

Canadian Inclusivity Squash Program Inc.

Program Description

Introduction

For far too long, squash has been a sport played predominantly by persons without disabilities. It is commonly acknowledged that people with disabilities face more challenges and barriers when they access sport and physical activity compared to people without disabilities. These include negative attitudes, inaccessible sporting venues, lack of trained staff to support persons with disabilities, cost and logistics.

Squash as a community sport is now possible, fun and safe for persons with disabilities in Conception Bay South (CBS), Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and the surrounding metro communities of St. John's, Mount Pearl, Paradise and Holyrood through the efforts of the Canadian Inclusivity Squash Program (CISP). Founded in 2019, CISP participants include persons from the age of 10 years and up with developmental disabilities and mental health conditions (e.g., Autism, Down Syndrome, ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, Cognitive Development Delay and Cerebral Palsy). In 2023, CISP will expand its programming to include Wheelchair Squash for persons with mobility issues.

CISP was conceived in 2017 by Eric Hart, former President and Vice-President of Squash NL and former Founder and Head Coach of the Conception Bay South Junior Squash Program that he ran for 19 years. Eric recruited a partner to help establish CISP, Lolly Gillen, former President of Squash Canada. Squash lessons commenced on January 7th, 2019 in Conception Bay South, NL at the Conception Bay South Recreation Complex. A year later, CISP became incorporated in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador on January 14, 2020.

The World Health Organization has demonstrated that people with disabilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to the cost of living. Consequently, a goal of CISP is to keep the cost to participate as low as reasonably possible. Currently, the Annual Participation Fee is \$70. To maintain a low Participation Fee, opportunities to avail of grants and other types of support from the municipal, provincial and federal governments, local foundations, businesses, service clubs and the squash community are pursued.

Player Recruitment

Apart from using social media, players are recruited by contacting local and provincial organizations that represent the interests of those with Autism, ADHD, ADD, Down Syndrome, Scoliosis and so forth. In addition, contact with the provincial Special Olympics organization and Special Olympics clubs in the region is pursued. Bring-a-Buddy Days are also held each year so that existing players can actively help grow the program.

Assistant Coaches Recruitment

Assistant Coaches are recruited from local junior squash programs for those who are in high school or university/college. These young men and women are supervised by the Head Coach and are mentored

to learn how to coach squash and how to interact positively and develop friendships with people with disabilities.

Operation

CISP squash lessons are offered from September to April annually. The program is run on Mondays and Fridays. Initially, CISP offered 90-minute group sessions with a maximum of 3 players per court. However, because of the coronavirus, CISP split the groups in two so that sessions are now 45 minutes with a maximum enrolment of 2 players per court.

Rackets, eye protection, balls and, for Wheelchair Squash, sport wheelchairs are purchased by the program and can be used by any player. Because of COVID, players can choose from the program's inventory of gear which racket and eye protection they want, and they keep them in their possession for the duration of the pandemic. If they feel the racket and/or eye protection chosen are no longer suitable, they can exchange it for new gear. Players advance at their own pace in a friendly, supportive environment. The Head Coach oversees the program and runs individual practices. An Assistant Coach is present on every court. The Head Coach assigns the players to each Assistant Coach and informs the Assistant Coach what to work on and identifies some drills that could be used. The Head Coach moves between courts to ensure players are being taught in the prescribed manner, to ensure players are adequately challenged by the drills they have been asked to do, and to confirm that the drill is appropriate. If the degree of difficulty appears to be inappropriate, the Head Coach will suggest some modifications. The Head Coach also answers questions from parents and venue staff.

Ball

Most times, beginning players start with the Blue dot squash ball (the color dot denotes the level of bounce) but, occasionally, the foam ball is used. As skill level improves, the player gets to use a ball that bounces at a lesser height. The ultimate goal is to progress players to the point that they become accustomed to the Double Yellow dot ball (used by advanced players.) If new players have significant difficulty hitting the ball, a ball with a string attached will be used to hold the ball steady and at the right height. Once a player learns to hit a stationary ball, the Assistant Coach will move the ball to mimic a ball coming off the front wall. Once new players demonstrate hitting the ball on a string, they will be tested to see if they can hit a ball that comes off the front and/or side wall.

Tournament

There is a tournament amongst all the players, normally scheduled for February or March each year. Prizes are available and selected by all entrants. The order of who chooses first is based on a lottery-style system. Every player in the tournament is given a ticket. For each match won, the player is given another ticket. At the end of the tournament when all matches have been played, all tickets are put into a container and a draw is held. The first player chosen can decide which prize they want. A player can only win one prize. The champion of the tournament also has their name etched on the multi-year championship trophy named after Hazel Maud Hart who was a pioneer nurse and midwife in Newfoundland and, at the latter stage of her career, ran one of the first community-based homes caring for children with various medical conditions and disabilities.

Evaluation

The Head Coach has goal-setting meetings with each player at the start of the season and as needed, throughout the season. Both the Head Coach and the player (and possibly the parent too) collaboratively set short, medium and long term player goals. Assistant Coaches complete a full evaluation on every player every sixty days. The Assistant Coach records the extent of learning of each squash skill that each player is able to demonstrate. Evaluation forms are reviewed by the Head Coach to determine if any goals have been attained; if so, consideration will be given to adding a new goal.

At the end of the squash season, players and parents evaluate the program. They have the opportunity to say what is good about the program, what needs to be improved and offer specific suggestions to improve the program.

Closing Ceremony

When possible, a Banquet is held at the end of the squash season. A meal is served to everyone who attends. Special guests are invited to speak and participate in the handing out of awards. Players are encouraged to invite at least two others to attend the ceremony. Players are congratulated on their progress and for their accomplishments. Awards are handed out to the players and volunteers are recognized for their service. Pictures are taken of everyone receiving an award and a group picture of the players, coaches and other volunteers is taken.

Reporting

At the end of the squash season, the Head Coach prepares an Annual Report on the progress of the players and the program. This report is shared with key stakeholders such as the Executive Director and CISP Board Members, the Town of CBS's Recreation Director and the CBS Town Council (owners of the squash facility used by CISP).

For more information contact CISP Head Coach, Eric Hart at e.hart@nl.rogers.com