

mpdale · Nov 14, 2023

Stockholm Squash Club sustains success thanks to its unique 'personal touch'



Gärdets Squashhall, the home of Stockholm Squash Club, is a three-court facility in a basement accessed straight off the pavement. Across the world, many 'old-school' venues like this are struggling - but this one sustains its success thanks to a few unique and ingenious twists.

The manager and owner of Stockholm Squash Club for over 20 years is Christian Drakenberg - former PSA Tour pro and multiple national and Masters title winner. The club has been his second home since he was a kid.

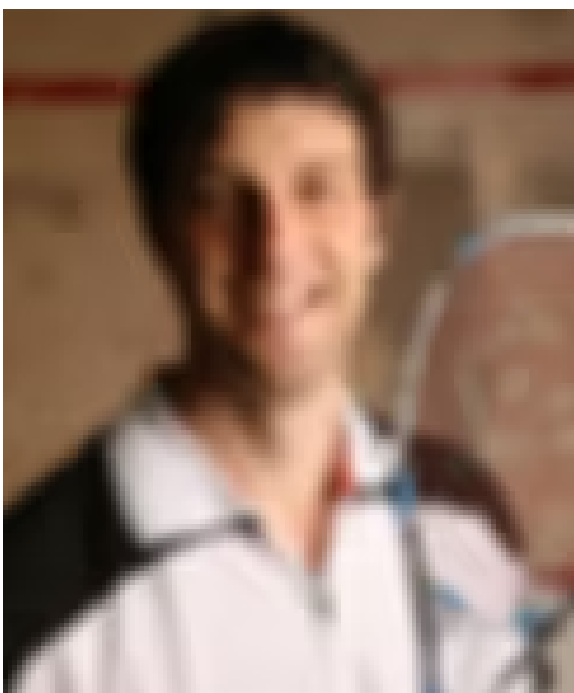
Founded in 1946, the club is the oldest in Sweden. Throughout its existence its fortunes have ebbed and flowed, but activity has always been underpinned by the spirit and camaraderie of its 300-strong community, nicknamed *Jonas Anda* (after the venue's founder Axel Jonason).



Another reason that the club manages to buck the trend of decline in such old-fashioned venues are intriguing differences to its marketing and membership strategies compared to a typical club model.

'Squash matchmaking'

For example, its 'half-court booking' system allows any player (whether a member or non-member) to book a court and the club's staff will find him or her an appropriate opponent. That player will not know who they are playing until they arrive at the court door. You could call it 'squash matchmaking'. It sounds unusual, but it's incredibly successful - an incredible 80% of the club's court bookings use this method.



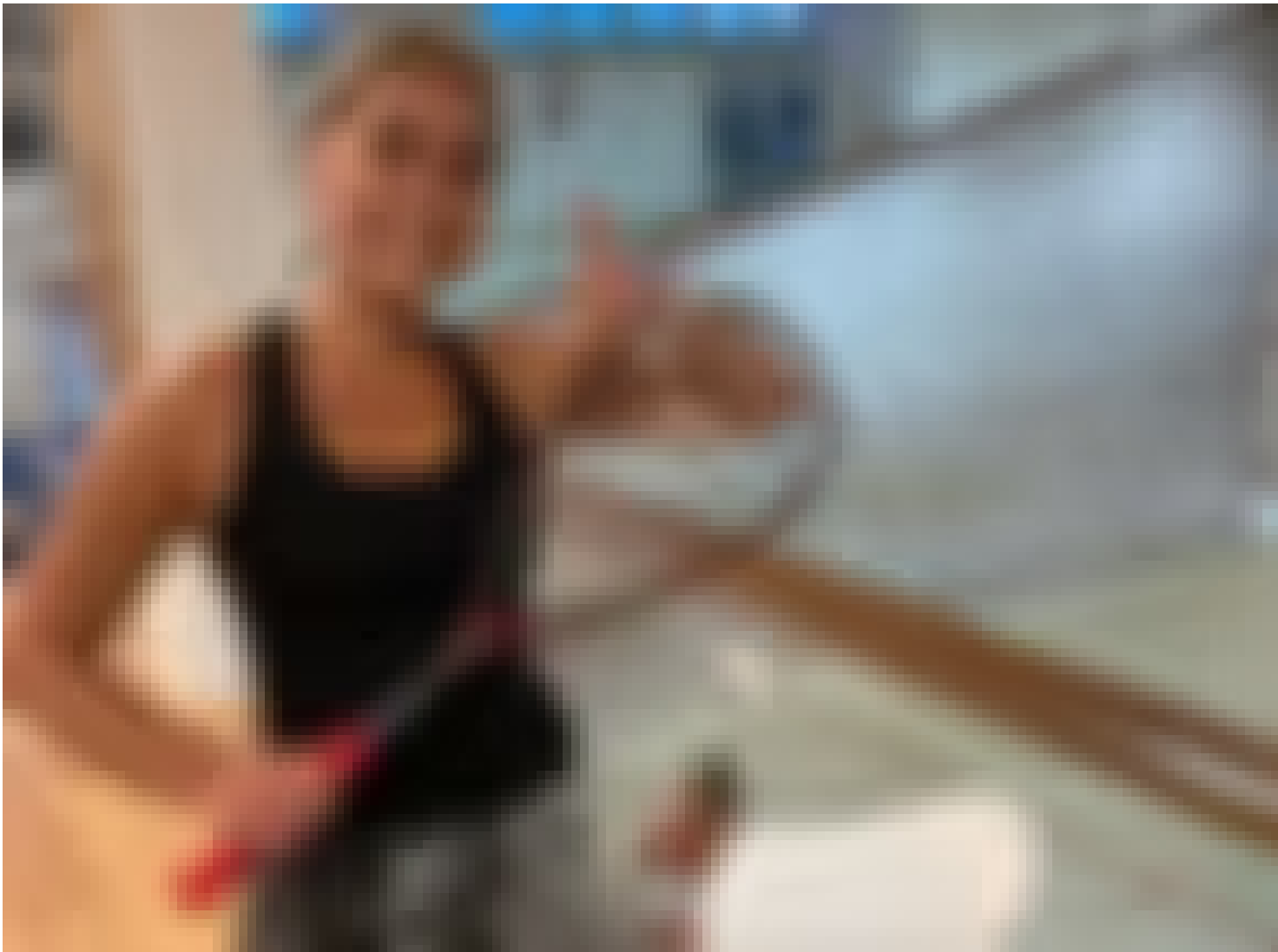
"I've never heard of anyone else doing it," says Drakenberg (pictured left) "If you want to play at 6pm on Wednesday evening, we'll fix you someone to play. We've been working this way forever. It's one of the unique things we have. It's free - we provide it as part of the service.

"It helps us keep our customers. Our players know they don't need to do any of the hard work finding an opponent - we will find someone for them to play.

"We think it's very important that we maintain this connection with players. It enables us to 'sell' the court even if it's not booked. We don't like empty courts! You want to hear that sound of the ball hitting the wall."

This proactive marketing technique obviously relies on club staff having detailed knowledge about all of its regular players. Drakenberg says his players like this "personal touch." He says: "You have to know everyone, and we do know everyone here.

"They know that we know who they are, which is really important. They feel like they are part of the community. Nowadays, everything is electronic. You don't even speak to anyone at the supermarket. Sometimes, you want to interact with people.

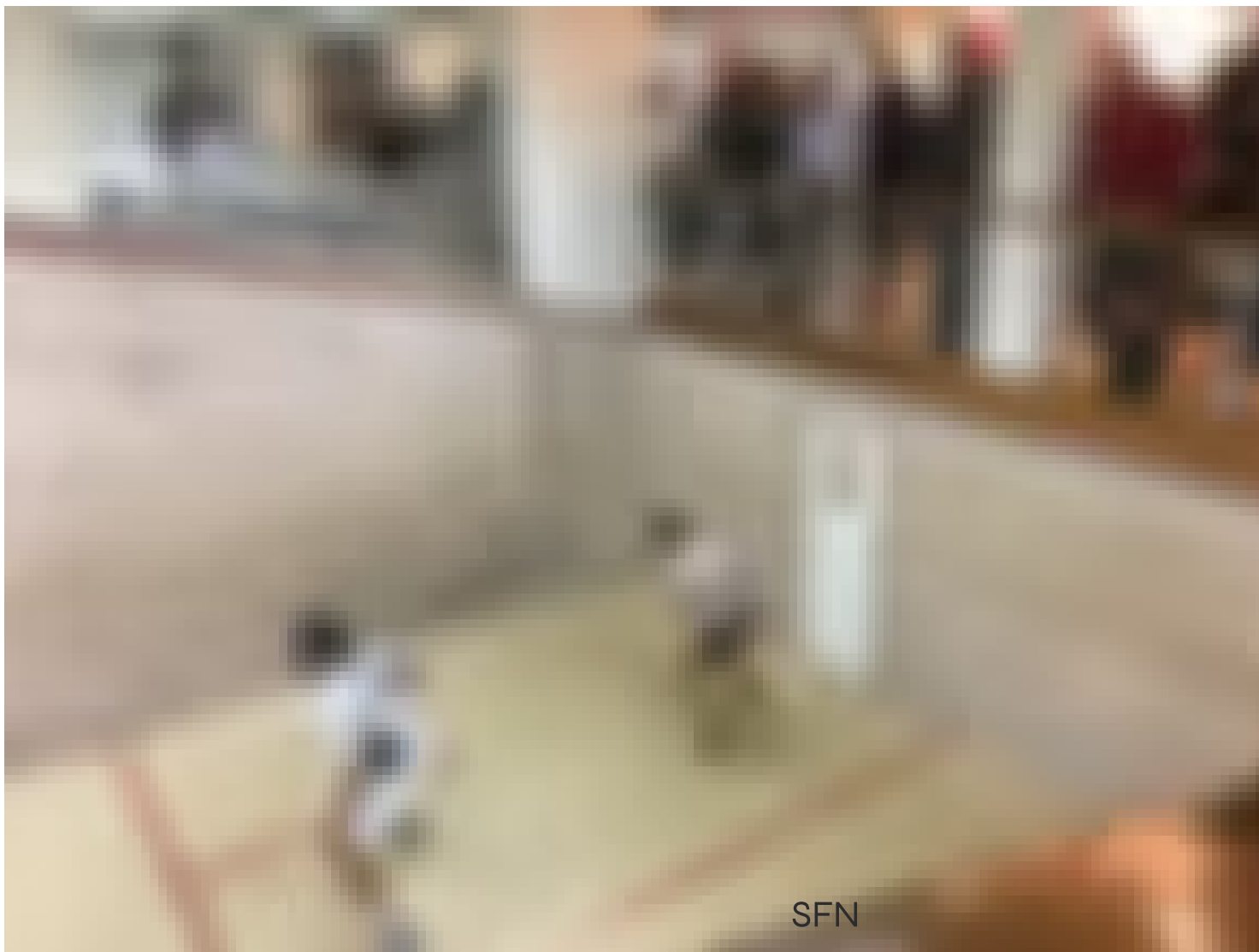


"It helps people make new contacts. They can play with two or three different partners each week and next week, two or three more. Everyone gets to know everyone very quickly and it actually brings everyone's levels up because we're giving them new challenges all the time."

For other clubs wanting to apply this method, there is obvious potential to use a system such as [SquashLevels](#) to match up players appropriately if you're not as familiar with their standards.

The club has [a ladder system](#) - which exists both online and in physical form on a wall right in the centre of the club. It currently has 147 players on it, split into six levels, and is taken very seriously by participants ("If two players play at lunchtime, they sometimes phone us in the evening if we still haven't updated the ladder with the result!" laughs Drakenberg). The ladder also acts as a good guide for staff to match up opponents.

The club is open to members and pay-and-play customers. For new players, matching them up with opponents is initially a bit of guesswork but observing their first match gives staff a good idea of their level for next time.



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Like all good clubs, there is a strong emphasis on juniors, with affordable membership and four sessions a week, including a very popular coaching and matchplay session on Sundays attended by over 50 children.

Unique membership model

There are three [levels of adult membership](#) - and this brings us to another unique twist in Stockholm Squash Club's operation methods.

A Bronze Card for 750 SEK (65 Euros) per month offers daytime and weekend play and shop discounts, a Silver Card for 1050 SEK (90 Euros) gives you anytime play, Monday Club and 50% Tuesday training discount, but a Gold Card is where the real difference lies.

As well as a variety of discounts, Gold Card holders get a locker and freshly washed towel for every match. They also get a free laundry service, so their kit will be washed, dried and ready for their match when they arrive.

The club has no bar or gym and could be described as 'no-frills', but the personal treatment offered by management and staff helps give both members and non-members a special welcome into the club, whether it's their first visit or their 1,000th.