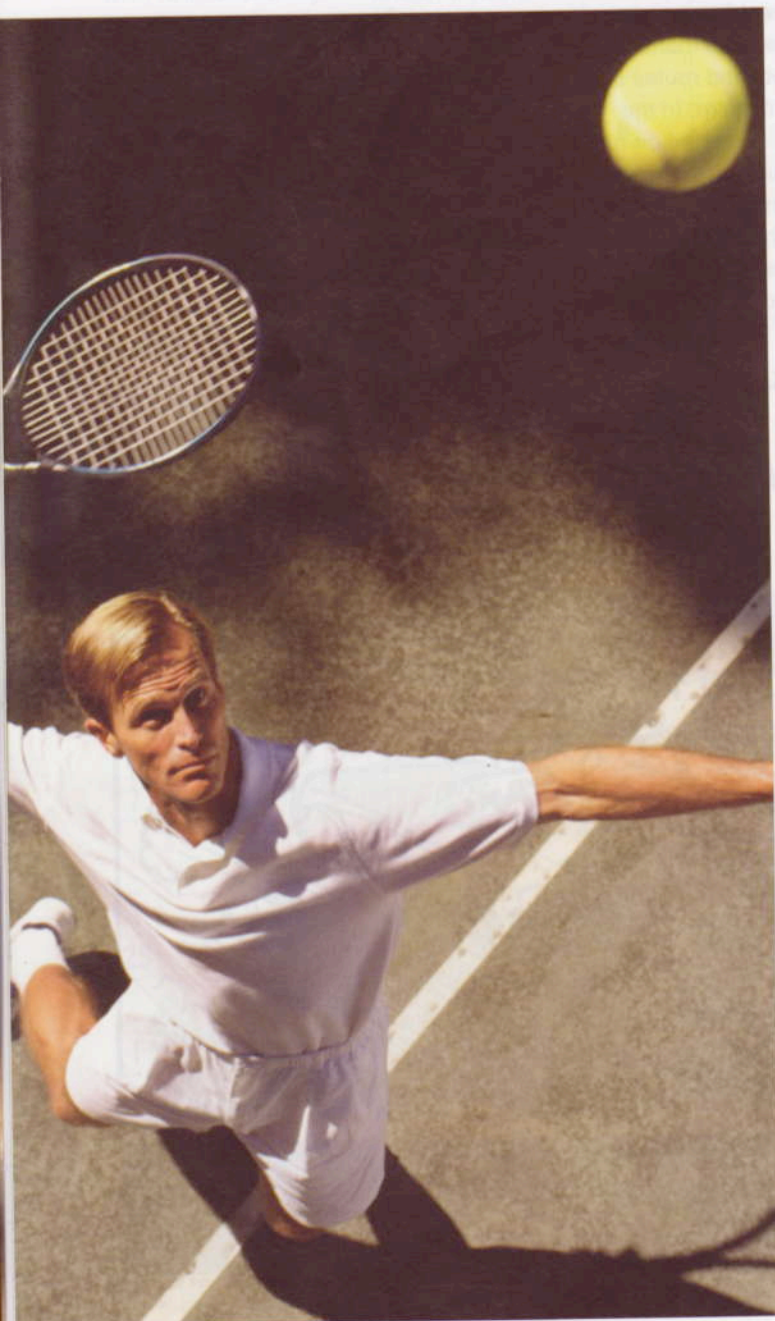


# That **extra edge**



As the spring and summer grand slam season approaches, tennis lovers are delighted that Justine Henin and Kim Clijsters have emerged from retirement better than ever. Spectators can again marvel at their speed as they hustle to well-disguised drop shots, their agility while lunging for balls and their overall stamina, withstanding hours of vigorous match play.

**J**ust as impressive is how easily they see and return a serve crossing the net at 190 kph, and their ability to strike the ball squarely in the racket's sweet spot while being fully aware of an opponent's court position. There are many traits that contribute to the success of top athletes like Kim and Justine - strength and speed, mental and physical toughness, determination and dedication. And, according to the team at the *Visual Fitness Institute* in suburban Chicago, superior vision is yet another integral asset of the complete athlete.

## “Keep your eye on the ball”

<sup>2</sup> Athletes of every caliber repeat this mantra when they step up to competition. From amateurs to the pros these words of wisdom permeate every sport that requires a ball no matter what the size or material. And as the speed of a ball increases,

**emerge (to):** to reappear after a difficult situation or experience  
**marvel (to):** to show wonder or admiration for sth or sb  
**hustle (to):** to move quickly or energetically  
**drop shot:** shot in racket games such as tennis in which a ball drops quickly after passing over the net  
**lunge (to):** to suddenly move forward with force  
**stamina:** physical and mental endurance  
**withstand (to) (withstood, withstood):** to resist successfully  
**strike (to) (struck, struck):** to hit  
**squarely:** directly in the middle

**sweet spot:** optimal place on a racket to strike a ball  
**trait:** characteristic  
**toughness:** strong, resistant  
**suburban:** located in the area just outside a large town or city  
**asset:** beneficial or valuable possession

<sup>2</sup> **wisdom:** knowledge that allows you to make intelligent decisions  
**permeate (to):** to filter through and be present everywhere  
**fastball:** baseball term for when the ball is thrown very quickly towards the batter  
**zip (to) past sth:** to move at an extremely high speed past sth

and the size of it decreases, all the more difficult and important to keep your eye on it. Imagine trying to smash a 145 kph fastball zipping past home plate, or return a tiny ping pong ball spinning wide off the table. Athletes are always looking for that extra edge - increased power, strategy or discipline, and vision training has developed as another avenue to improve on natural talents. According to Dr. Barry Seiller, ophthalmologist and medical director of the *Visual Fitness Institute*, the success of your visual system will impact your timing, your balance, and the decisions you make during play, which is often one critical difference between you and competitor. Dr. Seiller and his team at the institute found that visual skills are like all physical skills that can be taught, trained practiced and perfected. From their research they developed the *Visual Edge Performance Trainer*, a computer based program that assesses vision skills and provides vision training and exercises to improve flexibility, recognition, and tracking that work to improve the overall hand-eye-body coordination necessary for athletics. Perfect vision is essential and can be achieved with the help of corrective lenses or even LASIK surgery (Justine had the laser corrective surgery during her retirement). The next step is to work on the brain's ability to process visual information and the body's ability to respond to it.

and improve spatial awareness on the court. Bey has noticed a marked improvement from those players who had experienced problems and completed the training. Although he takes the technology seriously Bey thinks that it is often viewed in the athletic arena as a luxury, not a necessity. Many elite players, he feels, already naturally possess these superior visual skills. But, for the developing player vision training could be that extra competitive advantage. Dr. Seiller's client list ranges from Major League Baseball Clubs to the US Olympic Luge and Bobsled teams to the local high school tennis team, and the list continues to grow. He believes that as the technology advances and the concepts mature, vision training will become like "weight lifting for the eyes", an essential part of an athlete's training regimen. ■

MARJORIE CONLEY

## Visual training will become like weight for the eyes

### Visual training

Mark Bey, founder and director of the Care Academy, a United States Tennis Association (USTA) regional training center in suburban Chicago for elite junior players, encourages his players to be tested and evaluated at the *Visual Fitness Institute*. Bey said that if he observes a weakness in a player's ability to track the ball or a lag in his or her reaction time, he recommends visual ability testing to pinpoint and isolate any recurring issues. The goal of the visual training would be to help players spot the speed, direction and trajectory of a ball



## ACTIVITY

### Reading

Read the text again and find out how many different sports are mentioned by the author. The answers can be found in the 'Keys' section on the yellow page 'D' in the centre of the magazine.

**home plate:** final base on a baseball field that a player must touch in order to score

**spin (to):** to move in a circular rotating manner

**assess (to):** to evaluate or determine the amount, quality or importance of sth

**provide (to):** to supply sth that is needed

**recognition:** identification of sth which has been previously heard, seen or known

**track (to):** to follow

**corrective lense:** small round piece of plastic that is worn on the surface of the eye to improve sight

**founder:** sb who establishes a new business, organisation etc.

**lag :** the fact of moving slowly, of being slower than normal

**pinpoint (to):** to find the exact factors of a problem

**recurring:** happening a lot or happening again

**spot (to):** to see

**range (to):** to have an upper and lower limit in what it covers

**regimen:** set of rules or special diet that sb follows for sports, health etc.