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# Unlocking the Business Potential of Racquet Sports - Lessons from the Past

Racquet sports are among the most promising investments in today's leisure market. Whether squash, padel, pickleball, or badminton (in Europe), they all share a core business model centred on social interaction, repeat participation, and strong community-building. Since these sports are fundamentally similar, investors and facility owners can use proven strategies across them and avoid common mistakes.



A key to success in any racquet sport is to provide not just the courts but an appealing, well-structured venue. The facility should cater to recreational players while still offering competitive opportunities and a friendly social environment.

Around 90% of players in all racquet sports are recreational. They are there for fun, social connections, and fitness—so purely opening the doors is not enough for long-term success. Strategic facility planning and consistent community engagement are critical to maintaining momentum once initial buzz fades.

## Learning from Past Successes and Failures

History shows that even sports enjoying a boom can struggle or decline if core business fundamentals are ignored. Examining these lessons helps you understand what works—and what doesn't.

- **Racquetball (USA):** Once one of the fastest-growing sports in the 1980s, it later declined due to facility closures and dwindling participation.

- **Squash (Germany):** In the 1990s, there were around 9,000 courts; today, fewer than 800 remain, largely due to real estate costs and weak strategic planning.
- **Padel (Sweden):** Despite booming popularity, many courts have closed recently because of oversaturation and poor business planning.

## Common Factors Behind Failure

1. **Rising Real Estate Costs:** High property values tempt owners to convert sports facilities into more profitable commercial developments.
2. **Flawed Business Models:**
  - Unprofitable facility sizes
  - Poor location and inaccurate demand estimates
  - Inefficient facility design leading to higher operational and staffing costs
3. **Lack of Programming:**
  - Relying only on passive usage (just opening and closing each day) eventually hurts revenue.
  - Long-term success depends on events, structured programs, and ongoing community-building.

## Understanding Player Demographics of Racquet Sports

Offering multiple racquet sports under one roof can diversify your audience and ensure higher court usage. Each racquet sport tends to attract a slightly different player base:

- **Padel (The Social Starter):** Easy to learn, doubles-only format, and community-focused. Attracts adults aged 18–45; nearly half of players in Europe are women.



- **Squash (The Fitness Fanatic):** Known for its intense, fast-paced gameplay. Appeals to dedicated athletes and fitness enthusiasts, often those looking for a demanding workout.

- **Pickleball (The Casual Collaborator):** Growing quickly in North America, especially among older adults and multi-generational groups. Accessible for beginners, yet competitive enough to keep players engaged.



- **Badminton (The Speed Demon):** The fastest racquet sport, popular in Asia and Europe, with a strong presence in schools and universities. Appeals to those who love quick reflexes and agility.

## Location and Market Potential

A successful facility depends on understanding the local market and designing an attractive, functional venue:

- **Population Density:** Depending on your business model, you generally need about 100–400 players per court for healthy utilization. Ensure the area within a 10–15 km radius (or a 15–20-minute drive) has enough potential to meet this requirement.
- **Nearby Schools/Universities:** These institutions supply a steady flow of younger, active players.
- **Corporate Engagement:** Large companies and government organisations in the area can become important partners.

## Final Thoughts

Racquet sports offer a robust investment opportunity, but long-term success depends on strategic planning, careful facility design, and a strong community focus. To create a sustainable business that draws players back year after year, keep these key lessons in mind:

- **Learn From the Past:** Investigate both the successes and failures across all racquet sports to see which strategies work—and which to avoid.
- **Diversify Facility Planning:** Don't just maximise the number of courts for your favourite sport. Instead, figure out which combination of racquet sports is best suited to your location and target audience.
- **Build a Community:** Focus on programming, social spaces, and events that foster engagement and camaraderie among players.
- **Stay Flexible:** Design the facility so it can adapt over time to new trends, changing demographics, and evolving player interests.

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By blending proven insights with smart, data-driven decisions, you can develop a thriving venue that appeals to both casual and competitive players—one that stands the test of time.