

Tennis seeing a resurgence

Following its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s when John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg and Martina Navratilova helped to boost the popularity of the game, tennis saw a decade of decline.

A fresh focus on how the sport is taught to beginners, using slower balls, and a push to expand grassroots programmes have revived participation and the number of people playing tennis worldwide has grown significantly over the last few years.

"Tennis is growing because we're changing the way the game is being taught at starter level," said David Miley, director of tennis development at the International Tennis Federation.

A key change was the introduction in 2005 of three different lower compression balls - red, orange and green - which are 75, 50 and 25 per cent slower than standard tennis balls, making it easier for beginners of any age to keep a rally going.

More than 30 countries in six continents are now part of the ITF's new scheme.

"We've made a conscious effort to reposition our sport," said Miley. "It's moving a little bit more away from being like learning the piano, where you learn the scales



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GRASSROOTS TENNIS is seeing a resurgence, producing tennis stars such as Russia's Maria Sharapova.

music, much more towards soccer.

"The first day somebody comes to play soccer they kick the ball, they play the game and no one is telling them all the technical stuff; they are playing."

The U.S. has seen a sharp increase, with participation up 43 per cent between 2000 and 2008 and more players taking to the court last year than at any other time in the past 15 years, the Tennis Industry Association (TIA) said.