

SQUASH

A Sport Worth Rallying Behind



An Enigmatic Sport, Squashed By the Olympics

Squash is an enigma. The fast-paced racquet sport confined to 4 walls is played by over 21 million people from all over the world and 34 countries will host major tournaments in 2017, and yet it is not an Olympic sport. Much to the dismay of squash lovers, who proclaim that its intensity is unrivalled, squash has tried and failed three times to get into the greatest sporting show on Earth. With Rio 2016 behind us and Tokyo 2020 to look forward to, squash has failed to make the cut.

It's a topic of debate about which sport gets the honour of being featured. However, with the inclusion of skateboarding, surfing and softball in the Tokyo Olympics, squash lovers have a right to feel slightly (or rather very) aggrieved.

The reasons suggested are superficial. Firstly, that it isn't a "spectator friendly" sport. However the 1 million who tuned in to watch the Commonwealth finals would disagree. Secondly, the new rules give the host nation a very large say in which sport is included; and given baseball (& softball) is Japan's favourite sport, it was bound to be included. The youngest sport in the world, Sport Climbing, is also incredibly popular in Japan and Japanese climbers are amongst the world's best. Squash, sadly, just didn't find the right audience there.

A Sport with Many Takers in India

Olympic or not, the fierce racquet sport has a rich and deep history in India. Introduced by the British forces, the infrastructure for the game was built in military cantonments and private clubs as an outlet for their sporting interests.

In the early days, squash had the following of a smattering few who were either from the forces, members of private clubs or children returning from studies abroad. The ethos of the sport certainly fit the name it was given at that time – a bourgeois sport. An organised activity for the promotion of the game was non-existent. Over time, however, things changed.



A Dynamic Push in the Past Few Years

The Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI) was formed to oversee the promotion and development of the sport in India. Needless to mention, results did not rush in with a gush as a lack of systematic structure was posing unending problems. Non-existence of public facilities, lack of qualified manpower and public awareness of the game was pathetic. As time went on, we saw minor improvement in the situation.

5 years ago, the SRFI forged ahead with some dynamic plans. Squash promotion, development and performance at all levels in India have escalated more in the last 10 years than in the last 50. The SRFI headquarters is currently in Chennai. It has more than 20 State Associations and affiliated units. All these units are actively involved in the promotion and development of the game. As is usually the case with many sports, the metros have dominated in terms of activities and creditable performances. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai are the current front-runners. Nevertheless, it is the aspiration of our nation that the sport is successful in garnering champions from smaller towns and even rural areas.

Over the last few years the SRFI has formalised a long-term development plan to transform India into one of the leading countries on the world circuit. A lot of effort has gone into nurturing and developing the juniors. The last few years have been the coming of age of Indian squash, with our players winning laurels at the international arena.

International Glory Galore

On the International stage, India has been relatively successful. Amongst the various squash players we have had over the years, Saurav Ghosal has been the most successful male Indian squash player having become the first Indian to reach the quarter finals of the World Squash championships in 2013. He also won a host of international achievements such as a Gold medal in the 2014 Asian Games for Team India, Silver in the singles event in the same Asian Games, Bronze in the 2010 & 2006 Asian games in the singles event.

The golden girls of Indian squash are Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinappa. Dipika made the country proud by becoming the first Indian to break into the top 10 in the PSA Women's rankings in December 2012. Joshna followed suit in 2016 when she broke into the top 10 and finished the year at 13. At the 2016 World Doubles Squash Championships held in Australia, India won a historic 3 medals for the first time in the history of the championships. Dipika and Saurav won a silver in the mixed doubles; Harinderpal Sandhu and Joshna won the Bronze medal in the mixed doubles; Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal won a bronze in the women's doubles category.



Truly, the 'Next Big Thing' of Indian Sports

Olympic sport or not, India seems to be moving in the right direction when it comes to squash. Encouraging results on the International circuit have given the sport a much-needed impetus. Who knows, India might just give squash a world champion in the future. And maybe one day, the sport administrators will finally realise that debate of not allowing this vivacious sport into the Olympics just doesn't hold much solid ground.

