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# Hasta La Vista: How school partnerships can enrich your squash club club



The Squash Facilities Network (SFN) is keen to promote the vital role that local schools can play in enriching squash venues. Children are the future of our sport, but we can't wait for them to discover squash by themselves - we have to go out, introduce them to the game and make it a big part of their lives. Forging links with schools is vital in this process and the famous Hasta La Vista club in Wrocław, Poland, has achieved remarkable success in this area...

## Stage one

The story of Hasta La Vista's thriving schools partnership started when Wrocław was announced as host of the World Games in 2017. Squash was part of the programme and the local government was keen to promote all the disciplines that formed part of the Games.

That gave Hasta La Vista manager Barbara Jaworowska and owner Zenon Waniak the impetus to speak to the vice president of Wrocław, who is also in charge of the city's education department. Having secured the city government's support, Hasta La Vista invited all of the city's 260 schools into the club for free for fun lessons that would form part of their PE curriculum.

Almost half of the schools eventually took up the invitation - but first Barbara and Zenon had to address their concerns about safety and educate them about the benefits of squash. Barbara said: "We arranged meetings and did squash presentations - always offering coffee to the teachers

when we did so!"

The support of the local government was crucial and it was earned by very simply offering something that would enhance schools' provision of PE and sport and that cost them nothing for the first year. Why would they say no?

At the same time, Barbara conducted outreach and promotion work at local sports and community festivals using a small portable wooden 'squash wall' that she had specially-made, costing only 200 Euros. The city government organised many of these festivals and Hasta La Vista was always invited. This helped get rackets in the hands of children and adults who could hit a big red sponge ball up against the wall and get the taste for squash.



"The wall is easily transportable and can be put up anywhere," said Barbara. "Other clubs might think that they have to spend lots of money on marketing, but for us this was a simple, effective solution. We took it to parks and created lots of projects that helped us show people what squash is all about.

"People in Polish society think that squash is only for managers [high earners], or people who are already sporty and in good physical condition. The wall and the offer of free lessons to schools helped us show that our club and our sport is open to everyone."

## Stage two

But how could Hasta La Vista afford to give free lessons? By forming a partnership with the local sports academy and engaging its students. These young volunteers were given training in delivering the basics of squash, giving them valuable on-the-job coaching experience which contributed to their qualifications.

Some of the students had been keen tennis players, but several quit tennis for squash once they'd discovered the high-paced thrill of the game and had enjoyed coaching the children. Now, the club has eight students involved in teaching the school sessions. They are young, passionate, relatable - and free.

Hasta La Vista's own coaches also tutored teachers from local schools who had become interested in squash during the school sessions. "Those workshops were great - teachers told us they couldn't believe how much fun they had," said Barbara.



The Polish Squash Federation supported the project by organising coaching courses and many young coaches went on to take their Level 1 and 2 qualifications.

There are now up to 3,500 students from the city's schools coming to the club every week. Up to five classes (with 30 kids in each class) take place every weekday morning on the club's 33 courts, badminton courts, table tennis tables and gym. One coach takes 10-12 children each, with five instructors often working at the same time.

Some schools come every week, others once a term or once a year. Regardless of the regularity, these are all children who have been given the opportunity to interact with the sport. It's free to every school for the first year - and the schools who finish that year are more than happy to pay a small fee to keep the programme running thereafter. The price is still a lot cheaper than outsourcing their PE provision to any other provider.

### Stage three

To capitalise on the success of the schools programme, Hasta La Vista started running paid-for afternoon coaching for those children who wanted to play more and become club members. These sessions, too, are now full.

Since 2017, some of these children have now become European-ranked junior players (12 are entered into November's Polish Junior Open at Hasta La Vista). Others are now giving back to the project by coaching their younger peers in the morning and afternoon sessions in return for small payments from the club.



As these children spend more time at the club, their parents inevitably become part of the 'family'. They are encouraged to get on court in special evening adult intro sessions, starting with a free trial.

Thus, the children are the ambassadors of the sport for their parents. For both generations, it began with a free taster, then when they enjoy it and become hooked, they are more than willing to pay for the experience of enjoying the game and developing their skills in coaches and matchplay.

Squash is now an integral part of the city's school sport programme - and the programme has spawned a whole generation of players; skilled, experienced and qualified coaches, and engaged and enthusiastic parents - all of whom have been woven into the fabric of the club, making it a vibrant, interconnected and thriving venue.

SFN



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In the coming weeks, the Squash Facilities Network will be delving deeper into this topic through a series of in-depth 'best practice' case studies, looking at schools partnerships and outreach strategies to sustain and energise your club.