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Sports Stack

Tennis Players Show Unity

Written by [kylestack](#) on 9/17/2011 10:30 PM

I'll remember three things about the 2011 U.S. Open: Novak Djokovic's two gutty matches against Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, and the three notable men's players took a stand against USTA officials to stop play in poor weather conditions. The latter point is a fine example of how athletes can band together to force their sport to protect their health.

A rainstorm sweeping through New York City September 6th suspended matches for the day at the USTA's tennis center in Flushing, Queens, where the Open is played every year. Light rain – termed "misting" by media reports – hit the courts the following morning, at which time USTA officials thought the conditions were playable. Nadal, Andy Murray and Andy Roddick argued that dampness on the court created too much risk for injury. They refused to play. (No women reportedly voiced opposition, although it was the fourth round men's matches that were scheduled for September 7th.)

USTA officials relented and suspended play until conditions were agreeable with the players, which ended up being September 8th. Nadal, Roddick and Murray, who reportedly was the first to voice concern, showed the power athletes hold, even without a union.

Players on the ATP (men) and WTA (women) tours may not be unionized, but they have player councils. Nadal is a vice president on the ATP's council; I think his position there as well as his role as one of tennis' best players made it important for him to take a stand. Murray and Roddick are naturally outspoken, so it made sense for them to voice their opinion.

The USTA officials obviously had a selfish interest in resuming play September 7th – money. They wanted fans already at the tennis complex to stay there. They likely craved the walk-up customers that sports events like the Open usually receive. Players wanted to eliminate any risk of injury that they could. To the USTA's credit, they listened.

This is a situation in which a union wasn't necessary. Helpful, sure, but Nadal and others understood the leverage they had. Nothing hits home like the risk of physical health. Fans understand that. I've found that tennis fans tend to have more affection for their sport's players than I notice in other sports. Good for the players that they delivered an effective message to the USTA.

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