Markus Gaebel · May 23

One Sport, Many Courts: Why Context Matters in Squash Construction

Over the past few weeks, SFN has explored a fundamental but often overlooked topic: **What Makes Squash Courts Different**. We've examined the diversity of squash court types — from recreational settings to high-performance arenas — and what truly defines quality, functionality, and long-term usability.

The key messages of this series are clear:

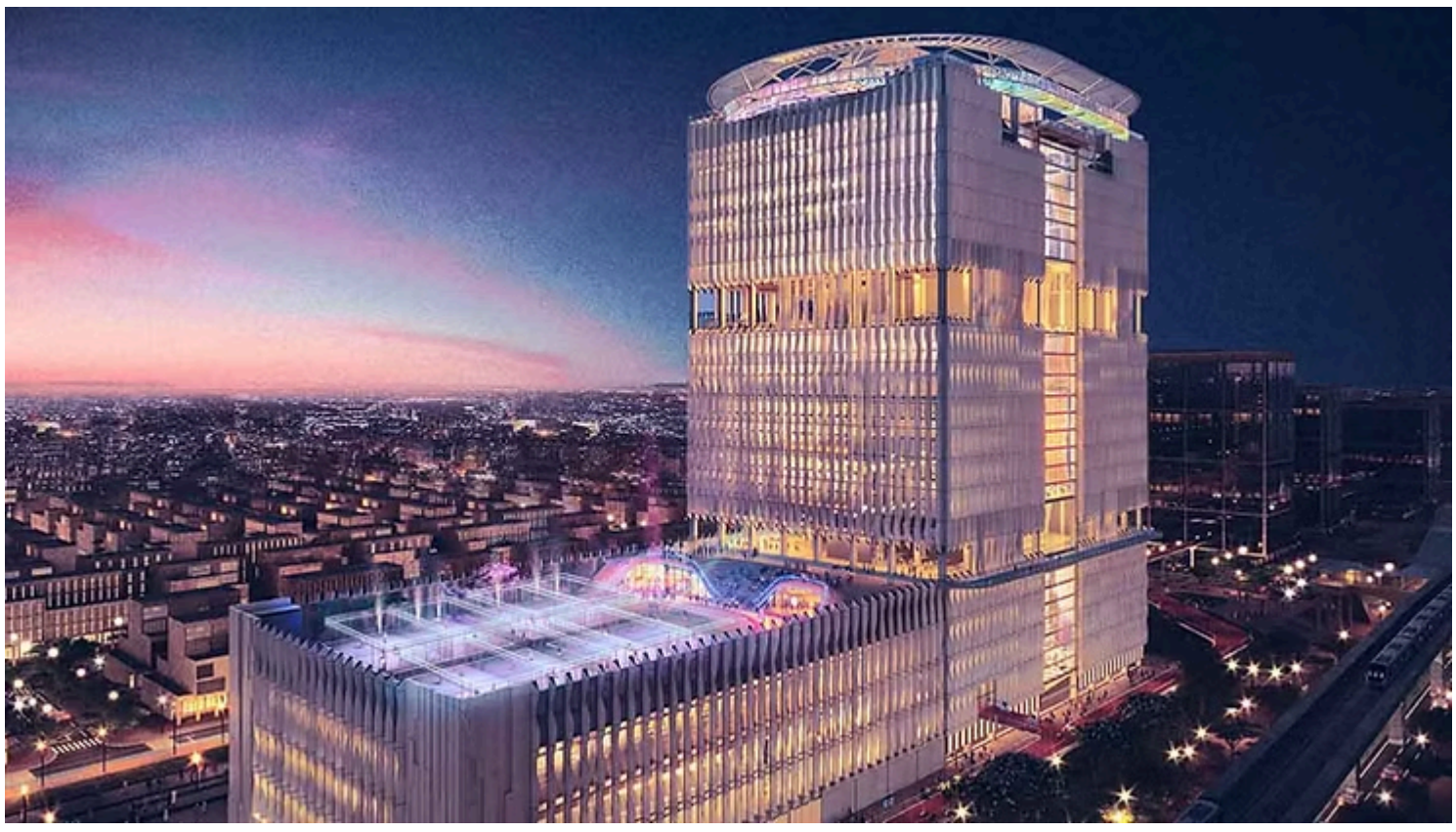
- There is no one-size-fits-all solution — playing characteristics and quality vary significantly.
- A glass court used in the wrong context is like using a Ferrari for daily commuting—prestigious, but not suited to the task.
- The wrong court can put the entire business model of a facility at risk.
- Design and construction must reflect the specific goals, user groups, and operational requirements of each facility.
- Working with independent experts is essential — avoiding costly mistakes starts with informed decisions.

A recent example underlines just how high the stakes are: Open Squash in New York has filed a legal case against their court supplier, CourtTech, alleging severe construction and performance defects that could jeopardize the functionality of the entire facility. The case (Index No. 650544-2024) is now public and can be reviewed here: NY Courts Case File.

While the outcome remains to be seen, one thing is clear: **when mistakes happen at this level, the financial and reputational damage is massive**. This case illustrates why working with independent experts during planning, procurement, and construction is not a luxury — it's a safeguard.

What Is Happening Today – Two Examples from Just One Country

The *Sports Boulevard* **in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - the world largest Global Sports Tower** is a urban development project designed to promote an active and healthy lifestyle. The initiative features more than **50 sports facilities**, including dedicated pathways for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders, as well as expansive **green and open spaces** covering over **4.4 million square meters**. Among its specialized zones is the *Athletics District* – a hub for a wide range of sports activities that also includes **several glass squash courts** and **Padel courts**.



The **Sports Boulevard** in **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

Glass courts look spectacular – and in a flagship project like Riyadh's Sports Boulevard, they make a bold architectural statement. But prestige is not performance. Glass courts behave differently: they're louder, the ball rebound is less predictable, and the acoustics can be challenging. For professional events, they're perfect. **But if the goal is to grow the game, the real question is: Are you building for show – or for play?**

Another Example: Squash Courts in Riyadh's Olympic Sports Complex

As part of Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030 and the broader modernization of sports infrastructure, another major new sports complex is currently under development in Riyadh, led by the Ministry of Sports and Youth. A key component of this complex is the Multi-Purpose Sports Hall at the Olympic Center, where squash is set to play an important role.

Within the Multi-Purpose Sports Hall, two doubles squash courts are planned. Both courts follow the old doubles court width of 7.62 meters, despite the shift toward the wider 8.42-meter format for international doubles. However, one of these two courts will feature a movable side wall, allowing it to be adapted to the standard 6.40-meter singles format.

About the Olympic Center Project:

- Location: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Total Area: 27 hectares

- Key Facilities:
  - Multi-Purpose Sports Hall with approx. 7,000 spectator seats
  - 5,000-seat outdoor stadium
  - Men's (9,500 m²) and women's (5,000 m²) swimming centers
  - Ballroom (5,000 m²), administrative buildings (1,000 m²)

- Urban Integration: Connected to the broader King Salman Stadium Complex, featuring a 92,000-seat main stadium, training fields, Olympic aquatics, athletics venues, and outdoor courts for volleyball, basketball, and padel. All are linked by a 9 km sports loop around King Abdulaziz Park.

- Partial openings are expected from 2025 onward, with full completion of the King Salman Stadium complex targeted for 2029.

- Strategic Importance: This project is part of a national strategy to:
  - Expand access to high-quality sports infrastructure
  - Attract international sporting events and sports tourism
  - Increase community engagement in sports
  - Position Riyadh as a leading global sports hub

The inclusion of squash in such a flagship development underlines the sport's growing relevance in the Middle East. However, the decision to use 7.62 m wide doubles courts illustrates the ongoing need for global coordination of standards and greater alignment between infrastructure planning and modern squash practices.

The WSF Court Specifications: Time for an Update!

The examples from Saudi Arabia are not isolated cases — they are representative of a global trend: squash is entering new markets, large-scale developments are integrating the sport, and investment is flowing into high-visibility infrastructure. In this dynamic landscape, one element plays a central role — often in the background, but with far-reaching consequences: the WSF Squash Court Specifications.

As the globally recognized framework for how squash courts should be built, the specification continues to shape projects worldwide. But as these real-world examples show, it is increasingly clear that the current version — while technically rigorous and historically important — no longer aligns with today's construction realities, material innovations, and the diverse use cases emerging across the globe.

The current specifications offer a comprehensive framework for court dimensions, materials, and performance characteristics. However, they were originally developed over 50 years ago and no longer reflect the realities of today's sports infrastructure. If interpreted strictly, not a single squash court worldwide with a glass back wall would fully comply with all technical criteria as currently written.

More critically, the specification fails to differentiate between distinct use cases — such as world-class competition venues versus commercial or recreational facilities with different budgets and functional priorities. It also overlooks the cost-performance trade-offs that are standard practice in most other sports facility guidelines.

This presents a real challenge: in projects lacking squash-specific expertise, the result is often courts that are either built incorrectly or to inappropriate standards. This does not support the sport's growth — it undermines it. Without practical, updated, and tiered guidance, squash risks losing ground in precisely those markets where development is most needed.

The following technical Assessment evaluates the current WSF "Specifications for Squash Courts" in terms of:

- Their technical feasibility in the context of modern sports facility construction

- Their alignment with global construction norms (e.g., DIN, EN, ISO)

- Known discrepancies between specification and practical construction realities

Note on WSF Accreditation and Global Practice

The WSF specification states:

"Championships played under the auspices of the WSF, Regional Federations, the World Junior Circuit and a number of National Federations shall only be played on courts which meet the Specification in all respects and are constructed entirely from Accredited Products."

However, in practice, this rule is frequently bypassed:

- Only a very limited number of court manufacturers worldwide currently hold active WSF accreditation.
- In particular, North and South America, Africa, and Australia see the majority of new courts being built by local or regional companies without WSF accreditation.
- Despite this, WSF-affiliated tournaments, including World Junior Circuit events, are regularly hosted on such courts.

This discrepancy highlights a practical disconnect between policy and reality. While accreditation can help ensure consistency and quality, its limited global adoption risks making the specification irrelevant or exclusionary. A broader, more inclusive certification model – perhaps including tiered compliance (e.g., "meets technical standards" vs. "fully accredited") – may be more appropriate to encourage development in emerging squash markets.

1. Comments to Squash Court Types

❌ International Doubles (7620 mm width): Outdated

The 7620 mm wide "international doubles" court, once positioned as the global standard for doubles play, has proven to be functionally too narrow. The current accepted width for international doubles is now: 8420 mm with a tin height: 330 mm

As a result, the 7620 mm format should no longer be included as a recommended option. It is not used in practice and cannot be retrofitted to meet modern expectations for doubles play.

2. Problematic or Technically Infeasible Specifications

⚠️ WSF Spec 6.01.03 – Wall Surface Flatness and Joint Tolerance

"The walls of the court shall be plane and have no indentations, holes or open joints of more than 2mm across in any dimension in the plane of the wall."

While this requirement is reasonable for solid walls, it directly conflicts with the standard 3 mm spacing used between glass panels in most squash courts.

📌 **Recommendation:** The WSF should clarify that the 2 mm rule applies only to solid walls and explicitly exclude structural joints between glass elements from this requirement.

❌ WSF Spec 6.02.03 – Wall Impact Requirements

"Impact of a 100 kg human body, 47% absorption, at 4.5 m/s into the wall at 1.47 m height..."

This specification aims to simulate high-speed player collisions, which is justified in principle. However, the required mechanical tolerance exceeds what current glass wall systems can practically deliver:

- No commercially available squash glass wall – even those meeting EN 12600 or ANSI Z97.1 – has been independently verified to meet the exact impact dynamics described in 6.02.03.
- Manufacturers rely on standardized glass breakage and deflection tests, not custom simulations involving body mass, velocity, and energy absorption.

🛑 **Conclusion:** This section defines an engineering scenario that is practically untestable and unenforceable with current glass materials. Unless the WSF provides a standardized method (e.g., surrogate test rig or simulation protocol), this clause is not viable for transparent wall systems.

❌ WSF Spec 7.03 – Door Width

"The door shall be between 750 mm and 900 mm wide..."

This specification is not in line with industry practice. Since the early 1990s, virtually all modern squash glass back walls use 914 mm (36") doors, a standard derived from:

- Accessibility norms (e.g., ADA compliance in the US)
- Fire safety and emergency egress requirements

- Manufacturing convenience and alignment with standard hinge and handle systems

📌 **Observation:** No glass wall system in common use provides a 900 mm door. Thus, this spec is not reflective of actual practice and should be updated to permit 914 mm as standard.

Conclusion

The WSF squash court specifications represent one of the most thorough and detailed frameworks in global sports facility design. However, to remain relevant, practical, and respected in today's construction environment, they must evolve.

To achieve this, the following points are critical:

- **Recognize current material and construction limitations**, particularly regarding glass wall systems and modern manufacturing tolerances.

- **Retire outdated dimensions and design components**, such as the 7620 mm international doubles format, which no longer reflects how squash is played at the highest level.

- **Establish dual or tiered standards**, clearly differentiating between requirements for high-performance competition courts and those suitable for recreational or commercial use.

- **Introduce more flexibility** by acknowledging globally accepted norms in accessibility, safety, and regional construction practices.

A **dynamic, updated specification** — one that reflects real-world conditions, modern materials, and diverse use cases — would not only improve construction quality, but also remove unnecessary barriers to the sport's growth, particularly in emerging markets. It would enable facility developers to build correctly and with confidence — and allow squash to expand globally without compromising safety or playability.

If the sport is to grow on a global scale, the technical standards that govern it must be grounded in **practical feasibility and i** **at** **e**
The future of squash depends on it.

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