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# How the St. James in Washington D.C. is becoming stunning squash hotbed



Entrance Lobby at the The St. James in Springfield VA

Josh Taylor is a squash coach and innovator of impeccable pedigree. He has found his perfect match across the Atlantic at the The St. James, an incredible multi-sport centre in Washington D.C.

## The St. James: A Multi-Sport Powerhouse

The St. James is a gigantic, privately-owned, multi-sports facility split into sections called 'houses,' each of which has its own sport/sports, individual reception area and unique business model.

The 'Field House', for example, features hockey, American football, lacrosse, athletics and football (soccer). The offering across all the houses includes ice hockey, swimming, dance, baseball, pickleball, basketball, gymnastics, climbing and even a water park. The St. James serves as training base for several professional sports teams including MLS club [DC United](#) and [Chelsea FC](#) (Chelsea controlling owner Todd Boehly is an investor).

## Squash at The St. James: From Modest Beginnings to a Thriving Hub

The 'Squash and Golf House' includes eight state-of-the-art squash courts and a golf simulator. Before Taylor's arrival, squash participation had been affected by the pandemic and was making only a modest impression within the overall ecosystem of The St. James.





Josh Taylor with "Bee Squash" winners

Taylor (*above*) was initially contacted by Abir Ray, who has sponsored many pro squash players through his company, [Expression](#), including Paul Coll, Gregory Gaultier, Olivia Weaver and his Canadian wife Danielle, the current world no.67. Abir wanted a coach who could make a big difference to squash in the area and introduced Josh to The St. James to set the ball rolling.

He's now over six months into the job, and it's fair to say Taylor has delivered on his remit of making a 'big difference'; introducing his unique philosophy and a business model unparalleled in squash.



Taylor is former National Performance Coach and Talent Pathway Lead at England Squash and Director of Squash at 'The Club', coaching programmes across several facilities in Greater Manchester. Since moving to the U.S. he has founded Bee Squash, based at The St. James, which aims to provide a developmental pathway for all squash players who turn up to the front door, whatever their age, ability or ambitions.

## Partnering with TPH Academy: A Game-Changer for Junior Development

Perhaps the biggest innovation since his arrival is the partnership with TPH Academy, which allows juniors to shape their education around squash training and competition. It's a model that works within tennis at the IMG and Rafael Nadal academies - but it's believed to be a first in squash.

"We have three full-time teachers based at The St. James so the students have complete flexibility in their academic timetable and their training," says Taylor. "They come in and have classes with other elite-level sports students, mixed with online lessons, and the rest of their time is training, competing and strength & conditioning provision. There's no set price for parents; each student can build their own model of how they blend each of the elements."



## Flexible Access: Squash for Everyone

Anyone can walk in to The St. James and play squash; it's open to members and non-members. Membership includes court usage and discounts on all coaching programmes but there are various pay-as-you-play options. "We try to have a journey for everyone who comes through the door," says Taylor. "Coming from the UK, I'm used to very static models, but here we offer five or six different ways to pay. That usually requires a conversation to find out what's best for them. There are no barriers. It's a very open space for all."

## Harnessing Internal Marketing: Turning Footfall into Squash Players

Word of mouth is a very big driver of squash participation within The St. James. One example is an adult who now plays squash three times a week, having wandered across to the squash courts out of curiosity during his son's ice hockey lessons.

"We have a huge footfall of people coming in to play sport every night - and they all have parents, siblings and friends," explains Taylor. "It means you don't have to work too hard [on marketing] outside the building, but you have to work pretty hard within the building to make full use of it."





## Tailored Programmes for All Demographics

For Bee Squash to capture every type of player (the beginner, the casual player, the ambitious junior and professionals), Josh and his three-strong coaching team are in constant communication with all demographics (and parents) to ensure they're offering them the right coaching and competitive programme for their level and financial means. "It's figuring out what the best fit is for them and revisiting those conversations quite regularly so they're getting best value from their usage," explains Josh. This is done through mailing lists, Whatsapp groups and verbal conversations.

The Squash House having its own receptionist is crucial. He or she can have initial conversations with everyone who walks in, ensuring they use the right ball, are offered coaching or taster sessions that are right for them and are paired with players of a similar level.

## Growing Juniors: From 'Honey Bees' to Champions

The Bee Squash junior section has grown from 10 to around 75 kids in Taylor's first six months in charge. Juniors are categorised as 'Honey Bees' (beginners), 'Worker Bees' (developing) and elite. Bee Squash had its first ever U.S. Junior Championship Tour Gold-level title winner recently and Taylor regularly brings in professional players and high-level coaches to work with his juniors.

## Engaging Adults: The Challenges and Opportunities

In addition to its juniors, the facility has around 200 casual drop-in players and 30-40 adults who play several times a week and regularly engage in programmes. Taylor admits challenges with the adult demographic: "They're usually there with their kids so don't want to spend a huge amount on their own sport. Pay-as-you-go users are also harder to capture, but we're working hard on our adult programmes right now so there's an offer there if they want to engage more deeply."



Squash’s Rising Status Within The St. James

Taylor concludes: "Very quickly, we've shown that when you pitch a good, clear offer, invest time talking to people and get     can go from a budget line that didn't really feature in this space, to one that is now making a very big impression."

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"When I first started six months ago, we were an interesting little side project which owners were starting to ask questions about. Now, we're looked upon as the sport that is growing very, very fast and has kids who are achieving. All of a sudden we're in conversations across a huge multi-sport facility. They could be talking about baseball or ice hockey, but squash is being talked about as the one making the biggest moves."

"When you get the ball, the coaching programme and the model right, squash is just as interesting as any other sport, including pickleball and padel. We just need to make sure we sell it in the right way."