

SFN Team · Dec 10, 2024

The Rise of Multi-Racquet Sport Facilities: A New Era for Squash and Beyond



The SFN is currently observing a significant trend towards large multi-racquet sport facilities. The era of dedicated squash, tennis, or padel venues is becoming a thing of the past. It's no secret that larger facilities are economically more successful than smaller ones due to economies of scale. Additionally, the investment required—which today often amounts to tens of millions of USD—can generally no longer be raised by private individuals. Investment companies now back the majority of investments in leisure sports.

The United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA), a professional organization that certifies and represents instructors, shares this perspective. Last month, the century-old organization changed its name to the Racquet Sports Professionals Association (RSPA). Future instructors can now be certified in five sports: tennis, pickleball, padel, squash, and platform tennis.

"The market demanded this change," said RSPA CEO Brian Dillman. "Clubs are adding new racquet sport facilities, and we want to capitalize on that. The mindset isn't 'us versus them.' It's 'we'—and 'we' is how we grow." Wise words indeed.

Some of the entrepreneurial minds in the squash community have already recognized this trend. There is a small but growing number of facilities that combine squash, padel, and pickleball under one roof. Instead of squash viewing these new trending sports as a threat, they are being seen as an opportunity.

Examples of facilities that have opened in the last 12 months or are about to open:

The Heights Racket and Social Club, Minneapolis, USA

Opened in December 2023, The Heights—developed from the city's former Commodore Club—is currently the only publicly accessible club worldwide that offers padel, pickleball, and both singles and doubles squash courts (three and one, respectively). The club hopes to have over 400 members by the end of the year.

Ballers, Philadelphia, USA



The Turbine Hall in Philadelphia, where Ballers will be based

Ballers, a new concept for social sports complexes in the US, is set to open its first club in Philadelphia in early 2025, with additional facilities to follow across the USA. The flagship club, located in the historic Turbine Hall at The Battery, will offer six indoor pickleball courts, three padel courts, and two squash courts, along with an indoor golf center and a multifunctional artificial turf field.

Belvedere Club, Vancouver, Canada

In Vancouver, Canada, the spectacular opening of the Belvedere Club is imminent. The \$110 million, 9,300-square-meter club features two fully glass-enclosed singles squash courts and one doubles court, alongside two padel courts, a 4G tennis court, a basketball court, and a futsal field in a gigantic, illuminated hall that constitutes only part of the facility. An adjacent hall, flanked by galleries with spectator seating, houses eight pickleball courts and a massive screen. The facility also includes a cinema, childcare services, a café, and additional outdoor sports amenities.

Nicol New Jersey, USA

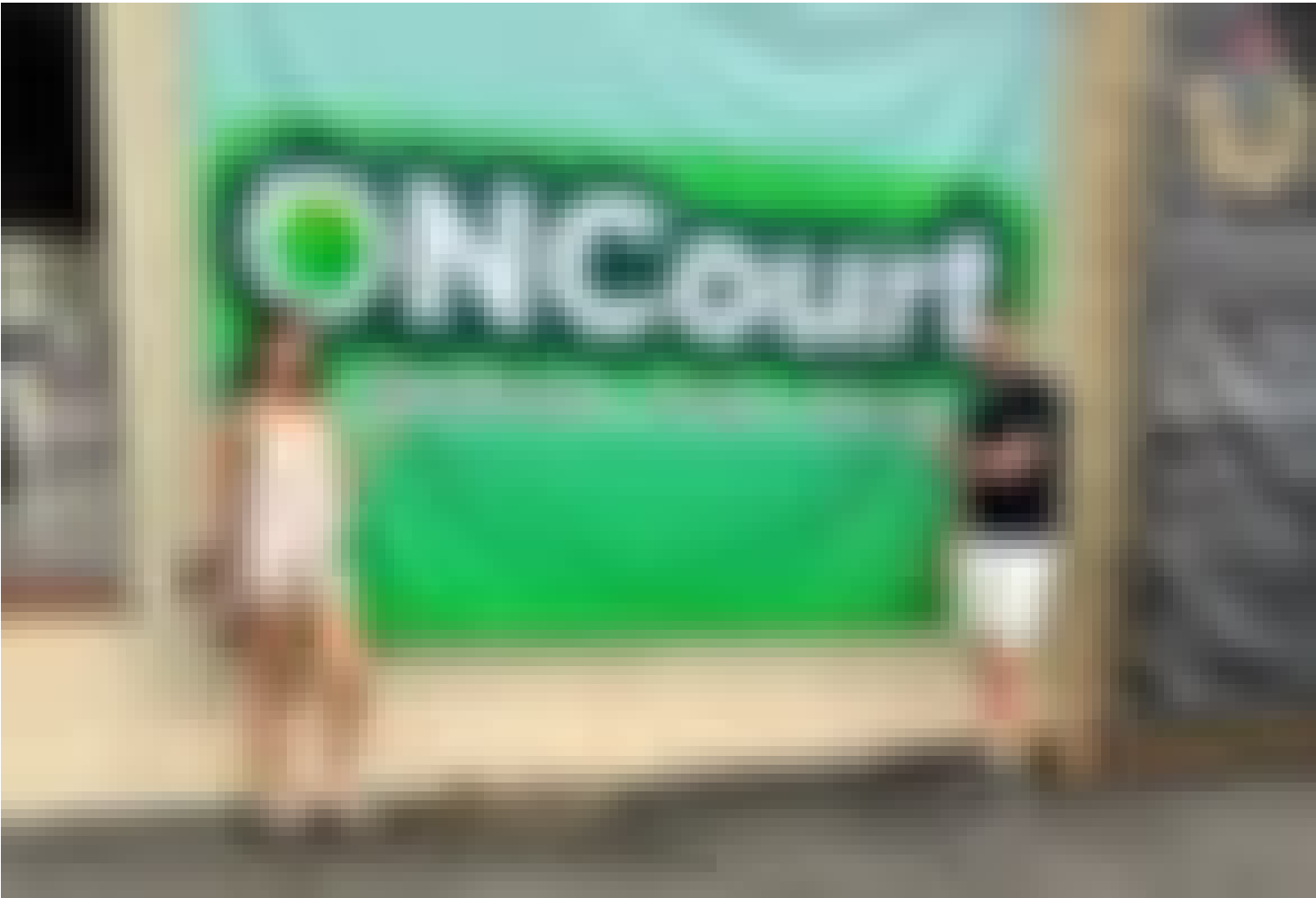


Nicol New Jersey

Nicol New Jersey, recently highlighted by the Squash Facilities Network, is another example of this cross-court revolution. Founded by former world number one Peter Nicol and his entrepreneur wife Jess Winstanley, the indoor club features four pickleball courts, three squash courts, and two padel courts, with two additional outdoor courts for padel and pickleball planned for early 2025.

Winstanley stated, "People have combined these three sports in country clubs, but these clubs are private and therefore inaccessible to most people. We're doing it in a public setting within a for-profit enterprise. We believe it will work. It will open squash to a much larger audience and become part of a broader racquet sport conversation."

OnCourt Multi-Racket Center, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Ibrahim Gul (right) at his new multi-rackets facility in Kuala Lumpur

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Ibrahim Gul—a descendant of the renowned Pakistani squash dynasty Gul—is opening a 7,400-square-meter squash, padel, and pickleball center in an old airplane hangar adjacent to a shooting range and a golf driving range. Construction began this summer, and he hopes to open by January 2025. The facility will feature six fully glass-enclosed squash courts, six padel courts, and up to 26 pickleball courts.

"I've long planned to bring these sports together to promote squash," says Ibrahim. "Pickleball and padel are becoming so popular, and they will attract visitors—we've designed the club so that everyone who comes in will also see squash. More visitors mean more visibility for squash. For me, I cannot let squash die. The only way we can move forward is by integrating with these other sports and showing people that hitting a ball against a wall has so many benefits."

Conclusion

Similar to the fitness industry, where various offerings from A for Aerobics to Z for Zumba are combined in one facility, racquet sports are undergoing a similar evolution. This approach is extremely economically sensible, as the business models of the individual racquet sports are identical in the most important aspects.

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