

PLAY IT BY EAR

Mike Dale reviews the main players in the world of squash podcasting, where listeners get fascinating insights from the game's biggest names and most colourful characters

We take it for granted these days that in our pocket is a device that can captivate and distract us, no matter how niche our particular passions may be.

Podcasts have ridden on the back of the mobile internet explosion, satisfying our demand for on-the-go entertainment with audio content that can be downloaded and listened to anywhere.

Usually free, podcasts take many forms – music, stories, documentaries, sketches and interviews – and cover an array of subjects. Squash is one of them.

Outside the Glass, presented by 'The Don' of US squash journalism, James Zug, is the most established of the genre. Its monthly episodes stretch back almost three years and include features and interviews with Ali Farag, Malcolm Willstrop, Geoff Hunt and Nicol David.

This reviewer's favourite is a mini-series in which club players reminisce about their first ever game of squash, blowing match points and memorable team matches. Listening to their resonant New York accents and vivid descriptions of local squash club characters are several hours very well spent.

Zug has a journalist's interviewing technique – he interrupts regularly, wanting more detail, names and dates – and his podcasts are notable for the high production values, with introductory blues music that conjures images of him and his interviewee sitting in a smoky backstreet bar.

"It's about storytelling rather than updating listeners on the latest goings-on in the game; timeless rather than

timely," he says. "That is the heart of OTG – something you can listen to today or in five years' time, and it will hold up.

"I've enjoyed getting to know people better. We all have stories to tell and sometimes it isn't until you formally sit down that you hear them. Whether it's Bryan Patterson's hidden history as a pro football player, Ali Farag's love of Las Vegas or how Steve Line used to develop film in a coal shed, the interviews have brought these stories out."

Zug's long-term aim is to release podcasts bi-weekly, but even that wouldn't match the prodigious output of Gerry Gibson's stellar **In Squash Podcast**, which has pumped out 43 episodes this year alone at the time of writing.

A Canadian teacher living in the UAE, Gibson is an understated host, gently cajoling guests through wide-ranging conversation. Chat partners have included Gregory Gaultier, Sarah-Jane Perry and David Palmer, as well as figures like Jamie Maddox, the scampish administrator of Facebook group Squash Stories.

"Producing the podcast for me is like being a kid in a candy store," says Gibson. "From interview preparation to the final editing process, it's a real joy for me. Delving deep into the back stories of my interview subjects is what I really try to achieve."

Comments From The Couch is the monthly magazine show from Daryl Selby and Cameron Pillely, featuring occasional

star guests such as Nick Matthew and Jenny Duncalf.

It is fair to say (to use a British radio comparison) that it is more talkSPORT than BBC Radio 4. In one episode, Selby describes Matthew's autobiography as "laddy". Then there is a long pause as he seeks an alternative adjective for James Willstrop's book, before eventually choosing "less laddy".

The hosting pair share great chemistry, though, banter flows copiously and, being current pros, they provide a few tasty tales of life on the PSA Tour.

If it is depth you are after, Tom Ford's podcast, **Finding Balance**, is often profound and occasionally emotional. His interviews (guests have included Camille Serme, Victoria Lust and Saurav Ghosal) are akin to therapy sessions, exploring how each subject achieves mental and physical wellbeing, along with a healthy balance in their separate lives on and off court.

There is an element of catharsis to the podcasts for Ford, 24, whose own squash career was cruelly stymied last year by chronic fatigue syndrome. Suffering with symptoms for some months, it was in fact his podcast with Peter Marshall (whose own career was blighted by the same debilitating illness) that led to him being formally diagnosed.

Ford is a deep thinker, especially for his age, and his thoughtful and slightly vulnerable personality brings out similar stark honesty from his guests. Like the other three main squash podcasts, it offers a new window on the game we all love.

Gerry Gibson, who produces **In Squash Podcast**

For information on connecting with squash podcasts and the latest offerings, see: squashplayer.co.uk > Audio, Video, TV