

THE OPERATION OF SQUASH COURTS

A survey undertaken in the North West by John Knowles on behalf of the Association of Recreation Managers, with a view to assessing the various methods used in the operation of squash courts.

All public sports centres are faced with the problem of adopting a system of control that is fair to the users, and is efficient to operate. It would appear that at the present time there is under-provision for squash in most areas and that often it is only the privileged few, those who can make a booking, that are able to enjoy the game to the full.

With these points in mind a questionnaire was prepared and sent out to all known sports centres in the North West.

Questionnaires were sent to 53 centres and 34 of these were completed and returned.

NUMBER OF COURTS

One Court	—	2 centres
Two Courts	—	17 centres
Three Courts	—	5 centres
Four Courts	—	8 centres
Five Courts	—	0 centres
Six Courts	—	2 centres

CURRENT CHARGE

Based on the equivalent court charge per hour.

£1.40 - £1.50	—	10 centres
£1.20 - £1.35	—	18 centres
£1.00 - £1.12	—	4 centres
.60 - .80	—	2 centres

6 centres offered some form of concessionary rate to juniors.

Two centres offer cheaper rates during off peak periods. Two centres offer cheaper rates for members. Several centres operate a membership system and charge an additional entrance fee for non-members.

MEMBERSHIP

Twenty seven centres do not operate a membership scheme. Details of fees charged by seven centres operating a membership scheme.

Annual Membership Fee	Court Charge per Hour
£	£
6.00	1.00
4.00	1.26
4.00	0.90
2.00	1.20
1.50	1.20
1.50	1.12 ½
not stated	0.80

NORMAL PERIOD OF LETTING

1 hour	—	1 centre
45 minutes	—	4 centres
40 minutes	—	14 centres
30 minutes	—	15 centres

Several centres let periods of 30 minutes but allow a maximum of one hour to any one person at a time.

One or two centres allow a maximum of 30 or 40 minutes only during peak periods.

The trend would appear to be towards lettings of 40-45 minutes with the aim of allowing more people to play.

HOW FAR IN ADVANCE CAN COURTS BE BOOKED?

3 weeks	—	1 centre
13 days	—	1 centre
8 days	—	1 centre
7 days	—	12 centres
6 days	—	19 centres

In some centres members are given preference by being allowed to book up further in advance.

FROM WHAT TIME EACH WEEK DAY DO YOU ACCEPT BOOKINGS?

Before 9 a.m.	—	3 centres
9 a.m.	—	18 centres
9.30 a.m.	—	5 centres
10.00 a.m.	—	4 centres
Later in the day	—	4 centres

DO YOU ACCEPT TELEPHONE BOOKINGS?

Yes	—	31 centres
No	—	1 centre
Members only	—	2 centres

DO YOU ACCEPT BOOKINGS FROM PERSONAL CALLERS?

Yes	—	33 centres
No	—	1 centre

In several centres times are limited in order to give telephone booking priority.

IF BOTH TELEPHONE AND PERSONAL CALLS ARE ACCEPTED, WHO HAS PREFERENCE?

Telephone	—	12 centres
*Personal	—	9 centres
Alternate	—	7 centres
Neither	—	5 centres
Regular patrons	—	1 centre

*Includes one centre using a ticket machine.

MUST THE COURT BE PAID FOR AT THE TIME OF BOOKING, OR AT LEAST PRIOR TO THE DAY OF PLAY?

Yes	—	16 centres
*No	—	18 centres

*Includes several centres where members only are not required to pay prior to the day of play.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH CANCELLATIONS?

The following systems are used:—

- Booking fee returned if 24 hours notice given—otherwise charged for.
- As a. but 48 hours notice.
- When cancelled within 24 hours of booking court re-let and no charge—otherwise charged for.
- No charge for cancellation.
- Cancellations not allowed.
- Reserve list takes up cancellations.
- No charge if court is re-let.

WHAT PROBLEMS DO YOU EXPERIENCE WITH THE BOOKING PROCEDURE?

12 centres said they have no problems, others mentioned the following points:—

- Not everyone is able to use a phone or go into the centre at the appropriate time.
- Booking and then not paying.
- Pressures on reception at commencement of bookings.
- Failure to arrive or late cancellation leaving a court empty.
- Lack of public understanding.

Most of the problems described are associated with peak periods when the battle is on to take the first bookings.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC COURT TIME AVAILABLE IS BOOKED UP EACH WEEK?

90% +	—	25 centres
80 - 89%	—	6 centres
70 - 79%	—	3 centres

Several centres although booked almost 100% of the time during evenings and weekends are not so busy during the day in the week.

Mention was also made of a slackening off during the summer.

DO YOU NEED MORE SQUASH COURTS? IF SO, HOW MANY?

Yes	—	32 centres
No	—	2 centres

Some said yes to cover peak periods but have doubts about their use at other times.

IS THE DEMAND FOR SQUASH ON THE INCREASE IN YOUR DISTRICT?

Yes	—	30 centres
No	—	1 centre
Neither	—	3 centres

DO YOU FEEL THAT THE DEMAND WILL EVENTUALLY DECREASE OR THAT THERE MAY BE OVER PROVISION?

No	—	14 centres
Yes	—	3 centres
Possible	—	6 centres
Levelling off	—	10 centres
Who knows?	—	1 centre

OTHER COMMENTS

- "...it will continue to be difficult to make squash courts pay...."
- "At this centre we regard the squash courts as the most profitable section . . . little maintenance or supervision . . . worth investing in more courts."
- "Staffing and payment problems can be kept to a minimum by introducing a stamp system for booking."
- "About time they were constructed properly . . ."
- "Current attitude of S.R.A. re-affiliation etc. could cause problems in Local Government."
- "As long as demand exceeds availability we will not produce a system of operation that satisfies all users."
- "Squash courts are by far the easiest of facilities to operate."
- "Over provision would not be a problem as the facilities could be used for other activities . . ."



A recreation manager is like a duck—he keeps calm and unruffled on the surface but paddles like the devil underneath.