

mpdale · Dec 12, 2023

Daisy Hill's thriving community is bedrock of its stunning success



Daisy Hill Squash Club in Brisbane, Australia is a bustling community hub where 1,400 friends get together to have fun. It just so happens that they do so by playing squash.

The club has nine courts, a gym, martial arts studio, bar, cafe, sauna, ice bath room and dart board. It has a weekly calendar chock-full of programmes to cater for all levels and demographics of players, regular social events, 34 competitive teams, a strong coaching staff and 100 volunteers.

Its community is the bedrock of the squash club's success - and that has been built up by the dynamism, dedication and passion of Bradley Hindle (pictured below). It was in 2018 that he walked through the door and began to turn Daisy Hill's fortunes around.

The club was built in squash's heyday of 1977, when Brisbane had an unbelievable 140 clubs. The sport's popularity gradually eroded over the decades and by 2018, Daisy Hill was run-down and had only 40 members.

Despite coming from an elite background (he reached a peak of world No.64), Bradley arrived back in his native Australia with rich experience of increasing grassroots squash participation. He worked for several years at the Union Club in Malta as well as in Isreal and the USA and had spent four years running a new club in St Petersburg, Russia.

'Scene creation'



He explains: "Those jobs really taught me the importance of 'scene creation.' As an ex-PSA player, I learned so much from how club members see the game. They are the most powerful asset in the squash industry. They taught me that the most important thing is not about producing the best players, it's about creating an environment people want to be part of."



Creating that environment began with a vision of what he wanted the club to become and how to make the members a part of it. "I didn't want members to 'buy into' the vision, I wanted them to be part of it - that was very important," Bradley explains.

A major part of that vision was to make absolutely everyone welcome and remove all barriers to people playing squash. One barrier was cost - so it now only costs AUS\$10 (€6) to become a member of Daisy Hill. Day passes (which allow members to play for as long as they want) are \$20 and coaching programmes and matchplay are similarly priced. These prices allow whole families to afford to play regularly.

Second is the importance of the personal touch. Absolutely everyone receives a warm welcome. Bradley says: "I felt the hospitality side was lacking. The old Australian tradition of 'mateship' had gone. Court owners didn't really care if you played squash or not. We were giving people another reason not to play squash. I got rid of that attitude very quickly.



"I make sure I have a chat with everyone who walks in. Every time they leave I say, 'See you later.' I've told all the staff to do that as well. Of course, I have days when I'm tired, but my members will never see that. I go home and hibernate later, but for my members I'm always welcoming and friendly."

Daisy Hill is a place where people can sit, chat, share a coffee or beer, invite friends, hold a meeting... as well as play squash and exercise.

Management put the emphasis on face-to-face communication, not email newsletters. "A lot of people think they will generate business through Facebook posts - I can tell you, that won't work," states Bradley. "Generating business is a people skill - it's based on word of mouth, getting into the local community and looking someone in the eye."

The digital communication platform Daisy Hill does focus on is WhatsApp groups where members can ask questions at any time and staff will answer them or respond with a personal phone call.

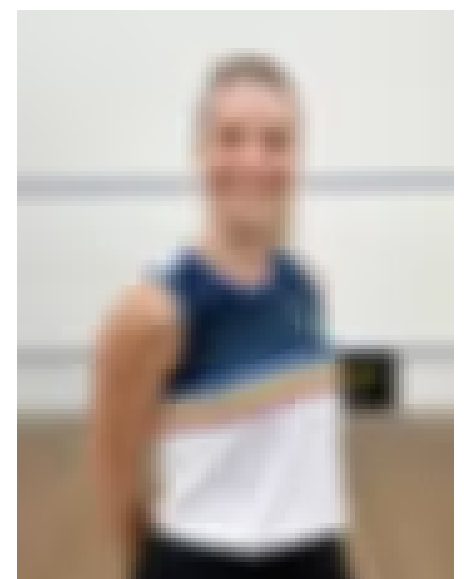
If anyone wants to play at a time the club isn't open, they are given a key. If someone can't afford to pay that day, they will be able to settle up later. They're simple things, but don't go unnoticed.

Offering beginners a warm welcome

Another aspect to Daisy Hill's ethos of removing all barriers to squash is how the club welcomes beginners. Kim Tracey Patte (right) is the club's beginner and junior coach and her gregarious nature and enthusiasm for the game sees 80 new beginners join every year.

"New players are your economy," says Bradley. "Some squash clubs like to boast about having the best level of players at their club - but I'd rather be known for my members welcoming every beginner and helping them become better. If more people adopted that model, you could multiply the numbers of people playing in your local area immediately."

"I'm on court four hours a day every day, but some people in my position refuse to do that. You've got to enjoy being on court with someone who can barely serve as much as when you're with top players who think they can beat you. People have become too preoccupied with excellence and not enough with the grassroots of the game."



"Our members are from all walks of life, all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. You can come here, swing and miss the ball 20 times but be valued. If you're holding a squash racket, you're as welcome as anybody else."

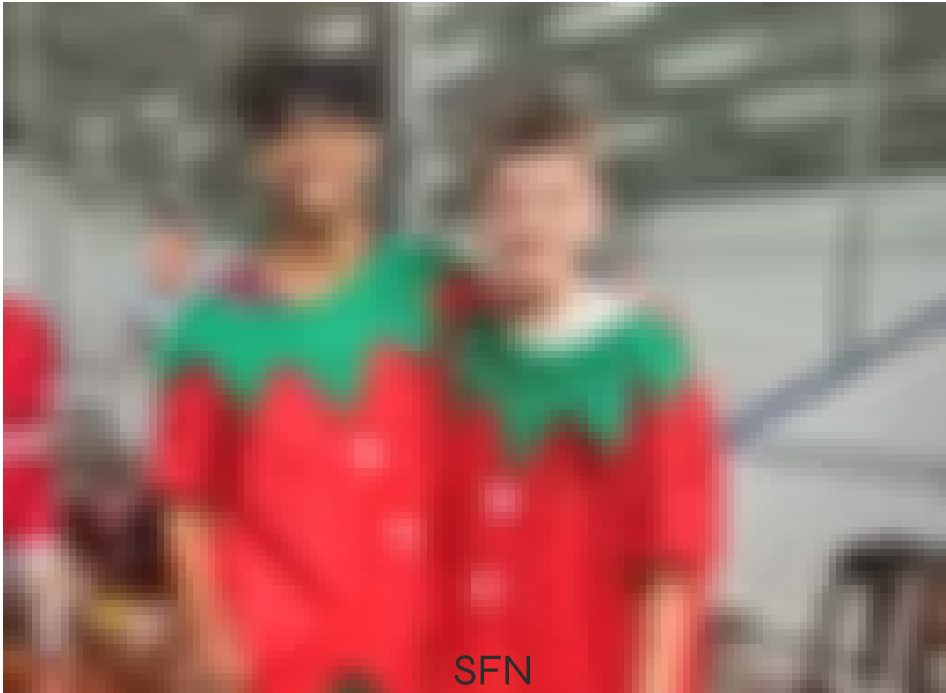
With beginners' group coaching on Tuesdays and Fridays, a Wednesday beginners league, daytime training, weekly in-house social competitions, Brisbane Southside fixtures with three other local clubs and an extensive junior programme, everyone is catered for.

This creates a thriving environment and dynamic atmosphere which people want to be part of - as evidence by the club's 100 volunteers. "People want to give back," says Bradley.

A positive attitude

This is all underpinned by the unswervingly positive attitude of the head coach. Bradley simply will not countenance any negativity about squash. For him, it is and always will be the greatest game on earth and he won't accept others' scepticism about its viability as a business.

"Squash is the greatest game ever created," he says. "It's non-contact, safe, easy to learn if taught correctly, it's not affected by the weather and it's the greatest game for social and friendship. I will never change from that view. If I started to show disinterest or believe that there was a better sport for our community, our members would start to lose faith in me and the club. But that will never happen.



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"I say to my staff, 'You don't need a thick skin to work in a squash club, you need an oily skin.' You might hear negative things but you have to let it slide off you.

"Thankfully our members are really fantastic people. I learn as much from them as much as they do from me on the squash court. It's a two-way street.

"They come to this club for a reason and I love finding out what those reasons are. It's because it gives them a feeling of community and a sense of identity and they're involved in something that's positive for their health and lifestyle. Why on earth would they want to be anywhere else?"