

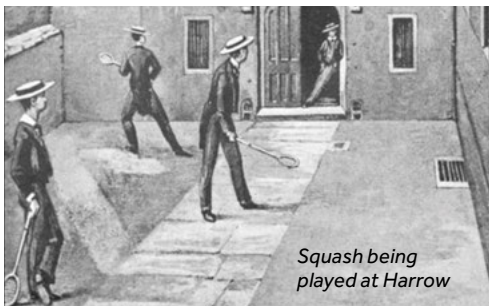
TAKING SQUASH OUT OF COURT

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.

The challenge is to make an indoor and outdoor game reflecting squash which is easily accessible to all with minimum expense, using facilities that are already there.

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

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.