

Markus Gaebel · Jan 31

# The secret behind Egypt’s Squash success: Facilities and Juniors



Ashraf Hanafi between the squash legends Nour Eltayeb and Nicol David

Anyone who has followed the global squash scene in recent years knows that Egypt reigns at the pinnacle. From the dominance of its junior programs to the string of professional titles won by its athletes, the country has transformed into a near-unstoppable force. Yet for all the talent on display, there is a deeper story behind Egypt’s success—one that blends government clubs, private investors, expansive residential compounds, and a sporting culture that nurtures ambition from an early age. Few are better placed to share this story than Ashraf Hanafi, a veteran coach whose insights illuminate how Egypt established its foothold at the top of world squash.

## Background on Ashraf Hanafi

Ashraf Hanafi is a distinguished figure in the squash community, bringing over three decades of coaching experience across multiple continents. He has guided players from Egypt, Australia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Austria, India, the USA, Germany, Russia, China, Japan & others—leading them in both individual and team world championships. In Egypt, he has served as head coach at the esteemed Heliopolis Club and led the national juniors boys & girls and men’s teams. He founded the famous Squashraf Academy to lead and support all levels of players and he has already couple of top 10 players men & women were trained and advised at his academy. He was a technical consultant for Wadi Degla & Alexandria Sporting Club, and acted as Squash Director & Head of Performance at Black Ball Sporting Club. In 2023, he assumed the role of technical consultant for the Egyptian Squash Federation.

His personal achievements include triumphs in the British Open Over-35 final against the great Ross Norman and a world championship title in his age group in 1995.

After honing his expertise in commercial squash operations in Germany, he returned to Egypt to push the sport’s development further. Many attribute Egypt’s phenomenal squash infrastructure partly to the tireless efforts of coaches like Hanafi, whose leadership and vision have shaped the country’s approach to junior training and overall facility management.

### Different Types of Clubs in Egypt

Egypt’s squash landscape features a variety of clubs and facilities that collectively support its thriving squash culture. Hanafi estimates there may be between 2,000 and 2,500 courts across the country, spread among four main types of establishments: government clubs, private enterprises, residential compounds owned by construction companies, and military bases.

*“In total, we have 2,000 to 2,500 courts in all of Egypt. It is difficult to know exactly, but this is my thinking.” — Ashraf Hanafi*



Sporting Club in Alexandria – Picture in the bottom left featuring Squash Courts with one outdoor squash court

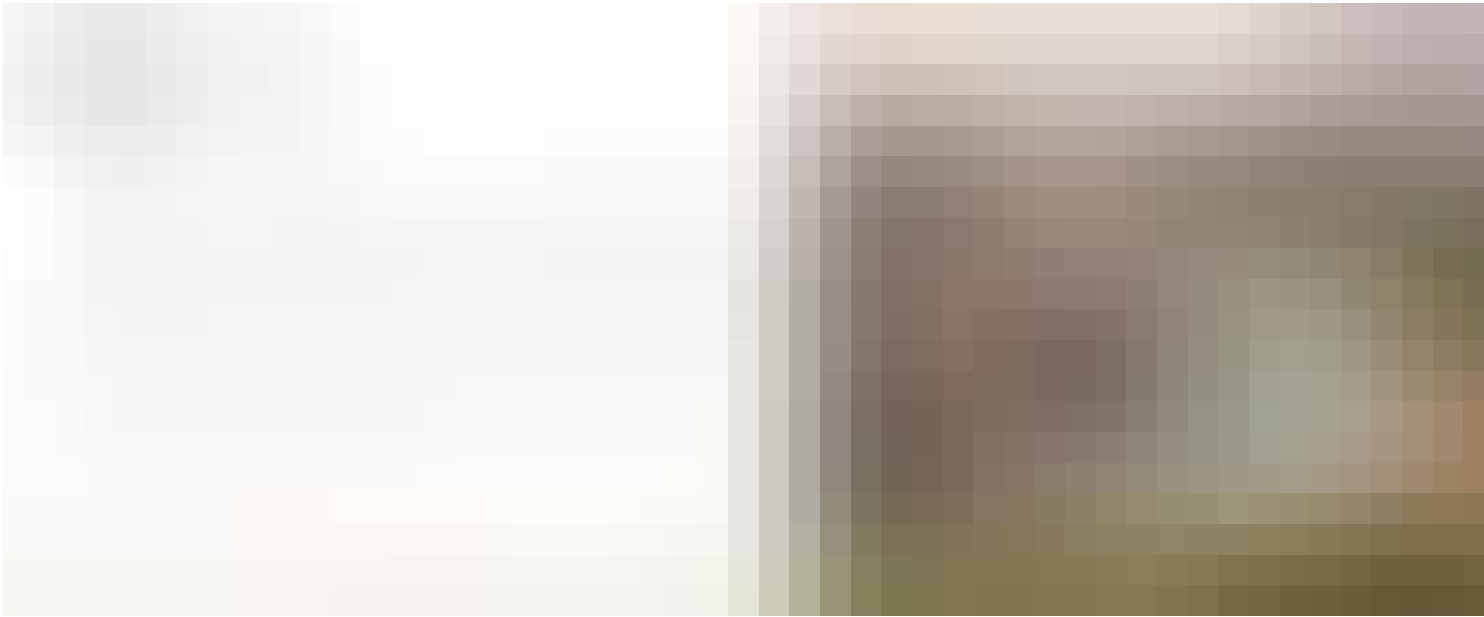
**Government Clubs** such as Heliopolis, Gezira, Al Ahly, Al Shams, Sporting & Smoha club at Alexandria wield enormous memberships, often surpassing 100,000 people. Representing around 80% of Egypt’s squash community, these clubs are multi-sport powerhouses, offering everything from horse riding to table tennis. Although they may not always boast dozens of squash courts, their existing courts stay busy all day with training sessions for juniors and adults alike. Heliopolis, for instance, has seven courts in its main branch and eight in another, while Al Ahly’s two locations each have eight courts.



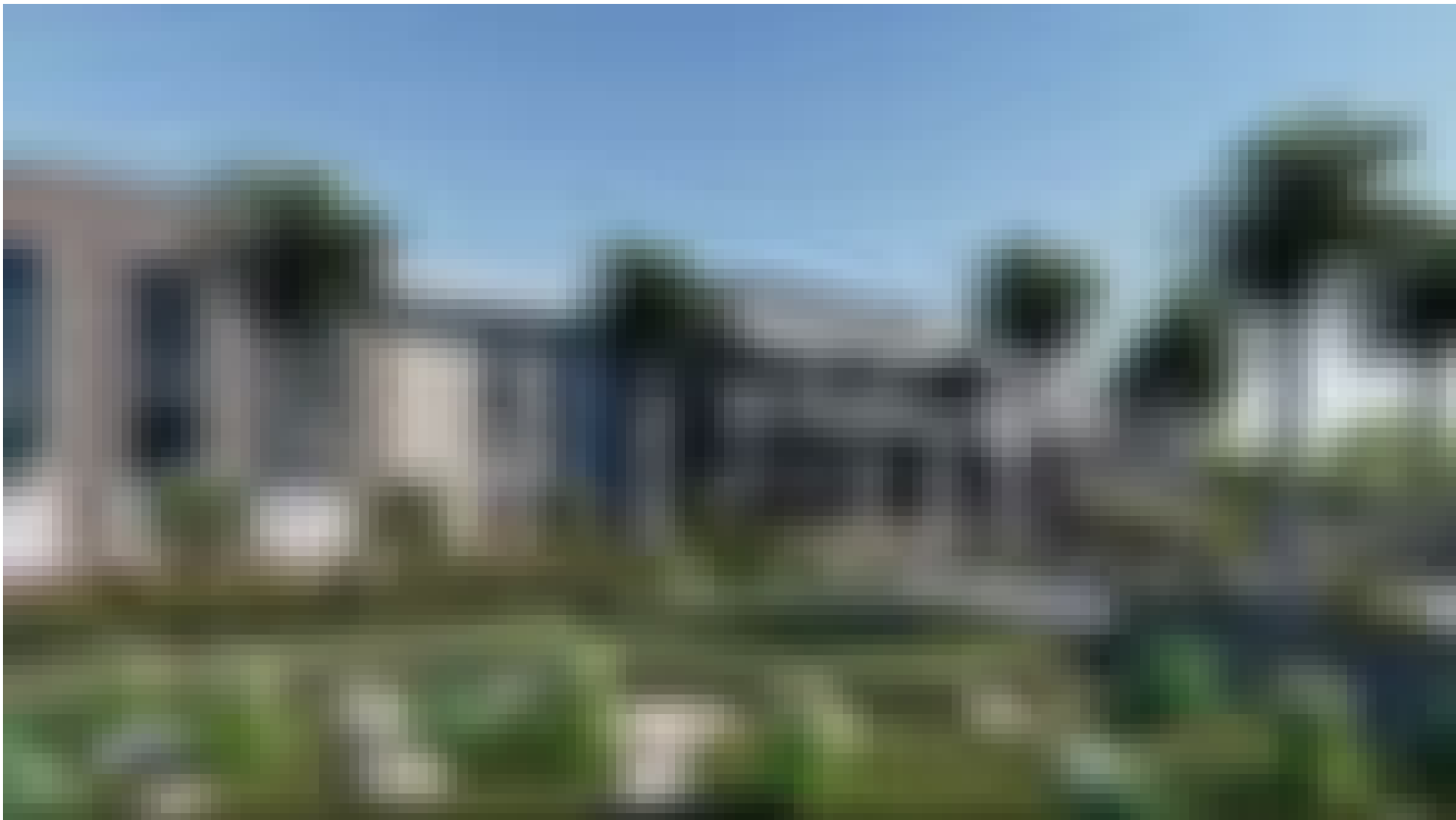


The squash building at Heliopolis Club, Elshorouk branch

**Private Enterprises** like Wadi Degla, Black Ball Sporting Club, Madinaty, Elrehab and the new Alex West in North Coast account for approximately 15% of the country's squash community. Black Ball, recognized for its 15 glass-backed courts and the famous four glass court which we follow all big tournaments on it, is among the largest squash complexes in Egypt.

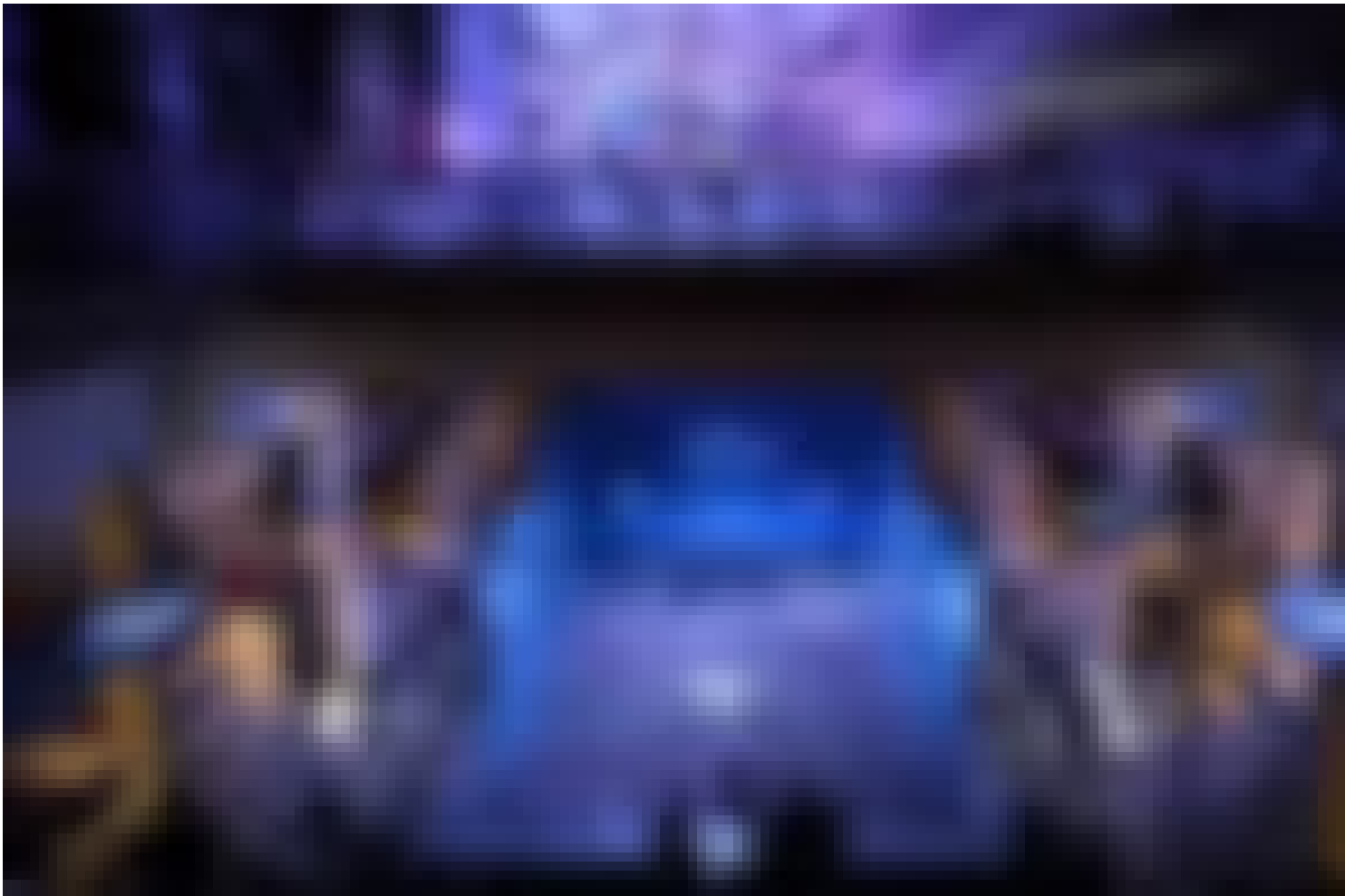


Impressive expansion of Wadi Degla over the past 20 years



The new Alex West facility in North Coast

These private ventures often resemble commercial entities, attracting top players with lucrative contracts. Wadi Degla, for example, started with just four sports but has expanded to more than ten branches in 15 years. Although it follows some government regulations, it operates primarily as a hybrid business. Black Ball similarly began with only a handful of junior players but swiftly grew into a high-performance academy serving almost four thousand members.



Center Court at Black Ball, New Cairo

Residential **Compounds** developed by construction companies like Palm Hills, Sodic, Elgouna & Ora form the third category, representing about 5% of the squash community. They add a few courts to upscale neighbourhoods, ensuring homeowners enjoy convenient access to the sport. While smaller in scale, these compounds extend Egypt's enthusiasm for squash into new markets and sometimes sponsor elite players.



Sports Club in the centre of the Badya Palm Hills Compound featuring Squash by Amir Wagih

Finally, **Military Bases** have recently built modern squash facilities, although they remain off-limits to the general public. Their existence, however, underscores a nationwide devotion to the sport that extends beyond the private and government sectors.

## The Foundation of Excellence: Junior Development Strategies

Egypt’s dominance in the world of squash is no accident. It stems from a deeply ingrained culture, strategic development programs, and relentless focus on nurturing young talent. Hanafi’s work at Black Ball Sporting Club exemplifies this approach, offering a tiered academy system divided into five skill-based levels. Players undergo regular assessments every three months, receiving detailed feedback on strengths and weaknesses. This ensures clear goals for improvement and creates healthy competition, as juniors strive to move up each level then they are ready to join the team U11 and with time they follow for U13, U15, U17, U19 until you watch them as junior world champions.

Coaches specializing in different aspects of the game tailor their training to each skill group. The results can be seen at national tournaments, where thousands of players sign up across age divisions, with under-11 events alone attracting over 550 participants. This robust participation rate forms a competitive pyramid, sustaining a sizable pool of elite talent. Egyptian juniors often display advanced technical ability and tactical awareness, far beyond what is typical for their age in other countries.

*“If you ask, every single one, ‘What’s your target in squash?’ you will get one answer:  
‘World Champion.’” — Ashraf Hanafi*



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Egyptian team winning the 2023 WSF World Junior Squash Championship in Houston

Parental involvement is also crucial. Families dedicate time, resources, and consistent support, sometimes driving children to training sessions multiple times a week. The environment created by this collective commitment—coaches, parents, and clubs—forms a powerhouse of resources and motivation that continually produces world-class champions.

Hanafi’s observations at Black Ball illustrate how many young girls transitioned from gymnastics to squash, bringing exceptional flexibility, coordination, and self-discipline. This crossover, while not unique to Egypt, is notably well-supported here, contributing to a pipeline of versatile athletes ready to excel in all facets of the sport.

## Egypt’s Public Perception of Squash

Although squash trails behind soccer and handball as a national pastime, Egyptians are keenly aware of their country’s global standing in the sport. Every time a rising star such as Ali Farag or Nour El Sherbini claims an international title, a fresh wave of interest surges. Parents see a potential future for their children; sponsors seize new opportunities for investment; clubs expand facilities to meet the heightened demand. The result is an unparalleled pipeline of junior athletes who keep Egypt at the forefront of world squash.

Media plays a big role as matches are broadcasted live with millions of viewers with podium before and after the matches for analysing the game and do it more attractive for young generations.

The “secret” behind Egypt’s success is not a single factor but rather a synergy of many. Government-backed clubs provide deep roots. Forward-thinking private investors create state-of-the-art facilities. Engaged parents support their children’s training. Dedicated coaches, refine and replicate proven methods. Affordable play for newcomers blends with rigorous elite programs, ensuring all levels of the game continue to thrive.

As Egypt continues to dominate professional and junior competitions worldwide, it seems evident that the country’s unique blend of resources, ambition, and expertise will keep it at the pinnacle. Hanafi, along with a host of other seasoned coaches, remains a guiding force in this environment, ensuring that when people think of squash, they will almost certainly be thinking of Egypt.