

# Fitting fitness in

In the first of a new series, fitness and sports conditioning expert Gary Nisbet underlines the importance of physical fitness to squash players and gives some tips on how to organise your sessions



Gary Nisbet

different elements, including endurance, speed, power and strength, all of which need to be considered in an all-round physical training programme. But at club level, away from the state-of-the-art facilities and dedicated strength and conditioning coaches available to the pros, what can you do to improve these different elements of your fitness, and how can you fit in the extra training time?

Here are some methods to squeeze a

**Watching elite-level stars such as Nick Matthew and Greg Gaultier covering the length of the court in a blur of movement, sprinting, lunging and diving to reach shots that often appear all but unretrievable right until the split second before they're picked off and returned with interest, it is clear just how important physical fitness and conditioning is to the game of squash.**

The ability to not only perform these breathtaking feats of athleticism, but to repeat them over and over again for anything up to two hours in what are often oppressively hot and humid conditions, really underlines the all-round physical conditioning necessary for an elite-level squash player.

While most of us may have no realistic hopes or aspirations of matching the dizzying physical heights of the luminaries of the sport, whatever level you play at there is no escaping the fact that being physically fit is an essential foundation of the game of squash.

Fitness, however, is comprised of a number of

little more out of your sessions and maximise the time available to you:

### 1. ADD SOME 'BOLT-ONS':

The concept of a 'bolt-on' is basically the addition of a 10-15 minute mini-fitness session that you include either before or after your usual weekly games of squash.

A very simple example, for instance, may be adding a set of 10x10 court sprints after each of your regular social hits each week.

Working with 30-second recoveries between each set, such a session would take no longer than around 10 minutes. Adding that in three times a week would immediately help start to give you a bit of an endurance boost for your on-court performance.

Get to the courts 15 minutes early or stay 15 minutes after your game to create the time, or if that's not possible, perhaps try reducing your match with your partner to the best-of-three games instead of the best of five and use the extra time to focus on some conditioning drills.

### 2. INCREASE YOUR GYM SESSION SPECIFICITY:

Ever-increasing numbers of people have gym memberships these days, but it is unfortunately quite common for these sessions to lack focus and direction. If you find time to fit in a couple of gym sessions outside your usual squash matches every week, why not try to gear them a little more towards helping enhance your squash performance?

Focusing on large, compound movements, such as squats and deadlifts, supplemented with unilateral (single leg) exercises, such as lunges and weighted step-ups, is the perfect way to help develop squash-specific strength, power and stability.

Cardio sessions can also be geared more towards boosting your squash performance by basing your workouts on interval or circuit-style training, moving away from just plodding along at the same old pace for long stretches of your session.

### 3. DEDICATED BLOCKS OF TRAINING:

Particularly for players who compete in leagues and club matches, it can be a great idea to schedule in a devoted block of physical training in the weeks leading up to the start of your season, similar to the pre-season training periods common in so many other sports, such as football and rugby.

If your season is due to

start at the beginning of October, for instance, you could plan your usual hitting/matchplay sessions throughout September to instead really focus on getting your fitness peaking ready for the commencement of league play.

You obviously want to keep your on-court skills sharp as well, so try to keep at least one session per week purely squash-based while including hitting in your conditioning drills wherever possible (i.e. shot and ghost drills).

You can, however, start to think about creating a periodised plan over several weeks with this approach, where you focus on developing aerobic, anaerobic, strength/power and speed/agility elements in a graduated, structured programme.

Getting your team-mates involved works even better here, as it allows you to work in a group and gain the increased motivational and competitiveness benefits that that can provide.

Mini pre-seasons can also be a great idea over any in-season breaks you might have, such as over Christmas.

In this new series we are going to revisit each of these three areas in a little more depth each issue, looking at some tips and strategies to not only get you fitter, but also to help you make the best use of the limited time most standard club players have available.

## Summary

1. If you are serious about improving your game, you need to be serious about improving your fitness.
2. It is unfortunately not always possible to create extra time for training, but you CAN maximise the use of the time you already have.
3. Consider the use of fitness bolt-ons, specific gym sessions or dedicated training blocks to make the most of your training time, and help optimise your physical conditioning.

*Gary is a fitness and sports conditioning coach, specialising in performance for squash players. He also serves as the fitness and conditioning director for the [squashskills.com](http://squashskills.com) website, and works with a range of top-class athletes from other sports, including several professional football clubs. See his website [www.unique-fitness-solutions.co.uk](http://www.unique-fitness-solutions.co.uk) for more information.*