

# SQUASH

50<sup>th</sup> YEAR

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## TAKING SQUASH

# OUT OF COURT

**OPINION:** Editor Ian McKenzie suggests squash's future prosperity may lie in developing a single-wall game to widen access to our sport

Squash has missed the boat. We have had a great opportunity and we have squandered it. We have been handed the heritage of hundreds of years of rebound ball sports, but we've been insular, purist and unimaginative, and now we're in decline. We have been keen to regulate, but have failed to innovate.

Squash had the chance to usurp the rebound sport territory and become leader of a serious group of sports (such as aqua sports or roller sports). Instead, our brilliant rebound ball sport has remained trapped within the confines of our exclusive courts.

Over 150 years ago, boys at Harrow School loved games and were inventive. Whilst they waited for their turn on the rackets court (rackets, for the uninitiated, is an elite sport played on a court twice the size of a squash court with a hard ball that approaches golf ball speeds) they had a knockaround on the walls in the courtyard with a new rubber ball. Such were the beginnings of squash – simple, inventive, adaptive and fun.



In essence in squash we have a rebound ball sport. It is one of the things we do with balls. We throw them, we catch them, we kick them, we hit them with hands, bats, paddles and rackets – and we rebound them off walls.

Rebounding is included in real tennis (the original racket sport), fives, handball, rackets, paddle, racquetball (US version) and racketball/Squash57, amongst others. Squash really should sit at the head of this 'rebound sport family'.

Imagine if we had gone to the IOC and demonstrated that there are millions

of kids and adults having fun by hitting balls against walls all over the world. We didn't. The IOC preferred breakdancing because it would have more resonance with young people. Did they really get it wrong? Would an example like Street Racket (opposite) or Wall Squash (below) have helped persuade the committee that squash holds wider appeal too?

All gyms, sports halls and buildings have walls and there's plenty of fun to be had hitting balls against them. Look at the brilliant innovations that showed up during the pandemic lockdown. Let's harness that innovation and develop it for an easy, inexpensive, accessible rebound ball sport – Wall Squash.

When people have tried that and enjoyed it, it might just be the catalyst to seek out the more traditional four walls on offer at their local 'proper' squash facility.

Court Squash is the competitive pinnacle of our sport. The question is, can we take squash out of the court and make it completely accessible for everyone?

### WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS!

How can squash extend its reach beyond the walls of its clubs? How can Wall Squash widen the sport's participation base?

Email [editor@squashplayer.co.uk](mailto:editor@squashplayer.co.uk)

## HOW WOULD 'WALL SQUASH' WORK?



**OPINION:** Workshop contributor Phillip Marlowe offers a blueprint for 'Wall Squash' – and how it may help rescue our struggling sport

The pandemic has shown us that people want to play squash, but with facilities closed, they couldn't. So what did they do? They went outside and used any wall they could find. Was it supposed to replace squash on a proper court? Of course not. However, is there a lesson for the sport that can be taken from these innovations?

The question I now have is, if the 'ideal' court is not available, can we innovate a simpler, adaptable version of the game for a single wall or perhaps walls? Could these impromptu, modified squash games be a feeder system for the sport, or could Wall Squash stand up as an acceptable 'cousin' of court squash?

If we can agree on some starting 'court' dimensions and basic rules, then with nothing more than a racket and chalk we can get people playing – rather like Street Racket have done (see opposite page).

We need squash rackets, a single yellow or red dot ball and a front wall which doesn't even need to be flat. If there are some bumps that make the ball rebound unexpectedly – that's all part of the fun!

The game needs to be able to be played on one wall with side walls and backwall optional (in fact, they may significantly limit our options). Lines on the ground are absolutely required. Without them, it's just a 'knockabout', but with them it becomes a 'game' with rules and scoring.

Perhaps we could use a racket's length as the guide because that way everybody can mark them out: I propose the 'tin' be one racket length above the ground. A front wall can be any height and width, with a rectangle on the ground (four to 10 rackets wide by eight to 15 rackets long) so we have an 'in' and 'out'. The server has to have their foot touching the 'out' line at the back. Let's experiment with variations until we find a suitable range.

The next chance I get, I'm going to find a wall and start trying various sizes of ground lines. I am tired of waiting for governing bodies to generate renewed interest in squash. I want people to be able to play and I want people to be able to play now! Let's get experimenting.



# TAKING TO THE STREETS

*Getting rackets in hands is the first step to solving squash's participation crisis. Mike Dale meets Marcel Straub who's doing just that through his revolutionary Street Racket concept*

**So much of squash's current participation crisis boils down to numbers: players, courts, coaches, advocates, sponsors, money, publicity... there's simply not enough of any of the ingredients needed for the game to grow.**

We know squash is a fabulous game, but the barriers to people discovering it are numerous – not least getting people to enter a (dark, sweaty, expensive, members-only, elitist) squash club in the first place.

Marcel Straub, a former Swiss squash international, has invented an accessible and addictive form of racket sport which kindles people's love for the game – and hopefully their desire to find their nearest court.

Street Racket consists of over 400 games that can be played solo, in pairs or larger groups, up against a wall or on a flat surface, on courts marked out in seconds with paint or chalk.

In a typical Street Racket game, played with a bespoke padel-sized racket and bouncy ball, the striker tries to hit into his or her opponent's zone, or hit targets on a wall or floor. To create long rallies, volleys and downward shots are not allowed, but that aside, there are few rules.

There is lots of movement, development of motor skills and intensity and complexity of the games can be adapted so every player finds the right level of challenge. The Street Racket mantra is 'anyone – anytime – anywhere'.

An example from their large (and expanding) catalogue of games is to draw nine numbers in squares on a wall and below it on the floor. That creates many competitive or cooperative variations, for example both players try to hit each number rising in sequence, or one player hits any number and his opponent then tries to match it.

Many games take place in Street Racket's



signature 'Swiss court' (with square zones arranged in a cross-shape). Four players each stand in a different square and hit the ball into the other sections. The squares can be coloured and as each player hits, they call out a colour for the next person to hit into. It's simple and fun, yet tests cognition, quick-thinking and skill execution.

Straub tells *Squash Player*: "I want more people in the world to get motivated to step into a squash court, but they will only do that once they see that racket sports are fun and that they can do it – then they want to know more and do it again.

"Our game is about fun, hand-eye coordination, movement and control. You get long rallies, it's never about hard hitting and it doesn't disturb the neighbours!" It is sustainable, versatile and can be used in schools and universities to enhance academic learning, with elements of maths, language or general knowledge included.

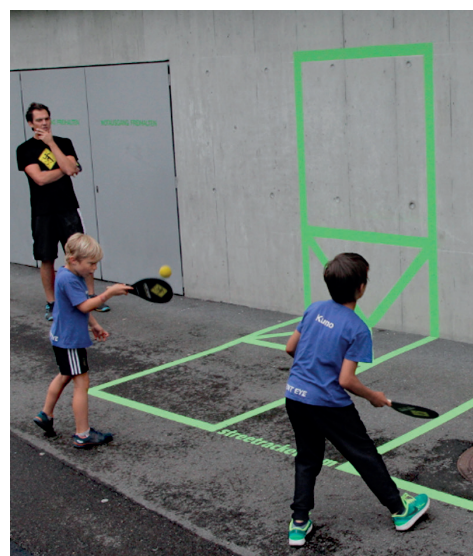
Straub (former head of school PE for the city of Zurich) and his wife and co-founder Rahel have made rapid progress in embedding the concept in schools and universities across Switzerland and Germany. There are 2000 permanently painted courts and 80 trained coaches in Swiss schools, villages and workplaces.

Street Racket is played in 30 countries including America, New Zealand, Pakistan, India, Iran and most of Europe. Advocates include Dutch football legend Marco van Basten. Lars Harms, Switzerland's former world No.41 squash player, called Street Racket "the perfect grassroots approach and an amazing barrier-free concept" giving federations of all racket sports "a magnificent tool at hand to look to a brighter future".

Straub, who grew up in the squash club his parents built, became a PE teacher and was troubled that racket sports were delivered so badly in schools, with cumbersome equipment which took ages to set up

and lots of 'dead time' fetching balls or standing still.

It was whilst doing charity work promoting table tennis in a developing country that Straub had his brainwave. With no tables, money or infrastructure, he was forced to innovate, use any surface and take the sport into the streets.



He started Street Racket as a hobby, then he and Rahel quit lucrative jobs to promote it full-time. With four kids, he admits it was a "big leap" and Covid-19 hasn't helped, but he is utterly determined to make it a success.

"What we've got is a dynamic, grassroots approach to racket sports," he says. "Street Racket is a great way of starting a lifelong love of the game."

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