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Courting couple: How Squash 57 is keeping Christel and Rolf active

The Squash Facilities Network found this article from Squash Player magazine exceptionally inspiring as it exemplifies best practice for engaging individuals in squash, particularly those in the later stages of life.



Christel and Rolf Finkenbrink having fun with Squash 57

Squash 57 has revitalised the lives of Christel and Rolf Finkenbrink and a merry band of players in the autumn of their years at Ebbisham Sports Club in Surrey.

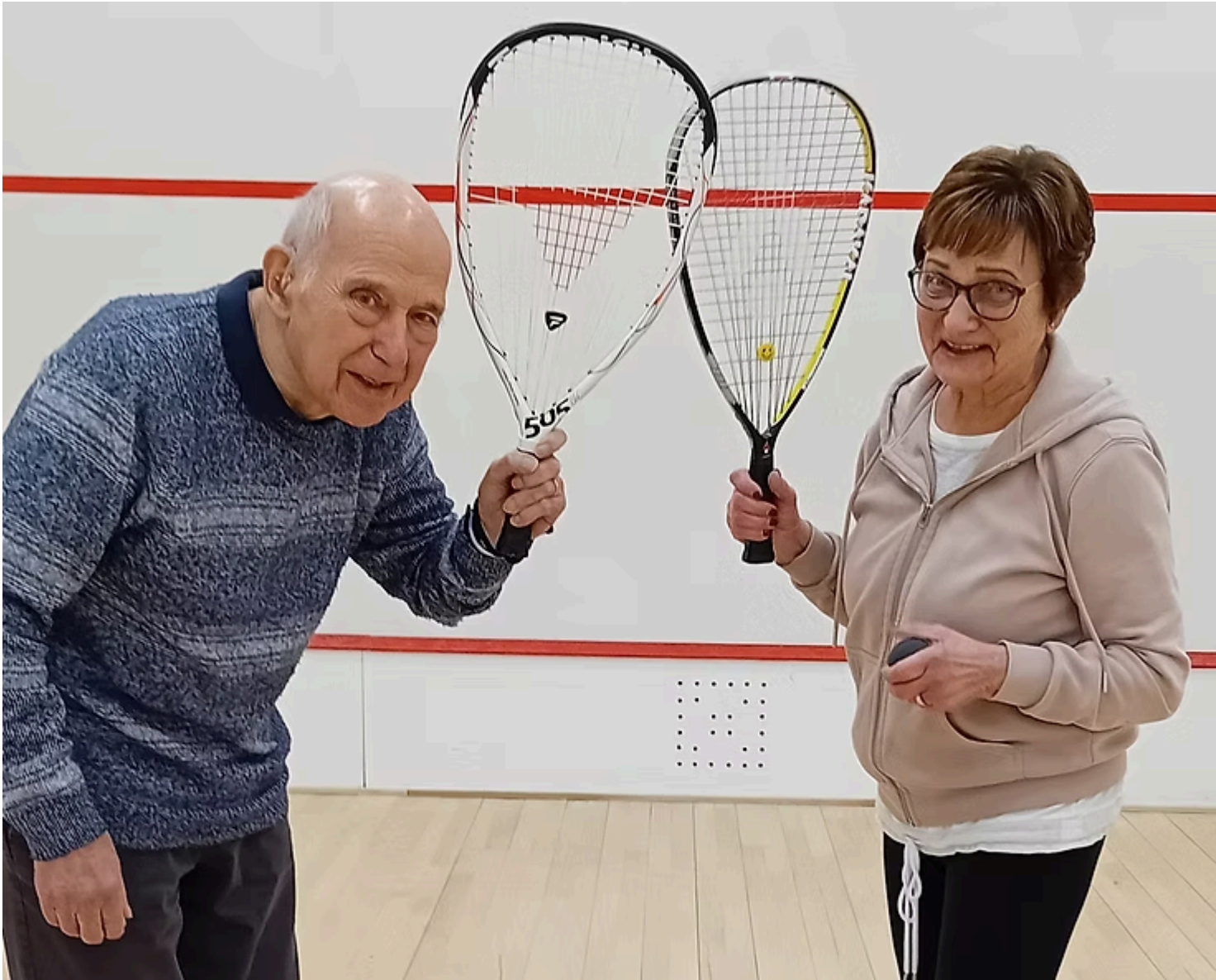
Christel, 76, and Rolf, 81, were introduced to Squash 57 in 2016 by Ebbisham's then-Club Coach and Development & Membership Co-ordinator, Jo Robinson.

At the time, Christel was recovering from lung cancer and was in search of a pursuit that would offer her aerobic exercise. She had never played any sport in her life - but she soon become "totally hooked" on racketball.

The racketball group at Ebbisham soon became great friends and were a vital source of mutual comfort and support during the lonely months of the pandemic, organising Zoom quizzes and walking groups of six when Covid rules permitted.

Just before the pandemic started, Rolf struggled in the aftermath of an aortic heart valve replacement. The other members of the racketball group at Ebbisham rallied round to coax him back to their weekly sessions and eventually he returned to the court.

"Racketball has been extremely important for us," says Christel. "Our grandchildren had grown up and we were no longer really needed to help look after them, so it was absolutely brilliant to have found a new set of friends. Everyone was so friendly. It was such a lovely, lovely group - and still is."



Christel and Rolf holding up their Squash 57 rackets

Christel and Rolf, who are originally from Germany, are fully immersed in the range of over-50s sessions run at Ebbisham Sports Club.

There are now four weekly racketball classes, one social rackets morning and a charity Tai Chi group, with an average of 50-70 people attending each week. The sessions are part of the University of the 3rd Age (U3A) - a network of over 1000 charities across the UK who create opportunities for older people to learn, have fun and make friends. U3A has over 430,000 members and they run local activities in most towns and cities.

"I was hooked right from the beginning - but it took me a really long time to learn," admits Christel. "I have never been sporty, but the others have all been so patient with me."

"The more exhausted I am, the better. I just love to play. I prefer singles to doubles because it's more energetic, but there's so many in the group now so we often need to play doubles to get everyone on court."

And are they going to carry on playing? "Yes, please God!" she laughs. "For us both, it has just been fantastic."

Ebbisham's example shows what an asset racketball can be for squash clubs, particularly in attracting and retaining older or less mobile players who may find the physical demands of traditional squash challenging. Older players, particularly retirees, are more likely to use facilities during daytime hours, a period when courts are typically underutilised. Ebbisham, which has three squash courts, is one club where racketball has been a key revenue and membership driver.

Jo, the coach who started the over-50s racketball group, said: "These classes really have made a huge impact on these seniors' lives. Christel and Rolf really are an inspiration.

"Racketball really should be as big as padel, if only more people knew about it. It is a good physical workout, it can be played in singles or doubles and it is never rained off. Coaches in clubs should be promoting racketball alongside squash for the many benefits it provides."



This article by Mike Dale was originally published in [Squash Player magazine](#)

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