

# THE LONG GAME AND WALKING SQUASH

*Squash Player looks at two adaptations of squash that are serving their devotees well – the Dawn Patrol in San Francisco and walking players in Hertfordshire*



The Dawn Patrol meets in the morning in San Francisco for their squash workout, a coffee and a well-earned pastry (left to right): Ramesh Shivdasani, Nat Katzman, Steve Marks, Shiraz Kaderali, Morton Beebe, Alan Rubin, Peter Sorensen, Tony Bretkelly

## THE DAWN PATROL

Over 40 years ago a young group of guys began playing squash at the San Francisco Bay Club. They consisted of doctors, lawyers, dentists, advertising executives, restaurateurs, CPAs, television producers and the occasional coupon-cutter. They found that they enjoyed playing against each other.

Although their politics often differed greatly, they found that they could get together each morning for a cup of coffee and a pastry

across the street at a convenient restaurant called Il Fornaio, and enjoy discussions together, as long as politics was avoided! Because of their early playing time, they called themselves the Dawn Patrol.

Over the years, the size of the group has expanded and contracted. An early leader wanted only squash players, but several stopped playing squash and stayed in the group. Later, leaders encouraged anyone who happened to have a locker near theirs to join.

As the group grew older, the strenuousness of the full game became a burden and a 'long game' was developed. In this the ball can only be played to the back of the court. If it lands in front of the short line, it is 'out'. The object is to get maximum tolerable aerobic exercise with minimum sudden lunges.

These are now the standard rules, although there was an evolution and different variations linger. Originally, the striker could choose to play any ball that landed in front of the short line or call a let. In a handicapped version, the aged player plays by the regular rules and the opponent by the 'long game' rules.

**Peter Sorensen, a member of the group, commented: "It is amazing to see how the aged player may even beat the club pro when the aged player determines the rules!"**

After squash, the camaraderie continues over coffee where they joke, laugh and comment irreverently about the events of the day.

Sorensen added: "The squash relationship has grown into lifelong friendships that include a monthly dinner, where the wine flows freely; an informal but competitive annual Christmas tourney followed by a luxuriant brunch; and various other social activities throughout the year.

**"The group keeps evolving as some members have left or passed away, and the next generation(s) of squash players is becoming more active, but the leadership torch has not yet been passed.**

"Squash has been and continues to be an important part of our lives. Vive la squash, the Dawn Patrol and the Long Game!"

## DESPERATION TO PLAY

**A group of ageing but innovative squash players have rekindled their careers in the sport by starting the UK's first Walking Squash League.**

John O'Callaghan, 57, and companions of similar vintage at the University of Hertfordshire Sports Village suffered a succession of injuries which caused most to retire.

However, O'Callaghan devised a simple set of rules for less mobile players which has got them back on court. Using a red-dot ball, they play essentially a crosscourt length (back-court) game. The ball is not allowed to bounce in front of the short line and must bounce in your opponent's back



John O'Callaghan (left), Peter Simmons (centre) and Chris Pike are as competitive as ever in the UK's first Walking Squash League

quarter of the court. Games are played PAR up to 15 and O'Callaghan says the average rally length is 15 shots.

The oldest player in the fledgling league is 66 and the five current league members have a combined age of over 260. Such has been the initial interest that O'Callaghan is already planning an expansion to three leagues of six.

O'Callaghan, who is director of the County Sports Partnership based next to the university sports village, told *Squash Player*: "It was borne out of desperation to get back playing. Like most good ideas, it's all about simplicity.

"It was meant to be non-competitive, but it's the most competitive league I've ever played in in my life!"

**• The Editor would be interested to hear from readers of other adaptations and variations of squash.**