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On Court The Squash Auckland Coaches Newsletter

Editorial: With Steve Hodges, Development Manager

Welcome to the first edition of On Court , the Squash Auckland coaches newsletter.

This newsletter is being produced as part of our continued commitment to your development as coaches in the region. With so much coaching activity taking place in the Auckland district, both at club and regional level it was decided that the time was right to produce a regular newsletter to keep coaches up to date with coaching events and happenings in the area.

As well as regular local updates Squash Ak will also be providing you with information about new coaching developments taking place locally and overseas. This may not necessarily just be information about squash coaching, but will also include

coaching tips, skills, techniques and ideas from a range of sports around the world.

One of the major success stories for Squash Auckland in the last two years, has been the increase in qualified coaches in the region.

Since February 2007, 69 coaches have attended a level 1 coaching course and 10 have attended a level 2 course. Of these 22 have qualified to level 1 and 5 have qualified to level 2.

In addition 12 coaches are booked to complete the assessment for their level 1 in November.

In 2009 Squash Auckland staged its inaugural coach development day at the Remuera Rackets Club. The decision was made to hold this event as a way for coaches in the

region to share information and learn about new developments in the world of coaching. After the success of this first event, it has been decided that this will become an annual event and form an integral part of Squash Auckland's continued commitment to coach development in the region.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the newsletter. If you have any comments, suggestions or would like to share a story about what you are doing in your club, please feel free to contact me at Squash Auckland.

For regular updates on coaching activities in the region register on the Squash Auckland website at: http://www.squashuckland.org.nz/Register_17.aspx

SNZ Releases its Draft Coaching Strategy

Over the past 12 months Squash NZ with the help of an external consultant have been working on the production of a draft coaching strategy for the country.

Taking into consideration new developments in coach education Squash NZ have produced a document that—if implemented—will see a fundamental shift in the way prospective squash coaches are

educated in NZ.

No longer will coaches be subjected to the traditional hierarchical coaching structure , where they have to pass one level before moving on to the next. The new approach will see coaches choose modules relevant to their level of coaching interest.

For example a coach who only wants to coach high

performance players only has to complete the coaching modules relevant to their coaching community. No longer do they have to do a level 1 course before doing level 2. They can now go straight to the modules relevant to coaching elite athletes. http://www.squashnz.co.nz/myfiles/FL-NAL_DRAFT_SQUASH_COACHING_STRATEGY.pdf

Squash Victoria Launches New Player Skills Programme

Recently Squash Victoria launched their online squash skills programme.

This programme is designed to provide a coach and/or player with a graduated programme of skill acquisition from beginner to advanced level.

Available to overseas coaches at a cost of AUS\$110 this programme is an excellent tool to help coaches of junior or senior players develop their squash skills and tactics.

If you are interested in subscribing to this excellent resource you can register with Squash Victoria at:

<http://www.squashvic.com.au/>

Squash Games Website

Looking for new coaching ideas? This website (see link below) provides squash coaches with a range of games that can be used to liven up your coaching sessions.

<http://www.squashgame.info/squashlibrary/13/56>

Squash Waikato Coach Development Day

Squash Waikato are holding their inaugural coach development day next month, for coaches in the Waikato region.

They have kindly extended an invitation to Auckland District coaches as well. If you would like to attend please email the Squash Waikato Development Officer Sharon Hema on email: sharonh@sportsforce.org.nz



Discovery Squash Beginners Programme is Launched

In July Squash Ak launched a squash programme for beginners. Called Discovery Squash, the programme involves 6 one hour coaching sessions for players who are new to the game wanting to learn the fundamental shots and basic tactics of squash.

The programme content covers the grip, swing, 6 basic shots of squash and some fundamental movement skills.

Posters and flyers are available to help your club promote the programme.

Discovery Squash is a great way to introduce prospective new members to your club. It is also a great way to help you and your club earn extra revenue.

If you would like to run a programme at your club you can contact Steve Hodges at Squash Auckland on 623 7856



The Challenge of Attracting Women to Coaching

A perennial dilemma for most sports—squash included—is the scarcity of women coaches. Numerous theories abound, but solutions remain allusive.

A review of the statistics of qualified coaches in the Squash Auckland region highlights the problem in attracting women to coaching.

Of the 22 coaches qualified to level 1 since February 2007 only

3 (14%) were female. During this period no females have gone on to qualify to level 2.

In an attempt to address this imbalance Squash Auckland introduced its Women in Squash programme in 2008. Primarily designed to encourage adult women to take up squash, the programme was also designed to provide a vehicle for female squash players to try coaching.

A review of the statistics suggest positive progress is being made.

On the first level 1 coaching course of 2009 8 (53%) of the participants were women. This was the highest number of women attending a Squash Auckland run coaching course since 2007. Equally importantly 50% of the women in squash programmes run to date have involved female coaches.

Mini Squash—Innovation in Junior Squash Development

The idea of modifying sports to cater for the physical attributes of younger players is not new. Many sports including tennis with its grasshoppers programme, soccer—small whites, AFL—Aus Kick and many other sports have recognized the value of modifying their playing areas, equipment, and rules to allow younger athletes to achieve success early.

Over the past 12 months Squash Auckland has been promoting its own modified version of the sport. Called Mini Squash the programme incorporates a 3 stage approach to the development of young players.

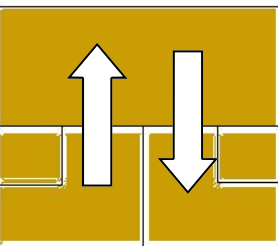
SYSTEM BASICS

Here is the basic progression. Levels are colour-coded for easy recognition

Step # 1: Mini Squash

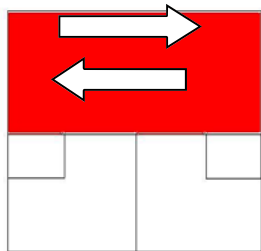
FUNDation: (Red) 5–6 yrs

Designed to be played in a school sports hall or gym using throw down lines, chalk, tape, etc to mark the court boundary. Can be played in the front half of a squash court but against the side



wall using the front wall as the boundary.

The focus at this level is on the use of fun games to teach the basics of athletic development (Agility, Speed, Balance, Coordination).



Step # 2: Mini Squash Improver (Orange) 7– 9 yrs

At this level players are introduced to the full court.

Players continue to use mini squash rackets and either blue squash balls or the larger yellow sponge balls.

Stage # 3: Mini Squash PRO (Green) 9–11 yrs

This is the final stage and prepares children for the full game.

After graduating from the PRO Mini Squash level 10–11 year olds would be able to successfully use a full court and regular balls and play in regular full court competition.

The benefit of the Mini Squash system is that it allows players to play quickly and successfully. In Mini Squash the philosophy is that squash is a great and fun game to play and the quicker and more skillfully a player can play the more fun it is. Each programme has not only modified equipment to aid success, but particular skills to develop as well. It is recommended a Game-Based-Approach be used.

The coaches job is to get them to play, and help them to play better.

Competition or Development for Young Players: What's Best?

This is a question that has challenged the mind of many a coach. Should we be focused on producing champion junior players who win lots of tournaments and trophies, and bring prestige to our club, or should we be spending more time on developing the skills and tactics of young players and removing them from competition in their formative years?

One argument for keeping the focus on development is the example of the Williams sisters in tennis. Their father Richard played a key role in keeping the pressure off them in their formative years— forbidding them from playing in junior tournaments from the age of 12–14. One theory is that this allowed them to adopt a greater risk taking attitude to their game, which has carried onto their senior years.

Equally importantly the lack of tournament pressure allowed them to develop a variety of skills unhindered by the need to win the next tournament match.

Coaching Female Athletes

For those who are currently coaching or intend to coach female players it is important to be aware of the communication and leadership differences between males and females.

These differences have implications for the way a coach structures a session, communicates with the athletes

and motivates them to achieve optimal performance.

For men coaching women this can be particularly challenging. For example where men traditionally adopt a competitive approach to training and playing women on the other hand respond more effectively to a cooperative approach. This is an important consideration when

we look for ways to attract and retain females in the sport.

Check out the following link for more information on this topic.

2003.<http://scienceofcoachingsquash.files.wordpress.com/2007/09/optimalcoachingfemale.pdf>

Train Situations not Strokes

One area of coaching that tends to get overlooked in the rush by coaches to improve a players technique—is tactics.

Good tactical play improves players game intelligence. Simply focusing on individual techniques (straight drives, boasts, lobs, etc) does little to improve the players perception, anticipation and decision making skills.

Coaching needs to reflect the fact that squash is a very tactical game and players need to be taught the fundamentals of good decision making early in their career.

Here are a few ideas of how a squash coach might go about teaching a tactics fist approach.

Choose a tactical theme or context—or pose a tactical

Problem to be solved.

Examples: a) “you have forced your opponent to boast to the front”, or b) “your opponent has trapped you in the back and is on the “T” volleying all your shots”.

Develop and start the training session with a “conditioned game that forces the players to deal with the tactical context.

Examples: a) start a game with the server boasting from the back and the returner on the “T”, or b) the server serves from the mid-court with a drive that comes off the back and tries to stay on the “T” by volleying—the returner can drive hard or lob from the back.

After 5-10 minutes, stop and briefly ask the player questions (open or guiding if necessary) to a) determine the best tactical options in the game, b) evaluate

the effectiveness of their technique (shots, movement, etc)

Examples: a) did you win more points by dropping or driving the boast? Was it better to drop straight or cross court? Which are better— your forehand or backhand drops in the front?, or b) was it easier for your opponent to volley the hard drives or lobs? Which shot gave you the most time to take the “T” in front? Are your straight or cross court lobs better?

If necessary , develop and use “closed drills to work on technique for about 20 min. Using this model: i) drill skill 1; ii) drill skill 2; iii) alternate skills; iv) randomise skills. During drilling question players about and reinforce good decisions and tactics as well as technique.

Example: a) i) backhand drop

off a boast, ii) backhand cross-court drive off boast in front, Iii) alternate; iv) give player a choice.

Return to the original game, reinforcing technique & tactics primarily through short questioning & reminders. Finish with a game with no conditions to test players learning.

Mental Training for Players

Check this link out for useful ideas on how to help your players gain a mental edge as part of their training.

<http://www.oncourtassessment.com/beginner-players/2.%20Mental%20training%20for%20beginner%20tennis/player.html>

Racketball as a Learning Tool for Beginner Squash Players

From a pedagogical, tactical, fitness, social and development perspective, there are good reasons for coaches to integrate Racketball into their coaching activities.

As the easiest to learn racquet sport, due to the slow, relatively high-bouncing nature of the ball and the relatively large racket face, coaches should seriously consider Racketball as a learning tool for both young and new learners.

Play Like an Egyptian

In researching stories for this newsletter I came across an interesting article about deception in squash.

In the article the author (A high level professional squash coach) bemoaned the lack of ability of a lot of the western worlds top players to be able to play deceptive shots under match conditions.

The problem according to the author was that coaches in many of the highly developed countries such as England and Australia are told that players are only to be taught how to play deceptive shots once they have mastered

the basic strokes.

It appears this is particularly prevalent in the English and Australian style of game with its focus on a grinding, attritional, fitness based tactical style. In contrast the Pakistanis and Egyptians emphasize a skillful, touch-oriented playing style.

Early in their development junior players from Pakistan and Egypt are taught and encouraged to play attacking, deceptive, squash and scrambling, retrieving, and anticipating skills around the court early in their development.

In fact coaches in Egypt spend a minimum of 20% of their time on coaching players shot making and deception skills.

The effectiveness of the Egyptian approach is evidenced by their recent results:

2003—World Junior women’s champions
2008— World Women’s Champions

What are the implications for New Zealand players trying to succeed on the world stage?

Is it time to adopt a more innovative approach to coaching junior players?