



## Olympics

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# Olympic tennis courts will soon be bound for Beijing

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The Olympic tennis stage for such stars as Roger Federer and the Williams sisters will soon leave Andover, Mass., for Beijing in 55-gallon drums.

Inside will be material for the top layers of the courts to be used at the Olympics in August. The material will be applied by squeegee, and the result will be DecoTurf hardcourts.

DecoTurf, a division of [California Products](#) in Andover, has been used at the U.S. Open since 1978 and was used at the Athens Olympics in 2004.

A four-layer acrylic surface was installed last year on Beijing's 17 Olympic courts before a test event there in October. Material for five additional layers, transported in about 350 drums, will be transported by rail next week to Long Beach, Calif., then shipped to China, where it is scheduled to arrive in late April.

The surface was selected by the International Tennis Federation and Beijing Olympics organizing committee, known as BOCOG. The time of year for the competition was a major factor in the decision, ITF executive director Paul Smith said.

Tennis is in the middle of the hardcourt season in August. Forcing top players to switch surfaces so soon before the U.S. Open might deter them from taking part in the Olympics.

"When BOCOG says DecoTurf is the surface they'd like, it's an easy choice to make," Smith said. "They are as keen as we are to have the best possible playing field. Two weeks before the Open, it's a good choice."

The speed of DecoTurf courts can be altered, depending on how much silica is used. The adjustment is so delicate that California Products uses a computer at its plant to measure the silica blend.

"That's how we get the consistency batch to batch for the speed of play," said John Graham, managing director for California Products.

When dealing with Olympic athletes, and finicky tennis players, such precision is important. The ITF has requested a pace of play similar to Athens and the U.S. Open.

"It's probably on the lower end of medium fast," Smith said, chuckling at the sound of such a detailed description.

The court lines also are textured with silica, ensuring a consistent bounce even when a ball lands on a line, Graham said. The courts won't be ready for play until July, a month or less before the tennis competition begins Aug. 10.

"In a climate like Beijing where there's a tremendous amount of pollution, we like to keep the courts as clean as possible," Graham said. "The longer they sit, the dirtier they're going to get."

During the tournament, water brooms will be used every night to clean the courts of dust that could make them faster.

Color choices are precise, too. The courts will be blue and green but slightly different from the color scheme at the U.S. Open.

"The green is a little lighter, and the blue a little darker," Graham said. Blue has become a popular court color because it's believed to provide a background that makes the yellow ball easier for spectators to see.

To win the bid, Graham's company had to woo the ITF, BOCOG and Beijing government. Representatives of the Chinese Tennis Association visited Andover to tour the plant.

Graham is accustomed to dealing with international customers. Nearly half of DecoTurf's sales are to foreign countries, and the courts can be found in Europe and South America, as well as in Dubai, Korea, Japan, India, Australia and the Philippines. DecoTurf is used at many Davis Cup and Federation Cup events, as well as in the entire U.S. Open Series.

California Products also makes Plexicushion Prestige courts, which were used at the Australian Open for the first time this year and drew mixed reviews from players. Novak Djokovic and Maria Sharapova liked the surface fine, they won the tournament, but some found it too slow, including Federer.

"There was an expectation the speed of play was going to be faster than it was," Graham said. "I think you can see that with the quality of play and the players who won, it was a very fair surface."

Still, DecoTurf is the surface California Products recommends.

"It's our premier line," Graham said. "It delivers a fair, consistent test."

Nonetheless, DecoTurf won't be used at the London Games in 2012, because the tennis competition will be at Wimbledon.

"DecoTurf is actually at Wimbledon," Graham said. "They park the buses on it during the tournament."