



Introduction

One of the key challenges for urban squash coaches is how to manage and instruct groups of students on court. Given their desire to serve as many students as possible, SEA programs often try fill their rosters with at least four players per court. Successful coaches must know not only how to teach the sport of squash, but also how to effectively manage large numbers of students of varying ability levels. Below are some tips on how to approach this challenge.

Overview

This guides shares tips on how to approach the challenge of managing large numbers of students on court.

- Have a practice plan
- Have an equipment plan
- Have a behavior intervention plan
- Have a consistent practice structure
- Give effective explanations and demonstrations
- Plan student groupings in advance
- Prepare and use volunteers effectively
- Plan for transitions and breaks
- Develop strong student-coach relationships
- Foster positive peer relationships and fun

Have a Practice Plan

To lead an effective practice, coaches should have a written plan in advance of practice. This enables the coach to keep a strong pace and flow to practice. The strongest practices have **no lines** (no students waiting in lines) and **no lectures** (clear, concise instruction). Students are constantly engaged. Be effective in your use of time, volunteers, and space.

Have an Equipment Plan

Coaches should have a clear system for distributing and loaning and squash equipment. Coaches should expect and hold students accountable for coming prepared to practice - dressed in athletic wear and with equipment. (See the [SEA Best Practice Guide on Squash Gear Management](#) for more on this topic.) At the same time as coaches expect students to come prepared, however, they must also plan for students to not be prepared for practice. Even the most organized students may, from time to time, may forget or misplace a piece of equipment. A coach who doesn't have a plan for how to manage this is not prepared himself/herself for practice. When a student comes to you saying, "I can't find my racquet," the coach should



know how he/she is going to respond. Here are a few options to consider.

- ❑ Could you have a bag or bin with loaner equipment and clothing available so you can quickly give the student the missing gear?
- ❑ What role might your volunteers play in helping students find missing equipment? How will you prepare them for this role? For example, could a volunteer track what students are missing equipment and give them a loaner for the day?
- ❑ Do you have a system for easily tracking which students are unprepared so that you can identify patterns and help consistently unprepared students come up with a plan for being better prepared?

Have a Behavior Intervention Plan

Just as coaches should expect that, from time to time, students will forget their gear, they should also expect that from time to time students will have behavioral issues that require additional support. Common issues that present themselves often include students showing a lack of effort, shutting down, or being disruptive. View these behaviors as opportunities to help students increase their resilience and emotional literacy, and have a plan in advance for what you will do when these behaviors surface. Here are some questions to consider.

- ❑ Do you as the coach have the ability to sit out with a player and talk to him/her during practice? If not, is there someone else, like a Program Director, who you can call?
- ❑ If you pull a player off court but are not immediately available to talk with him/her, where is a supervised space where the player can wait without distracting others or causing problems? Do not leave a player who has been pulled off court for behavioral issues unsupervised.
- ❑ What can you have the player do while waiting for someone to address him/her? For example, is there a clipboard with a reflection sheet where a player can write out what he/she is feeling, what he/she did that resulted in him/her being removed from court, and what can happen in the future to prevent this problem (what he/she can do differently, what other players can do differently, and what the coach/volunteer can do differently).
- ❑ How do you deal with repeat offenders? For example, how do you deal with a student for whom a pattern of disruptive behavior appears?

Have a Consistent Practice Structure

Strong squash practices have a flow that students expect and know how to follow. Here are a few structures/routines to consider in your practice.

- ❑ **On-time start.** Students, coaches, and volunteers should all know and hold themselves accountable to starting practice on time. When start times change, students are more



likely to give pushback when the coach announces that it's time to start. If your exact start time has to change from day to day due to transportation or other challenges, you can at least give students a consistent amount of time in the locker room and a two-minute warning before you call them together.

- ❑ **Warm-up.** Coaches should have a plan for warm-ups prior to the start of practice, either a standard warm-up or a handful of different warm-ups. Both have their merits.
 - ❑ Teams might have a standard warm-up that students can lead and execute by themselves. For example, students might do ten laps around the court with each lap being a different warm-up movement (high knees, butt-kickers, shuffles, etc.) followed by stretching in the center of the court. After this initial warm-up, students might either do some court sprints or a fun, active game that gets their heart rates up and muscles warmed up.
 - ❑ Warm-ups provide a good opportunity for student leadership. Coaches might select alternating leaders to direct the warm-ups, encourage students to move quickly to practice from the locker rooms, etc.
- ❑ **Introduction / Explanation.** Students should gather in a semi-circle around the coach in a way that every player can clearly see the coach and the coach can clearly see every player. The coach welcomes students to practice, acknowledges volunteers, and gives an overview of the plan for the day. This is also a good time to publicly recognize and celebrate any students who competed in tournaments recently or had other squash or fitness-related achievements. Introductions should not last more than five minutes. See below for more details on explanations.
- ❑ **Activity.** Students spend the bulk of the practice drilling on court, engaging in fitness activities, and in simulated play. Other sections of this guide speak more directly to this aspect of the practice.
- ❑ **Wrap Up:** At the end of practice, students should gather again in a semi-circle around the coach. The coach should summarize, or ask students to summarize, the skills they worked on during practice and why they matter. The coach might also ask students to silently reflect on their own individual progress/effort, give players the opportunity to openly recognize other players for their effort, persistence, or accomplishments during practice, thank volunteers for their assistance, and/or do a quick team cheer.

Give Effective Explanations and Demonstrations

Assuming a group size of 12-20 students, coaches should be thoughtful about when and how they give explanations during practice, ensuring that players are able to hear, see, and understand without being distracted or losing focus. Here are some questions to consider:

- ❑ How will you physically position yourself and your players so that they can clearly see



and hear a demonstration?

- ❑ Is it better to give thorough instructions for all courts at the same time, with the whole group together, or to prepare volunteers to give instructions when students arrive on their court, or a mixture of both?
- ❑ Are you providing students with multiple ways to take in information so as to reach all learning styles (kinesthetic, visual, auditory)? For example, write out key points, say them outloud, and have students practice them.
- ❑ How will you ensure that written information is easily understandable by students (clear font, bold markers, pictures to accompany words, etc.)?

When explaining a practice plan, keep in mind the “IDEAS” concept presented by US Squash:

I: Introduction - Share the goal/purpose of the activity. No more than one or two minutes.

D: Demonstration - Show students what the specific shot or activity should look like. Make sure student safety is taken into account in lesson plan.

E: Explanation - Explain the importance of the shot/drill. Why is it played? In what matchplay situations can it be applied. Again try to keep this concise.

A: Activity - Students do the activity. Have structured, logical progressions, use both sides of the court, keep everyone involved. This should be what takes about the majority of the session.

S: Summary - Highlight key points of drill. Give praise to students.

Plan Student Groupings in Advance

Plan in advance for how you will break students up into groups. Write the groups out in advance if possible to eliminate time wasted reading them off, especially in large groups. As students arrive at practice, do a quick reshuffling if necessary before the start of practice to account for student absences. Nothing slows a practice down more than a coach slowly thinking through and breaking up players into groups. Breaking students up into groups on the spot also increases the likelihood that students will argue for who they want to practice with, as opposed to them knowing that you’ve already determined the groups in advance.

Prepare and Use Volunteers Effectively

Preparation - Volunteers can only support you as well as you prepare them to do. Be thoughtful about how you will get them the information they need to support you. What content do you need to cover in volunteer trainings, and how often will you hold trainings? How and when will you share your practice plan with volunteers?



Usage and Consistency - Be strategic about where you place volunteers. In a simple feeding drill, more experienced volunteers should be placed with beginners because of the importance of a strong feed. In condition drills, however, where the volunteer is playing with students, more experienced volunteers should be placed with more experienced players. Less experienced volunteers can be effective at leading fitness activities. Consistent volunteers can be very helpful in managing large groups. For example, a volunteer who may know each student on a personal basis may be able to handle a situation more effectively than a volunteer who is not familiar with the students.

For additional guidance on this topic, see the Best Practice Guides on [Volunteer Recruitment and Training](#) and [Squash Volunteer Recruitment, Training, and Management](#).

Maximize Your Space and Resources

With large groups, you need to make the most of your space. Here are a few points to consider:

- ❑ **Use both sides of the court.** For example, while one group works on forehands, have another group work on backhands, or have a student take a shot and then ghost to the opposite side corner before returning to the line.
- ❑ **Lead fitness off court.** You don't need a lot of space to run effective fitness sessions for squash. Think about how to reduce the number of players on court by having players rotate to an off-court fitness activity.
- ❑ **Have students hand feed.** When working with beginners and limited volunteers, students can be used for feeding. Be sure to emphasize the importance of feeding in the drill to the students. Compliment students not only for good shots but for good feeds as well.

Plan for Transitions and Breaks

Poorly planned transitions and breaks can negatively impact the flow of practice, as coaches struggle to get students to refocus. To prevent this from happening, consider the following points.

- ❑ Monitor the time spent on transitions. Having a system of positive reinforcement for students who are efficient in their transition will help motivate students that may not be as efficient. If it takes the coach 4-5 minutes to transition, students should be given no more than 8 minutes to transition.
- ❑ Think through the choreography of transitions. Where will students wait while other students get their things? Where should students keep their gear so that they can collect it quickly when it's time to transition? How will students move through the



building in the most efficient way (which staircases, what direction, etc.)? How are they supervised during transitions? Thinking through these questions will help minimize delays during transitions.

- ❑ Water breaks are important. It gives the students an opportunity to hydrate and catch their breath. However it should not distract from the flow of practice. Water breaks should not run for more than a minute or so. A water break can also serve as a transition point between drills/exercises.

Develop Strong Student-Coach Relationships

Having strong plans and practice structures are critically important to managing large groups on court, but the other key component is the relationship the coach has with the individual players. Players who have strong relationships with their coaches will be much more likely to work hard, focus, and be honest about what is stopping them from performing at the highest level. Think through how you can meet with students individually, either formally or informally. This reminds them that you care and are invested in their growth. See the Best Practice Guide on [Building Strong Student-Staff Relationships](#) for more on this topic.

Foster Positive Peer Relationships and Fun

When coaching large groups of students, coaches need to intentionally build team culture and facilitate the development of positive peer relationships. A coach who neglects the peer dynamics and culture on his/her team will find that he/she needs to dedicate practice time to addressing misbehaviors as opposed to coaching squash. Below are simple ways to foster fun and positive peer relationships.

- ❑ Lead fun and active opening games to set the tone of practice with students smiling and moving
- ❑ Encourage high fives
- ❑ Integrate team competitions
- ❑ Integrate quick challenges to break up monotony (ex: tell students do a 1.5 full court sprints from mid-court)
- ❑ End practice with the opportunity for students to give shout-outs to their peers and coaches

Additional Resources

- ❑ [SquashSkills](#) is an online resource for coaches and players with videos, practice plans, and more. If you set the filter to “groups,” there are a few fun group games on there for beginners. SquashSkills offers discounted memberships to SEA member program staff



and students, at a rate of \$50 per player. SEA will pay \$25 per player for up to 200 memberships across SEA, meaning the cost to programs is just \$25 per player.

- ❑ [Serious Squash](#): 3-person drills for intermediate to advanced level players

SEA Shared Drive Resources

- ❑ [SquashBusters sample practice plan](#): A detailed plan with student groupings, court-by-court instructions, and practice overview.
- ❑ Cincinnati sample practice plans using the IDEAS format:
 - ❑ [Straight lob](#)
 - ❑ [Beginner service game](#)
- ❑ [Cincinnati group management explanation](#): A summary of how Cincinnati Squash Academy manages groups of students in their program.
- ❑ [Cincinnati drills and activities by level](#): A summary of some common drills and activities for different squash levels.

This guide was written by Vir Seth at Cincinnati Squash Academy, with support from the 2017-2018 Academic Leadership Committee.