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The Interest for Practicing Squash in Timișoara

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Abstract

Squash is a complex sport between two players (singles) or between four players (doubles), who use special racquets to alternatively strike a rubber ball in a four-walled court with a dedicated layout; by practicing this sport, an individual may gain a number of benefits: squash optimizes the overall state of health, improves coordination, flexibility, agility and speed of reaction, develops the capacity to concentrate and the attention span, fosters a competitive spirit, reduces stress levels, increases the resistance to effort and constitutes an activity that may successfully counteract sedentariness and obesity. Furthermore, squash is a means by which one may socialize and strengthen interpersonal relations. Taking into account that, even though squash is not extensively known in Romania, it is on the rise both from the point of view of the number of people who practice it and from the perspective of institutional organization. In order to accelerate the promotion of squash both on a national and on a regional level, a qualitative research has been conducted among squash players in Timișoara. The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons which determine one to practice squash and the interest dedicated by those who practice squash to competitions.

Keywords: *squash, reasons, interest, competition.*

Rezumat

Squash-ul este un sport complex, între doi jucători (simplu) sau patru jucători (dublu), în care jucătorii, folosind rachete speciale, lovesc alternativ o minge de cauciuc, într-o sală cu patru pereți special amenajată, practicarea acestuia aducând numeroase beneficii asupra individului: optimizează starea generală de sănătate, îmbunătățește coordonarea, flexibilitatea, agilitatea și viteza de reacție, dezvoltă capacitatea de concentrare și atenția, dezvoltă spiritul de competiție, reduce nivelul de stress, mărește rezistența la efort, constituind o activitate care poate combate cu succes sedentarismul și obezitatea. De asemenea, squash-ul este un mijloc de socializare și întărire a relațiilor interpersonale. Având în vedere că, deși squash-ul este un sport relativ puțin cunoscut în țara noastră, acesta se află într-o ascensiune atât din punct de vedere al numărului de practicanți, cât și din punct de vedere al organizării instituționale. Pentru a accelera promovarea squash-ului atât în țară cât și pe plan local, a fost realizată o cercetare calitativă, în cadrul jucătorilor de squash din Timișoara. Scopul cercetării este identificarea motivelor care determină practicarea squash-ului și a interesului pe care practicanții de squash îl alocă competițiilor.

Cuvinte cheie: *squash, motive, interes, competiție*

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In 2003 the editors of *Forbes* magazine published an article that contained the top of the healthiest sports in the world. A number of criteria were taken into consideration: cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and the number of consumed calories and the risk of injury. A series of specialists were consulted: trainers, fitness experts, psychologists and athletes; for each of criteria a number of points has been awarded (from 1 to 5). A ranking was established in which the first places were occupied by: squash, rowing, climbing. Thus, squash effectively overtook sports such as: swimming (4th place), basketball (6th place), cycling (7th place) or running (8th place) [1].

General considerations

Overall context

Squash is a game that has the same origins as tennis and it is practiced in over 185 countries. Squash is a complex sport between two players (singles) or between four players (doubles), who use special racquets to alternatively strike a rubber ball in a four-walled court with a dedicated layout; by practicing this sport, an individual may develop muscle groups, stress is eliminated and a number of direct benefits arise, both from a physical and a psychological point of view [2].

Squash optimizes the overall state of health, improves coordination, flexibility, agility and speed of reaction, develops the capacity to concentrate and the attention span, fosters a competitive spirit, reduces stress levels, increases the resistance to effort and constitutes an activity that may successfully counteract sedentariness and obesity. Furthermore, squash is a means by which one may socialize and strengthen interpersonal relations [3].

Taking into account the benefits brought upon by practicing squash, coupled with the fact that it is easy to learn, it can be practiced at any age all year round (as it is an indoor sport) and that it has a low risk of injury, the popularity of this sport has significantly increased; at present there are over 50 million squash players in the world.

National context

In Romania the first squash courts appeared around the year 2000 (in Bucharest). Squash courts appear in turn in the other cities of Romania. At present there is at least one squash court in București,

Brașov, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, Iași, Oradea, Bistrița, Baia-Mare, Arad, Sibiu, Odorheiu Secuiesc. [4]

Currently there are two squash associations that conduct activities in Romania - Pro Squash Romania and the Romanian Squash Association - which aim to promote squash in Romania. In 2012 Pro Squash Romania organized the first major competition of squash from Romania, which was attended by players from 8 cities: Brașov, Timișoara, Oradea, Arad, Baia-Mare, Cluj-Napoca, Bistrița, Sibiu [5].

In 2014 the two squash associations aim to establish the National Squash Federation. Furthermore, 2014 is the first year in which all the major competitions organized in Romania are reunited in a calendar of competitions under the aegis of the Romanian Squash Association [6].

Local context

The first squash club appeared in Timisoara in 2010: the Timisoara Squash Club [7]. In June 2013, the Helios Club inaugurates a sports hall with two squash courts that comply with international standards. As an acknowledgement of the quality of the investment, in October 2013, the Helios Club accepts to organize the Romanian Cup for squash, which is the second most important competition organized in our country, after the Squash National Championship [8].

Issue

Taking into account that, even though squash is not extensively known in Romania, it is on the rise both from the point of view of the number of people who practice it and from the perspective of institutional organization. In order to accelerate the promotion of squash both on a national and on a regional level, a qualitative research has been conducted among squash players in Timisoara. The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons which determine one to practice squash and the interest dedicated by those who practice squash to competitions.

The method used consisted in the application of a questionnaire in November 2013 to squash players that go to the two squash clubs that are on the commercial circuit of Timisoara. The main directions that were followed: the amount of time since the person started practicing squash, the number of hours dedicated to practicing squash, the reasons

for practicing squash and the interest for taking part in squash competitions.

Forty people answered the questionnaire – 34 men (85%) and 6 women (15%). Figure 1 depicts the distribution of respondents per age groups. The most significant number of respondents, 18 (45%) are 30-39 year-olds.

Results obtained

The answers relating to the *amount of time since the person started practicing squash* are depicted in Figure 2; the majority of respondents, 22 (55%), have been practicing squash for at least 1 year and at most 3 years; 8 respondents (20%) have been practicing squash for at most 6 months, 6 respondents (18%) have been practicing squash for at least 6 months and at most 1 year, while 4 respondents (10%) have been practicing squash for over 3 years.

The number of hours dedicated to practicing squash on a weekly basis is depicted in Figure 3; 18 respondents (45%) dedicate 1-3 hours to practicing squash per week, 12 respondents (30%) dedicate 3-5 hours per week, 8 respondents (20%) dedicate 5-7 hours per week, while 2 respondents (5%) dedicate under one hour to practicing squash per week. It must be noted that no respondent dedicates over 7 hours to practicing squash per week.

As regards *the motivation for practicing squash*, the answers are depicted in Figure 4. The main reasons why people practice squash are, in order: keeps oneself fit (22 votes), induces a state of wellbeing (21 votes), consumes a high number of calories (20 votes), eliminates stress (19 votes), improves endurance, strength and speed (17 votes), fosters a competitive spirit (16 votes), it is a means of socializing (15 votes), it can be practiced regardless of weather conditions (11 votes). *The most important reason why people practice squash* is indicated by 15 respondents (37,5%) as being that it keeps one fit, followed by the significant consumption of calories, indicated by 10 respondents (25%).

The reasons why respondents do not dedicate more time to practicing squash are depicted in Figure 5. Thus, a lack of time is indicated by 31 respondents as the main reason for this situation, followed by the costs involved with renting the court (15 votes), the lack of fellow players (9 votes), the lack of squash

courts (7 votes), the cost of the equipment (6 votes) and fear of injuries (5 votes).

When questioned regarding the *participation into squash competitions*, regardless of the level of the competition, 29 (72%) of respondents declare that they took part in at least one squash competition. As regards *the interest for participation in squash competitions*, the answers received are depicted in Figure 6. Thus, 33 respondents (83%) declare that they are undecided, while 2 respondents (5%) are not interested by the competitive dimension of squash.

The reasons which determine the interest of respondents towards taking part in squash competitions are depicted in Figure 7. Thus, the competitive spirit (19 votes), the opportunity for socializing (16 votes), the possibility of meeting different players (14 votes), the accumulation of experience (12 votes), the possible material gains (10 votes), and sportive tourism (8 votes) are the main reasons which determine the interest for taking part in squash competitions.

The reasons which determine the lack of interest for taking part in squash competitions are presented in Figure 8; the main reasons are the low quality of the game (6 votes), the lack of time (4 votes) and the fear of competitions (2 votes).

Conclusions

- The majority of respondents are active persons, as 80% of them have been practicing squash for at least one year. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that 50% of respondents dedicate at least 3 hours of week to practicing squash.
- The main reasons why people practice squash are, in order: it induces a state of wellbeing, consumes a high number of calories and eliminates stress. The most important reasons why people practice squash are keeping oneself fit and weight control, through the high number of calories it consumes.
- The main reasons why respondents do not practice squash more often are the lack of time and the cost of renting a squash court.
- The majority of respondents (72%) have taken part in at least one squash competition, while 83% are interested by the competitive side of squash.
- The main reasons which determine the interest of respondents towards taking part in squash competitions are: the competitive spirit, the opportunity for socializing with other squash

players and the possibility of meeting different players.

- The main reasons why 17% of respondents are not interested or are undecided as regards taking part in squash competitions are: the low quality of the game, lack of time and fear of competitions.

Recommendations

Taking into account the conclusions drawn after the study was conducted, we propose that the two squash clubs from Timisoara adopt a number of measures to promote squash among the active population and not limited exclusively to it:

- To employ and train personnel for training squash;
- To establish and support squash groups for children
- To adopt a policy of minimal prices in two directions: towards a timetable when the squash courts are free and towards categories of persons such as pupils, students, senior citizens;

- To adopt a policy of preferential prices for club members who constantly take part in competitions;
- To develop partnerships with teaching institutions with the aim of organizing P.E. lessons in the form of practicing squash;
- To organize training sessions for club members;
- To constantly organize various competitions with the aim of attracting a high number of players.

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