

SQUASH



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About the Tutorial

Squash is a racket sport where two players strike a small hollow ball alternatively onto the four walls of the court. The sport requires striking the squash ball onto the walls while taking alternative turns. It demands speed, agility as well as a high-level of physical strength and stamina.

Squash should not be confused with Racquetball, as there are quite a few rules that differentiate these two games. This is a brief tutorial that will help you understand the basic rules of Squash.

Audience

This tutorial is meant for anyone who wants to play Squash. It is prepared keeping in mind that the reader is unaware about the basics of the sport. It is a basic guide to help a beginner understand this sport.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are required to have a passion for Squash and an eagerness to acquire knowledge on the same.

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1. Squash – Overview

Squash is played by two people (singles) or four people (doubles) in a room surrounded by four walls. Here the players need to strike the ball using their rackets on to the wall alternatively. Squash is also recognized by International Olympic Committee and presently its supporters are lobbying for its involvement in Olympics.

In this sport, players have to strike the ball alternately using their racket on to the surrounding four walls. The players can move anywhere in the court without obstructing the opponent player. In case of the walls, there are valid target areas where the ball has to be hit otherwise it would be considered out. This way they need to score points to win the match.

Squash vs Racquetball

Squash should not be confused with Racquetball. The following points show how Squash is different from Racquetball:

- The racket of racquetball is smaller than squash
- The ball of racquetball is larger than squash.
- There are more variety of shots in squash than in racquetball.
- The court of squash is smaller than the court of racquetball.
- In squash, player cannot hit the ceiling but this is not the case with racquetball.

A Brief History of Squash

Squash originated in the United Kingdom. In 1830, it was invented in Harrow school before spreading to other schools. Initially stringed rackets were used in this sport and the ball was made up of natural rubber. Later on, rackets similar to tennis rackets were used in the sport. Previously rackets were made of laminated timber and after 1890, it shifted to light materials like aluminium and graphite with small additions of Kevlar, boron and titanium. Previously used gut strings were replaced with synthetic strings.

The first squash court in North America was formed at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire in 1884. In April 1907, Tennis, Racket and Fives Association formed a subcommittee to set the standard for squash. Thus combining those three sports together Squash was developed. In 1923, Royals Automobile Club held a meeting for further modification in rules and regulations of squash and after five years Squash Rackets Association was formed in Great Britain to set the rules and regulations of squash.

Participating Countries

As of 2009, there are 49908 squash courts in the world with 188 countries having at least one court. England is having the highest number of courts which counts up to 8500. As of 2009, there are players from nineteen countries in the top fifties of the men's squash ranking with England and Egypt leading with eleven players each. In case of women squash ranking, players from sixteen countries are there in top fifty with England again leading with eleven players.

Based on estimation, as of 2009, there are 20 million squash players are there all over the world. Countries with more than 1000 squash courts are: England, Germany, Egypt, The United States of America, Australia, South Africa, Canada, Malaysia, France, The Netherlands and Spain. Among all of these countries USA has the fastest growing squash participation. Squash is hugely popular mostly around United Kingdom.

2. Squash – Equipment

In this chapter, we will discuss about the equipment used in Squash.

Squash Rackets

Rackets are used to hit the ball on the walls. Previously, timber ash was used to make the rackets and gut strings were used to make the mesh. Now the rackets are made up of boron, Kevlar, graphite, or titanium. The strings are made up of synthetic material. The length of the racket is 686mm and width is 215mm. The strung area is 500 sq. cm. The maximum weight of the racket is 255gm but 90 to 150 gm weight is preferred.

Squash Balls

The balls used in squash have a diameter of 39.5 to 40.5 mm diameter and has a weight of 23 to 25 gram. They are made of two pieces of rubber compound, that are glued together to form a hollow sphere and are polished with a matte finish. Different balls are used based on varying temperature, atmospheric conditions and standards of the match as well as the experience level of the players.

Experienced players use balls which give less bounce, whereas less experienced players use ball which gives more bounce because slower balls die in the corner rather than bouncing up which allow the players to play easier shots. Based on their rubber compositions, squash balls have the property to bounce more in high temperature because of which squash balls are hit so many times at the beginning of a match to warm them up as cold squash balls don't bounce high.

Small colored dots are present in every squash ball to denote its bounciness, thus setting the standard of the match for which it suited. The recognised speed colours and their dynamism are:

Colour	Speed	Bounce level	Experience Level
Double yellow	Extra super slow	Very Low	Experienced
Yellow	Super slow	Low	Advanced
White	Slow	Low	Advanced/Medium
Blue	Fast	Very high	Beginner/Junior

The four different balls based on the color of the dots are:

- Intro (blue dot)
- Progress (Red dot)
- Competition (yellow dot)
- Pro (Double yellow dot)

Squash Court

The court of squash is a playing surface surrounded by four walls. On the ground or surface of the court, there is a front line which separates the front and back of the court. There is a half line at the back side of the court which again separates the back side into left back and right back sides totally creating three portions., which are: **the front half, the back left quarter** and **the back right quarter**. Both back boxes contain smaller service boxes. The surface markings are only relevant during the serves.

The court is 9.75-meter-long 6.4 m wide. The height of the court is 5.64 m which is measured from the court surface. The amount of light recommended is 500 Lux. Based on rules and regulations, the walls has to be really plane when verticality and straightness is concerned. In case of glass specifications on the ground, 12 mm glasses must be used as back walls because of security reasons.

A total of four walls are there in the squash court among which the front wall contains three parallel lines and has the largest playing surface while in case of the back wall, which has the entrance to the court, has the smallest playing surface. The outlines run on the top of the front wall descending around the side walls to the back wall. There are no other markings on the side or back wall.

Shots that strike on or above the outlines in any of the walls are considered out. In case of the front wall, if the ball hits below the bottom line, the ball is considered out. The bottom line marks the top of a half metre high metal area known as **tin**. The middle line of the front wall is known as **service line** which is relevant only during the service.

Clothing for Squash

Players wear comfortable clothing similar to tennis. While men wear shorts and t-shirts, tank top or a polo shirt, women wear frock, t-shirt, tank top or sport dresses. National institute of health recommends using goggles with polycarbonate lenses for safety issues.

Many squash venues have mandated eye protection while some of the associations have also regulated rules that require all junior and double players to wear eye protections.

3. Squash – How to Play?

In this chapter, we will discuss about the procedures of playing Squash.

Squash – Service

Initially the players spin a racket to decide who serves first. After which the player starts the match by electing to serve from either left or right side service boxes which are present at the back half. For a legal serve, a player's feet must touch one of these service boxes, not any part of the service box lines while striking the ball.

After striking the ball, it must hit between the outline and service line on the front wall and it must land in the opposite back quarter of the court. The receiving player can choose to volley the ball once it has hit the front wall. If the server wins the point, both players exchange their places for the following point.

Squash – After Service

After the serve, players hit the ball alternately on to the front wall, above the tin and below the outline. After hitting the ball with the racket, it must not hit the floor before hitting the front wall. A ball hitting above or on the outline or the line among the top of the tin is considered out. After a ball hits the front wall, it is allowed to bounce once before a player must return it. The players are allowed to move anywhere in the court but accidental or deliberate obstructions to players is forbidden.

A rally or exchange of shots ends, if

- the ball bounces twice on the ground before being hit by the player.
- the ball hits the tin in the front wall after being struck by any of the players.
- the ball hits outside the outlines of any of the walls.
- any of the players is accidentally or deliberately obstructed by the opponent player.



Squash – Scoring

Squash scoring system has evolved over time. The original scoring was known as **English scoring** or **Hand-out scoring**. According to this rule, if a server wins a rally, he/she gets a point but if the returner wins the rally, only the service will be changed which is also called as ball goes hand-out but no points are given to anyone. The first player to win nine points wins the match. The player who wins eight points first decides, whether the match will be played till nine points (set one) or till ten points (set two).

The current official scoring system is known as **point-a-rally scoring** (PARS). In case of PARS system, the player who wins the rally gets the points regardless of whether he was the server or returner. The match is played to 11 points, but unlike English scoring, here the player must have to win by two points, i.e. even if the score reaches 10-10, it continues till one of the player leads by two points.

The height of tin is reduced by two inches and PARS up to 11 points is allowed in all the competitions whether men or women. In case of women's professional tournaments, they have started using PARS rule since July, 2008 while the tin height remains the same in case of women's professional tournament. American scoring system is another scoring system which is very much similar to PARS to 11 but the match is played to 15 points. Competitions are played to Best-of-five, i.e. players winning more matches out of five matches will be the winner.

4. Squash – Shots

Squash has different kinds of interesting shots with different strategies. In this chapter, we will discuss the shots that are used in Squash:

Straight drive

It is one of the basic squash shot where the ball has to be hit parallel and close to one of the side walls to travel deep back of the court. It is also known as the **good length shot**.

Boost

In this shot, the ball is hit to the side wall at an angle or to the back wall before it hits the front wall.

Volley

In this shot, the ball is hit before it touches the ground mostly directly to the strong wall.

Drop shot

In a drop shot, the ball is hit softly to the front wall to fall softly to the floor in the front corner.

Lob

Here the ball is hit softly and high on the wall with a big curve to land on the back corner.

Cross Court

The ball is hit to the front wall from the right side to the left side or vice versa.

Kill

The ball is hit hard and low to the front wall so that it won't travel more than half court.

Trickle boost

It is like a boost shot where the ball is hit to the side wall on the front of the court. It is often disguised as a drive or drop shot.

Squeeze boost

It is a more difficult shot and very much similar to trickle boost. Here the ball is hit from the front of the court when it is very close to the side wall.

Nick

The ball is volleyed to the front wall then the junction of the side wall and floor, which is called the Nick, to give minimum or zero bounce.

Rolling nick

When nick shot is played really well, the ball rolls along the floor.

The Ramy

Here the ball bounces in to the light fittings of the room. It is also known as **inadvertent foul shot**.

Back wall boost

In this shot, the ball is hit moderately hard and high on the back wall so that it travels the length of the room and hits the lower part of the front wall.

Philadelphia

In this case, the shot is played diagonally upwards into the front corner which hits the front wall first and then the side wall. The ball then lobs over the court with significant spin and hits the opposite side wall at the back and then it travels parallel to the rear wall making a return very difficult.

Skid boast

This shot is played from the back corner of the court where the ball is hit high on the side wall with a small angle so that it hits the sidewall first, then hits high in the middle of the front wall and while being high in the air, it crosses the court ideally hitting the opposite sidewall and landing close to the back wall to go past the opponent.

Reverse angle

This shot is similar to a boost shot where the ball is first hit on the reverse side wall.

Mizuki

This shot is very much similar to volley but the only difference is that the ball is hit by the opposite side of the racket by using wrists which helps to change the direction of the ball.

5. Squash – Strategies

Dominating the **T** is considered as one of the key strategies in squash. Here players start playing at the intersection of the red lines near the centre of the court which is the best position to retrieve the opponent's shot. Usually skilled players, after returning a shot, move to this position to play the next shot as from this position, they could hit back opponent's shot with minimum movement.

Another famous strategy in squash is to hit the ball straight up the side walls to the back corners which is also called as **Rail**. After hitting the shot, player move to the T section to again hit back opponents next shot. Hitting the ball softly on the nearby wall corners makes the opponents move more along the court and it may result in an instant winner.

Skilled players make their opponents run more in order to win, which is considered as a widely followed strategy in squash. Keeping the ball low also lessens the chance for the opponent to reach near it before in bounces twice. As the places like corners between the walls and the joint places between floor and walls are the places where once the ball hits, doesn't bounce much. Players usually try to make the ball strike there in order to get less bounce and make opponent player run more.

Some basic Squash fundamental tactics which skilled players use in order to win the match are:

- Varying speed and direction of your serve.
- Making your opponent get defensive by volleying the serve.
- Hitting the ball long and wide for cross courts.
- Varying the time of hitting the ball to upset opponent's rhythm.
- Varying the pace of the shots to reduce predictability.
- Hitting the ball early when opponent is out of position.
- Volleying the ball where ever is possible during a rally.
- Hitting the ball to the corners to get the opponent off the T area.
- Recover the T area as soon as possible after striking the ball.
- Hitting the ball away from the opponents and making them run.

Squash experts can change the direction of a ball which creates confusion for the opponent. Due to this the opponent either reacts sooner or later in order to return the shot. Depending on this, the players can be divided into following categories.

- **Power Player** – Players who play powerful shots to take time away from the opponent.
- **Shot makers** – Players who play accurate shots to take time away from opponents.

- **Retrievers** – Players who are excellent in retrieving the ball with accuracy and to return shots more quickly.
- **Attritional players** – Players who play consistently high-paced match both from shot speed and running speed to wear their opponent down over time.

6. Squash – Rules

In this chapter, we will discuss about the rules of the sport that every player has to follow.

Interference and Obstruction

Since two players are confined within a shared space, interference and obstruction are quite inevitable in squash. Generally, the rules entitle players to direct straight line access to the ball in order to get reasonable swing as well as unobstructed shots to any part of the front wall. When interference occurs, a player may appeal for a **let** and the referee or the player himself/herself (if there is no referee) then interprets the extent of the interference.

Depending on the degree of interference, the referee may elect to allow a let and the players then replay the point, or allow a **stroke** to the opponent which makes the opponent a winner. The degree of interference depends on conditions like whether the interfering player made an adequate effort to avoid obstruction and whether the player interfered with was likely to strike a winning shot if the interference had not occurred.

In another scenario, when the interfering player is preventing the other player's swing by being directly in the path of the other player's swing, stroke is always rewarded. When there is very less or no interference or it is impossible to denote whether it was an interference, according to rule, no lets are provided in the respect of continuity of the match as well as to discourage spurious appeals for lets.

Fouls

When a player's shot hits the opponent before hitting the front wall, **interference** occurs. If the ball was travelling towards the side wall when it hits the opponent, or if it had already hit the side wall and was going towards the front wall when it was obstructed, it is usually a let. However, if the ball was travelling straight to the front wall when it hits the opponent, without even hitting the side walls, a stroke is awarded to the player who hit the ball.

An exception to all these conditions happens when the player hitting the ball has turned, i.e. the player lets the ball pass him on one side but it again hits on the other side while coming off the back wall. In cases like this, stroke is awarded to the player who was hit by the ball. Generally, after a player gets hit by a ball, both players stand still and if the struck player is standing directly in front of the player who hit the ball, a stroke is awarded to the hitter else if he is not in the front, a let is played. If it is noticed that the player is deliberately trying to hit the opponent player, he loses the stroke.

Turning

When a player turns 360 degrees about a point i.e. spinning one whole revolution it is called turning. In squash, turning is allowed, but if it has hit the opponent player after the striker has turned the stroke, then point is given to the opponent. If the opponent makes a deliberate attempt to intercept, then point is awarded to the striker.

The following must be practiced to avoid interference:

- A striker must make every effort to provide an unobstructed direct access to the ball to his opponent.

- A striker must give his opponent a fair view of the ball, before and after the ball is hit.
- The opponent must give the striker enough freedom to hit the ball directly to the entire front wall.

Doubles Matches

In case of doubles, two teams each consisting of two players play in the match. The court size is four feet wider than the normal single match court while the length of the court remains the same. Eye protection usage is strongly recommended. PARS 15 scoring system is followed where the winning team has to score at least 15 points while leading by 2 points.

While serving any one of the team's player serves and retains the service till their side loses the stroke. The next time after retrieving the service, the other partner has to serve and vice versa. If the striker hits his partner with the ball, his side loses the rally. The two sides warm up separately with each side using half of the five minutes.

If the players make genuine effort to get out of each other's way, then few strokes are given. Partner of the side whose turn it is to play the ball is given direct access to the ball. He has the freedom to hit the ball, but not necessarily freedom to return it to any part of the wall.

Referee

The referee is the certified person who manages the sport and is appointed by the club or squash league. The referee has the maximum power in a match and issues like conflicts or interferences are dealt with by the referee.

The referee is authorized to deduct points if a player flaunts any rules or displays improper etiquette. It is the referee who can decide the scoring of the match. Nowadays, three referees are taking control in case of international games where the central referee takes call for the scores and makes a decision with the help of two side-referees.