



 [Log In](#)

Home	Ecosystem	Facilities	Management	Architecture	Marketplace	About us
------	-----------	------------	------------	--------------	-------------	----------

Markus Gaebel · Feb 14

From School Halls to Squash Courts: How Paul Selby Makes Squash Accessible in School Programs

About Paul Selby. *This article is based on an extensive interview with Paul Selby, a veteran squash coach and program leader who has been designing school-based squash initiatives since the late 1990’s. His hands-on approach has shaped successful junior academies, and he continues to advise clubs and federations on how to replicate these outcomes worldwide. He is presently a director of Off The Wall Squash.*

Off The Wall regularly introduces squash to thousands of children each year to more than 20 schools. Their system consistently brings new talent into their junior program—currently hosting around 150 active players in his club. A lot of the Academy participate in the National Junior Championships and ESF Junior tournaments as well as England Squash Junior Circuit tournaments.



Paul Selby coaching

For many of us, squash conjures up images of bustling clubs and high-level tournaments. Yet Paul Selby, a long-time coach and innovator, believes the real opportunity lies in bringing the sport directly into schools—especially those with limited resources. In an interview with the SFN, Selby shared his experiences implementing squash programs with Off The Wall Squash in primary schools, outlining the benefits for children who might otherwise not engage in sports, and offered practical steps any school or federation can follow. Here are the key lessons.

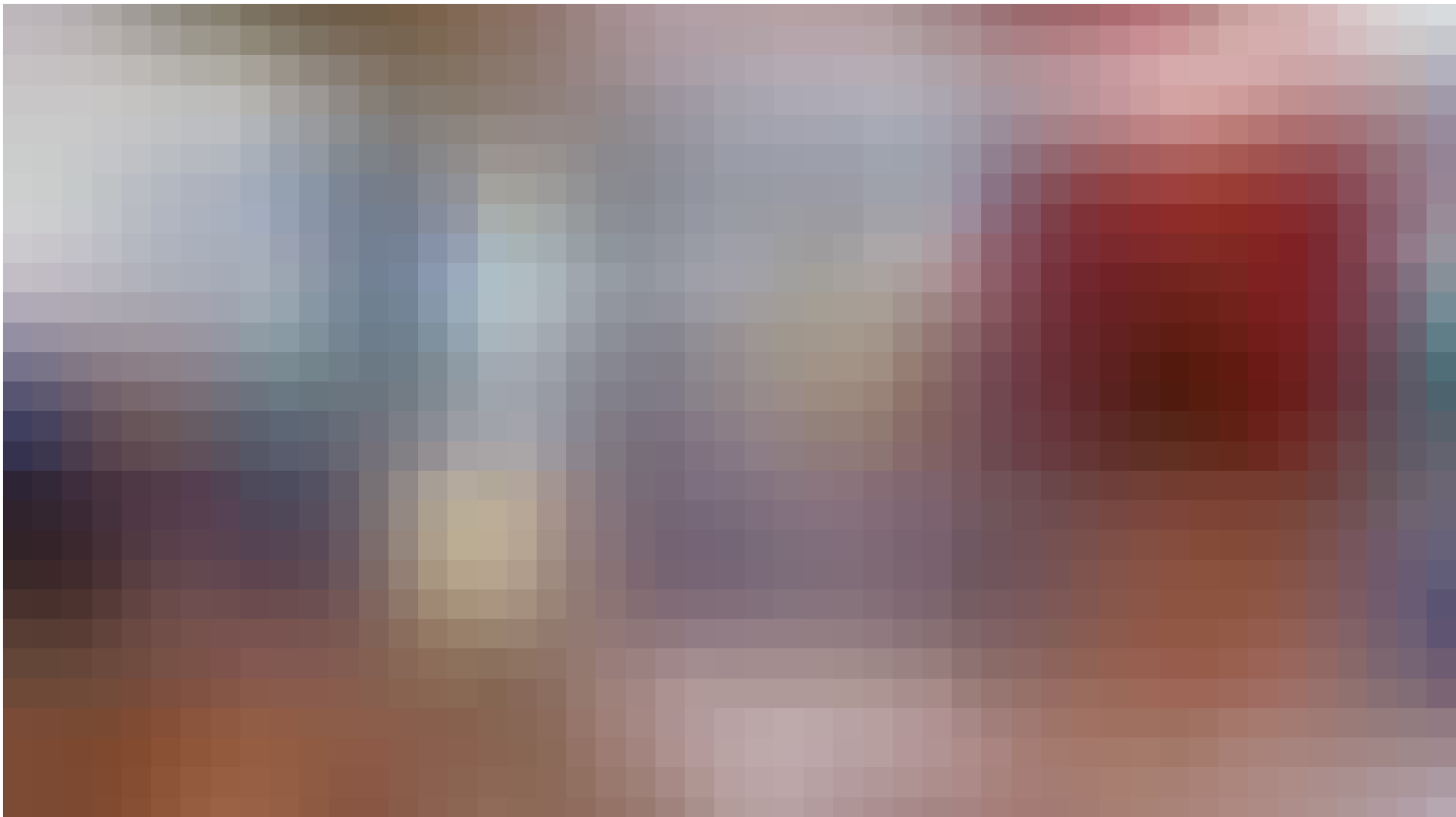
Why Squash? Making a Case for Priority Schools

Many “priority schools” (often those in under-resourced communities) seek fresh ways to engage children in physical activity. While mainstream sports like football, netball, and hockey dominate the curriculum, they don’t appeal to everyone. Selby argues that squash offers:

- **Accessibility for all skill levels:** Some children feel overshadowed in team sports. Squash gives them the chance to compete at their own pace, building confidence and fostering independence.
- **Indoor, year-round play:** Being weather-proof is a major plus in many regions. Schools don’t need large fields, and activities can continue regardless of the season.
- **Health and fitness benefits:** Squash delivers a fun, high-energy workout that helps combat sedentary lifestyles.

“Some kids struggle to be part of a group sport,” Selby explains. “Offering them an individual activity—while still being social—is a game-changer.”

No Courts Required: Keeping Costs Low



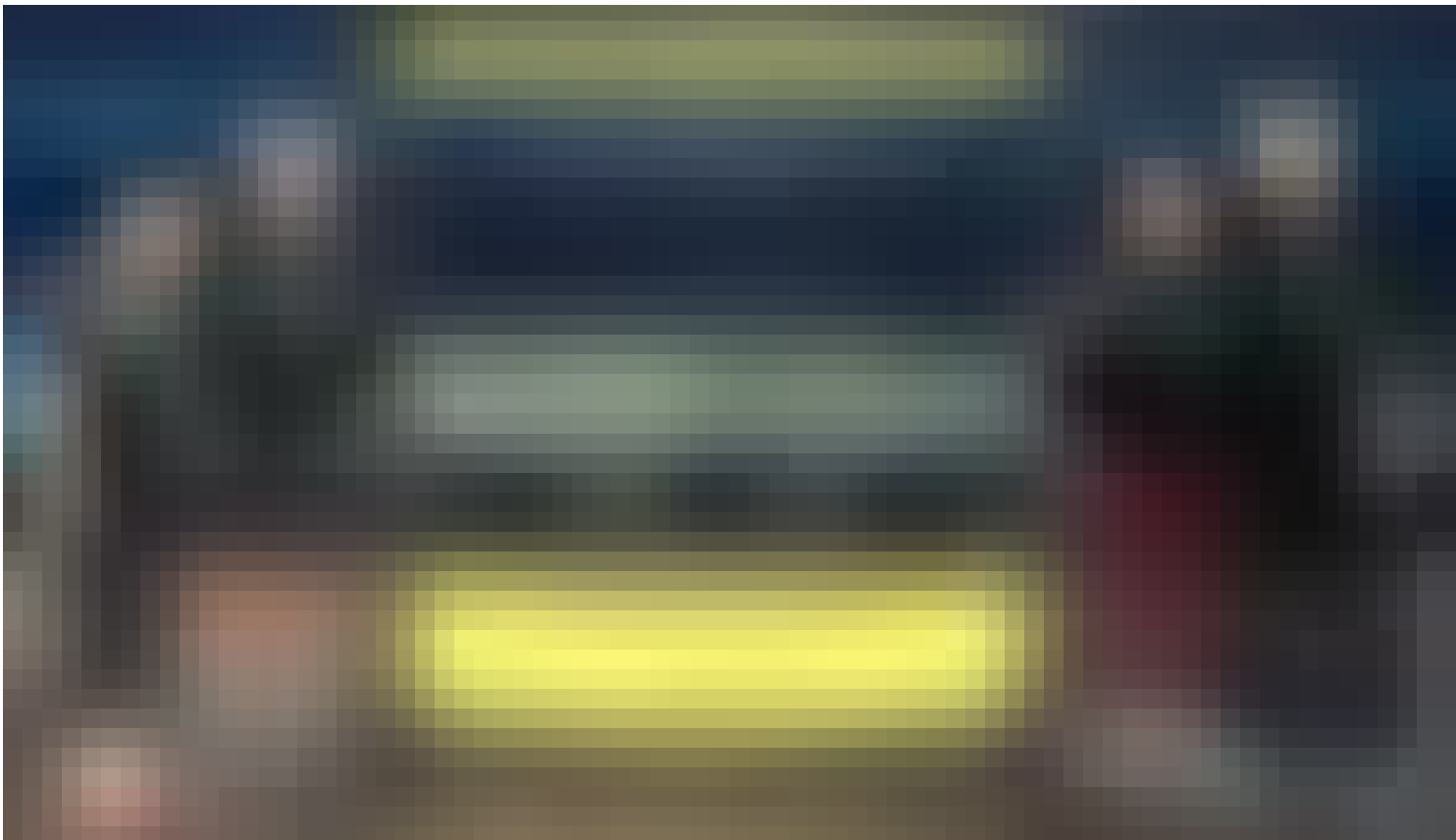
Portable Squash Net in Action

One of the biggest revelations from the Off The Wall program is that schools don’t need permanent squash courts. A typical setup involves:

- **Portable squash nets:** Lightweight nets can be set up in school halls or gyms, even outside in School playgrounds in nice weather.
- **Throw-down court lines:** These can be placed on the floor to mark court boundaries.
- **Mini-squash balls:** Softer and bouncier than standard squash balls, ideal for beginners.
- **Short-handled rackets:** Designed to help younger children with hand–eye coordination.

Because the equipment is minimal (and often supplied by the coaching provider), schools rarely invest more than the cost of the coaching sessions. Off The Wall’s team, for instance, arrives with nets, rackets, and balls in tow. Schools that do want their own nets can order them and store them onsite, but many simply let the coaches handle setup and takedown.

The Role of Coaching—and the Teacher’s Involvement



A key ingredient in Off The Wall's system is having **two coaches** per class of around 30 children. This ensures a safe environment where one coach can troubleshoot issues while the other keeps the rest of the group engaged. While the presence of a teacher or teaching assistant is often required (for safeguarding and classroom management), they don't lead the sessions:

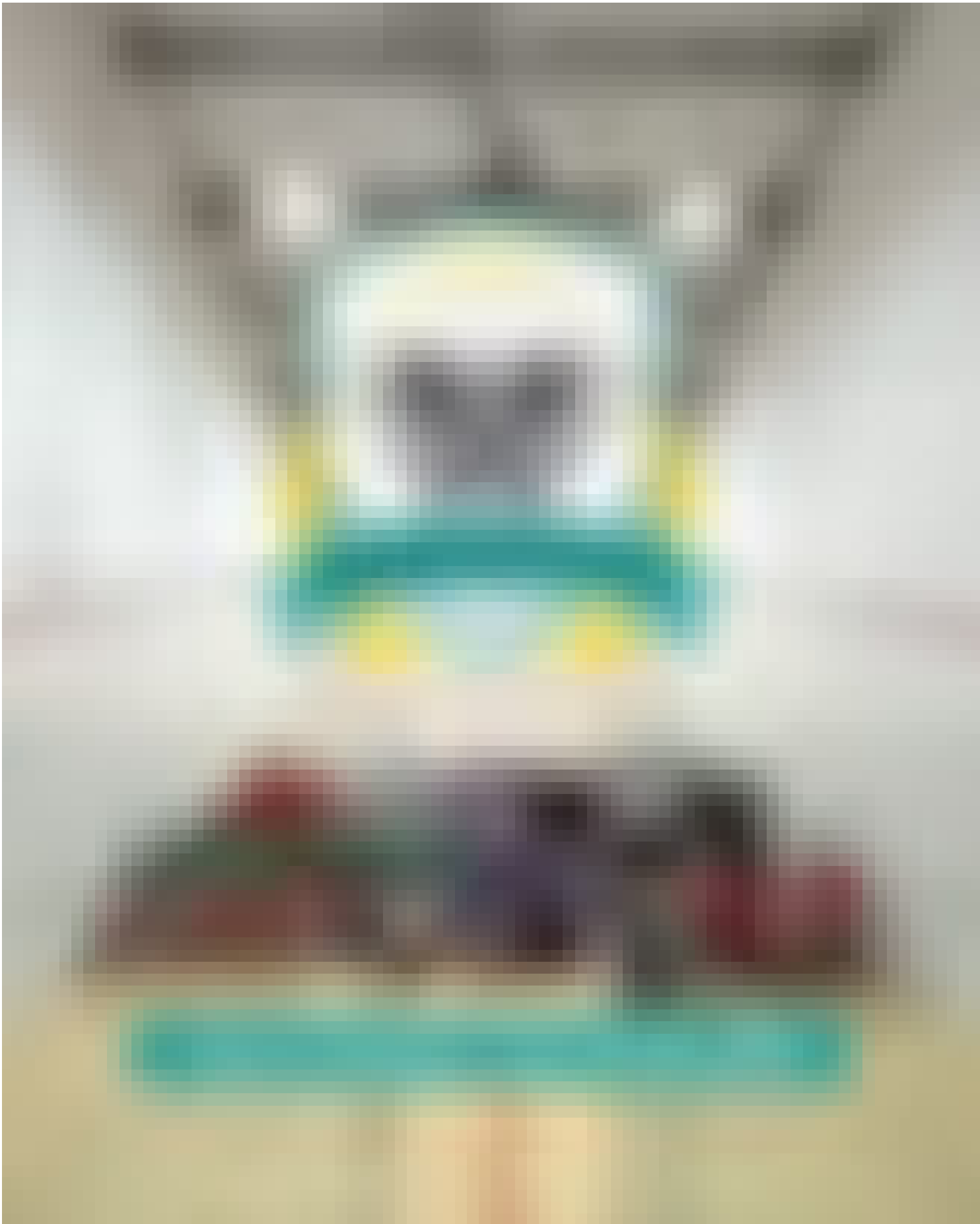
"In most cases, the teacher is there on the sidelines, sometimes marking papers. They jump in if there's a child with special needs or if someone needs extra help," says Selby.

For coaches, a basic coaching qualification is sufficient for one of the coaches while a more experienced coach can lead the sessions—one experienced lead coach and one assistant is enough to keep a session running smoothly and to ensure high-quality instruction.

Getting Started: The First Six Weeks

Off The Wall typically runs a **six-week introduction** for children who have never held a squash racket. Lessons start simple:

- **Week 1:** Basic ball-handling and movement, often without rackets. Kids practice rolling or lightly bouncing mini squash balls to develop hand-eye coordination.
- **Progressive Skills:** Each week, children quickly move from racket-free activities to shot specific rallies, culminating in mini-games over the net.



The Roman Cup is a junior inter-school squash competition

This structured approach fosters confidence; kids who initially struggle with racket skills get the repetition and support they need. By week six, most are rallying and showing real enthusiasm for the sport.

From Try-Out to Ongoing Play: The “Big Question”

After these school sessions, how do you keep kids playing? Selby emphasizes that **conversion** from curious participant to club member is the trickiest part. His program addresses this by:

- 1. Every child who has been through the schools programme is offered one free try out session unless they are already part of the Academy or have tried it previously.

SFN



2. **Identifying Talent:** Near the end of the course, coaches select a handful of children to represent the school in a Inter Schools Competition—often four to eight from a group of 30 or more made up of two boys and two girls per team. (Boys play boys and girls play girls.)
3. **Offering a Free Month:** Those children chosen to play in the Inter School Competition are offered complimentary sessions at a local squash club.

“If they like it enough during that free phase, they’ll often stay on,” Selby says. Yet location matters. If the club is too far from the school, transport can be a barrier. “Without nearby courts, you lose kids simply because they can’t get there.”

Reality Check: Conversion Rates and Program Impact

Selby and the Off The Wall team reach around **3,000 children every year** in more than 20 schools in his area plus about 10 more in a neighbouring regio). But the conversion rate to regular club members is modest:

- From a pool of 3,000 kids, about 2% transition into committed club players each year.
- At any one time, the Off The Wall academy maintains around 150 juniors, and 80% of them got their first taste of squash through school sessions.

“We’ll lose some every year as they move on to other activities or outgrow junior sessions. But new kids come in through each new school term,” he explains. “It’s a constant cycle—much like a gym membership model.”

Looking Beyond the UK: Lessons from Abroad

Off The Wall’s program has caught the attention of federations worldwide:

- **Norway:** His daughter Lauren, Coaching Director of Off The Wall , introduced a “Mini Squash” schools program when she was the national coach. The idea was to get children playing in schools, building up local talent from the ground up.
- **Denmark:** Danish coaches showed strong interest in adopting a similar school outreach and had a Schools Coaching Workshop delivered to coaches from around Denmark delivered by Off The Wall coaches.
- **India:** Plans are underway for workshops to train local coaches on delivering school sessions in various locations.

In each case, success hinges on training local coaches, securing portable equipment, and—most importantly—ensuring a facility is close enough so that kids can continue playing after the initial exposure.

Top Tips for Launching a School Squash Program

1. **Win over the head teacher**
If the school’s leadership is enthusiastic, the program gains traction.
2. **Keep it simple**
Mini Squash balls, mini rackets, and portable nets transform a school hall into a “squash court.”
3. **Use two coaches per class**
Safety and engagement rise when kids can be split into smaller groups for personalised attention.
4. **Offer a clear pathway**
Children need an immediate follow-up option—like a local “club open day” or free trial sessions—so their newfound interest doesn’t fade.
5. **Run a friendly competition**
Inter-school matches or fun cups motivate kids to keep improving.
6. **Plan for the long haul**
It is not instant success but is definitely the best way to steadily increase the amount of new children playing and being introduced to the sport.

Ready to Get Started?

The takeaway from Paul Selby's experience is clear: **Bringing squash into schools is one of the most effective ways to introduce large numbers of children to the sport.** Even if only a small percentage end up joining a club, those who do can become dedicated players—and potentially future coaches.

If you're a school administrator, a local club manager, or a federation official seeking fresh ideas, consider investing in portable equipment, training coaches, and—above all—making squash part of the school culture. The children who rarely shine in team sports might just discover their passion in squash.

Need Expert Help?

Paul Selby and his Off The Wall team are happy to share their resources and know-how worldwide. If you'd like guidance or want to run workshops in your region, reach out directly paul@offthewallsquash.co.uk or get in touch through the [SFN contact formular](#) for more information.

[Discover the OTW Squash Wall—a lightweight, portable solution for school programs](#)