

# WILSON

# PRO ROOM

If you're good enough, the folks in the Wilson Pro Room can help you become better

BY GREG RAVEN

Off-the-shelf racquets may be fine for the majority of tennis players, but touring pros want equipment that is fine-tuned to make the racquet feel like an extension of the arm. There are a number of racquet tuners who cater to the pros and near-pros, but Wilson has taken racquet customization into another dimension with its "Pro Room."

First opened in 1983 by Bill Severa, who was recently named director of technology for the newly formed Wilson Racquet Sports Innovations & Design Group, the Pro Room is part of Wilson's player services group, which is run by Michael Wallace, Wilson's global director of the tour.

The Wilson Pro Room stands ready to serve tour players

from around the world at any time. The company dedicates customer service experts, lab technicians, and its premier lab facilities to servicing its pros 365 days a year. The Wilson player services group even travels to each of the majors and to the NASDAQ-100 in Miami, to ensure its pros are playing with the right equipment.

The hands-on work is performed by Global Tour Equipment Manager and Principal Racquet Designer Ron Rocchi, a USRSA Master Racquet Technician, along with Designer and Prototype Manager Klara Nowak, and lab technician Dawn Cacioppo, a USRSA Certified Stringer. Although Wilson has been providing players services for years, only in the last seven years has this service been given the official



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term “Pro Room,” and been made available to more players. In 2003, the Pro Room shipped more than 2,500 racquets to its pros.

For the most part, the best on the tour will receive hand-crafted racquets from Wilson. This includes racquets that match in weight, balance, or swingweight, depending on what the player chooses. Players can request different string patterns (such as an 18x20 string pattern for a racquet that normally comes with a 16x18 pattern), custom handle shapes, and matching of weight, balance, and swingweight on all frames. Rocchi does all the tuning himself by hand, sometimes spending hours on a single racquet.

A top touring pro, such as world No. 1 Roger Federer, has all available technology, means, and services of the Pro Room at his disposal. Top pros can even request a unique frame because Wilson is able to create the perfect racquet for them with custom string patterns, and custom grip. It takes hours on court with the player and more hours back in the Pro Room tweaking the racquets to get everything just right.

Wilson also acknowledges those who will be the next Pete Sampras, and offers basic racquet tuning to 200 juniors, including nationally-ranked U.S. juniors as well as ITF-ranked juniors, providing them with services such as frame matching and tuning.

One of the benefits to Wilson from its Pro Room program is the input and feedback from top professional players. The Pro Room worked for years with Federer, who had been using the Pro Staff 6.0, but wanted something a little different, yet familiar. The result is the Wilson Pro Staff Tour 90, which is now available to all consumers.

Success stories such as this are, according to Rocchi, what separate Wilson from the pack. While there are several places where a top-level player can obtain customization services, says Rocchi, “Frame geometry is always going to be the major determinant in the way the racquet plays, and we can even customize that.”

Even though the focus of the Pro Room seems to be on the technical side, one of the main goals is to build relationships with players, including convincing players to use Wilson racquets. Rocchi’s emphasis is on tour players, while European Tour Manager Massimo Calvelli focuses on players outside the U.S. Each travels extensively to see players when not at one of the majors. In addition to delivering racquets, Rocchi and Calvelli are on court play-testing frames with players in order to get each customization exactly right.

The personal touch is important in Pro Room tuning. According to Rocchi, different players will key in on different aspects of racquet performance. Some may not be as sensitive about swingweight, but the balance has to be exact on each frame. Others may need the swingweight to be the same on each frame, but matching the overall weight isn’t as important. There are even some players who want each frame to look exactly like the others, despite the fact that each frame needs a different amount of external lead tape. “That’s where foil tape comes in,” says Rocchi.

From foil tape to unique racquets, the Wilson Pro Room has the capability to go where no customizer has gone before. ▶