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Outdoor squash: is Rik Zwikker's fresh air court the best solution yet?



The concept of outdoor squash has been gaining traction in recent years as our sport seeks to increase its visibility and accessibility and get more people on court. The PSA Foundation has formed an [Outdoor Squash Committee](#) which has supported a handful of projects using different sizes of court and various types of materials, offering players old and new different al-fresco ‘squash experiences.’

Dutchman Rik Zwikker, founder of [Outdoor Squash BV](#), has invented what might just be the best solution so far in squash's search for the perfect outdoor court - tackling the principal issues of weather, temperature, durability, floor design and performance.

Rik’s pioneering prototype court has stood in a public park in Amsterdam since summer 2022 and was showcased at the recent Windy City Open in Chicago. He’s soon erecting a permanent outdoor court in Chicago for public use. Those who have played on the court agree - it could be a game-changer.

For any outdoor squash project, two main problems must be overcome - withstanding the rain (floor) and wind (walls) - to provide an environment which offers an authentic and enjoyable squash experience. Let's take each of those aspects in turn.



Outdoor court with steel structure to withstand all wind loads

FLOOR

The challenge with outdoor squash court flooring is to create a surface which drains but also has enough grip and gives a good ball bounce. Rik tried various types of floor which he found held water on top of the surface and became too slippery. Then, a personal trainer told him about a composite material - a micro mesh with sand baked into it.

Rik sourced the material and made small adjustments. Since installing it a year ago, feedback from players using it in Amsterdam has been positive.

WALLS

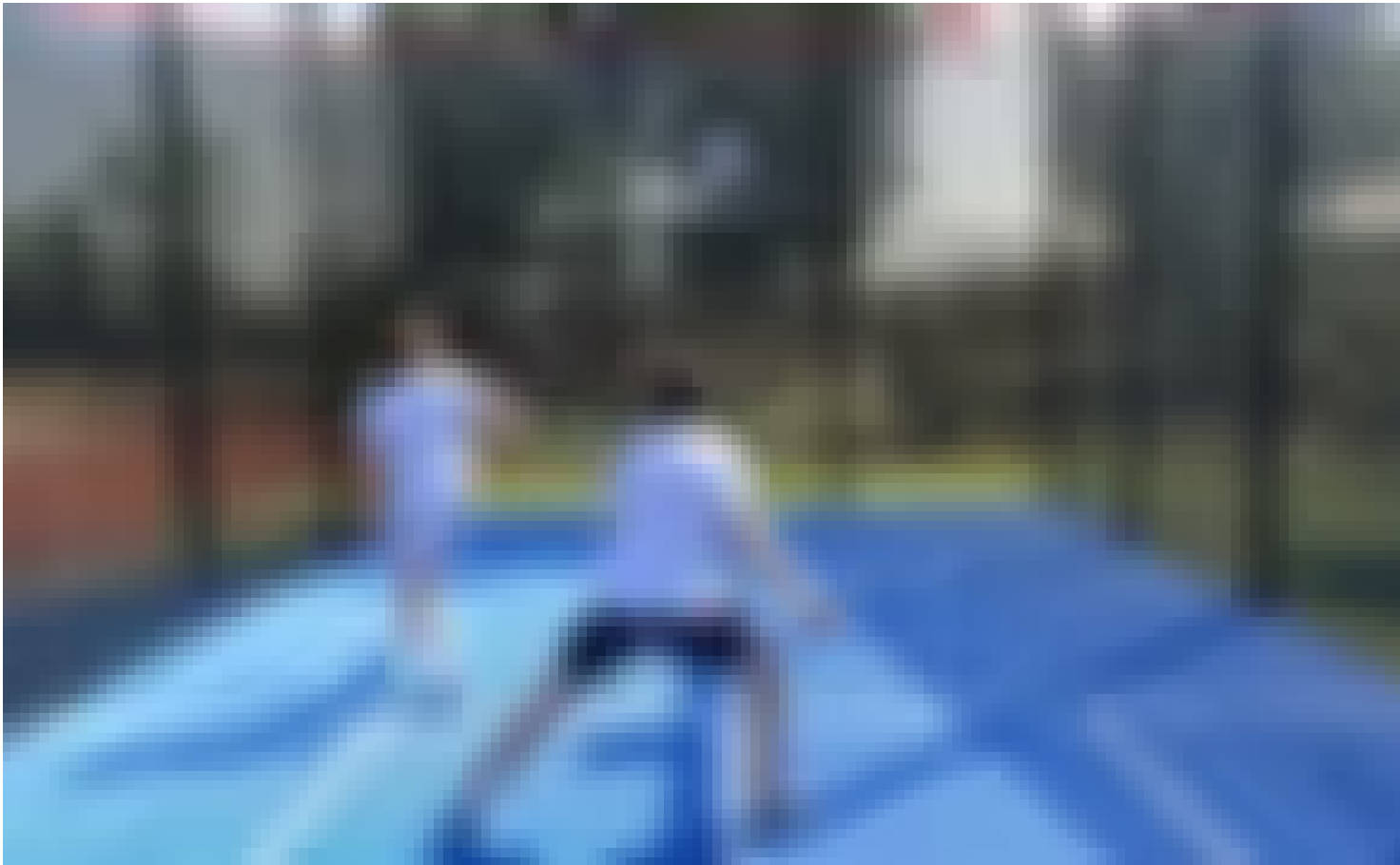
"It was quite a challenge to create a court which could withstand wind loads of up to force 11, especially in the west of the Netherlands near the coast," said Rik.

With the front wall of a court measuring over 5m high, creating a structure to support these glass walls in the face of high winds was a difficult task. With a friend who is a structural engineer, Rik designed a steel frame with beams and braces. "It took a while to make it really efficient," he says.

Rik admits he would still like to modify the support behind each big pane of glass with extra rods down the middle to make them stiffer and reduce noise and vibration. "The next court will have supports every metre, which will also make the ball bounce more similarly to an indoor court," he states.

The walls were transparent to begin with with some logoed stickers over the top of them. That didn't really work, so Rik added a dark grey film over the front and side walls to aid visibility. "It finally became a playable court," he says. "It's a scalable court which is really easy to produce, transport and assemble."

"Within a year, I had 1,200 bookings during daylight hours. Even in the rain, the grip on the floor and the film on the walls were good."



The outdoor squash court flooring drains but still with enough grip

WHAT BALL IS USED ON THE COURT?

Because of the dark film on the walls a white ball must be used rather than the traditional dark ball. What type of ball is used (double yellow, single yellow, red or blue) depends on the players' standard and the outside temperature. "Obviously the ball doesn't bounce as much when it gets colder, so below 15 degrees it's better to use other balls," says Rik. "I use mainly the Dunlop beginners' orange balls. You don't need to warm them up and they are a bit bigger. They play really well in the cold weather.

"The beginner squash players who have used it don't mind that much if the rebound is not quite the same or the floor is not totally flat like a traditional indoor court. The more experienced squash players of course notice the differences – but they are used to playing on traditional concrete or brick indoor courts. Of course, there will be differences on glass, such as a good tight drive will grip to the glass wall more."

COST

Rik says: "The court is designed to be manufactured really easily with standard materials and it will be produced in China. The price will depend on how many we can produce at once. If I just produce a few, the price will be around €60,000, but if I'm able to produce 10, 20, or more at once the price will really drop.

Rik believes outdoor squash courts hold huge potential for the future of the game. "My drive to do this is because I think squash is undervalued," he says. "I have played for 25 years and our venues are built in the 80s or 90s, and many owners have done nothing to improve their venues in that time. They are not appealing any more. I speak to all kinds of people about squash, and they love the game but the facilities are not up to date.

"So putting squash in a new environment is important, especially for the youth. I love seeing my own children playing outdoors as it's so healthy.

"We should consider it as no different to tennis or padel being played outdoors. When you play squash outdoors, people can see the game and they will want to play outdoors, especially if the weather is good.

"The growth will come from the grassroots of the sport, so I really think there's a lot of potential – not only in squash facilities but all kind of sports parks, hotels, holiday parks, offices and campuses. It's a really small area you need to use to put up a court like this so there's no reason

why it shouldn't be possible."

Read about other outdoor squash projects:

[Outdoor courts in Birmingham building on Commonwealth Games legacy](#)

[The steel court at Maspeth Squash in Queens, New York](#)

[Read more at the PSA Foundation's 'Outdoor Squash' page](#)

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