

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

New York: **Today**, abundant sunshine, breezy at times, low humidity, high 79. **Tonight**, mainly clear, calm, low 63. **Tomorrow**, sunny, high 80. Weather map, Page D8.

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One Doctor's Invention Is Some Players' Necessity

By KATHLEEN McELROY

Pier Francesco Parra walks around the United States Open grounds with a coach's credential, but he is quick to say it is fake.

"They don't have a category for a doctor," he said, scoffing at the identification around his neck.

Nor do they have one for a magician, which is one of Parra's nicknames. No matter. Open players already recognize him because of his three-laser healing machine. The mysterious device makes him the tennis version of Dr. James Andrews, the much-sought-after surgeon who treats baseball's broken pitchers in Birmingham, Ala.

But Parra, an Italian surgeon, carries his machine with him, through airport security, no less.

"It's like to have a baby," he said, making the gesture of a cradle. "I carry it always with me."

Rafael Nadal, the world's No. 2 player, has taken his sore knees to Parra's hotel room three times a day to use the laser system, which is about as big as a television set in a kitchen.

But Nadal is merely Parra's highest-profile patient. "Ivanovic, Djokovic, Ljubicic, Bjorkman, they all line up outside my hotel room, all night," he said.

After their matches, interviews and massages, players take their aches and pains to Parra, whom they also call Dr. Guru. He treats their backs, ankles, shoulders and whatever else hurts.

"We call him Doc, like in 'Back to the Future,'" Tathiana Garbin of Italy told The Telegraph.

Parra, whose English is limited, was vague in describing how his invention works. He calls the device FP3, after his initials and the number of lasers. "It is three

lasers working together," he said. "They go deep in the tissues."

He made his name by helping extend the skiing career of Alberto Tomba, a longtime patient who wrote the preface for a book by Parra. Back then, athletes had to go to him because the machine was too big to travel. He said he did not charge the players but hoped to make the product smaller and have it patented. "When it's the size of a phone," he said with a laugh.

Parra described his success rate as "97 percent." When asked if a player had ever complained, he said, "Maybe they don't come back, but I still have a long line."

NEW GAMBLING RULE The ATP Board of Directors is considering instituting a law at its year-end championships in November that will penalize players for not reporting a gambling incident if they are made aware of one, said Etienne de Villiers, the chairman of the ATP.

In a news conference yesterday, de Villiers discussed the results of the ATP board meeting this week. He then discussed what he acknowledged as "the elephant in the room," referring to the gambling investigation of Nikolay Davydenko.

Davydenko is under investigation because of his Aug. 2 match in Sopot, Poland. He defaulted because of a foot injury against a lower-ranked opponent. The match drew a suspiciously high amount of betting.

But although the ATP announced the investigation in August, Davydenko said he had not been interviewed and would not be interviewed until after the China Open, the second week of September. When asked to explain why there was such an inordinate delay in contacting Davydenko,



PATRICK ANDRADE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dr. Pier Francesco Parra treating the player Ivan Ljubicic with his laser healing machine.

de Villiers told reporters yesterday, "He will be interviewed when the investigative body feels it is the right time to investigate."

The ATP has involved the British Horseracing Authority as well as two investigators from Scotland Yard.

"This is a traumatic process for everyone," de Villiers said. "We need to be fair. We need to be thorough. We need to be comprehensive. There are people's reputations at stake here, too."

The ATP also announced that it was re-structuring its top-tier tournaments in 2009 with increased prize money, adding Monte Carlo to its schedule of eight mandatory events. The year-end finals will be held in London in 2009. LIZ ROBBINS

ANOTHER LATE NIGHT FOR BLAKE James Blake's reward for his first career victory in a five-set match, against Fabrice Santoro late

Thursday night at the United States Open, is that he gets to play Stefan Koubek of Austria in another late match tonight at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Koubek handed Blake one of those previous five-set losses, at the 2002 Australian Open. Worse, Blake was up two sets to none when Koubek came back to take three in a row.

"I wouldn't mind getting a little revenge," said Blake, who had been 0 for 9 in five-setters.

Despite his reputation for heartbreaking losses at the Open, Blake has kept making strides in his career. The biggest came after bouncing back from a broken neck in 2004. He stretched Andre Agassi to a five-set classic in the quarterfinals in 2005 and extended the three-time champion Roger Federer to four sets in the quarterfinals last year. He came here seeded sixth this year and no longer thinks of himself as a

long shot.

"Last year was the first time I came in thinking it wouldn't be a surprise if I made it to the second weekend," he said.

But the five-set match had been the bane of Blake's career in Grand Slams. He said he never thought about his failure to win one during any of the previous nine tries. It only entered his mind when Santoro stretched him to five. Blake took the court for that last set with a look of pure determination.

"When I lost to Koubek, I just think I rushed through it," Blake said. "I got down and I just started rushing. This time, whether it's three sets, four sets or five sets, I'm just going to take my time and do what I need to do."

Blake said yesterday that he felt good despite the long, late match. He practiced for only about 30-40 minutes, he said.

LYNN ZINSER