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The solution to recruiting and retaining players? Give them the right ball



Most of them probably don't realise it, but there is a specific member of staff at most squash facilities around the world who occupies a vital role as gatekeeper to our beloved sport. The success of squash at their venue (and the prosperity of squash as a whole) relies hugely on their basic knowledge and competence. We're not talking about coaches or club managers - we're talking about the person behind the reception desk.

Because all over the world, these modestly-paid employees are the individuals who give curious newcomers their first experience of squash. And so often, after those eager first-timers take those first steps through the door, they are unwittingly being given the wrong ball.

Mistakenly sent on to court with a gnarled old double yellow dot, these wide-eyed newbies are surprised to find that the ball rarely bounces above their ankles and that rallies aren't lasting much more than three shots. They may enjoy themselves a little, but most are unlikely to return. A massive chance to recruit new members is lost - and squash's future prosperity takes another small hit.

This is a huge problem for our sport - but it is within the power of every squash facility across the world to solve it, with simple communication and education.

The World Squash Federation and Dunlop (the overwhelming leaders in the global squash ball market) recently promised to [launch a campaign](#) to promote use of the right ball to support player retention and participation.

Dunlop pledged to change the way they sell balls to retailers, clubs and coaches, focusing on selling the full collection of double and single yellows, red and blue dot balls – not just offering double yellow dots, which limits consumer choice and exacerbates the problem. They will also produce posters and articles.



This top-down approach may increase awareness and have some impact, but it must be supported at the key battlegrounds - the squash facilities themselves, especially multi-sport public venues where there may not be a resident coach and squash-specific expertise may be more limited.

The range of balls starts with blue dot for beginners, then as players progress they can move on to red, single yellow and finally double yellow dot balls.

Each category of ball gets progressively less bouncy - or, to put it another way, has less 'hang time.' The more bouncy a ball is, the easier it is to get to and hit - so beginners need bounciness to have a good rally. More advanced players, with better shot technique and movement around the court, don't need as much bounce.



There is much debate about when players should use red, single yellow and double yellow dot balls when they reach certain standards, ages, physical condition and different court conditions. We needn't worry about that here, because those players are already playing squash. Squash venues need *new players* - and when they take those first steps on to a squash court, they should be playing the most appropriate ball.

Some squash people may be fed up of hearing the words padel and pickleball - yet we can learn much from their astonishing recent success. One of the important reasons is that they are *immediately* fun. Within minutes, even with no previous racket sport experience, you can have good rallies. There are no barriers to instant gratification.

By contrast, squash is the only racket sport where the ball is not ready to play with when you step on to the court. It must be warmed up first - then the fun begins. But only if people are playing with the right ball! It's a barrier we can - and must - remove.

The Squash Facilities Network will be running a series promoting the importance of using the right ball and inviting experts to add their insights. Let us know if you'd like to contribute thoughts and ideas.

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