

## ***The History of Squash in Ten and a Half Chapters***

*By James Zug*

### **I. Before Squash**

The game of squash was invented more than a century and a half ago in England.

Its origins are in the ancient game of real tennis. Ball games have been pastimes for thousands of years. Egyptians, Greeks, Mayans, Native Americans, Romans—most civilizations featured games with balls.

A millennium ago in France, children played in the narrow streets of their villages. They slapped balls along the awnings or roofs that lined streets or into shop windows and door openings. Eventually called *jeu de paume* (game of the palm), this was a rudimentary sport. The balls were a patch of leather or cloth with dog hair sewn, sawdust, sand or moss sewn inside. In time these street games became more formalized. Monks played in cloistered courtyards. Players extended their hands by picking up a stumpy stick, a branch of a tree, a shepherd's crook. During the late fifteenth century the Dutch invented the racquet and the game, particularly on enclosed, purpose-built courts, expanded. It became the national sport of a dozen European states, with thousands of courts springing up. In Paris in 1600 there were at least two hundred and fifty courts.

The British called it tennis. Tudor kings loved the game—Henry VIII built courts at all his palaces. Today there are nearly fifty active real tennis courts in the world and a vibrant population of aficionados.

Lawn tennis, as played at Wimbledon, was invented in 1873 as an outdoor version of real tennis.

In the early eighteenth century, prisoners at the Fleet, a London's debtor's gaol, created a simplified version of real tennis. Called racquets, it involved no more than smacking a ball against one or two walls. The ball, similar in size and weight to a golf ball, was made from wound cloth; the racquet was a stretched tennis bat. Soon racquets spread across Great Britain as an outdoor pastime: workingmen played in tavern yards and alleys and schoolboys played outside their classrooms.

Britons started building racquets courts, unadorned, roofless, usually just one or two stone walls and a paving stone floor. Inclement weather drove players toward a court with a roof. In 1830 the Royal Artillery built the first known covered racquets court at their Woolwich depot. The Marylebone Cricket Club, the home of cricket, built one in 1844 next to their real tennis court at Lords.

Racquets spread all around the world. The first covered rackets court in Canada was put in Halifax in the seventeen-seventies; in India in 1821; Australia in 1847. In 1793 Robert Knox, a Scot, put up the first covered court in America on Allen Street, between Hester and Canal, in lower Manhattan. A few years later the Allen Street court had a nearby rival that was called, due to the predominant profession of its membership, the Butcher's Court. Today you can find remnants of old racquets courts in Buenos Aires, Burma, Gibraltar, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Melbourne, Pakistan and St. Lucia. Today there are three-dozen racquets courts in Canada, England and the U.S.

Alongside racquets, another nineteenth-century English ball-and-wall sport was equally popular. Named for the five fingers of the hand, this traditional version of handball was more or less the game of racquets but without the racquet. Fives was common at English public schools. More than a dozen variants derived their standards from quirky spots on campus where boys originally played. Eton fives, for example, emerged from the pale stone

buttresses outside the Eton school chapel. There is also Warminster fives, Winchester fives, Clifton fives, St. John's fives, etc., all named after the school that invented it. Like racquets, fives spread around the globe, with purpose-built courts in Australia, Brazil, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and Switzerland.

Rugby fives, created at Rugby School (where the sport of rugby football also was started), had an unadorned court twenty-eight feet by eighteen, with side walls that sloped towards the back wall and a two and a half foot tin on the front wall. A Rugby fives court looks suspiciously like a modern squash court—for good reason.

## **II.Harrow**

The combination of racquets and fives sparked the creation of squash. It occurred at Harrow School, a prestigious English public school outside London.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Harrow boys were addicted to racquets. The chief place to play at Harrow was in the yard outside the main school building. One special nook there, the so-called Corner, had two good side walls and a front wall with a buttress which dropped the ball straight down and a water pipe that might send it anywhere. If the Corner was busy, boys used the stone-walled yards at their boarding houses or village alleys. The Harrow yards and alleys, like the Corner, boasted peculiar hazards: pipes, chimneys, ledges, doors, foot-scrapers, wired windows and fiendishly sloping ground.

Technology intervened. The first patent for the vulcanization of rubber was issued in 1845. Within a few years, balls made of rubber became available. Instead of using the bullet-hard racquets ball, Harrow boys began substituting a larger, slower, hollow rubber ball when they played in their yards and alleys. This bastardized version of racquets was called "baby racquets" or "soft racquets" or "softer." (In those days the word "racquets" was always spelled with a "qu.") Baby racquets was perfect for the young Harrow boys.

On 20 January 1865 Harrow officially opened a new complex of racquets and fives courts. The boys loved the new racquets court (it is still in use at Harrow). The fives courts had a mixed reception. The four new Eton fives courts immediately were filled with activity, but the four new Rugby fives courts never saw much fives play. Instead, boys jumped on there and played their new game of baby racquets.

And this game became the game of squash.

Why did "baby racquets" become "squash?" The Latin root, *exquasser*, means "to shake out." Although an onomatopoeic explanation could make sense—the word squash could possibly refer to the sound that a rubber ball makes when it smashes against a stone wall—the more logical reason relates to a curious Harrow custom. At the same time that Harrow boys were inventing a new form of racquets, they employed a rough-and-tumble version of democracy. Once a year in the main yard, the entire school gathered. Each student voted for the school's cricket keeper (or student coach). After each vote, the rest of the students would kick, cuff and push the voter. This would last an hour and was more or less a general melee. The election was called squash.

## **III.England**

In the beginning, squash was a Harrow game. Much like other public schools and their idiosyncratic sports (like the Eton wall game), it only existed at their school. The boys continued to play in their yards and alleys, as well as in the fives courts. In fact they sometimes called the game "Rugby squash" or "Rugby squash racquets" because it was so often played in the Rugby fives courts.

From the first, the game enchanted. It captured the imagination. The Euclidean violence of the dark ball pin-balling from wall to wall, the chess-like strategies and tactics, the

gladiatorial, one-on-one nature of the game, the wisdom of finesse versus the flattery of pure power—squash was addictive. The four courts were constantly in use. Shops in the town of Harrow sold new and used squash balls and racquets.

And so it spread. On holidays, Harrow boys packed home balls and racquets. After they graduated, they created courts. Somerville Gibney, Harrow class of 1867 and his brother Gerald, 1868, built a court in a stable loft at their home in Lincoln. Gurney Buxton, Harrow 1882, put a wooden one at Catton Hall in Norwich for a cost of £360—his was first squash court to be depicted in print when an 1890 book ran two pages of its architectural drawings. (It was forty feet by twenty-three and a third.) In 1883 Vernon Harcourt, Harrow 1855, erected one at his home along the Cherwell in Oxford. It was thirty-eight feet by twenty, made of wood, with a tin of thirty inches. Harcourt played with a black ball, a red ball and ball with a hole in it. Several other private houses became adorned with a squash court; the remnants of one, built in the late 1880s by the Holland-Hibbert family at their estate, Munden, in Hertfordshire, are still evident today.

Other English public schools with five courts, notably Elstree and Rugby, picked it up. Squash made its way to London. Lord's added a court when it erected a pavilion in 1890. Four years later the Bath Club, under the leadership of Lord Desborough, an old Harrovian, put in several courts. In 1905 Queens Club erected two courts. In 1911 the Royal Automobile Club put in three squash courts in the basement of their new clubhouse on Pall Mall. Moreover, squash went up north with the Aberdeen Squash Racquets Club opening in 1908.

In these early years, with no official standards, the courts at clubs varied as much as the ones at private homes. At Lord's, the squash court was forty-two feet by twenty-four, with a twenty-eight inch tin; at Cambridge they divided a sixty by thirty racquets court into three squash courts, each quite tiny; one court at the RAC was exactly thirty-two by eighteen and a half—the size more common in America; Marlborough House, a royal residence, also had an American width until the mid-thirties; one court at Queens was dubbed the Long Court because it thirty-five feet by eighteen. Both the Lord's and Bath courts had electricity, which meant they could be used at night or on rainy days.

After the First World War, the Bath Club built two beautiful courts that had outstanding lighting and in 1922 launched the Bath Club Cup, a squash league for London clubs that greatly increased enthusiasm for the fledgling sport. (It was hard at first: that inaugural season saw players contend with six different court sizes and five different balls.)

Administratively, squash had a slow start in Great Britain. In April 1907 the Tennis, Rackets & Fives Association was founded at Queen's and formed a squash sub-committee. In 1909 this sub-committee issued a preliminary set of rules. Court length and width was considered a matter of local opinion. Cement or stone were preferred to wood for the materials of the court. Two types of balls were the best: "What is required is a fast ball that bounces well but not too high, and does not fly about: a very small hard solid ball or a medium-size thin rubber hollow ball, without a hole." As far as the rules of play were concerned, the sub-committee recommended flexibility. Serving could be either one serve or two, courts could have a cut line on the front wall or not and most delightfully, the man returning could have the right of "refusing a service he does not like."

The sub-committee had no power to enforce its recommendations and another eleven years passed without any official decree on standards. In January 1923 the Royal Automobile Club hosted a meeting of delegates from English clubs where squash was played and formed a "Squash Rackets Representative Committee." The committee chose the slowest of the half dozen different kinds of balls then in vogue as the standard ball and declared the Bath Club court, thirty two by twenty-one feet, as the standard for English squash.

In December 1928 the Squash Rackets Association (now England Squash) was formed to run squash in Great Britain. The SRA immediately began slowing the ball down further. While

the Bath courts served as the model for English squash, the Bath ball, similar to an American ball, was deemed far too large and fast for English sensibilities. Between 1930 and 1934 in a series of incremental changes, the association cut the standard ball's speed almost by half.

#### **IV.U.S.**

The first squash court in North America appeared at St. Paul's School in New Hampshire in 1884. Jay Conover, an avid racquets player, had attended Columbia University in New York with Hyde Clark, a graduate of Harrow. Clark had told Conover about an enjoyable adaptation of racquets that was popular at his alma mater. Conover's four squash courts, built outside a building that contained two racquets courts, were open to the air. Any pupil who annually paid one dollar could use them.

Like in England, the game slowly moved from boarding school to city club. In 1889, the Boston Athletic Association built a fives court, which was soon used for squash. In 1900 the Racquet Club of Philadelphia put in a wooden fives court high in the rafters of the half story in the three and one-half story clubhouse. It measured thirty-one feet by seventeen and a half. Instead of playing fives, the members played squash there. In 1902, Jimmy Potter, a St. Paul's graduate and president of the club, divided a racquets courts into three squash courts. Each court measured thirty-one and a half feet by seventeen and a half and was made of cement, except for a wooden front wall.

Parented by the Racquet Club, squash quickly dispersed around Philadelphia and by 1903 it offered a cup for the winner of a six-club league competition and hosted a Pennsylvania state championship. In 1904 the leaders of the inter-club league founded the United States Squash Racquets Association. The USSRA (now US Squash) set the standard squash court measurements at thirty-one and a half feet by sixteen feet three inches, with a twenty-four inch tin. Scoring was originally first-to-fifteen, hand-in, hand-out (like racquets) and best two of three games.

In 1907 the USSRA ran its first men's national championship. The next year Boston sent a team to the nationals, evidence of the spread of squash beyond Philadelphia. Four years later the USSRA changed the scoring rules to best three out of five, and one could score a point whether serving or not. In 1920 the USSRA changed its standard to thirty-two feet by eighteen and one-half.

By the 1920s, the world figured out there was a problem. Just like its parent games of racquets and fives, squash had developed different, unstandardized versions around the world. Squash coalesced around two versions: the twenty-one foot court popularized by England and called softball and the eighteen-and-a-half foot court in North America called hardball.

For the next seventy years there were two types of squash, softball on a wide court and hardball on a narrow court. It was analogous to tennis, with clay, grass and hard courts. The division persisted until the 1980s in Canada and the early 1990s in the U.S. and Mexico, when North America switched from hardball to softball. Today there are still more than a thousand hardball courts in North America, but the world finally plays the same game.

#### **V.Global**

Squash appeared in a tremendous variety of guises in countries around the world.

Asia was one of the first places to get courts. In 1898 the Chiangmai Gymkhana Club built a court made of teak wood. The first courts in what is now Pakistan were built in 1901 at the Peshawar Club, when a racquets court was converted. The first courts in India probably were at the Bombay Gymkhana Club, when their 1882 racquets court was converted to squash.

The first bonafide court in Canada appears to have been built in 1904 at the St. John's Tennis Club in Newfoundland. Sir Leonard Outerbridge, whose two brothers were on the club's building committee, sent the proper dimensions from Marlborough College in England where he was studying. The dimensions were of a Rugby fives court, with no back wall. In 1911 three clubs, the Montreal Racquet Club, the Toronto Racquet Club and the Hamilton Squash Racquets Club, formed the Canadian Squash Racquets Association (now Squash Canada) and hosted the first national amateur championships. It soon standardized a thirty-four by nineteen court (with a twenty-two inch tin). In 1921 the CSRA made formal application to the USSRA for affiliation and a year later switched to the American standards.

In 1906 the Country Club Johannesburg built an open-air court that was wider than the American size and four years later began hosting a national championship. The Sudan Club in Khartoum had six courts, all unroofed. Government House in Dar es Salaam boasted a fine, open-air court, with a stone floor. In Kenya the Nairobi Club had two English standard courts made from knotless cedar, but the Muthiaga Club nearby had stone floors and an American width.

In Stockholm the first courts were made with walls of powdered marble. In France the first courts were at the Societe Sportive du Jeu de Paume, where in the late nineteen-twenties Pierre Etchebaster turned a real tennis court into four tiny squash courts, each with a cement floor. In 1930 Siemens built four courts at its electronics factory in Berlin. The Irish amateur championships began in 1931; Scottish in 1935; the Danish and Swedish in 1936; the French in 1937; Welsh and Maltese in 1938; and the Dutch in 1940.

In the Antipodes, squash quickly became a popular sport. New Zealand played in an English court with an American ball, a combination that was not resolved until the thirties. In 1913 a racquets court at the Melbourne Club was split into two squash courts. In 1927 the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club built a court that was nearly as big as a racquets court. In 1934 the Squash Rackets Association of Australia was formed and three years later both Victoria and New South Wales formed their own state associations.

The St. James's Barracks in Port of Spain, Trinidad had one open-air, concrete-floored court that was American-sized in width. Bermuda also saw its first courts, built at private homes as well as at the navy's base on Ireland Island and the garrison at Prospect.

## **VI. Post-War**

Squash reached a tipping point in the aftermath of the Second World War. Wherever more courts were built and more courts were accessible, it blossomed.

Egypt was a great example of an ex-British colony taking to the game. In the 1930s the Egyptian ambassador to Great Britain in London, Abdel Fattah Amr Bey, claimed six British Opens as well as the inaugural Egyptian championships. After the war, more Egyptians joined expatriates on court in Cairo and Alexandria, and British Open champions like Mahmoud Karim in the 1940s and A. A. Abou Taleb in the 1960s continued the winning tradition. But the real renaissance came in 1996 when Egypt's leading newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, sponsored a men's glass-court tournament at the Pyramids of Giza. When local Ahmed Barada reached the finals amidst tremendous media attention, there was an explosion of interest in the game, leading directly to today's dominance by Egypt's professionals.

Likewise, Pakistan was another sleeping squash giant that awoke because of one man's achievements in a tournament. Hashim Khan stunned the world by winning the 1951 British Open and became a national hero. In the 1960s the Pakistan Air Force Squash Centre opened in Peshawar and a renovated and public Punjab Club opened in Lahore; and later the PIA Squash Complex opened in Karachi. The Khan family dynasty included a number of world champions including the greatest player ever, Jahangir Khan, but the dozens of other top players emerged from Pakistan, which spoke to the widespread popularity of the game and

governmental support. With less than forty courts in the country at Partition in 1947, Pakistan had more than four hundred thirty years later.

In the 1950s Australia experienced a boom of commercial squash clubs. This led to two generations of men and women champions, in particular Heather McKay. It was apparent early. In the early 1960s Australian men won every international match in two tours of England, and in London in 1964 Australian women beat Great Britain in their first international match.

In the twenty years after the end of the Second World War, the game of squash spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Kenya, Greece and Jersey inaugurated their national amateur championships in 1947; Thailand in 1948; Hong Kong and Uganda in 1949; Guernsey in 1950; India in 1953; Mauritius in 1956; Zimbabwe in 1957; Hong Kong in 1961; Gibraltar in 1962; Bermuda and Zambia in 1964; and Bahamas and Ghana in 1965.

## **VII. World Squash Federation**

In January 1967 representatives from seven nations (Australia, Great Britain, Egypt, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa) met in London and formed the International Squash Rackets Federation. Later that year Australia hosted the first ISRF men's championships. In 1969 the U.S. and Canada were admitted, despite the different standard of play in North America. Five nations came to the world championships in South Africa in 1973; ten to England in 1975 and fourteen to Australia in 1979. In 1980 the ISRF opened their championships to professionals and organized, in Sweden, the first world junior championships.

In 1992 the ISRF changed its name to the World Squash Federation.

Today the WSF has nearly one hundred and fifty member nations. It is recognized as the governing body for the sport by the International Olympic Committee. The WSF is responsible for the rules of the game, refereeing and coaching standards and specifications for equipment including racquets, balls, courts and eyewear. In addition, the WSF maintains and organizes a calendar of world championship events for men, women, juniors and masters players in both singles and doubles; as well as regular coaching and refereeing conferences. A critical part of the WSF mandate is its leadership of the sport's anti-doping program.

The WSF has been integral to the acceptance of squash as a medal sport in multi-sport international competitions. The Olympics are next. Squash has been shortlisted three times for inclusion in the Olympic Games, and the WSF continues to lead the campaign to have squash a part of the Olympic program.

As a major force behind the development and growth of squash, the World Squash Federation is at the forefront of many exciting aspects of the game today.

## **VIII. Pro Squash**

Professionalism has always been the shop window of squash, but it took decades before that window was bright and inviting.

Pro squash began hesitatingly with small tournaments and two-men challenge events. The first bonafide professional tournament in the world was held in Philadelphia in 1904, with just six entries. In 1916 Jock Soutar, the world champion in racquets, was crowned professional champion of America after he beat Bill Ganley two matches to one in a three-leg, two-city contest. Soutar won \$1,000. Ganley won nothing. Four years later Soutar defended his title against Otto Glockler.

In 1928 a group of American teaching pros formed the United States Professional Squash Racquets Association (the original forerunner of today's Professional Squash Association) and two years later the USPSRA organized its first national tournament in Boston.

In other countries, pro squash also took a long while to solidify. In Great Britain, the grandly-named Professional Championships of the British Isles was started in 1920 and the men's British Open in 1930. Until 1948 both events were two-man challenge tournaments, a home-and-home played at two different London clubs on two different days. (The Professional Championships ended after 1961.)

After the Second World War, matters improved. The Australian Open, started in 1939, was revived in 1947. The next year the Scottish Open was launched and the British Open moved to the Lansdowne Club—with a knockout draw, the British Open established itself as the world's leading pro event, the so-called Wimbledon of squash. In 1954 the U.S. Open was started in New York; in 1966 it amalgamated with a newer Canadian Open to form the North American Open and the U.S. Open only reappeared in 1985. India started a professional championship in 1953 and the Egyptian Open was started in 1958.

By the 1970s enough events existed that teaching pros were able to leave their clubs and become full-time touring pros. Just like there were two types of squash courts, there were two squash tours on them, hardball and softball.

In the late 1970s the men's pro hardball tour, now called the World Professional Squash Association, reinvigorated pro squash in North America and in the 1980s reached more than \$600,000 in prize money and visited more than thirty cities across the continent. Americans like Mark Talbott and Ned Edwards, Canadians like Michael Desaulniers and Clive Caldwell, Mexicans like Mario Sanchez and the Pakistani-born, Toronto-based Sharif Khan dominated the tour. The richest event in the 1980s in pro squash was the \$75,000 North American Open, held on a stage at Town Hall in New York.

Men's pro softball was equally successful. After the dominance of the Khan family (a member of the family—Hashim, Azam, Roshan or Mohibullah—won the British Open thirteen straight years), the star of the late 1960s was Jonah Barrington. A six-time British Open champion, Barrington was the first pro to cut himself off from the clubs and earn his entire living from tournaments, exhibitions and clinics. In 1970 he organized a five-man barnstorming tour of Asia that led to the formation of the International Squash Players Association in 1973 and the creation of a viable men's pro softball tour.

The ISPA launched a World Open championship in 1976. Heather McKay and Geoff Hunt, two legendary Australians, won their draws. McKay was famous for not losing a squash match for eighteen straight years, and Hunt, a seven-time British Open champion, was renowned for his amazing physical and mental endurance. Other dominant pros were Australians like Ken Hisco, Rodney and Brett Martin and Chris Dittmar, New Zealand's Ross Norman and Englishmen like Phil Kenyon and Gawain Briars. An exciting group of players came from Pakistan. Following in the footsteps of Hashim Khan were such giants as Hiddy Jahan, Gogi Alauddin and Qamar Zaman (who won the 1975 British Open). The 1980s were dominated by Jahangir Khan and the 1990s by Jansher Khan.

In 1993 the WPSA and the ISPA merged to form the Professional Squash Association—the men's world tour—and pro hardball squash disappeared.

Pro women's squash came into existence in the 1970s. In 1974 the British Open finally lived up to its name by offering prize money and allowing pros to enter the women's draw. Three years later the first pro hardball event for women, the Bancroft Open in New York was played for a prize pool of \$6,500; Heather McKay won the event. In the 1980s American women created a pro hardball tour (named consecutively the Association of Women's Professional

Squash, then the Women's American Squash Association and finally the Women's American Squash Professionals Association).

In softball, women were even more successful. In the late 1970s a group of women founded the Women's International Squash Rackets Federation to coordinate world championships. Janet Morgan Shardlow, the ten-time British Open champion, chaired the WISRF. At the same time teaching pros like Angela Smith and Sue Cogswell became full-time touring pros. In 1983 the Women's International Squash Players Association came into being to coordinate pro events and produce world rankings. The top early WISPA players were Susan Devoy of New Zealand and Vicki Hoffman Cardwell of Australia; Devoy won eight British Opens. In the 1990s Michelle Martin of Australia captured six British Opens in a row. She was followed by Sarah Fitz-Gerald, another Australian, who earned five world titles; and then Nicol David of Malaysia, who was ranked world No.1 for one hundred and nine consecutive months, the all-time record.

In recent years, women's pro squash has blossomed. In 2013, US Squash ensured that there was parity between the men's and women's prize monies in the U.S. Open. This move led to a global effort to achieve prize-money parity in all major squash tournaments, an initiative that was reached in just four years. In 2015 the men's association (the PSA) and the women's association (then called the Women's Squash Association) merged under the PSA banner.

Becoming one of the few sports where the men and women's tours were managed together, the new PSA experienced tremendous growth. This was coupled with improvements in broadcasting squash, both on the internet and on television, under the umbrella of the PSA's broadcast company SquashTV.

## **IX. Doubles**

Doubles began at the Racquet Club of Philadelphia in 1907 when Fred Tompkins, the pro at the club, erected a forty-five feet by twenty-five court. After the First World War, dozens of clubs across North America built courts and an amateur circuit of tournaments sprung up. In 1933 the U.S. squash association started a men's and women's national championship; Squash Canada launched their men's version a year later (and women in 1985).

Pro doubles started with the founding of the Heights Casino Open in 1938 in Brooklyn, New York. In the 1980s the pro doubles circuit included more than a half dozen events with a total prize money of \$100,000; in the 1990s this increased to ten or twelve events and \$150,000. In 2000 the tour's players separated from the PSA and formed the International Squash Doubles Association; in 2012 it was reconstituted as the Squash Doubles Association. In 2007 a women's pro doubles association began promoting a circuit of events. Today there are two-dozen pro events across the continent with a total prize money purse over \$500,000. Every two years the associations help host the World Hardball Doubles; the most recent event featured players from nineteen countries.

The game is growing. Today there are a hundred and fifty active hardball doubles courts in North America, a sixth of those having been built in the past decade. In addition, there are courts in Tijuana, Mexico, at the Royal Bangkok Sports Club in Thailand, at the Tanglin Club in Singapore and at the Raintree Club in Kuala Lumpur.

There is just one left in Great Britain. In 1935 four hardball doubles courts were built there: at St. John's Wood Squash Club, Prince's Club and Ladies' Carlton Club in London and at the Edinburgh Sports Club in Scotland. Starting in 1937 the Squash Rackets Association held national doubles tournaments for both amateurs and professionals and England played Scotland in an annual Test match in doubles. The Second World War led to the destruction of the St. John's Wood and Ladies Carlton courts and Prince's closed, but Edinburgh still maintains its court.

Today softball doubles is the norm outside North America. In 1988 the Royal Automobile Club constructed two softball doubles courts at their Woodcote Park clubhouse outside London. The courts were thirty-two feet by twenty-five, which was proclaimed the standard softball doubles width. With sliding wall technology made common by the German-based court building company ASB, the inchoate game appeared around the world. In 1997 the first World Softball Doubles Championships were held in Hong Kong and it has been held intermittently ever since. Since 1998 the biggest showcase for softball doubles has been the men's, women's and mixed doubles events at the Commonwealth Games.

## **X. Resurgence**

In the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, squash completely changed.

Squash entered as a medal sport all the multi-sport international events except the Olympics: Maccabiah Games (starting in 1977); Pan-American Games (1995); World Games and World University Games (1997), Commonwealth Games and Asian Games (1998), Arab Games (1999) and World Masters Games (2002). This brought in a tremendous amount of public exposure and governmental support.

In the 1980s the three pro tours—the men's hardball (WPSA), the men's softball (ISPA) and the women's softball (WISPA) helped bring mountains of media attention and corporate support. Thousands came to the British Open when it was at the Wembley Conference Centre.

Moreover, the showpiece of squash now became a show. Because of advances in all-glass, portable court technology, tournament promoters could put an event on in iconic or communal places that brought the game into the public's eye: the Great Pyramids of Giza in Cairo, Symphony Hall in Boston, Grand Central Terminal in New York, a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur, a soaring atrium at Canary Wharf in London, a park in Colombia and waterfront locales like the harbour in Hong Kong and El Gouna and Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt and the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean.

Courts appeared in every possible country and in every possible guise. For the first time, public clubs became the catalyst for growth and the shedding of squash's elitist image. In many countries, squash went from being a private game at a few exclusive clubs to an accessible public sport. In Ireland, for example, in 1972 there were ninety-four courts; a decade later there were five hundred and fifty courts, most of them public. Denmark had just one three-court club in Copenhagen before the commercial boom: it leapt to fourteen clubs with fifty courts. Japan had no courts until 1971; in a dozen years it boasted eighty courts at twenty-two clubs. Switzerland had one court in 1970 and a hundred and sixty a dozen years later. Argentina launched their national championships in 1966; Malawi and Trinidad in 1967; Iran in 1968; Finland and Monaco in 1969; Mexico, Nigeria and Singapore in 1970; Ethiopia in 1972; Brunei, Jamaica, Japan and Switzerland in 1973; Guyana in 1974; Kuwait in 1975; Italy in 1976.

By the new millennium, fifty thousand courts were being used in nearly two hundred nations. Squash was everywhere: from Andorra to Zimbabwe, from the southernmost court in Ushuaia, Chile to the northernmost court on Svalbard Island inside the Arctic Circle. All five continents have produced world champions. More than thirty nations have a player ranked in the top one hundred in the world rankings.

West Germany formed a national association in 1974 and started their national championship in 1975; in 1976 the ASB court construction firm started building squash courts. Since then ASB has become a global force in court innovation and Germany has the third highest number of courts in the world.

By 1983, the world association had nearly fifty member nations, including the Philippines and Spain (joining in 1978); Caymans (1979); Barbados (1980); Indonesia (1981); Brazil, Israel and Venezuela (1982). Nearly every year since, a new nation has joined the WSF. Moreover, regional associations took on grassroots development and staging championships. The European Squash Federation started in 1973; Asia in 1980; Pan-American in 1989; and Africa and Oceania in 1992.

In recent decades, Malaysia and Hong Kong, with significant government support, became leaders in producing top-notch players and staging major events. Squash was entirely private in Malaysia until 1978 when a commercial club was built in Kuala Lumpur. Major clubs came in the 1980s—including a twenty-six court complex—and in the run-up to the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian government greatly expanded its efforts at developing squash. More recently, the Middle East has surged, with Qatar and Dubai in particular investing heavily in the game.

After the end of the Cold War in 1989, Eastern Europe became a fertile region of growth. Today the largest squash club in the world, Hasta La Vista Club with thirty-three courts, is in Wroclaw, Poland.

Just as the move to public, commercial clubs in the 1970s expanded the idea of who played squash, the urban squash movement more recently led the game into new communities. Begun by Greg Zaff in Boston in 1996, urban squash—a year-round, intensive academic and squash program for underserved youth—has spread to more than thirty-five cities around the world, representing a total investment of over \$100 million.

## **X & ½ Future**

The future of squash has never been brighter. Technology has forever shattered the inherent limitations of this racquet, ball and wall game. Racquets are much lighter and stronger today, making the game more exciting. The ball is now consistent throughout the world. Innovations are continually being introduced that make the game more accessible in person and more approachable online: glass floors, LED lighting, side-door entry and scoring and booking apps.

The game is uniquely modern: you get the best workout in the quickest amount of time. Recently, Forbes magazine rated squash the healthiest sport in the world.

In a century and a half, squash has gone from a quirky schoolboy pastime at Harrow to the most exhilarating, entertaining and explosive game in the world.