Heart attacks are very rare in squash, but the recent tragedy of a young squash player who died while competing has highlighted the issue. Dominic Bliss finds out what the risks are and how you can minimise them.
benefits of vigorous exercise “massively” outweigh any risks. “There are very few situations where exercise should be avoided, particularly when you’re talking about young people,” he says.

Although cardiac problems do kill young people – the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) says that around 12 British people under the age of 35 die every week from a previously undiagnosed heart condition – vigorous sport is not necessarily the catalyst.

“Sport itself does not lead to cardiac arrest,” says Dr Godfrey, a former club squash player himself for West of Scotland in his younger days. “Get fit to play squash.”

Get fit gradually to intense play. Don’t get fit by playing squash, or if you feel light-headed. Chest pain is a sign of trouble, too, especially if it persists.

With younger players, early warning signs are even tougher to spot. However, there are medical tests available. CRY currently tests around 12,000 young people every year using a simple and non-invasive procedure called an electrocardiogram (ECG).

There are several life-threatening nasties they are looking for, ranging from cardiomyopathies, myocarditis and coronary artery anomalies to Wolf-Parkinson-White syndrome and ion channelopathies. There isn’t room in this article to explain all the medical symptoms, diagnoses and treatments. More information can be found on CRY’s website at www.c-r-y.org.uk/medical_conditions.htm.

So should squash players consider having an ECG, just to be safe? The European Society of Cardiology and the International Olympic Committee both recommend cardiac screening for any young person taking part in competitive sport. In countries such as Italy, screening is obligatory for youths taking part in organised sport. In the UK, however, it is voluntary.

CRY carries out ECG tests all over the country, often at schools or sports clubs where the procedure is free. Dr Steve Cox, the charity’s director of screening, encourages players who compete in regular matches to get tested (for more information visit www.testmyheart.org.uk).

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Lauren Selby is one of several top British players who have undergone screening. She stresses just how easy the whole procedure was. “All I had to do was find a screening near me and book it online via the CRY’s website,” she says.

“People should be made aware of CRY,” she said. “People should be made aware of CRY.”

Unfortunately, this is all too late for Harry, who will be missed by the British squash fraternity. Since his death many clubs have dedicated victories and trophies to the young man. At the finals of the National Championships, staged just days after his death, Harry was honoured by spectators who applauded for a full minute in memory of him.