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# Non-profit Uster Squash Arena is Swiss success story



Uster Squash Arena, situated in a picturesque town 15 miles east of Zurich, must surely be the world's only squash club to share its building with a gigantic climbing wall. But that is not the only extraordinary feature of this amazing venue.

The facility is part of a huge public sports park just outside Uster which has facilities for just about every sport you can think of - from show jumping to athletics to mini golf.

Uster Squash Arena, in the corner of the park, is a giant building with one permanent all-glass squash court (the only one in Switzerland) flanked by six glassback courts (three down each side). Behind the spectator seats is a small bar and changing rooms, and down some steps behind them is the huge climbing centre, with towering walls indoors and outdoors. Upstairs is another bar, lounge and restaurant.

The set-up is even more impressive because the squash facility is a non-profit operation. The squash courts are pay-and-play and are distinct from the squash 'club' whose members hire the courts at a discounted rate.





The club has two coaches who are funded in part by the Swiss Olympic Committee, the local council and through group and individual lessons. Between them they run junior programmes, schools programmes, beginners', intermediate and women's classes, 11 league teams and junior and senior national squad training sessions.

The 'club' is run by a committee of volunteers who consult regularly with Uster Squash Arena. "It's a win-win situation for both parties," says Florian Poessl, who leads many of the coaching programmes at Uster Squash Arena alongside Oliver Gutenberg.



"We make each other happy. If the club is doing well, then they are doing well as a venue. They give us discounted rates and help us organise tournaments, junior programmes and events. As it's a non-profit venue there's not a lot of risk for them."

Poessl admits the agreement is "not perfect." To hire out squash rackets and oversee day-to-day issues, they rely on staff who are employed by the climbing facility and don't necessarily have squash knowledge. The facility is also not ideally set up for social squash, with the main bar and lounge out of sight of the courts.

However, there is still a lot to admire. The Uster Squash Arena was a magnificent host venue for the recent ESF European Division 1 & 2 Team Squash Championships, with an army of volunteers ensuring the event ran smoothly and was well supported.



The Arena opened in 2014, funded by the city, the Swiss Olympic Association, Swiss Squash and a group of members who formed a cooperative. Those members previously played at Blue Point Sports Centre, just 300 metres across the sports park, which had four courts and had developed a good junior programme. Blue Point is still there today (albeit now with three courts) and although the clubs are separate, members can book courts in either venue.

"Uster has a reputation as a sports town, and the city, the Swiss Olympic Association and the Swiss squash federation were keen to build on the successful programmes that had already been developed at Blue Point," says Florian.

"A local climbing group also needed a permanent facility, so they cooperated on a joint project in 2012 and two years later, the arena opened."



The Squash Arena is a non-profit venue which earns money through hiring courts to the 'club' (for training, private lessons, tournaments or general play) at discounted rates or to members of the public at full price. Florian and Oliver get discounted court fees to deliver their programmes, which include partnerships with the local 'gymnasium' (sports school) and secondary school.

World no.23 Dimitri Steinmann was a former pupil at the gymnasium and benefited hugely from the links with the squash club, which allowed him to train before and after school. "The pupils get a good education on both sides [academic and sporting]," says Florian. "The school supports it because they can see good players coming out of the programme. We work together very successfully."



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The reputation of the Squash Arena has grown to such an extent that it is now one of three national centres of excellence (together with Pilatus Kriens in Luzern and Langnau on the other side of Zurich). This mean national training camps take place in Uster two hours per week for all national age groups from U11s to seniors, as well as individual lessons.

A non-profit operation doesn't suit every facility, but thanks to extensive public funding and strong volunteers and partnerships, Uster Squash Club has become a notable success.

For more information about Uster Squash Arena [click here](#).