

Life as a WTA Tour Physiotherapist

The Clay Court Season

The second Grand Slam of 2016 commenced this week, the French Open. 'Roland-Garros' as the French call it is the only Grand Slam of the year played on clay. Clay is a relatively short 8 week season and I have recently returned from two of the main lead up events; the Madrid Open and the Rome Open. Unlike most tourists that visit these cities, it isn't the food, fashion or architecture which entices players to these historic cities. Both the male and female athletes use these lead up events to obtain pivotal match practice.

Clay courts often see increased rally lengths and hence longer match times, due to the slower surface and an increase in the use of top spin. The often slippery surface requires quick foot movement as well as the ability to slide over the court. The ball may bounce higher but it also become heavy, as it collects clay through rallies, demanding more strength and endurance than other surfaces.



As a WTA physiotherapist, our day is never dull. We spend most of our time within the training room, which is usually located next to, or within the player locker room. Our primary focus is the health and well-being of the WTA players, spending time preparing athletes for their match, with a focus on injury prevention, then helping them with their recovery when they come off the court and providing treatment for any injuries they may have.

Due to the higher bounce and heavier balls on clay, we frequently treat injuries of the upper extremity, such as shoulders and elbows. The slippery surface can also lead to muscular strains in the lower extremity, such as thigh or groin strains. Having a good understanding and knowledge of potential areas of injury helps us to guide and prepare the athletes as they change from one surface to another.

Once the French Open finishes, there is a relatively short turn around (one week) until the grass season and the build up to my favorite event, Wimbledon. On grass, the ball bounce is low and often skids through at a fast pace, totally the opposite to clay! Not only is the ball bounce completely different, the surface can often be uneven, making it difficult to slide. All this needs to be considered by the WTA athletes in their training and match preparation as they adapt their game to suit the differing surfaces and conditions.

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