



Plastic balls production update

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Posted On: July 03, 2013

The ITTF have announced an update on the progress of plastic balls that are set to replace celluloid balls next year. Although there have been some issues with the development of a seamless ball and 'with seam' ball, it has been assured that the changes are still on course to take place on July 1st 2014.

Full updates of the production can be found below:

1. Manufacturing

1.1 There is now the possibility of having two types of plastic balls: a) seamless; and b) with seam.

1.2 The seamless balls are being manufactured in a factory in Guangzhou, let's call it "Co.X", according to a new manufacturing process and a new technology with specially designed machines that can produce balls made of plastic composites and without seams. These balls have been tested extensively so far and they are of good quality, except that it is difficult to implement the "veer" test on these balls for lack of a point of reference (the seam). Instead, they will be tested for even distribution of the material all over the sphere of the ball. This is currently the weakness of these balls, the material is not sufficiently evenly distributed all around the sphere resulting in only 30% to 50% of the produced balls passing the ITTF ball tests.

1.3 There is supposedly an agreement in place between Co.X and DHS and DF. The agreement would state that Co.X only manufactures the balls, while DHS and DF market and sell the balls wholesale. It is also claimed that it is DHS and DF that funded the research for the production of the seamless ball, which is a considerable investment.

1.4 There is now apparently a dispute between Co.X on one side and the other two companies, DHS and DF, on the other side. It would seem that all sides are claiming a breach of contract. This is not ITTF business and must be resolved between the companies. However, this dispute has changed the original plans.

1.5 Now, because of the dispute, DHS and DF have proceeded to produce their own plastic balls, using a different plastic composite material and using the traditional production technology of balls with seams. This is the same as celluloid balls, but using non-celluloid materials.

1.6 The result is that now we will have plastic balls submitted for approval by Co.X (seamless plastic balls) as well as from DHS and DF. Samples of the new "with seam" plastic balls were given out in Paris to players and others for testing and feedback.

1.7 Please note that neither the ITTF nor the manufacturers have any obligation to provide samples to anyone.

The plastic balls are legal and have always been legal according to the ITTF rules. As long as the plastic balls pass the ITTF ball tests they can be used, even now, without any change in rules. It is the same procedure as if a new racket covering comes on the market.

1.8 The ITTF will use for ITTF events the plastic balls as of 1 July 2014. Other bodies (national associations, continental federations, leagues, clubs, etc.) can make their own decisions to use plastic or celluloid balls.

1.9 The celluloid balls will remain legal, and in use for those that want to use them, until their supply is depleted and are no longer available from the manufacturers

1.10 Initial sufficient supply of plastic balls will be available, according to the manufacturers, by the beginning of 2014, and full supply should be available by July 2014.

1.11 The strategy by the manufacturers, suppliers and resellers to sell off their stocks of celluloid balls is their own strategy and does not involve the ITTF.

2. Patent

2.1 There are three approved patents that we are aware of (maybe many more) with regard to the plastic balls. These three patents of which we are aware are distinctly different and owned by three different entities and do not affect the production of the plastic balls in any way.

2.2 Co.X owns a patent for the production of the seamless plastic balls using a specific technology and using specific non-celluloid materials. DHS and DF own a different patent for the production of non-celluloid balls with seams and the materials used are different than those used for the seamless balls. Therefore, there is no patent issue between Co. X and DHS and DF.

2.3 There is also a patent owned by two persons, of which one is related to Dr. Kuhn. I can confirm that the materials described in this patent are DIFFERENT than the materials used for the seamless ball (Co.X) and the materials used for the plastic balls with seams (DHS and DF). This is confirmed by all companies currently involved in the production of plastic balls. Therefore THERE IS NO PATENT ISSUE.

2.4 I urge all concerned, especially the distributors, NOT to create an issue where it does NOT exist. Do NOT meet with Dr. Kuhn. It is not necessary. And do NOT pay anything to Dr. Kuhn or his relatives or friends with regard to the patent. This is NOT necessary. The supply of balls from China is not affected by this patent.

2.5 In the unlikely scenario that the patent held by Dr. Kuhn's connections becomes relevant, then the ITTF will immediately step in to solve the problem. Until then, there is NO ISSUE.

I hope that this message is clear and that now we can all concentrate on developing our sport and anticipate top quality plastic balls not only from China but from all over the world.

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