

mpdale · Jan 23, 2024

Tips for engaging children in squash - David and Alison Fear, Club Malmoe



Australian couple David and Alison Fear have worked at Club Malmoe in Sweden since 2019. Developing juniors has always been at the heart of their philosophy.

Built in the 1970s, Club Malmoe has seven courts, around 700 members and is run as a not-for-profit organisation. David and Alison (pictured above) have been working hard to rebuild junior participation after it took a heavy hit after the pandemic.

The club has marketed squash to local schools and forged local links with staff so successfully that the sport has become part of their sporting curriculum. Once the kids are through the door, David and Alison make adaptations to the game to make it easy to pick up and play for first-timers, before gradually modifying it step-by-step as the participants' develop their skills.

For many years, the club has run an annual tournament called Bästa 6an (Best of Year 6). Teams of five Year 6 pupils (12 and 13 year olds) from local schools represent their class in a large competition every spring. The winning team takes a prize back for the whole class.

With many years' experience between them, David and Alison know what it takes to get kids through the doors of a club and give them an experience of squash that will keep them coming back. Here are some of their 'best practice' tips:



Engaging with schools

"It's all about building relationships with the right people at the school," says Alison. "The sports teacher might seem to be the best person, but they in turn have to persuade the class teacher to allow their pupils time out of the classroom to take part, so going to the class teacher directly is often better."

"Just can't visit once - you have to follow up, be persistent and eventually they will take notice and understand that squash is a good option for the children."

David and Alison have found success by slotting squash in as part of schools' varied offering of sports. With one school, squash is on a rotation with basketball, football and golf. Pupils try each one for six weeks, at the end of which they can either switch or choose to stick with that sport for the next six-week period. "We often get classes who choose to come back," says David. "Or if a child misses out on selection for the football team, for example, they will return to squash later on because they enjoyed it so much."

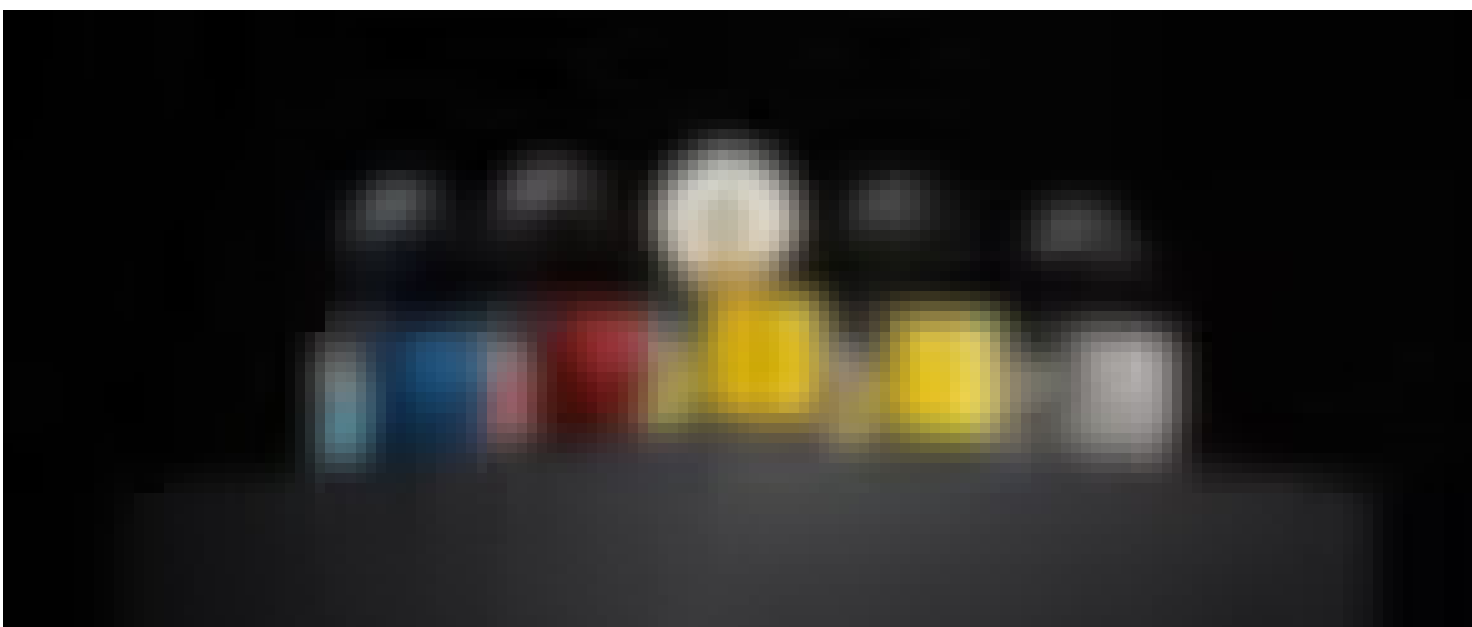


Adapt the game to suit skills levels

When children first arrive at the club, David (pictured above) and Alison are careful not to impose rules too quickly. "We make it so easy for them to run around and have fun," says David. "If the balls goes out [of court], just keep playing - as long as you don't hit the lights!"

They start with a 'drop shot game': the serve must go above the cut line, but players use only the front half of the court, the ball is allowed to bounce twice, although the second bounce can't go beyond the short line.

"They play that game as soon as they can hold a racket," says David. "It means they can engage straight away. Then we slowly introduce skills that turn them into players able to play a full game. We get a big uptake from kids who join as members, because they taste the programme and love it immediately."



For goodness sake, use the right ball!

On the junior programme, the younger children use the bigger, bouncier Karakal or Dunlop balls, only progressing to a blue or a red dot when they're ready.

Even as they progress and their skills develop, juniors play with a red dot at most. David and Alison both agree that rushing juniors into using a single or double yellow dot has no benefits.

"Kids sometimes want to play with a double yellow dot and I ask them, why? Rallies are what make the game fun, so why would you be in a hurry to compromise that?" says David.

Market squash as a fitness tool

In order to attract more people on to the court, David and Alison both feel that squash needs to 'get back to its roots' and promote its value as an activity that is great for fitness.

David says: "In my opinion, squash should be competing against gyms. People are trying to get a good body or lose weight in the gym, whereas in 45 minutes on a squash court they can achieve those things. Coaches from other sports send their kids to the gym, but squash is more efficient.

"Squash is the No.1 healthiest sport in the world. I don't think enough coaches convey that message. I tell the kids to get their phone and look up the No.1 healthiest sport in the world. They're always surprised when they read that. When I tell them that Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal play squash to improve their touch, reactions, movement and speed, that definitely helps sell it."



Cross-sell squash to other sports

Club Malmoe has a partnership with Malmo Sport School where pupils specialise in one sport. Alison and David approached a teacher (a keen squash player) and offered to include squash as part of a training regime for their footballers and golfers, emphasising the benefits it can have across the sporting spectrum. Yes, squash offers a great physical workout, but its benefits go beyond this.

SFN

©2025 SFN (Squash Facilities Network) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Accessibility Statement](#)

"There's great synergy between the movements in squash and sports like hockey or golf," explains David. "A forehand squash swing is just a golf swing. I get the kids to show me their golf swing and get them to repeat it - they all hit this amazing forehand drive and they all smile... they can't believe it!

"When they're tucked in the back of the court, the shot becomes like a chip, at the front it's a putt with soft hands... We create a connection between their sport and squash. They pick it up so quickly because they already have skills they can draw upon in their own minds.

"It's important to state that we're not trying to steal their athletes, but squash can complement their kids' development. The value it provides to youngsters at all stage of childhood and adolescence is immense."