

ball with sub-surface reflective layer, which was assignable to Godin alone – were jointly owned by the two parties. An appeal on the basis that the versions specifying particular ways of recessing the reflectors, as determined by Christie, should belong to him alone was dismissed.

A principle was established that a claim embodying both parties' ideas together with an additional feature contributed by one party was nevertheless jointly owned. For those wishing to learn more about the case, the appeal was filed in the name of Viziball Ltd, as Christie had assigned his patent application to that company. Questions of priority and claim to inventorship that occur regularly with patent applications make this a much-cited case in patent law.

One of the other features of the patent application was the televisual system. It described a method whereby the path of the ball would be illuminated and a camera would be directed towards that path to receive images of the light reflected from the reflective material in the ball. In practice this required a beam of light directed towards the court from behind the back wall, where

the main camera would be. Televised matches of that period used a court with a glass front wall, behind which Press photographers would be sited in order to get the best shots of play. They found that having a bright light beam pointing straight towards them destroyed any hope of getting a decent picture.

In any case, the reflector ball's demise was already assured courtesy of another, slightly earlier, invention that was gaining ground in the sport. The logical extension of a court with a glass front wall was an all-glass court. Vision control panels, which allowed for plain, single-coloured one-way transparent walls became available in the late 1970s and made the all-glass court viable. The panels, produced by Contra Vision, have a partially imaged substrate and a design superimposed on a print pattern. This pattern can be opaque, as with the squash court, in order to achieve one-way vision panels incorporating the court's wall markings. Such courts have walls that are opaque to the players but, with sufficient internal illumination provided by overhead lighting, are simultaneously transparent to outside observers. The conditions are ideal

for television cameras and allow for seating to be arranged around all sides of the court rather than solely behind the back wall. Photographers can be sited comfortably, undisturbed by unwanted light, at their preferred location facing the front wall.

The squash ball started life black. It became green to reduce the markings made by the ball on the squash court walls. Battles have been fought in the Patents Court over, firstly, the introduction of a blue ball alleged to improve visibility and, secondly, a reflective ball supposed to do the same, especially for televised matches. The blue ball disappeared virtually without trace, and the reflector ball was superseded by another technology. Almost all squash is played nowadays with a traditionally coloured black or green ball.

A footnote to the story is that the visual conditions created by the opaque (from the inside) walls of modern all-glass courts have led to fairly successful experiments in televised tournaments with another new ball. Its colour? White. ●

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