

mpdale · Dec 20, 2023

Welcoming beginners to your squash club: 'It's all about forging connections'



This is the third instalment of our series on Daisy Hill Squash & Racquet Club in Brisbane, Australia. Read [part one](#) and [part two](#).

When a squash novice enters your facility for the first time, how do you give them an experience that makes them want to come back?

In the daily rush to give private individual lessons, group lessons, organise competitions and make sure existing members are well provided for, some club coaches may ignore this absolutely vital facet of their role.

As we have learned from Head Coach Bradley Hindle in the first two articles in this series on Daisy Hill Squash & Racquets Club in Brisbane, "new members are your economy."

He said: "Some squash clubs like to boast about having the best level of players at their club - but I'd rather be known for my members welcoming every beginner and helping them become better."

Part of that warm welcome is embracing new members into the club's vibrant community. After all, it's not how quickly they learn to play a forehand, it's how you make people feel that counts.

That's why Daisy Hill have created what may be a unique (or certainly all-too-rare) role - a specialist Beginners and Junior Squash Coach - Kym Tracey Patte. Her gregarious nature and expertise in fusing social connections helps attract and retain an astounding 80 new members per year.



Kym says: "What we've learned here is that squash is the glue that brings people together. Once people have made connections and had fun, they will come back for that reason."

So in a myriad of big and small ways, Kym, Bradley, fellow coaches Collette Sultana, Bryan Lim, Cameron Darton and the club's 100 volunteers do everything they can to forge those connections which keep people coming back.

"We love to engage with everyone who comes through the door," Kym says. "That's just our personalities but we know it's essential for the success of the club. If it's not a staff member welcoming them, it will be a club member. It's about acknowledging everyone who comes through the door, no matter what their age.

"If an adult or a kid comes in by themselves, we will say, 'Have you met so and so?...' We'll give them a ball and get them on court. Kids naturally engage with each other very quickly especially when you give them a ball.



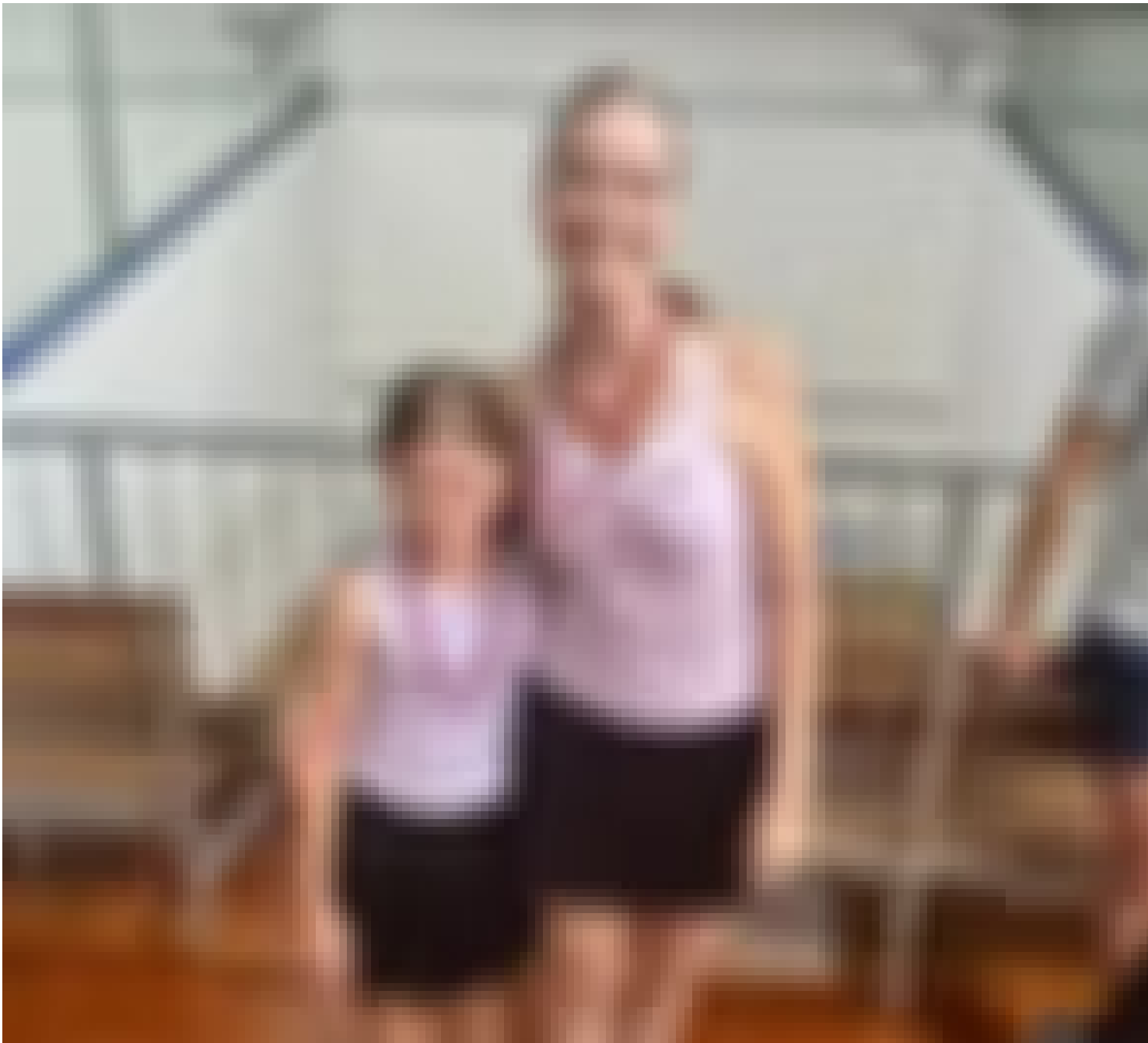
"If parents are playing, I'll take the children on court with a bouncy ball or just give them a ball to throw around. Squash has lost some of its family vibe over recent decades as gym chains have taken over - but we're trying to bring that back.

"Even if a visitor feels too old to go on court, you make them a cup of tea and they sit down, watch and start chatting to the person next to them. Then they want to come back. These are little things, but so easy things to do."

First-time visitors will get the standard tour around the facilities and an introduction to the most appropriate sessions in the club's packed weekly programme of coaching and matchplay. More importantly, they will be introduced to whoever is around and sent straight on court for a hit. "All of a sudden they make a connection, so they feel like they're welcome," says Kym.

A key tool in this introduction process is Daisy Hill's daytime social squash sessions which attract a hugely diverse clientele. Semi-retired or retired people mix with college students and parents with young kids. They play social matches, everyone brings a plate of food, and babies are even passed around while mum or dad goes on court! "That ensures no-one is prevented from playing their sport - it works really, really well," Kim explains.

Kym (pictured below) adds: "The younger and older players in that group are a very positive influence on each other. The dynamic works - but it doesn't just happen automatically. You still have to have that middle person - our staff - to make those connections happen."



As for what happens on court, many coaches would find the prospect of a room full of beginners with different ages and ability ranges somewhat terrifying. For Kym, it's an everyday occurrence.

"I won't pretend it's not tough work," laughs Kym. "I can have five-year-olds on court, who are just developing their gross motor skills, playing catch games with older ones. I sometimes have 20 kids on court for an hour. It's very inclusive.

"In those circumstances, I get the older ones to coach the smaller ones what they have learned. I bring in lots of volunteers - parents and some of the elite players donate their time. I have to be very vocal, think on my feet and be ready to alter things if they're not quite meeting everyone's needs."

Once again, so much of giving newcomers an enjoyable experience comes down to the coach's personality. Kym admits: "Some coaches are better suited for group settings instead of one-to-ones and others are best suited for private lessons. For us it's about getting the best of both worlds."

"Kids and parents read your energy very well. It's about the coach 'reading the room' and bringing the optimal energy for each session."



For Daisy Hill's two thriving weekly adult beginners' sessions, Kym says the key is to make it "very, very social." The format follows the club's ethos - 'If they're happy and learning, they're always returning.'

"Really it's all about putting smiles on their faces and giving them confidence," she explains. "Have a chat to new people beforehand and find out what they want to get out of it. Mostly, they want to use squash as a social outlet, to meet new people or to get a bit of fitness. So make sure they have a laugh on court and form friendships.

"Our beginner sessions have become more of a catch-up than a serious squash lesson. It's a 'safe space.' If it's their birthday next week, bring in a cake. Those little gestures make the world of difference."