



CASE STUDY:

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF CREATING A GREAT FEMALE EXPERIENCE

ISLAND BAY TENNIS & SQUASH CLUB



SQUASH
NEW ZEALAND

OVERVIEW

The Island Bay Tennis & Squash Club was experiencing a severe reduction in its female membership and this was having a significant impact on its junior membership. Rather than continuing to focus its activities on members, the club opted to take a different approach and instead focus on providing quality opportunities for women to participate in squash (who are not necessarily members). To attract and retain women in squash at their desired level of involvement the club designed and implemented a new integrated pathway of activities using an athlete-centred approach. This was measured by the number of ladies attending each session, as opposed to counting the number who joined as a member.

CHALLENGES

Perception

Feedback from women who had a link to the club, either through an existing member or family involvement in tennis, said that squash was seen as an extremely intense and technically demanding sport; and squash clubs are exclusive enclaves that do not cater for novices just wanting to give the sport a try.

Time and Competition

Most potential new female players have families and are time poor; and plenty of other activities they can fit into their lives more readily are more prominent options e.g. gym, yoga.

Disincentives

Time-poor novice female players will have little reasons to schedule a mutually convenient slot to try out a sport they know little about and involving gear they do not own.

Club Objectives

A squash club's bread and butter activities (interclub and tournaments) cater only for the committed; while Club Night puts off all but the most confident female beginners.

SOLUTIONS

Targeted Communications

Care was taken to promote the activities in a way that reached the intended targets through dedicated channels and spoke to them in a welcoming, non-threatening, social manner. Professionally-designed attractive posters were placed in kindergartens encouraging groups of friends to try it out together and the local newspaper carried an article that interviewed a mother of two young children who had been bitten by the bug after trying squash through Mums' Squash.

Activities

A pathway of activities* was implemented to target players at specific stages of participation ranging from:

- Giving beginners a taste.
- Offering match-playing opportunities to play other females.
- Providing structured coaching to up skill.
- Encouraging players seeking more competition to join the club's leagues.

* More details provided.

RESULTS

28

Attended Ladies night (averaging 20 per session).

20+

New members this season – most joined after participating in one of the activities.

3

The members of the lowest ladies' interclub team were new novice members.

CONCLUSION

The Island Bay Tennis & Squash Club found that squash can attract female participation if a range of activities is offered at different levels of intensity designed to capture and nurture ladies at different levels of commitment. They also observed that advanced or longstanding players who have the skills and confidence to self-engage do not need much support to continue playing. By providing on-court activities and social exposure to higher graded players, the club has retained the interest of intermediately skilled or reasonably engaged players. Even though a considerable amount of volunteer hours was needed to nurture novice players, the club has seen the value in doing so as it has also attracted other junior members to the club environment.

Club member Catharine Sayer says, "It must be healthy that the club is back in the position where my teammates know fewer than half the names of the Ladies' Night attendees – which we'll address next season over more post-session wines no doubt – but everyone attending seems quite at home. A sense of ownership is no longer the preserver of interclub stalwarts."

ACTIVITIES

Activity	Mums' Squash (now Ladies' Squash)	Ladies' Night	Ladies' coaching
Purpose	Break down perception barriers by giving participants taster of squash and squash club environment in a low-key, social session.	Integrate current members of all grades socially who rarely saw each other, provide match-playing opportunities for members post-interclub seasons and expose Mums' Squash participants to match play and female members.	Improve skills of all women interested in squash.
Target	Ladies with pre-school or school-age children.	Members, Mums' squash participants who wanted more, friends of members and Mums' squash participants.	Women playing or potentially playing interclub.
Content	Small group skills using Club equipment taught by coach but punctuated by plenty of gossip; short time with kids using junior equipment on court at end; participants rotated responsibility for supervising kids; coffee machine available for attendee use.	12 week Interclub-like format (teams of four players) albeit each team of mixed ability; matches refereed and scored to introduce new players to this; drinks and nibbles in bar thereafter.	Structured and more formal session than Ladies' Squash; group coaching doing about 3-4 drills per session to work on 1-2 skills. No match play.
Timing	Weekly after school to fit with any required pick-ups.	Timing: Weekly, weeknight 7:00 – 9:00pm.	1 ¼ hour on Sunday morning.
Cost	Low - \$5 per session but special membership deal offered.	Nil.	Nil.

Other Activities

Women who sought more match play, but at times convenient to them, were encouraged to join the club's Leagues, where they were placed in a small ladder of about 5-6 people of similar ability.

Club Night attendance was encouraged for ladies who wanted to try their match skills out against a variety of other men and women in a casual atmosphere.

Interclub and tournaments were offered to women who took out memberships and wanted to immerse themselves in competition.

Mums' Squash

*Gather the girls,
bring the kids and get fit!*

Great for health & fitness

*Only \$5 per week or ask
about our special deal*

Perfect for beginners

Mondays
3:30-5:00pm

Bring: snack & toys for kids

Provided: rackets, balls, cartoons,
table football & ping pong



Programme

- 20 mins coaching in groups
- 30 mins playing
- 20 mins minding the kids
- 20 mins on court with your kiddies using junior rackets and foam balls.



Island Bay Squash Club
The Parade, Island Bay

To enrol, email sdm@squashwellington.org.nz
or call William on 383 7262

Ladies' Squash

**Gather the girls,
have fun and get fit!**

Great for health & fitness

**Only \$5 per week or ask
about our special deal**

Perfect for beginners

**Mondays
3:30–5:00pm**

Start Date 26th Oct

Provided: rackets, balls,
kids' entertainments

Bring: snack & toys for any kids



Programme

- Coaching in Groups
 - recap on previous skills
 - new skills
- Playing to put skills into practice
- Court time with any kids using junior equipment



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