

GETTING SQUASH BACK ON TRACK

Appetites were whetted for the Commonwealth Games by a stunning week at Birmingham New Street as over 2,000 people played on the glass show court in the train station's spectacular atrium.

Over one million people came past the court during the week-long programme of events and those lucky enough to play on it included school children, club players and members of the armed forces, plus pros, legendary ex-pros and up-and-coming stars playing exhibition matches.

The court also hosted the semi-finals and finals of the University of Birmingham Open, with the men's and women's winners – Egypt's Ibrahim Elkabbani and Japan's Satomi Watanabe respectively – earning places in the World Championships in Cairo as a result.

Mostly though the week of activity in early April was about showcasing squash to new audiences – indeed, 95% of people who went on the court had never played before.

The Eventis glass court was sited in prime position right in front of the train departure



boards in the station's vast atrium. Alongside it was a smaller three-sided court designed by Melior Sports which also attracted passers-by for a quick hit.

The festival of squash was organised by Squash United, an official project of United by Birmingham, the Commonwealth Games community programme. The collective of enthusiasts includes the PSA Foundation, Rackets Cubed, the WSF and England Squash.

Delivering countless coaching sessions throughout the week was the indefatigable 'Mr Squash', Mike Harris, supported by the organisational gusto of PSA Foundation manager Adriana Olaya, Ming Lee and Rackets Cubed founder Michael Hill.

Hill said: "It's been amazing to see so many people of all ages and backgrounds trying their hand at squash at this unique event. The smiles on people's faces said it all!"

Olaya added: "Having this court in such a public space was incredible. Every single person that walked through the station this week talked about squash, even if they were just wondering what it was. It made squash stand out. It really truly was a celebration of our beloved sport and our squash community!"

GUYANA'S GUIDING LIGHT

Carl Ince's wisdom will embolden the Caribbean island's squash squad as they head to Birmingham



Guyana's tilt at Commonwealth Games squash success will be watched intently by legendary 78-year-old national coach Carl Ince from his farm in the tropical rainforest.

Ince's squash obsession began aged 30 in Manchester. After he returned home to the Caribbean, he built two concrete courts at his farm alongside his fruit trees and black

water creek. He recently added a third court with a glass back wall which hosts national team training camps.

Philadelphia-based coach Ramon Chan-A-Sue will accompany the Guyanese players to Birmingham this summer as Ince is "not too fond of travelling these days," but his influence on every member of the squad will remain profound.

"Coach has been part of my life for 21 years," said Mary Fung-A-Fat. "He created such a strong foundation for me as a player that has led me to so many successes. Coach has a way of making you feel heard and his sincerity, wisdom and gentle nature has left a lasting impression on me.

"The last Games [on the Gold Coast] was my first Commonwealth experience, and what excited me the most was simply the buzz of the village, sharing space and experiences with some of the world's best athletes and meeting some of my squash idols. I'm looking forward to just being part of it all again."

Ince's grandson Shomari Wiltshire, 18, recently won Guyana's national title. He said: "Coach Carl has had a great impact on me as I have been his student since I was six. In Birmingham, I can't wait to see how I adapt against top players from the PSA Tour."



The two other members of Guyana's team for the Games are brother and sister Ashley and Jason-Ray Khalil (pictured). Both played international badminton before dedicating their energies to squash. The island's most famous player, Nicolette Fernandes (now 38), had to pull out of the qualifying play-off competition.

Guyana are reigning Caribbean champions and the island hosts the Caribbean Area Squash Championships for juniors in July. Ince, a Level 4 coach, plans to relinquish his coaching duties soon and be a coach tutor, including to his grandsons Dan and Samuel who are both Level 2 coaches.