

LETTER FROM AMERICA



James Zug interviews Englishman Mark Allen about hosting the 2018 World Masters Squash Championships in the U.S.

The world's largest adult squash tournament, the World Masters, is coming to the United States this summer and it is being hosted by an Englishman.

It is fitting that Mark Allen, 46, is the director for the global event. Allen grew up in Colchester, Essex, led England to victory at the 1990 World Junior Championships in Germany and reached world no.41.

After earning a degree at Nottingham University, Allen coached on three continents.

He taught in Guernsey, then came to the U.S. to work at Potomac School in northern Virginia, the Bay Club in San Francisco and Meadow Mill in Baltimore. He subsequently spent six years in Cape Town, teaching at the Western Province Cricket Club and marrying a South African. He and Tracy have two children, Daniel and Jayden.

Just under five years ago, Allen moved from Cape Town to Charlottesville, Virginia, a small city about a hundred miles south west of Washington, DC. He took up a position at Boar's Head Sports Club, a 600-acre historic resort which was opening a new squash facility. The McArthur Squash Center is a 35,000 square-foot building with 13 glass-backed singles courts, two hardball doubles courts and a four-wall blue-and-orange glass showcourt. The facility has state-of-the-art audio/visual systems and boasts a beautiful, deeply-researched display on the history of squash.

Besides teaching at Boar's Head, Allen is

the head coach of the University of Virginia's squash teams (the university owns Boar's Head). Squash has a long history at UVA. Its first courts were donated in the 1930s by Lady Nancy Astor, a Virginia native and the first woman to be a Member of Parliament. When Allen arrived, the Cavaliers' women's team were ranked 26th in the nation and the men were 36th; this season they are ranked 13th and 14th. And there is more to come – Allen is recruiting players from around the world, including Barbados, Brazil, Hong Kong and South Africa. Academics are a core part of the program. Two years ago, one of Allen's players was named a Rhodes Scholar.

At Boar's Head, Allen has hosted numerous pro singles and doubles tournaments, as well as three straight U.S. National Singles and one U.S. Women's Team Championship. In July the World Squash Federation-sanctioned World Masters comes. This will be the 25th staging of the event. It was originally started in London in 1976 and has been held in 10 different countries, but never before in the U.S.

Two years ago, 950 players entered the World Masters in Johannesburg and Allen is expecting a similar amount in Charlottesville. So far more than 300 men and women have signed up. The list already looks like a United Nations festival: they come from Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Chile, England, Finland, France, Hong Kong China, India, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan,

Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Wales and Zimbabwe.

Allen has tweaked the format to help improve the event. He has organized a special three-day pre-tournament stint in Washington, DC, where players can practise at a prep school and explore the nation's capital. In Charlottesville women's and men's draws will be staggered, so the draws will be more compact (no more rest days for women) and all days will be divided into two halves, so that players can plan off-campus excursions in advance. Thus, players can go to Monticello, for example, or simply enjoy Boar's Head's spa, golf course, swimming pools, tennis courts and on-property hiking, biking and fishing opportunities.

The World Masters will be a lot of squash: three-fourths of all players will play in at least four matches over the week and in most draws players will play out for the top 16 finishing positions.

“ Allen said: “There are many aspects of WM2018 that I'm really looking forward to, but right at the top of the list is the opportunity to host and hang out with many old friends, acquaintances and squash rivals from the many places around the world I have played and coached in, including the UK, South Africa and even the west coast of the United States.”