

Commit to get **SQUASH FIT**

THIS MONTH LEADING PERFORMANCE TRAINER *ALLISTAIR MCCAW* TALKS ABOUT IMPROVING YOUR ON-COURT PERFORMANCE WITH JUST A LITTLE FITNESS TRAINING ADDED TO YOUR WEEKLY SQUASH SESSIONS



Ever heard the saying: “Don’t play squash to get fit; get fit to play squash”? It couldn’t be more true.

In my job, I travel a lot so I cannot play regularly. After a recent trip to the United States, the first thing I did was call my squash buddy Tony DeCuba (aka Tony Montana) from Almere. I had a hit with him and decided to play some points. After five points I realised just how out of shape I was. My fitness level was so poor that I was performing the old ‘tie the lace’ and ‘check the strings’ tricks to buy myself some time to catch my breath between points. After one particularly long rally where Tony sent me to all four corners of the court at least four times, I felt as if I had just reached the summit of Mount Everest without an oxygen bottle. It then dawned upon me that even though I don’t regard myself as unfit, for me to enjoy my squash more I needed to try to incorporate some form of squash-specific fitness training into my travelling schedule.

Going into the third game (yes, I got that far), I could feel my co-ordination and stability starting to deteriorate. I was moving more clumsily, no longer feeling light on my feet, and subjecting myself to the risk of an injury such as going over my ankle.

Squash is a great game to keep you in shape, but to really enjoy it you have got to be in some kind of shape already. If you aren’t fit and alert, you cannot think and react quickly. Squash requires you to think on your feet – and fast. The game also places the body under an incredible amount of strain no matter how fit you may be. Squash is a game of unpredictability, which is why I love playing it – you just don’t know what is going to happen next!

Professional players put in a lot of hours on the court, hitting thousands of balls, perfecting nicks, boasts, drives,

“ No matter how badly out of shape you may be, you can do something about it without having to spend hours at the club or gym. ”

volleys ... But besides the time on court, they also spend a great deal of time in the gym and on the track. Their goal? To stay injury free and maximise

their athletic potential. They understand that these two elements are crucial to a achieving a better performance. But fitness is not only for the pros; anyone who wants to improve their game, no matter what their age or level, needs some form of performance training that helps them avoid the two most destructive problems for the athlete: injury and fatigue.

“ As little as 20 minutes of some form of squash-specific performance training three times a week can dramatically improve your game. ”

THE 20-MINUTE RULE

No matter how badly out of shape you may be, you can do something about it without having to spend hours at the club or gym. It’s about committing to getting fitter, faster and better. If you play three hours a week, just doing an extra 45–60 minutes of some type of squash-specific fitness training will improve your game by 25%. I have proof of this in the shape of numerous clients I have worked with – players ranging from 13 to 70 years of age.

When advising professional players on how much time they should spend on performance training, I tell them at least 75% of the time they spend playing squash. So for every hour they spend on court, they should devote 45 minutes to performance training. That doesn’t necessarily mean doing ‘heavy stuff’ like court sprints, agility and weights. This allotted time includes regeneration (recovery) work like prehab, core and foam rolling.





For the recreational player who works or studies full time, I advise that for every hour they spend playing squash they spend 20 minutes doing some form of physical activity that complements their squash game. That is not too much to ask in my opinion, especially when it could dramatically improve your game.

Some people detest any form of fitness training. Believe it or not, even some professional athletes hate the thought of having to go to the gym or track. However, those who don't find the time for exercise now will have to find time later to recover from injury and illness.

A joke I like to share with clients who don't enjoy fitness training is to make sure their tactics and game plan are designed around making their opponent run more!

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A SCHEDULE FOR A PERSON WHO TRAINS THREE TIMES A WEEK

DAY 1

Squash 45 mins to 1 hour with 20 mins leg exercises (forward and side lunges, squats, etc.)

DAY 2

Squash 45 mins to 1 hour with 20 mins core exercises (abdominals and lower back)

DAY 3

Squash 45 mins to 1 hour with 20 mins agility and speed training (court sprints, ghosting, agility drills)

FIVE ESSENTIALS

I am often asked to list what I feel are the five most important physical elements to a squash player. In my opinion they are:

1. Mental muscle – The most important 'muscle' in the body is the one between the ears! Squash is a game that requires you to think on your

feet – and fast. I like to compare squash to chess. You have always got to be one move ahead ; you have got to be smarter than your opponent.

2. Strong legs – A squash player needs strong and supple legs to be able to cover the court well. The first thing that usually goes when a player gets tired is the legs. All that lunging, stretching and bending saps the energy in the muscles.

3. Strong core – The core is the centre of the body. A strong and trained core controls motion and provides the player with good balance and rotational strength (strong back and abdominals) and promotes a efficient movement. A good mover on court will always have a well trained core.

4. High anaerobic level – Squash is an anaerobic sport, meaning it requires short bursts of energy and short rest periods (intervals). I have done tests and found that a player's heart rate can reach up to 200 beats per minute after a long and strenuous point. How anaerobically fit you are determines how quickly you recover from such exertion. What good is it to win the

“ Those who don't find the time for exercise now will have to find time later to recover from injury and illness. ”

longest and most spectacular point of a match only to be totally exhausted after it and lose the next three points or even the entire match?

5. Regeneration – Good recovery. Your next match or training session is only as good as your recovery from the last. If you do not take care of your body after a strenuous session, it will not perform the way you want it to next time. It is like driving a car and not servicing it. You drive and drive it until it breaks down. Good regeneration activities include foam rolling, massage, yoga and stretching.

A NOTE TO COACHES

Incorporating the teaching of some squash-specific exercises in your lessons is a way of providing added value to your existing clients and a USP for attracting new clients. It not only gives the client an extra tool to help them perform better, it also keeps your income stream by making your clients healthier and less injury-prone. Remember that in most cases a sick or injured client is lost income.

No matter your client's age or level, adding some basic exercises and drills to their lesson (preferably at the end)

can increase their stamina, strength, speed and, most importantly, game enjoyment. They don't need to be complex or difficult exercises; just four basic exercises, performed two or three times, is enough to make a difference.

I will be running a performance training workshop for coaches (and players) in the near future. Keep an eye on the site: www.AthletesConditioning.com.

“ What good is it to win the longest and most spectacular point of a match only to be totally exhausted after it and lose the next three points or even the entire match? ”

HERO – A DEFINITION

“A hero to me is someone who uses their god-given abilities (no matter how little those are) to the full. A hero to me is a “just do it” person. A hero to me is a human doing instead of a human being. God has blessed most of us with incredible able working bodies. Working out and playing sport should be a pleasure. On this subject I will never forget the 2008 Forexx Dutch Open at the Frans Otten Stadium in Amsterdam, where Dutch paraplegic tennis player Robin Ammerlaan took to the squash court on his wheelchair and wowed the crowds with his skill and enthusiasm. That's a hero for me.” Allistair McCaw



ALLISTAIR McCAW

is the founder of Athletes' Conditioning, which specializes in athletic performance enhancement through sport-specific conditioning.

He has worked with various world class athletes including top-ten tennis players Jelena Dokic and Dinara Safina. In squash he has trained one of the world's top female players, Natalie Grinham.

Allistair advises athletes at all levels and also contributes regular articles to Squashlife, Medicine & Tennis Journal and Australian Tennis Magazine.

Visit his homepage at www.AthletesConditioning.com