hitting against a wall of any form, we need to be mindful of the noise that it may create. Therefore, courts 3 and 6 are not appropriate locations for a hitting wall.

Other Clubs Experiences

In September 2022, a query was raised on the Tennis Volunteer Community Facebook group about whether clubs found a practice wall useful enough to invest in. In summary, the responses were:

- We used to have a rebound net and it was well used, mainly by kids but we are a rural setting which gets quite windy so it wasn't suitable all of the time.
- We have a wall and have done for many years. It is rarely used, I doubt we would build one if we had to now.
- We have a wall but it's not big enough. Too easy to send balls over the top! We have a net at the top, but it still interrupts the game. It's basically a bit rubbish, balls get stuck in the net or fall down onto the top of the wall and you can't get them out without a ladder.
- We have a professional practice fence which was installed a couple of years ago in response to members requests. It cost £11K and was the biggest waste of money!
- Our club had a wall put in a few years ago, can't remember the last time I saw it used!
- We have a wall and it is well used by juniors and adults.
- I also have a wall that is rarely used (unless I want to graffiti it for fun throwing targets!) I'd say it's not worth the investment and you also have to think about the upkeep costs. We're about to spend £1500 on having it repaired and then painting costs on top of that.

Rebo Wall

The Rebo wall in the left hand picture above is probably the best solution on the market. It has an adjustable angled hitting surface for the perfect rebound. It is freestanding and can apparently withstand all weather.

<https://www.rebowall.com/>

However, it is not cheap. A 3.45m width wall is £12,000 for supply and install, whilst the 8.05m version is £24,000. In addition to that, it would be necessary to extend the court fence around the wall, which would be recessed into the side of the court. The side of court 5 would probably be the best option.

Below is an example of it in use by Andy Murray on his drive at home.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CAA5BArJRCz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

There are also portable 2m x 2m rebound walls on the market. However, we don't have the storage space available for these and they are probably too small to meet the need. They are more of an aid for coaches teaching junior players. Rebo's example wall is £2,750.

ServeAce

In the right hand picture above, is the ServeAce fence, manufactured in the UK by JB Corrie and Co Ltd. It can be installed by JB Corrie or they can supply it to selected UK tennis court contractors authorised to install the product.

It comprises: rectangular hollow section posts, angle iron rails with 358 rebound mesh. It has a smooth face with no bolt heads in the playing area to give a constant rebound with minimal random deflections. It incorporates a noise reduction system, although it is unclear what this comprises.

It would be installed on the side of a court, replacing an existing stretch of fencing. The existing fencing would need to have end support struts installed either side of the ServeAce rebound fence. The standard length is 4.5m.

<https://jbcorrie.co.uk/serveace-practice-wall/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9_xmWH4fNI (The YouTube video was loaded in 2009).

Build our own wall

Whilst the playing surface is not perfect, the bricked over boules court could make an appropriate surface to practice on (similar to Andy Murray's drive). Therefore, one option could be to heighten the size of the wall next to court 4, pictured below. It would need to be surfaced for a clean rebound, then a line could be painted on the heightened wall at net height. Optionally, a net could be put on top of the wall to capture high shots to avoid disturbing players on court 5 too much. This would be a relatively low cost option. It could be played against whilst all six courts are being used but not when cricket matches are being played. However, it may prove a bit of an eyesore and would need the approval of the Berkswell and Balsall Common Sports and Community Association.



Recommendation

Given the amount of unplanned expenditure likely to be needed to invest in the reconstruction of courts 1 and 2, only a low cost option should be considered. If a heightened wall by the ex-boules court is an acceptable solution, the membership should be surveyed on its likely use, before investing in any construction.