

SFN Team · Nov 19, 2024

# Best Practice of the month, Part 3: 'The key factor is enjoyment'



As part of our "Best Practice of the Month - Choosing the Right Squash Ball for Beginners" series, the Squash Facility Network (SFN) conducted an interview with Paul Selby.

Helping people choose the right squash ball is absolutely vital to engaging and retaining players as they make their journey through the sport. It's estimated that 90% of first-time squash players do not return - and use of a completely inappropriate double yellow dot ball is a major factor in that statistic. It's not just beginners - more experienced players are also using the wrong ball for their level and not getting an optimum squash experience.

Paul Selby, his wife Karen, daughter Lauren and their dedicated coaching team have run [Off The Wall Squash](#) in Essex, south-east England for over 10 years. They deliver squash to over 2,000 children in primary schools (ages 7-11) every year. The best and most enthusiastic kids from that programme enter the annual [Roman Cup](#) and a proportion of those players go on to become members of the Off The Wall Squash Academy, working towards playing competitive squash in the English county and national competitions.

Paul and his team know exactly how to deliver squash to beginners and how to adapt it as their players develop their skills and become more capable - and using the right balls is a major factor in their success.



## THE RIGHT BALLS FOR JUNIORS

Off The Wall Squash use the orange Dunlop Mini Squash ball when delivering squash to their 7-11-year-old beginners in school sports halls. When the kids progress to the squash court, they change to the Karakal Big Ball or a conventional red dot ball "as quickly as possible" once they learn how to serve and play short rallies.

When children join the Off The Wall academy squads, they will generally play with a single yellow dot ball. Only once they reach county or national competition standard will they play with a double yellow dot ball (in the right temperature conditions). Even young players at that standard are encouraged to use single yellow dot balls in certain practice situations, like soft hand work on lobs and drop shots. "For top-level juniors, using a single yellow or a red dot can aid training rather than detract from it," says Paul.

## ADULT BEGINNERS

As we know from the 2024 Global Squash Report, 90% of the people on squash courts across the world are leisure players. Giving them a fantastic first-time experience of squash is absolutely vital if we are to keep our sport sustainable. But too often, those first-time players are given a double yellow dot ball that rarely bounces above their ankles.

Paul uses a neat metaphor: "Squash is like a pint of Guinness - the white bit is the tournament and elite players, and the black bit underneath is everybody else. The bit that holds up the froth at the top is so much more important. Without that, the froth wouldn't exist and the glass would be empty!"

The advice on which ball an adult beginner should be using is not quite so 'black and white'! It depends on the players' age, physical capabilities and previous racket sport experience as well as the temperature of the court. But it is almost never appropriate for even the most physically fit beginners to use a double yellow dot.

Paul's advice is to experiment until they find the ball that gives them the best matches. To do that, they need to be educated in the first place about the different options and have all options available to try. That's not always easy when many sports shops and squash facilities only sell double yellow dot balls!

As Paul explains: "Squash has got a problem because the suppliers (to public sports centres) are not always educated enough to know what to recommend and the the public sports centres don't always know what to order. There's a disconnect between the two.

"They both have to be educated on what ball is appropriate for players who play regularly, and for those playing occasionally or recreationally. It's a different dynamic to a private squash club, where that knowledge is (or should) already be there. But the majority of beginners don't start playing the game in a members' club!"



## ADULT SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL PLAYERS

Once adults become more experienced on a squash court, Paul's advice is for them to use a single yellow dot ball. However, many intermediate-level players progress too quickly on to using the double yellow.

"It's just vanity!" says Paul. "I would ask them, 'Do you want a good game or do you want an average game because you think you're a pro?' Ultimately, everybody should want the ball that's going to give you the best game."

"Generally speaking, players at most clubs should be using a single yellow dot except for guys in the teams and top divisions of the box leagues. If you feel like the ball is too lively then you can try a double yellow dot, but don't be scared to return to the single yellow if you feel it's not as enjoyable."

"The key thing for me is enjoyment. If you're not enjoying playing as much then go back to the ball that gives you the best game."





Paul Selby with a junior player at the Off The Wall Squash Academy

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Squash's ball system can be confusing for newcomers to the game, so raising awareness among suppliers, sports equipment outlets, public squash facilities and players is of paramount importance so that a variety of balls are fed down the supply chain.

Paul feels the guidance, marketing and even packaging of balls by manufacturers and brands isn't clear enough. "A box of 12 double yellow dot squash balls looks almost exactly the same as a box of blue dots," he says. "Can we make it much clearer who each type of ball is for? Could the whole ball be a different colour too, rather than just the dots?"

Paul also calls for a standardised ball bounce height for each type of ball: "There is an industry-standard size and weight, but no requirement for how high a ball should bounce at a certain temperature. Who's to say that the Dunlop ball, for instance, has the right bounce height? We need criteria for how a ball should perform at certain temperatures."

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As players get older and less mobile, many continue to use the double yellow dot ball out of habit or stubbornness. The ball stays cold and rallies get shorter and less enjoyable. Could there be rules brought in at regional, national and international Masters competitions to mandate the use of faster balls above certain age categories (as happens in Squash57 with the black and blue balls)?

Join the upcoming SFN webinar to shape a winning strategy for selecting the best ball for beginners. Secure your spot now and be part of this important discussion!



**Best Practice of the Month: Choosing the Right Squash Ball for Beginners**  
28 November 2024, 16:00–16:45 CET | Webinar

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