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# Squash Glass Courts: A Perspective from the Top with Ashraf Hanafi

In a detailed interview with Ashraf Hanafi, a renowned figure in the world of squash, the Squash Facilities Network (SFN) delved into the intricacies and implications of using glass squash courts in clubs and facilities. With over 30 years of experience as a player, coach, and promoter, Hanafi's insights offer a unique perspective into the operational and strategic aspects of squash facility management.



Ashraf Hanafi at Black Ball Squash Open 2024 with Adriana Olaya, Head of PSA Foundation (middle), and Omneya Abdel Kawy

## Background on Ashraf Hanafi

Ashraf Hanafi brings an exceptional breadth of experience to the squash world. Over his more than three decades in coaching, he has not only played a pivotal role in the achievements of players from various nations—including Egypt, Australia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Austria, India, the USA, Germany, Russia, China, and Japan—but has also managed their participation in both single and team world championships.

Hanafi has served as the head coach at the prestigious Heliopolis Club and numerous Bundesliga clubs in Germany. In Egypt, he was the head coach for both the junior and men’s national teams. Beyond coaching, he has significantly shaped the sport’s landscape as the founder and director of the Squashraf Academy, technical consultant for Wadi Degla & Sporting Club, and the Squash Director & Head of Performance at Blackball Sporting Club. Recently, he also undertook a role as a technical consultant for the Egyptian Squash Federation in 2023.

With triumphs in the British Open Over-35 final and clinching a world championship in his age group in 1995, Hanafi's credentials extend beyond the court. He spent several years in Germany mastering the nuances of commercial squash operations before returning to Egypt. There, he took on the role of National Junior Head Coach and later founded the NoLet company. Most recently, Hanafi served as the director of squash at the Black Ball Sporting Club in Cairo, a major hub with 15 standard squash courts and a single glass court.



Black Ball squash club in New Cairo Egypt

The Debate on Glass Courts

During the interview, Hanafi articulated a critical stance on the proliferation of glass courts in squash facilities. He argued that while glass courts hold significant value for broadcasting and high-level competitions, their benefits do not translate as well for training and regular play, especially for beginners and intermediate players.





The glass court in the Black Ball facility

Pros of Glass Courts

- Visibility for Spectators: Glass courts enhance the viewing experience during tournaments, making them ideal for televised events and live audiences.
- Special Events and High-Level Training: They are preferred for high-stake games where professional players can exploit the unique conditions offered by glass courts.

Cons of Glass Courts

- Limited Utility: Hanafi believes that having more than one glass court in a facility is unnecessary and can even be detrimental. The ideal setup, according to him, involves a single glass court used selectively for top-tier matches and training sessions preceding major events.
- Technical Challenges: The play on glass courts is fundamentally different. The altered dynamics of ball bounce and speed can skew a player's performance, which does not accurately reflect their skills on traditional courts.
- Noise and Distraction: Glass courts are louder and can disturb other players and spectators, making them less suitable for a club environment where multiple games occur simultaneously.

Utilization and Preference

Hanafi's experience at the Black Ball Sporting Club reveals a telling preference among players. Only a small fraction (5%) opts to play on the glass court, with the vast majority favouring traditional courts even during national team trainings.

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Recommendations for Facility Managers

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Based on the insights shared by Ashraf Hanafi, SFN recommends that squash facilities:

- Limit the number of glass courts to one per facility to maximize utility and minimize disruption.
- Use the glass court strategically for high-visibility events and as a training tool for players to adapt to its unique conditions before significant competitions.

- Focus on developing a robust array of traditional courts that cater to the training and development needs of all levels of players, from beginners to advanced.

The conversation with Ashraf Hanafi underscores the importance of strategic facility planning in squash. While the allure of glass courts is undeniable for their aesthetic and commercial appeal during major events, the core of squash development lies in the quality and accessibility of traditional courts. Facility managers and investors looking to cultivate a thriving squash environment must weigh these considerations carefully to foster both growth and excellence in the sport.