



Bob Patterson

RSI Stringer of the Year

TALK TO BOB PATTERSON ABOUT stringing and one thing is immediately clear. “Everything we do is built on consistency,” he says. That word—“consistency”—sneaks in everywhere. Patterson, of Birmingham, Ala., even has his customers using it.

“The consistency is wonderful,” says recreational player Jim Perry of nearby Hoover, Ala., of Patterson’s stringing expertise. “You know that when you take your racquet in, it’s going to be exactly the same every time.”

Patterson has been stringing racquets—consistently—for three decades. And it’s his consistency in all aspects of the business that has earned him RSI’s 2005 Stringer of the Year honors.

Patterson says he kind of fell into stringing. “My first job out of high school was overseeing the public tennis courts,” he says. “Players there wanted to get their racquets strung. I knew nothing about it, but I got some information, ordered a stringing machine, and started stringing.”

After graduating from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, he kept stringing because he couldn’t find anyone to string his own racquets. “I invested about \$1,000 in a machine and string, and I was overwhelmed with business,” Patterson says. “My plan was to recoup the costs in a year, but I recouped it in six weeks.”

In 1992, Patterson, at the urging of his wife, Pam, moved his growing business out of the house and opened a retail shop, Players Choice Tennis (which last year was named RSI’s Pro/Specialty Retailer of the Year). Later that year, to differentiate between the retail shop and the stringing business, Patterson created a racquet customization business, RacquetMaxx, which shares space with the retail operation. Currently, he has three Babolat stringing machines in the shop and three more that he and his team travel with.

Patterson estimates that RacquetMaxx does 7,000 to

8,000 frames a year. Patterson himself will string 75 to 80 racquets each week, and he’ll pull in personally trained racquet technicians when business is heavy, or for stringing at pro events and other tournaments. Before RacquetMaxx technicians ever touch a client’s frame, they’ll string well over 500 racquets. “We have a pretty extensive, 12-week training program,” Patterson says. “Then we have the new techni-

cians stringing all the demo racquets.

“During training, they hear the word ‘consistency’ so much that they probably want to throw something at me,” he adds. “The finale is to prepare to take the Master Racquet Technician (MRT) test from the USRSA. Everyone who

works for Players Choice and RacquetMaxx is either an MRT or in training to be one.” (Patterson also administers MRT tests in his area.)

Helping the RacquetMaxx team, especially when it comes to matching racquets, are the USRSA’s *Stringer’s Digest* and online tools available to USRSA members at www.racquettech.com. “That website is pretty much up on our computer at all times,” Patterson says.

RacquetMaxx (www.racquetmaxx.com) not only has tons of local business (normal turnaround is 24 hours), but players also send him frames from around the country, even internationally (generally, Patterson says, the frames ship out within 24 hours). Fees vary according to string type, but labor, without string, is \$18, sometimes higher at tournaments. “We never discount strings, and we never discount racquet service,” says Patterson.

“When I first started, I decided that to be the best I could be, I was not going to try to be competitive based on price—there’s always someone willing to do it cheaper,” he says. “That didn’t help things take off real rapidly, but over the years, it’s paid dividends.”

And, of course, “It’s all about consistency,” Patterson says. “I have guys who want to join the team and tell me how fast they can string, but I want to know if they can repeat the results time and again. And that comes from being methodical, even down to the most ridiculous nuance, which customers *do* notice.”

Some of those nuances, says Patterson, include always mounting the racquet with the butt cap facing up. “We also put a sticker on the frame, in exactly the same place every time. And we put the racquet in a plastic bag.” Patterson uses a Babolat RDC machine extensively, including recording the string-bed deflection on each freshly-strung frame. RacquetMaxx also keeps a database on clients and their racquet and string specs.

“Whether they’re a recreational player or a top touring pro, they want to get the most out of their equipment,” Patterson says. “And that’s where consistency really counts.”

—Peter Francesconi



Bob Patterson’s

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- ▶ To help service your customers, keep a thorough database on your clients and their equipment.
- ▶ For stringing and customization, take full advantage of the tools offered by the USRSA.
- ▶ And, as if you need to ask, it’s all about consistency.