

## Net gain: Cardio tennis offers more than a stronger backhand. It builds a stronger heart.

By HANNAH WIEST

Star-Tribune staff writer Tuesday, July 03, 2007

They pulled their monitors snug and strapped on a watch that measures not time, but the state of their heart.

Then, they watched that watch as its digits climbed steadily upward.

They hopscotched, sprinted around the tennis court throwing and catching fuzzy yellow balls, hit a forehand, sprinted and hit another. Then they dashed back into line and hit a backhand before sprinting to reach an overhead at the net.

Chantel Torres and Jenny Blom took a few breaths. One. Two.

A ball whizzed through the air. They smacked it. They sprinted. They zig-zagged through cones.

About five minutes went by and the game of tennis was no longer a gentleman's sport. It was a hard-core workout that left Torres and Blom wondering why they spent all those hours zoning out to a television show forcing themselves to take just a few more halfhearted steps on the treadmill.

Cardio tennis is a new trend in the workout world sure to get people's most important muscle pumped up and fully pumping for healthier, and hopefully longer, lives. It launched three years ago but is just now taking off around the world, with 1,500 official sites in the United States. In Wyoming, Casper, Cheyenne, Laramie and Jackson currently offer cardio tennis, but instructor Charelene Klein hopes more sites will be added.

"The heart is so automatic, we forget it," Klein said. "But the fact is, the stronger the heart is, the longer you're going to live."

The fist-sized heart muscle beats about 100,000 times per day and pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through the body, circulating oxygen and nutrients vital for life, according to [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com). Problem is, a lot of people's heart muscles are suffering. Lack of exercise, obesity and poor diets have led to a monumental increase in heart disease as people's arteries clog and force their heart to work harder to perform its normal activities.

The United States Tennis Association noticed this unhealthy trend and decided to invent a fun way to exercise and keep hearts in shape, Klein said.

It wasn't an unnatural transition for tennis to become a cardio workout, Klein said. Tennis great Arthur Ashe, the first black man to win Wimbledon, always said tennis required fast feet, fast hands and a fast brain. A good cardio workout requires much the same: constant movement to keep the heart rate in its optimal zone for burning calories.

Tennis, with its quick starts, short sprints and brief rests, offers a workout with a lot of variety that keeps a person's heart pumping, Klein said. Plus, it's fun. It's a social event with so much going on it's nearly impossible to get bored.

"No one wants to be in the gym, especially in the summer," Torres said. She recently tried cardio tennis for the first time. A yoga and water aerobics instructor, Torres is in good shape but still found cardio tennis to be a great workout, she said. And although cardio tennis doesn't offer full-on tennis instruction, improvement happens naturally after hitting so many balls, Torres said. She hopes to beat her husband soon.

But cardio tennis is for anyone -- avid tennis players looking for a way to spice up their game and their workout and those who have never touched a racket but need a fun way to get moving. Klein will vary the pace for each participant to make sure they're hitting balls and constantly moving to keep their heart rate in their ideal aerobic zone.

"It's fun. You learn skills for a lifetime sport, but at the same time get a great workout," said recent participant Jenny Blom, who hasn't played in 15 years.

Then Blom and Torres started throwing out slogans: "Are your pants too tight? Join cardio tennis," Torres said. "Keep up with your kids. Join cardio tennis," Blom tossed in.