

# Rating the world

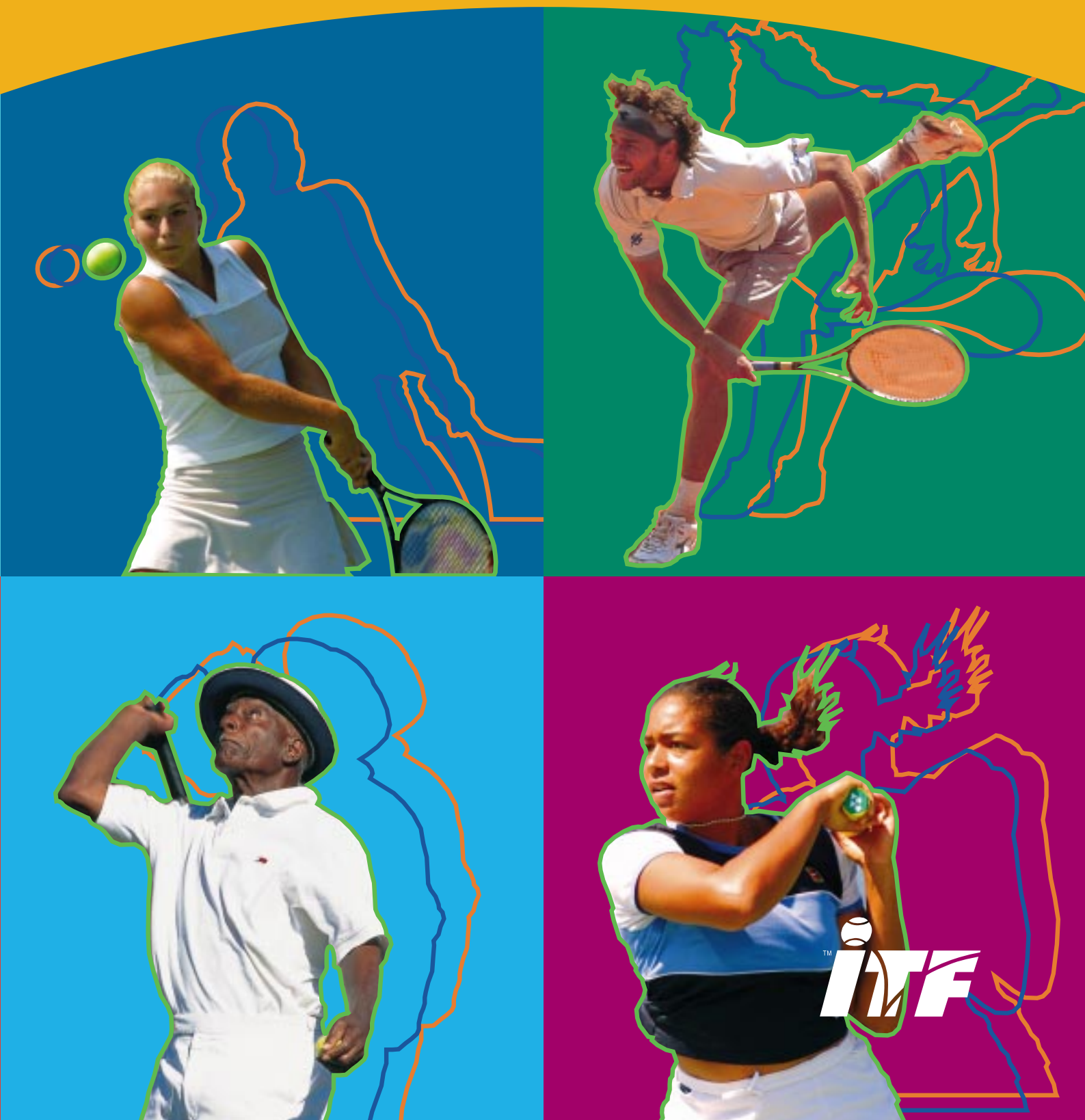
## The ITF International Tennis Number (ITN)

what's your number?



International Tennis Number

A guide to the ITF International Tennis Rating System





# Rating the world: the ITF International Tennis Number (ITN)

The ITF is delighted to announce the launch of an International Tennis Rating System for world tennis. The rating system will be known as the ITF International Tennis Number or simply 'ITN' for short. It is envisaged that in a relatively short time, all tennis players worldwide will be allocated an ITN between one and ten and that this number will correspond to their general level of competitive play.

This document outlines how the ITN has been developed in conjunction with experts from some of the leading tennis nations and explains how the ITF believe it can be used by its member nations to increase participation in tennis worldwide.

## Marketing the game – the drive for growth

In 1997, the ITF began a long-term international marketing research project to ascertain participation trends and attitudes to the game of tennis. The research showed that tennis continues to grow in the vast majority of ITF member nations. However, some concerns in the more mature tennis nations were highlighted.

Building on this three-year research, the ITF developed a series of activities that focused on increasing tennis participation and growth of the game. The initiative involved a number of key partners who influence and contribute to the growth of the game including:

- National and Regional Associations
- leading players
- the tennis industry
- sports marketing and communication experts
- development directors of the respective tennis organisations.

Upon completing this research, a decision was made to organise the 'Marketing the Game' Summit in September 2000. The top (most mature) tennis nations together with the ATP, WTA Tour and other constituents of the game met with the ITF to discuss how best to market the game of tennis and increase participation, whether it be the number of:

- players coming into the game
- spectators and followers of the game
- purchasers of tennis related material.

Following on from the 'Marketing the Game' Summit, it was decided to implement a number of projects including the development of an international tennis rating system.

In early 2001, the ITF set up the International Tennis Rating Taskforce with its overall mission statement being:

***'To create, utilise and promote an international tennis rating system that will help grow all levels of competitive tennis participation worldwide.'***

This Taskforce consists of experts in competition and rating systems from some of the world's leading tennis nations and is chaired and co-ordinated by ITF Executive Director of Development, Dave Miley.





## The objectives of the ITF International Tennis Rating System

The International Tennis Rating System will provide a method of classifying skill levels of tennis players' globally which in turn can help:

- encourage more playing of tennis
- unite tennis under a common rating language
- encourage national associations to implement a tennis rating system in their own country
- promote a variety of tennis competition formats, which are linked to the tennis rating system
- give more options for finding compatible playing partners and therefore more enjoyable competitive play
- facilitate the movement of all levels of players between countries.

It is believed that current tennis rating systems linked to a country's competitive structure have played a crucial part in increasing the number of people playing tennis.

For example, in the Netherlands where a national rating system linked to the competitive structure has been in place for many years now, over 5% of the population are registered fee paying members of the Dutch Tennis Federation (KNLTB).

## What is a rating and how does it differ from a ranking?

A **rating** is a description of standard that is used to determine the general competitive level of a player. It groups players of a similar level together within a category. The most famous example of a global rating in sport is the golf handicap. The relative level of players within each category is not determined by the rating system. This is the job of a ranking system.

A **ranking** is a more accurate estimate of the relative standard of players, based upon specific tournament results or competitions. A ranking is a comparison of similarly 'rated' players based on results of players within a specific rating category. For example in the proposed ITN 1 rating category (see chart on page 4), ATP / WTA rankings would represent a ranking within this rating category.

Most national associations use rankings that they produce on a regular basis at various levels of their national game. However the ITF estimates that there are less than 20 countries worldwide that have a national rating system.





# The development of the ITF International Tennis Rating System - the 'ITN'

Following an initial meeting of the Taskforce in July 2001, a strategy was formulated to develop an international tennis rating system that could be used by national associations which currently have no national rating system, and could also be used in conjunction with those rating systems currently in place in some of the more established tennis nations.

The Taskforce, with help and advice of a tennis marketing company, decided on a name for the rating system – **the ITF International Tennis Number or 'ITN'**.

## What is the ITN?



The ITN is an international tennis number that represents a player's general level of play. In time it is hoped that every tennis player worldwide will have an ITN .

Under this system players will be rated from ITN 1 – ITN 10. ITN 1 represents a high level player (holding an ATP/WTA ranking or of an equivalent playing standard) and ITN 10 is a player who is new to the game.

A '**Description of Standard**' has been developed to describe each of the ten rating categories. A concise summary of this Description of Standard is shown on page 5. Approved by the ITF Coaches Commission and the ITF International Tennis Rating Taskforce, it is hoped this guide will enable players to be accurately rated. Whilst trying to make the Description of Standard as precise as possible, the Taskforce has attempted to keep it simple and not too technical. The intention is that it should be easy to understand and useful for both the player and/or the assessor (coach/administrator).

This Description of Standard has also avoided rating players purely on the technical assessment of individual shots. Instead it has used as its basis:

- the general characteristics of various playing levels
- the five-game/tactical situations of tennis (e.g. serving, returning, both at baseline, approaching, passing) and
- the game-style of the player.



## The ITF International Tennis Number - the 'ITN'



what's your number?



International Tennis Number

The following is a concise summary of the ten ITN categories:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>ITN   1</b>     | This player has had intensive training for national tournament competition at the junior and senior levels and has extensive professional tournament experience. Holds or is capable of holding an ATP / WTA ranking and major source of income is through tournament prize money. |
| <b>ITN   2</b>     | This player has developed power and / or consistency as a major weapon. Can vary strategies and styles of play in a competitive situation. Is usually a nationally ranked player.  |
| <b>ITN   3</b>     | This player has good shot anticipation and frequently has an outstanding shot or attribute around which a game may be structured. Can regularly hit winners and force errors off short balls. Can put away volleys and smashes and has a variety of serves to rely on.             |
| <b>ITN   4</b>     | This player can use power and spin and has begun to handle pace. Has sound footwork, can control depth of shots, and can vary game plan according to opponents. Can hit first serves with power and can impart spin on second serves.  |
| <b>ITN   5</b>     | This player has dependable strokes, including directional control and depth on both ground strokes and on moderate shots. Has the ability to use lobs, overheads, approach shots and volleys with some success.  |
| <b>ITN   6</b>     | This player exhibits more aggressive net play, has improved court coverage, improved shot control and is developing teamwork in doubles.   |
| <b>ITN   7</b>     | This player is fairly consistent when hitting medium paced shots, but is not yet comfortable with all strokes. Lacks control over depth, direction and power.  |
| <b>ITN   8</b>     | This player is able to judge where the ball is going and can sustain a short rally of slow pace.   |
| <b>ITN   9</b>     | This player needs on court experience but strokes can be completed with some success.  |
| <b>ITN   10</b>    | This player is starting to play competitively (can serve and return / rally) on a full court using a normal ITF approved ball.   |
| <b>ITN   10.1*</b> | This player is able to rally with movement and control.  |
| <b>ITN   10.2*</b> | This player has developed some simple tennis-specific skills in hitting an oncoming ball regularly, however rallying with movement and control is not yet achieved.  |
| <b>ITN   10.3*</b> | This player is in the early stages of tennis skills development and is primarily learning simple tennis co-ordination tasks / exercises.   |

\* The ITN 10.1 to ITN 10.3 categories will usually involve playing in a modified environment e.g. using transition / soft balls on a reduced court and / or using adapted rackets as appropriate.

*The ITN...what's your number?*





## Why use only ten rating categories?

The number of rating categories is limited to ten to ensure that the system is simple, easily understood and relatively easy to promote and to use. The number of rating categories was discussed extensively by the Taskforce and, while recognising that the rating categories could be expanded at national level, the ITF's intention is to persevere on an international basis with ten rating categories. However, the rating categories ITN 1 – ITN 10 should not be restrictive and national associations should be able to expand and adapt by adding sub-levels within each category (e.g. 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5 etc) if they feel it is beneficial to tennis in their country.

## Growing the game - the importance of the ITN 10 category



Within the ITN 10 category, three sub-categories (ITN 10.1, ITN 10.2 and ITN 10.3) have been developed to take account of those adults and young children who have started to play tennis but are not yet ready to play competitively on a full court with a normal ITF approved ball.

The progression from ITN 10.3 to ITN 10 will see these players (usually within their lessons) being helped to achieve a series of tasks using soft tennis balls on a smaller court, with the end objective (ITN 10) being a beginner that can serve/return/rally on a full court using a normal ball .... a player ready to participate in and enjoy competition.

The Taskforce believes that the ITN 10 category is vital to the future growth of the game and that creating these sub-categories will ensure that a person can be included in the ITN system as soon as they begin tennis. This will help attract and retain new players in tennis.

## How will players be rated?

The method of rating players can vary depending on the situation in the country, region or club and could include the following:

- **Self-rating:** players can rate themselves using the Description of Standard guidelines provided.
- **Independent verifiers/classifiers:** some of the national associations may want to pass the responsibility for rating players to independent persons who understand the ITN system. This person could be the club coach, club manager or tournament director. Some national associations have already produced videos to help classifiers with their task.
- **Computer:** it is envisaged that some countries may use computers as a means of helping players to be rated. Interactive programmes can be developed which allow players to answer questions which in turn lead them to their correct rating. Computers can also be used to reclassify players' ratings based on results obtained in 'rated' tournaments.

It is recognised that no method of rating can be totally accurate in all cases. Regardless of the method used initially to rate players, once the player begins to play matches at their level (i.e. within their relative ITN rating category), their rating should move (according to results against other rated players) to the correct ITN category within a relatively short time.



## How will the ITF International Tennis Number (ITN) be used in ITF Member Nations?

For those countries that do not currently have a national rating system in place, players can be rated by following the Description of Standard chart and using it to determine which ITN best describes their present ability. Players in these countries will hold only one rating - the ITF International Tennis Number (ITN).

Once rated, a player's ITN will move up or down as a direct result of matches played in 'rated' competitions in each country. The ITF will be providing a simple calculation system linked to competitive play, which can be used (manually or by computer) from club to national level to adjust a player's ITN rating according to results.

For those countries with established national rating systems, the ITF has developed a Comparison Chart (see page 7). This chart compares the rating categories of those countries with the various ITN levels. Once the ITN is launched the players in these countries in effect will hold two ratings - their national rating and the corresponding ITN.

These countries will continue to calculate the national rating of their players as before and as players move up or down their national rating categories, so their ITN will also move up and down according to the Comparison Chart.

The Comparison Chart will also provide to those countries implementing a national rating system additional information that can be used when evaluating and determining the appropriate ITN for their players.





## ITN Conversion Chart

ITN	AUSTRALIA	BELGIUM	CANADA	FRANCE	GBR	ITALY	MOROCCO	N'LANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZ	USA
<b>1</b>	N1	A Int'l A Nat'l B-15/4 (23bis-35bis)	7.0 6.5	1st série Promotion -30 -15	1.1 1.2 1.3	Cat. 1 2.1 2.2	1st série	Cat 1	No 1- 150	Above 600p	N1 N2	7.0 6.5
<b>2</b>	N2 N3 N4	B-15/4 (50bis-65bis) B-15/2 (100bis)	6.0 5.5	-4/6 -2/6 0	1.4 1.5	2.3 2.4	-30 -15 -4/6	Cat 2	No 151 - 300	401- 600p	N3	6.0 5.5
<b>3</b>	N5	B-15/1 B-15 B-4/6	5.0	1/6 2/6 3/6	2.1	2.5 2.6	-2/6 0 2/6	Cat 3	3rd cat. Group 10	301- 400p	N4	5.0
<b>4</b>	N6 N7	B-2/6 B-0 B+2/6	4.5	4/6 5/6 15	2.2 2.3	2.7 2.8	4/6 15 15/1	Cat 4	3rd cat. Group 9	201- 300p	R1	4.5
<b>5</b>	N8 N9	B +4/6	4.0	15/1 15/2	3.1	3.1 3.2	15/2 15/4	Cat 5	3rd cat. Group 8	61- 200p	R2	4.0
<b>6</b>	N10 N11	C +15	3.5	15/3 15/4	3.2 4.1	3.3 3.4	30	Cat 6	3rd cat. Group 7	51- 60p	R3	3.5
<b>7</b>	N12	C +15/2	3.0	15/5 30	4.2 5.1	3.5 4.1	30/1	Cat 6	3rd cat. Group 6&5	50p	R4	3.0
<b>8</b>	N13	C +15/4	2.5	30/1 30/2	5.2 6.1	4.2 4.3	30/2	Cat 7	3rd cat. Group 4&3	NR	R5	2.5
<b>9</b>	N14 N15	C +30	2.0	30/3 30/4	6.2 6.3	4.4	NR	Cat 8	3rd cat. Group 2	NR	R6	2.0
<b>10</b>	N16 N17	C +30/2 C +30/4	1.5	30/5	7.1 7.2 7.3	4.5	NR	Cat 9	3rd cat. Group 1	NR	R7	1.5
<b>10.1 to 10.3</b>	N18 N19 N20	NR	1.0	NR	8	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	1.0







## The different competitive groups

The Taskforce gave a great deal of thought to the different competitive groups in a country such as juniors, veterans and wheelchair tennis players. However it was decided that only one international tennis rating system would be operated and that juniors, veterans and wheelchair tennis players would be rated within the same system based on their current level of play.

The issue of doubles was also considered but again it was felt that a separate doubles rating would complicate the project at this time. However, for doubles matches the rating of the team should be determined by combining both players' ITN and arriving at an average. A calculation system has been developed to allow doubles results to be counted towards the singles ITN of each player.

There will be only one Description of Standard used for both men and women. However because it is recognised that the level of an ITN rated man will be different to that of a similarly rated female player, there will be separate male and female ITN scales e.g. an ITN 2 rated man would not be the same as an ITN 2 rated female. The Taskforce intends to look to develop some guidelines to facilitate competition between men and women particularly at the recreational level.

## What about handicapping?

The Taskforce believes that an effective handicapping system for tennis could play an important role in increasing participation specifically at the recreational level and therefore has developed a handicapping system to facilitate play between players of different competitive levels. They believe that a form of 'free points' handicapping could be used effectively for players where the difference in level is not too great (e.g. when the average set score is between 7/6 and 6/2).

However the Taskforce concluded that establishing effective handicapping for play when the difference in level is too great (6/0 or 6/1) was at this time unrealistic and ultimately ineffective.

The system proposed involves the weaker player taking, as and when he decides, a fixed number of free points in each set. The following chart is a guide which can be used to ensure that a match is closer and so more interesting and enjoyable for the players concerned.

AVERAGE SCORE WHEN PLAYING WITHOUT USING A HANDICAPPING SYSTEM	FREE POINTS AVAILABLE TO THE WEAKER PLAYER PER SET
7/5 7/6	0-3 points
6-4	2-4 points
6-3	3-6 points
6-2	5-8 points

It should be noted that the Taskforce does not recommend that results from handicapped matches be included in any rating system or count towards a player's rating.





## ITN calculation system



Once players have been rated, they will begin playing competitions. It will then be necessary, on the basis of matches played, to re-classify the ratings of players on a regular basis.

Obviously, national associations will have to decide on the best method of calculation which suits the particular conditions in their country. Some countries will choose to use a very simple systems while others may choose to use a more sophisticated system. Cost and administrative time will be a major factor in this decision.

The Taskforce has developed a simple low cost calculation system for re-classifying players. The head-to-head system can be operated manually or with a computer using a simple excel spreadsheet. The player receives positive points for beating players rated equal to or better than them and negative points for losing to players rated below them. The sum of their points will be used to re-classify their ITN on a regular basis.

In addition, as mentioned before, the ITF has developed a calculation system that allows results in doubles to count towards the singles ITN of each player. National associations can then decide if they wish doubles results to be included in the national rating system.

## New scoring systems and competition formats

Over the past few years, the ITF Rules of Tennis have changed and they now allow a number of different scoring systems to be used in competitive play. These changes allow national associations, clubs and tournament organisers to better adapt the competition to the needs of the participants.

The new scoring systems include:

- **No-Ad scoring system:** at 'deuce', one deciding point is played to determine the winner of the game. The receiver decides to which service court this last point is to be played.
- **Short sets:** The first player/team to win four games, wins that set, provided there is a margin of two games over the opponent(s). If the score reaches four games all, a tie-break game shall be played.
- **Deciding Tie-break game:** When the score in a match is one set all, or two sets all in best of five set matches, one tie-break game shall be played to decide the match. This tie-break game replaces the deciding final set.

In addition a number of creative competition formats which guarantee players more than one match are also being encouraged. These include round robin, box leagues, feed-in consolation and rated/progressive draws.

Whichever scoring system or format is used, it is envisaged that all competitions at national, regional or club level will use the ITN rating categories as the basis for organising tournaments.

## The Tennis Ratings Manual

A manual has been compiled to assist national associations with the introduction of the tennis rating system at national level. The Manual provides a step by step guide to implementing and managing the ITN and outlines ways that the ITN can be used to increase participation in tennis.





## The ITN and Coaching

The ITN will be an effective tool with which club coaches can work. In addition to the competitive programme within a club, coaches will also be able to use the ITN as the basis for organising and tailoring coaching programmes to specific ITN groups of players in the club. It is also expected that the coaches will be involved in the initial rating of club members by running regular ITN rating clinics.

## The Way Forward



The ITN is being launched in January 2003 at the 2003 Australian Open when Tennis Australia becomes the first ITF member nation to adopt the ITN as their official national tennis rating system. A number of other national associations are already planning to introduce the ITN and it is envisaged that the 'pilot project' in Australia will be a valuable case study, providing important information for other national associations wanting to launch the ITN in their own countries.

The ITF, together with the Taskforce and their respective national associations, is also looking at ways to promote the ITN worldwide. A thorough promotional effort is important to the successful implementation of the ITN. Generic material is being developed to be used by ITF member nations to inform players of the ITN and its benefits, as well as an ITF website dedicated to the International Tennis Number ([www.internationaltennisnumber.com](http://www.internationaltennisnumber.com)).

Promotion through coaches and tournament organisers worldwide is also vital to the success of the ITN, and at the recent ITF Regional Coaches Workshops held during 2002, over 1000 of the world's top coaches representing close to 120 nations were introduced to the ITN.

We recognise that the success of the **International Tennis Number** will be measured by its ability to be implemented at the club and recreational level and we encourage each country to focus on this. The more the ITN is used as a base for recreational and competitive activities, the more it will grow in popularity and acceptance.

The ITF believe that the ITN can have a big impact on tennis participation worldwide.

**We are ready to begin to 'Rate the Tennis World'... Are you ready?**

*The ITN...what's your number?*

## The ITF International Tennis Ratings Taskforce

Dave Miley, ITF  
 Peter Johnston, Tennis Australia  
 Martin Reiter, Tennis Austria  
 Allard Elema, Dutch Tennis Federation (KNLTB)  
 Jean-Francois Magne, French Tennis Federation (FFT)  
 Wolfgang Burkhardt, German Tennis Federation (DTB)  
 Martin Rands, Lawn Tennis Association of Great Britain (LTA)  
 David Schobel, United States Tennis Association (USTA)  
 Frank Couraud, ITF  
 Miguel Crespo, ITF



what's your number?



International Tennis Number



For further information please contact:

International Tennis Number

ITF

Bank Lane

Roehampton

London SW15 5XZ

UK

Tel: 44 208 878 6464

Fax: 44 208 392 4742

E-mail: [internationaltennisnumber@itftennis.com](mailto:internationaltennisnumber@itftennis.com)

Web: [www.internationaltennisnumber.com](http://www.internationaltennisnumber.com)

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Designed by **One** London

Contributing photographers

Ron Angle, William Crabb, Gepa Pictures,

Rien Hokken, Susan Mullane, Paul Zimmer