ARBITRATION

Lockers v Baskets

A popular cause of discussion is viewed from both sides then in a third article summarised by a leading recreation figure.
In this edition Trefor Jones puts the case for baskets as opposed to lockers.
An article supporting lockers v baskets is invited to reply.

by Trefor Jones

I was saddened to read that a Yorkshire council has changed the clothes storage systems at six of the swimming pools under its control—one being in a Sports Centre—from a basket system to coin-operated lockers. Having managed two sports centres (one with baskets, one with lockers) and having visited many pools and centres and had discussions on the 'fors and againsts' of both systems, I believe that the council, or more precisely the honest patrons, managers and staff of the establishments will live to regret the decision.

I will stick my neck out and predict what will happen. I do so not with having visited Gypsy Rose Lee, but with the sickening facts of un-manned locker rooms well catalogued.

a. Despite the locker makers' claim that their product "has been designed to provide maximum resistance to theft, vandalism and corrosion," I say that lockers will be vandalised and patrons' belongings stolen. I saw more human misery following the loss of personal gear in three days using lockers bearing a similar claim than I did in three years of a staff controlled basket system.
b. Many patrons will be faced with the problem of not having the correct coin to operate the locker. Result—unnecessay frustration.
c. Children, particularly those between six and ten years, will not operate the lockers correctly, thereby exposing their belongings to pilferers. Some will even leave their gear in a cubicle. Where are the staff to assist with these and other problems?
d. Keys will be lost. More vexation and frustration.
e. The staff will find great difficulty in operating sessional swims. How are the coloured bands issued in sequence and then returned?
f. Many swimmers will take to the water free of charge. Who is there to check tickets? The pool attendants cannot for safety reasons. The fire doors will provide the way in.

The problems detailed will not be isolated incidents. They will occur with alarming regularity in un-manned locker rooms until eventually management will be forced to employ staff on a permanent basis, thus defeating one of the prime objectives of the exercise.

Let us then consider the Yorkshire council's aims in making the changes.

1. "To considerably reduce the running costs of the pools and sports centres through savings in the staff required to operate them it is estimated that at least £20,000 annually will ultimately be saved throughout the 6 establishments".

a. The capital cost of the conversions, which must run into thousands of pounds, seems to have been quietly forgotten in these sums.
b. An admission is made that at peak periods one person can be detached from poolside duty to check that all is in order in the locker room. Surely this figure must be two, one male, one female. But where are these staff to come from if "for reasons of economy it is necessary to keep staff levels as low as possible consistent with efficiency and safety"?
c. A well known leisure centre can reveal that in the past 18 months damaged and faulty locks have had to be replaced at £10.00 per time. The number of locks? Six hundred. To this cost of £6,000 must be added the cost of labour in checking, removing and replacing locks.

2. "To save space and utilise this to provide additional recreational facilities or storage accommodation".

This is a most attractive aim to any Manager, but I maintain that the safe custody of patrons' belongings far outways the addition of a couple of table tennis tables or more storage space.

3. "To eliminate queuing and speed the throughput of bathers in the changing rooms".

Again, this is a laudable aim, but I personally would prefer to wait a few minutes than to find £50 worth of clothing and gear had disappeared. This can and has happened.

Wrong doers do not commit crimes in full view of staff. The locker system is invariably planned with quiet passages between the banks of lockers.

Apart from staff costs the only argument I have heard against baskets is that the staff can be accused of theft, if articles are missing. As staff have master keys for lockers that argument seems to even itself out.

In conclusion I offer these two points.

1. If the main aim of the change from baskets to self-operated lockers is to reduce running costs then I suggest that the authority has adopted a very negative approach. Far better to add comparatively high income facilities to offset the losses in the pool service.
2. Even if my gloomy predictions prove wholly wrong in that no persons of ill-intent ever enter these establishments, all children operate the lockers perfectly and never lose keys, etc., I would still ask "What are we in business for? To provide a de-humanized conveyer belt to cram through thousands of sardines per hour—untouched by human hands? I maintain that the staff/customer relationship 'makes' Sports Centres and Swimming Pools as much, if not more than, the quality of the sports facilities.

No doubt the council will display signs stating that they do not accept responsibility for the belongings of patrons. What they are saying is "We have now taken away the staff who looked after your gear. We have put in a system which leaves your possessions at the mercy of the less law abiding citizens, but if your gear disappears—hard luck." What an exercise in public relations!

ARBITRATION

Lockers v Baskets

by D. H. Kerrigan,
Manager, Dagenham Swimming Pool

A popular cause of discussion is viewed from both sides, then in a third article summarised by a leading recreation figure.
In this edition the case for lockers is put in reply to Trefor Jones' article in the last edition favouring baskets.

Trefor Jones seems to have covered all the main points in focus on this controversial subject, but has, I feel, been carried away with his own personal feelings. Perhaps I can throw in a few pertinent points to give a wider base for discussion on this subject **by following Mr Jones' tabulated account.**

a. Locker manufacturers may claim many things, rightly or wrongly, but I always feel that you get what you pay for. In these times of local authority cutbacks it too often happens that the expensive product which is required to do the job, is substituted for an inferior product simply because the cost differential is great. Added to this is the myth that lockers need not be supervised which all leads to trouble in one form or another for the operator.
b. Surely this is a management problem—change machines can be placed in the desired areas thus dispersing with this so called frustration.
c. This point is somewhat of a joint exercise between the education of the user via supervision in the early stages of the scheme and the proper promotion of the operation of the system.
d. Keys will be lost—of course, depending on the nature of the site and the area it is in. As for vexation and frustration, a quick release type lock system alleviates these problems with reasonable cost replacement of single lock barrels and not the whole lock. Alternatively there is the possibility of interchanging locks in different sex areas with just the cost of a replacement key.
e. This is a difficult area but with education and notices the situation would improve.
f. It depends on the design of the building and the type of supervision in operation.

Mr Jones again makes reference to the unmanned situation which I agree is a difficult area depending on the type of persons using the site. I would say that the inclusion of locker systems in existing buildings is a way of reducing staff and not eliminating them.

Mr Jones then considers the plight of the Yorkshire council's aims in making the changes.

1. To reduce running costs to the tune of £20,000 per year.
   Has Mr Jones considered that one operative can cost his authority in the region of £4,000+ in total every year! The capital cost of conversion would normally be written off over 7 - 10 years so it is quite feasible for the authority to show these savings on the monies included in the revenue estimates for which there would now be a reduction. Points b and c have been covered in the manning application and the type of locker provided.
2. To save space and to utilise this to provide additional recreation facilities or storage accommodation.
   This can provide a lucrative extra income to the site which will feature in the cost provision and saving calculations.
3. To eliminate queuing and speed of the throughput of bathers in changing rooms.
   Again this seems to reflect on the unstaffed situation.

To Mr Jones' conclusion I would add:—

1. Is it not better to reduce operating costs and increase efficiency rather than reduce the service to comply with requested cutbacks.
2. I think we are in business to provide the public with the best recreation opportunity within the financial budget available.
3. Sites can be made very attractive and a popular focus point even with this type of locker facility.

Arbitration Series

There are, of course, no simple answers to the arguments raised in this series. So much depends on the facility and the community it is serving. Views in favour of a certain line of action need not be without sympathy for aspects against.

The third and concluding article on lockers and baskets in the next edition will attempt a summary.

If you have views for or against membership schemes at sports and leisure centres ARM News would like to hear from you—as this will be our next Arbitration topic.

Few of us choose—most of us inherit

Barry Follett,
Administration Manager at Folkestone & District Sports Centre Trust, outlines their particular course of action.

MAKING THE BEST OF LOCKERS

I was very interested to read Trefor Jones' article Arbitration Lockers and Baskets. Folkestone Centre has had a locker system in operation since it opened in 1972, it has proved to be a real headache until this year. We had a think about the system, looked into baskets, availability of storage, staff to cope and decided to:

1. Place all the lockers along one wall, where a quick glance from either the duty Manager, supervisor or pool attendant at irregular intervals, would show the customers that serveillance was being kept.
2. We changed our ticket machine roll colour to white for swimming only.
3. We insist that all swimmers have a ticket, otherwise no admittance, and this together with the locker key is given in for a band.
4. All swimmers have a band which they collect from an area by the side of the pool, manned in rotation by one lifeguard, who can watch the water and deal with bands, although dealing with bands within a cordoned off area is his prime responsibility for one hour in four. The band system is set up in 4 colours, and the key numbers written on the plain bands in indelible ink.
5. A change machine which takes 1 × 10p and gives 2 × 5p is situated at the entrance of Male and Female changing rooms, beside it is a 5p shampoo machine, we find that many people take 1 × 5p for a locker and buy a shampoo sachet.

That briefly is the system, it's not foolproof, locker keys can be lost or broken, lockers can become jammed, thefts will occur, but the incidence problem has greatly diminished and we are getting almost to the situation of keeping the lockers available for use at all times.

We would have preferred a basket system, but we had to make do. It can be done if a little thought is given to the problem.

We have found that the worst area for vandalism and theft is the men's/boys' wet area. The ladies' wet changing room and the dry changing areas get very little abuse, so the constant security would only really worry us at our centre in one area.

Prior to introducing the new system the bands were given out by reception in colour sequence. We have a great influc of foreign students and visitors in the summer and found we were losing bands faster than Lennards could supply them.

The new bands are much cheaper, 5p each as against 16p each, and to date we have only have breakages, no losses at all. The reason: ticket and key for bands, band for key, no ticket no band, no band no key. The cost, 1000 bands × 5p. 1000 small hooks, 4 pieces of laminated board, 8 tins of enamel car spray £120 including rope to cordon off area.

ARBITRATION SUMMARY

Lockers v Baskets

by Roy Simons

Having been asked to take on the onerous task of summarising this highly controversial and emotive subject, I decided to research as much as I was able into the whole subject of clothes storage. In doing so I can only report that the majority of arguments for and against any particular system have changed little over two decades of discussion. The notable difference arises, however, in the strength and priority given to some of the reasons for recommeding one system against another. These reasons, as we are well aware in this present day of rising inflation, drastic cut-backs in public spending and lack of respect for the property of others, are finance and vandalism. Every day we, as recreation managers, are seeking ways of reducing expenditure and increasing income; new projects and renovations are being shelved and even small sums of cash are not available to finance projects even where these can be shown to repay the capital invested and increase income in a relatively short period of time. Because a local authority is one of the largest single employers of manpower in any one area, then it follows that the easiest way to reduce spending is to reduce labour costs. In most cases this means redundancies or non-replacement of staff. This leads, naturally, to considering ways of introducing automation into an operation, which in the case of most council operated services, especially recreation, may be considered to be impractical. In a completely honest, vandal-free and de-humanised society fully automatic systems of entry, payment, changing, clothes storage and session control would be an ideal solution. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on one's point of view, these ideals cannot be met in the present climate and, myth or not, most authorities, because of vandalism, theft and general abuse are finding that the locker rooms and changing rooms need to be supervised. Whether this supervision means a full-time attendant, periodic checks by staff or closed-circuit television surveillance operated from a central control and linked to other unsupervised areas, is open to question.

That unique animal, the general public, within whose ranks we must include ourselves, unfortunately does not know any better than to bring valuable watches and rolls of bank notes with them when they visit our establishments and neither, it seems, do they realise that ultimately the cost of repairing any vandalism and damage caused comes out of their own pocket.

One point made abundantly clear in my enquiries is that the type of clothes storage and changing systems installed depends, to a large extent, on the prevailing environment and clientele. These conditions vary markedly even across a city in that what may be ideal in one area low on the socio-economic scale may not suit a more affluent area. This is where the experienced recreation manager comes into his own in recommending a particular system. Changing facilities are one of the most important areas within a sports or leisure complex and yet in many cases they are still designed in such a way as to ignore the economies of the service and apparently provide the customer and staff with as much inconvenience as possible, inadequate, dirty, wet, dark and inconvenient changing facilities cause a customer to pre-judge the remainder of his use of otherwise satisfactory facilities and thus he tends to over-react to any other slight annoyance or dissatisfaction to which he may be subjected.

Looking back over the development of clothes storage systems in this country it is fairly apparent that most of the antagonism towards locker systems has come about because of the miserable failures of early locker designs. These failings are still with us in some of the cheaper lockers produced today, e.g. painted ferrous metal which quickly rusts, fragile locks, thin guage metal doors which can be easily be bent and prised open (ruining the doors in the process), flimsy hinges which can be ripped off and flat thin metal keys which can be bent and broken. With the advent of anodised aluminium, stainless steel etc., and the improved design of hinges, locks and keys some, if not all, of these problems have been eliminated. We are still, however, left with one tiresome problem that of lost keys and all the implications of lock changing. Even with the most recent development, a Nimrod locker with a new Selectomatic lock, one wonders how long it will take an ingenious person to duplicate the special key used for removing or changing these locks, thereby invalidating the whole system.

A word here on the staffing of changing areas having locker installations and with particular reference to the arguments the (a) "staff can be released from poolside duty at peak periods to check changing rooms," and (b) "all swimmers have a band which they collect from an area by the side of the pool, manned in rotation by one lifeguard, **who can watch the water and deal with the bands. . . . .?"** At peak periods **ALL** attendants are required on poolside duty. One can imagine a coroner's remarks and the reaction generated in the press if the reason given at the inquest for the loss of a life in a swimming pool was "one of the attendants was busy checking the changing rooms" or "the lifeguard was otherwise engaged giving out bands." Where life is at risk economies cannot be made.

Let us consider the vital requirements for a satisfactory clothes storage system.

1. Customer convenience and satisfaction.
2. Financial economy within safety limits.
3. Security of clothes and valuables.
4. Elimination of wasted court and water time i.e. maximising usage.
5. Ease of operation and supervision especially where teams, clubs, groups and school classes are involved.

Expanding on these requirements:—

1. Customers require a clean changing cubicle or area with a locker or basket immediately and conveniently available into which they may transfer their clothes (which should hang uncreased) and their valuables in perfect security. There should be a minimum walking distance between changing and storage and any need to queue or to walk over dirty floors should be avoided.
2. True costs are not simply initial capital costs plus operating costs, but are derived from a combination of
   (a) Initial capital cost of the installation plus the space within the building required to house it.
   (b) Interest payments on the capital borrowed plus rates (i.e. the more space used the higher the capital borrowed and the higher the interest charges and rates).
   (c) Any additional labour costs incurred in the operation of the system.
   (d) The cost of repairs and periodic replacement of ancillary equipment.
   (e) The cost of repair/maintenance of buildings and fittings damaged by the movement of any ancillary equipment used within the system.
   (f) The cost of redecorating and refurbishing the areas concerned.

   It is evident that some of these costs will be spread throughout the lifespan of the installation but additional labour costs from the largest proportion of these, taking into consideration enhanced rates of pay for overtime and weekend working, employers contributions to national insurance and superannuation schemes, cost of employing relief staff during holiday and sickness periods, shift pay, qualification payments and any bonus payments. Thus the total cost of a single attendant should now be estimated at approximately £4000 per year. Account must also be taken of the fact that although an installed system may require only one member of staff to operate it at any one time the majority of establishments are open 14 hours per day, 7 days per week. Thus the number of staff required to operate such a system over a one week period is increased to perhaps two full-time and one part-time attendant. The total cost of wages, therefore, is increased to aroung £9000-£10,000 per annum. It is interesting to note that this figure has almost trebled since 1972 when it was estimated at £3500 per annum.
3. No system can offer absolute security or freedom from accusation of theft. Articles can be lost in transit, lockers can be prised open, keys can be lost, staff can be dishonest and opportunist thieves are always around. Futhermore imagined losses or deliberate false claims for compensation are also experienced. It would appear, therefore, where individual coin-operated lockable changing cubicles are not feasible, that the need for security is best met by a system providing substantial echelon-type, vandal-proof, corrosion resistant, coin-operated lockers adjacent to the changing areas where they can be readily observed by patrolling attendants or other forms of surveillance. Such a method should eliminate most of the faults with the exception of staff dishonesty since a duplicate or master key must be used in the event of lost or broken keys. Here again the method of key carrying by the customer is important and a specially designed robust key carrier would

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Photo by Coulthard Photography.

Lockers v Baskets (continued). . .

be worth the investment. The use of a common master key in the event of lost keys is not recommended since if this one key is lost or copied then the security of the whole system is in jeopardy. It is better to use individual duplicate keys which can be retained under the control of one designated person on each shift—say the Duty Officer. Locks should be of the type which can be easily changed and, for instance, used in the female section so that if the key is subsequently found it cannot be used on the same locker and the locker also becomes immediately re-usable.

4 Obviously there must be sufficient changing area and consequently sufficient clothes storage space available to accommodate the maximum number of persons at changeover or session-end periods thus avoiding queuing and loss of court or swimming time.

5 Various systems could be employed in conjunction with (4) where a large proportion of court or pool time is given over to organised groups, clubs teams or to special events. One of the easiest systems is to install lockable changing rooms with simple benches and coat hooks lining the walls and with self-contained shower facilities. The team manager or other responsible person pays a deposit or signs for the key to that room and, thereby assumes responsibility for his team's clothing and valuables. Any installation should be easy to operate and acceptable to staff and every area must also be visually accessible at all times.

Conclusion

Many elaborate and sophisticated systems of clothes storage have been conceived from hanging baskets on moving rails to simple rectangular wire baskets, polypropylene trays or even paper sacks. Some of these systems may be suited to a particular environment in which they operate. This environment is important and may often dictate the type of system to be installed. For example, in an establishment at a coastal resort with a very high influx of casual summer visitors, the best system may be simple paper sacks, whereas at a high class golf club in the heart of the stockbroker belt, a locker system would be acceptable. Although little mention has been made of basket systems in the text so far, they should not in any way be dismissed out of hand. Apart from the need for extra staff to operate this type of system one of the main objections to basket installations is staff acceptance. Clothes storage baskets are heavy when full and need to be lifted and transported by both customer and staff. By far the strongest objections raised by staff to a basket system are, however, those of smell (especially in hot weather) and the risk of infestation. Many centres have reported on their inability to obtain basket room staff and the reluctance of attendant staff to carry out basket room duties, even on rota.

The ideal system of combined changing and storage would appear to be that of rows of coin-operated cubicles in a single combined sex area, capable of being supervised by surveillance equipment or a single attendant. Access to each cubicle should be via a "dry" entry door lockable from the inside and exiting via a "wet" door giving onto the shower and toilet areas and which also gives access to the sports/swimming areas. The "wet" exit door should be fitted with a coin-operated, vandal-proof lock and the doors and partition walls of the cubicle should be vandal-proof, easily cleanable, rust-proof material. On returning to the cubicle the system is reversed and the "wet" door is unlocked by the use of the key which is subsequently retained in the lock and the coin returned to the user. The person changes and exits via the "dry" door. Where finance is no obstacle all materials and equipment used must be the best available. Changing capacity must, of course, be appropriate to the maximum average use of the building at change-over periods. Key carriers as described earlier, should also be used. This system should be supported by a series of lockable team changing rooms as described previously and be linked to external doors enabling direct access to and from transport.

Coming back to the reality of the present day there are only two main systems of clothes storage which merit detailed consideration as some arguments for and against a particular system apply equally to those alternative systems already mentioned.

These two major systems are those of hanging baskets and coin-operated lockers. In weighing up the pros and cons it is considered that any system of clothes and valuables storage which requires actual handling by staff and which requires staff to operate it, is unsatisfactory both to customers and staff. This type of system is unduly costly in operation and, if the current rate of inflation continues, will become increasingly more so to the extent that the operating cost is likely to exceed the total initial cost of the whole premises served by the system, within the lifespan of that building. Having operated both systems, and having no personal axe to grind, whilst at the same time maintaining that the old adage of "horses for courses" still applies, I am of the opinion that, if correctly designed and providing the necessary finance is available to obtain the highest quality coin-operated lockers, a locker system is the best bet in the majority of situations.

Summary of the main points for and against the two major systems of clothes storage.
(Not in any order of priority)

HANGING BASKETS

For

1 Smaller capital outlay for initial installation.
2 Low replacement or repair cost to repair vandalism or corrosion of baskets.
3 Inconvenience and cost of replacing identification discs or bands is minimal.
4 Attendant available to oversee changing areas and to clean changing areas between session or during slack periods.
5 Can assist customer/staff relationships.
6 Less bending for basket room attendants who serve at two levels only.
7 Baskets easy to clean and sterilise.
8 System is felxible to cope with heavy demand or increased usage and with variations in the proportion male to female.
9 Easily adaptable for session systems.
10 All clothes, especially overcoats, can be placed in one basket with less liklihood of loss during transit.
11 Damp or wet clothes are more easily stored without dampness being transferred to other clothes and can dry out to some extent.
12 Clothes may be properly hung and the problem of creasing is reduced.
13 Clothes do not get wet on collection from storage after swimming or showering.
14 Changing room layout can be designed for wet and dry changing areas and to avoid bare feet on dirty floors.
15 Lends itself to an easy ticket check system.

Against

1 Larger space required to accommodate a basket system.
2 Damage can be caused to walls, ceilings, doorways, and fitments by banging baskets.
3 A separate system of valuable storage is required i.e. security lockers or valuables held at reception.
4 Extra staff required both for normal operation and busy periods compared with unmanned locker rooms.
5 Storage area must always be manned, overlooked by attendant or lockable for security.
6 Baskets are not always returned to the counter and, therefore, need to be collected by staff.
7 Smell from clothes storage area is very offensive, especially in hot or wet weather.
8 Baskets are heavy and bulky when full both for customer and attendant.
9 Transfer of vermin from basket to basket and to staff cannot be avoided.
10 Staff honesty may be brought into question.
11 Basket room counter must be low thus giving easy access to would-be thief.
12 Loss of band or identification can result in clothes being claimed by thief and, therefore, extra care must be taken.
13 Customer cannot collect clothes and then shower without leaving clothes insecure in changing area.
14 Customers have to collect and return basket.

COIN-OPERATED LOCKERS

For

1 Less space required for locker system.
2 With high quality lockers the repair and replacement costs are reasonable as they are less susceptible to vandalism and break-in.
3 Walls, ceilings, doorways and fitments are not subject to damage by banging baskets.
4 No need for separate system of valuables storage.
5 A profit can accrue if non-return coin-operated locks are installed.
6 A deposit must be forfeited or fine imposed for lost keys.
7 Permanent changing room staff not required except where vandalism etc., is rife resulting theoretically, in less running costs.
8 Less likelihood of offensive smells if well-ventilated and kept clean.
9 Problem of staff honesty reduced if coin-operated lockers are used.
10 Less risk of vermin being transferred from locker to locker or to staff.
11 Greater measure of security for users belongings and valuables except when less substatial lockers are installed.
12 Customers can return to lockers to obtain soap etc., for showering and leave belongings secure whilst showering.
13 Can eliminate queuing if sufficient changing accommodation is provided.
14 Customers or staff do not have to collect, carry or lift baskets.

Against

1 High initial capital outlay especially if the more substantial vandal-proof, thief-proof and corrosion resistant lockers are installed.
2 Increased repair and maintenance costs if cheaper type of locker is used and earlier replacement necessary.
3 Reasonably sized lockers must be used to allow space for storage of overcoats, sports bags, crash helmets etc.
4 Cheaper and less substantial type of locker can be easily broken into and damaged.
5 It is usually necessary to install change machines.
6 Cost of replacing lost keys and changing locks, in view of high labour charges etc., can be high.
7 Lockers are more difficult to clean and sterilise and can smell is not cleaned regularly.
8 Staff required at peak periods or where vandalism and theft are a problem and usually both a male and female are necessary.
9 Destroys customer/staff contact.
10 Care must be taken over loss of keys by customers and staff and use of duplicate key or master key by staff.
11 Clothes have to be carried thus increasing risk of dropping belongings onto wet floor during transit or becoming damp from wet body.
12 Top tier of locker can prove difficult for smaller children to operate and they have a tendency not to use lockers.
13 Customers have a tendency to leave belongings in changing cubicle or area.
14 Difficult to design a system which avoids customers with bare feet walking over soiled floors.
15 Less easily adaptable to session systems.
16 Number of lockers cannot be readily increased to cope with increased demand and system is not sufficiently flexible to cope with variations in proportion of males and females.
17 If required a ticket check system cannot be operated if permanent changing room staff are not employed.