

mpdale · Aug 6, 2024

Steel City Squash typifies American market's focus on youth



steel city squash kids

Steel City Squash, which has just moved to a new purpose-built eight-court facility in Pittsburgh, encapsulates many of the US squash market's unique characteristics.

The vast majority of Steel City Squash's \$11.1 million build and running cost came from private philanthropic funding - which would be the envy of many European facilities - with some state, local and federal funding on top. The construction of the facility was completed in June with the official inauguration scheduled for September 2024.

But Steel City Squash's most distinctive feature is its focus on juniors, with a model that combines being a members' club and running a non-profit programme.

It is home to one of the 20 Squash and Education Alliance (SEA) non-profit programmes across the US, which combine squash with academics, mentoring, travel, college support and employability for kids from under-privileged communities. At Steel City Squash, around 50 children are enrolled.

From September, its SEA programme will be augmented by an additional junior squash programme (paid for by families) in clinic-style after-school and weekend training. Both programmes will be led by Executive Director, Brad Young, Head Squash & Fitness Pro, Daren Ramsay, and

Squash Director, Jose Fernandez.

The brand new facility features six standard singles courts, an all-glass championship court and one North American hardball doubles court, plus a small fitness room and several classrooms. They currently have 80 club-members, not including the SEA academy players. The long-term aim is to have over 150 junior squash members and 500 players overall.

CHILDREN FIRST

Brad says that adults are welcome to come into the facility to play squash and have fun - but the focus is firmly on developing junior players. There is no traditional-style locker room and no bar. The first thing visitors see on entering the club is the students' career centre.

"We are a members' club but strongly mission-driven," says Brad. "Our extended family works tirelessly to empower and uplift Pittsburgh's youth through the dynamic world of squash."



"We absolutely want and encourage adults to be a part of this community, but we recognize that we are not an adult social club. If adults want that, there are options elsewhere. We're OK with that. We make no bones about the fact that our space is very youth-centred."

The Squash Facilities Network's 2024 Global Squash Report shows a strong correlation between countries with upward squash participation and the number of commercial squash facilities in those countries. America is different.

COMMERCIAL CLUBS IN THE MINORITY

"Commercial squash facilities are in the minority in America," explains Brad. "No investor is going to put up that capital without a clear pathway to a return - and there just isn't enough squash knowledge in the American landscape to make that investment worthwhile."

"My hope is that will change in five or 10 years. You don't have to convince me that squash is a good investment, but the confidence is not there right now."

"A good analogy would be the explosion of racketball in the 70s and 80s. It was a white collar workout space for people to have some fun. We saw huge investment, but now they're all going, or have gone, out of business. That is scary to investors."



Ground plan Steel City Squash

“Now there's the pickleball craze that is sucking all of the oxygen out of other racket sports. That will be a drag on investment into private squash clubs achieving any immediate growth.”

Luckily for America, the long tradition of philanthropic donations makes up for this lack of investor confidence - and young people are benefiting in their thousands.

As well as the SEA and junior programmes, Steel City Squash operate PE classes for local schools and they are developing a partnership with Chatham University so their men's and women's team can use the courts during morning hours. From 3pm-6pm, the junior squash league combines the SEA and paying junior members in coaching and matchplay and the classrooms are constantly abuzz with academic, career skills, resume building, test preparation and university training.

Brad is optimistic that Steel City Squash's membership (non-commercial) model will be sustainable. "We believe membership will cover the cost of operating the facility and our business plan shows that, over the next couple of years, we will be able to net contribute to the operation of the academy (the SEA programming). However, we will always have to fundraise to cover the cost of operating the academy.

“Our mission is to develop opportunities and pathways to building wealth over time so that, God willing, this place is crushed out 10 years from now, and we can build another \$15m facility across town.”

SFN



©2025 SFN (Squash Facilities Network) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Accessibility Statement](#)

Read more about Steel City Squash at steelcitysquash.org