

# Why the need for eye protection?

The World Squash Federation Annual General Meeting in October 1997 approved a motion making it compulsory for eye protection to be worn by all players in World Junior Championships from 1 January 1999.

Please read this data sheet so that you will be fully informed on the reasons why the WSF has taken this major step forward in eye safety.

## FIRST, A TESTIMONIAL FROM WILL CARLIN

About five years ago I was hit in the eye by a Squash ball. At that time I was the United States Squash champion and number 1 player and, for the first time in fifteen years, I was playing without eyeguards because they were in my other bag and I had forgotten to transfer them. If anyone tells you that eye injuries don't happen to good players they are wrong. Period.

It was a random accident. My left handed opponent was hitting out of the back corner. I was on the T. I thought the ball was going down the wall so I edged over a little, but then as I watched him he hit a cross-court shot instead and it went directly into my eye from close range. Hard.

I went down and when I tried to open my eye, I couldn't. It was swollen past the end of my nose. I went to hospital immediately but there was so much blood in the eye that they couldn't inspect the retina and I had to sleep overnight in a sitting position to let it drain. Two days later it had cleared enough for inspection and the report came - emergency surgery.

My retina was torn and partially detached and the operation consisted of stitching a small piece of metal to the outside of the eye so that the torn edges could overlap. For a week I could not read or watch TV and was in terrible pain. It was four months before I could play Squash again and then after a year I found that more surgery was required to repair another part of the retina. This time there were complications and for about a week I thought I was going to lose the sight of that eye.

Now, with powerful contact lenses, my vision is about 20/30 but I have ghost images everywhere and will get glaucoma in the next 10 to 15 years. But the thing that frustrates me most is that I have not been able to stop more people getting the same injury. It happens more than most people think and yet it does not have to happen.

Do me one favour; let me be the idiot for all of us. Please wear eye protection every time you step on court.  
Will Carlin  
Brooklyn, NY

### ➤ THE OVERVIEW

The risk of serious eye injury in Squash is very low, but one in every four players will receive some form of injury of this type in their playing life. However, the risk of a player being blinded in Squash is **TOTALLY AVOIDABLE**. The consequences of a momentary lapse of concentration, or an accident, causing a lifetime of blindness are too severe for the WSF not to recommend eye protection and take every step to make it worn by all players.

### ➤ WHAT IS THE RISK?

Serious cases of eye injury result in hospital treatment, but the doctors and managers in them are generally too busy healing the sick to carry out studies on the causes of accidents in minute detail. So there are many studies on injuries through sport, some on eye injury in sport, but few on eye injuries through Squash. From those that

have been done in England, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, NZ, Australia, Canada and USA the following facts emerge:

- Eye injury occurs between 5 and 33 times per 100,000 playing sessions. A person has a 25% chance of receiving an eye injury in a playing career.
- In the UK there are an estimated 15,000 injuries per year.
- In Canada there were 280 recorded hospital admissions between 1982 and 1987, before mandatory eye protection.
- In 6 UK studies Football and Squash were the sports most commonly causing eye damage.
- In Australia 26% of all pennant players admitted to a previous eye injury.

➤ **WHO IS AT RISK?**

All players. No exceptions. Often beginners are less vulnerable because they do not turn around to watch their opponent. Better players keep their eye on the ball at all times and can be more at risk. Good players do get injured. Read the message from former USA Number 1 player Will Carlin overleaf and stop believing your skill will protect you.

➤ **WHAT CAUSES THE ACCIDENT?**

Most players receive minor injuries to the eyebrow and eye surround from racket blows which do not require any more treatment than a dressing. Sometimes more serious accidents happen with the racket, but two thirds of all serious accidents, and almost all blind eyes, are caused by the ball.

An A grade player hits the ball at up to 200 kilometres per hour and it has 4 times the energy of a .22 bullet.

➤ **WHAT DAMAGE OCCURS?**

1. Hyphaema. Bleeding inside the eye. Long term complications and possible glaucoma.
2. Pupil injury. Tears to the iris can distort the pupil and lead to an inability to focus.
3. Retinal damage. Haemorrhage & swelling of the retina can permanently reduce vision.
4. Orbital fractures. Surgery is often needed and double vision or disfigurement can result.

➤ **WHAT IS THE RESULT?**

Blindness, even in one eye, can cause misery and ruin lives and careers. In Israel an air force pilot lost vision in one eye through a Squash ball, he lost his licence to fly and a future high earning job as a civil airline pilot. He was compensated by the courts against the club owners as they were judged to have not advised him of the dangers.

➤ **WHY JUNIORS?**

The WSF believes that making eye protection compulsory for Junior players in World Championships is the right route to start cultivating safe habits. Juniors accept the situation more easily than adults who have played for years without protection. Our challenge is to make eye protection in Squash fashionable - cool as the kids would say. They wear knee pads and elbow protection when they roller-blade. Crash helmets when they cycle or play hockey. Gum shields when they play Rugby or Football. They are all part of the dress code and are seen as adding to the sport not detracting from it. And, in your judgement, which is the more serious - a grazed knee, a broken elbow, a missing tooth, a cut head and concussion or a blind eye?

➤ **THE FINAL FACTS**

In Canada over 60% of adults wear eye protectors. Ten years ago it was 20%. The incidence of Squash inflicted blindness has disappeared.

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