

U3A Racketball



How to get U3A set up at your club?

- Speak to your members – do we have any racketball enthusiasts who are members of U3A or who would be able to contact U3A ?
- Contact U3A and create an open event for their members – free and with refreshments
- Set up an activator / coach to run the sessions and have coffee afterwards!

<http://www.uk-racketball.com/how-to-play.html>.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThQ5JRGWp5c>.

1. Case Studies in Yorkshire – Heaton, Bradford – written by Terry Wassall

The Bradford U3A racketball group started in January 2012 with the support of English Squash and Racketball (ESR) who provided equipment and initial coaching to introduce the sport and help get the group established. It uses a larger, bouncier ball and a shorter racket. It is easier to learn to play than squash and is less physically demanding.

Complete beginners have found it quick to learn and get a good workout right from the start. It is an ideal game for men and women and players of different abilities to play together.

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THE YORKSHIRE SQUASH & RACKETBALL ASSOCIATION

Our group has 24 members with an average age in the late 60s; our oldest player is 76. About half have played squash before but the others were new to racket sports.

We have two 2 hour sessions a week, Monday and Thursday mornings, after which usually the group chat in the club bar over coffee and, for some, a light lunch.

We play at the Heaton Tennis and Squash Club where we have been made extremely welcome by staff and members and the club coach. We play on normally under-used weekday courts and bring in welcome revenue. Typically a U3A racketball session costs £3 or £4.

1.2 Who leads it?

Our sessions are led by our group leader, Doug, who is an experienced squash player and retired PE teacher. In addition two of our members have been on free ESR 'activator' courses to learn the basics of running sessions for beginners with an emphasis on safety and enjoyment. A typical session starts with a warm up followed by a series of practice routines designed to develop basic skills. These are followed by a sequence of friendly competitive games, usually a 'round robin' or the 'king of the court' format so that everyone gets to play a number of games against different opponents. Games are usually played between two players but we often use variations of the game designed to be played safely when there are more than two players on court. Apart from being great fun, these versions of the game are usually less strenuous and can make a welcome change to give players a bit of a rest.

1.3 Why?

Another significant benefit of playing U3A racketball has been the opportunity to meet players from other U3As in friendly tournaments. Bradford U3A members regularly play with others from the Leeds, Ilkley, York and Skipton U3As amongst others. Like all U3A tournaments, players are placed in categories - beginners, improvers or experienced – so everyone, regardless of ability, is included and will have good games with others of a similar standard. Typically the groups are mixed. Not everyone is competitive of course and many started playing as an enjoyable way of getting some exercise and burning off a few calories. Competitive or not, we have found that the more skilful and fitter we get the more we enjoy the game and the more benefit we get from the sessions. There is no doubt friendly rivalry contributes to the fun and motivation.

1.4 In summary

Racketball is an ideal sport for older players. It is easy to learn and safer than squash and usually beginners can play decent rallies and have good games quite quickly. It is particularly suitable for men and women of mixed ability playing together. It gives you a good workout, burns lots of calories, and is very sociable and great fun. If you have access to the internet a short video entitled 'Why I Love Racketball' <https://www.facebook.com/groups/U3Aracketball/>.

2 Case Studies in Yorkshire – Abbeydale, Sheffield – written by Peter Keene

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Abbeydale Squash & Fitness Club (AS&FC) started day time racketball sessions at the club several years ago, targeting the U3A membership (some Abbeydale members were also U3A members). There are currently three morning sessions per week, attracting an average of 32 participants drawn from both U3A and club membership and generating a gross income for the club of around £6kpa. In addition, some U3A participants, who wish to play more often, have joined the club.

Several other venues do or have run U3A racketball sessions - Heaton, Chapel Allerton and Ilkley, whilst York RI hosts a do-it-yourself U3A group on the outside courts.

Much of the initial ground work to U3A was created by Carol Cherry of ES.

England Squash refer to racketball as Squash 57.

3 Abbeydale Racketball sessions

2.1 Evolution

Peter Keen started the Abbeydale session in January, 2014 via Sheffield U3A, with a simple message:

“New year, new game, racketball ticks all the boxes. Easy to learn, fun to play, with a friendly group ranging from beginners to recycled squash players. Coaching and equipment provided, in state of the art, weather proof facilities. You must be interested. For more information call Peter Keen, 0114 2364914 or just turn up at Abbeydale Park or Stocksbridge Leisure Centre”

2.2 Timing

Sessions were initially run on Monday morning and Thursday afternoon for approx. 2 hours.

Initial uptake was encouraging, with around 60 participants in the first two years, but there was a high level of turnover.

The sessions also began to attract club members, such that, even with five courts available, it was necessary the split the Monday group into experienced players – mainly club members – at 9am and beginners/improvers at 10:30am. Despite some muttering about an early start, this has not adversely affected attendance.

Most U3A players are happy to play just once or twice a week at these sessions. However, some of the more competitive have joined AS&FC to play in the box leagues.

2.3 Attendance

Based on the last quarter of 2019, attendances are:

		Average	Range
Monday	9:00 – 10:30am	10.5	7 – 16 (mainly club)

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	10:30 – 12noon	12.3	10 – 16 (mainly U3A)
Thursday	10:30 – 12noon	8.8	6 – 12 (mainly U3A)

Pre-booking is not required, activities are 'tweaked' to cater for the numbers attending and to concentrate on the three front courts which are favoured by both players and leader.

3.2 Pricing

The price per session was initially set at £2.50 followed, after twelve months, by an increase to £4, including a coffee after the session. The coffee has proved very popular with both club and U3A participants, the latter having formed a social group who pursue other activities together.

Pay and play visitors pay £6, but this market has not yet been significantly tested. The sessions are on the ES website Places to Play Court Finder.

3.3 Session structure

Each session is run, with some modest variations, to a standard structure:

30 minutes Warm up/practice using 'three quarter court' with 3 -4 rotations, 3 to 4 per court depending on numbers

30 minutes Group competition using 'fives' game, handicapped as necessary.

30 minutes Normal games to 7, to minimise sit out time.

Sessions are coach led, with some drills included for beginners/improvers when numbers permit. However, since most of the participants attend regularly, alternative leaders are available when necessary.

3.4 Coach's Notes

- Safety is very important. Some attendees were too unsteady on their feet to take part and I had to recommend that they find a different sport. Obviously we want to make racketball accessible and open for everyone, but the safety of the participants comes first. We have had some nasty accidents over the years and I now start every new member off with a safety brief to warn over tripping and head injuries.
- With large numbers to each court, I favour $\frac{3}{4}$ court games or 50 up (5's game) with 3 per court to keep as many players on court as possible and minimise sitting out.
- With the larger numbers, I tend to keep the coaching to more of a classroom off court basis rather than on court feeding. This allows me to talk to large numbers at a time and prevents me breaking off with a small group and leaving the others unattended.

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- The key to keeping them coming back is the social aspect of these sessions. We offer a free coffee afterwards and now our visitors no longer turn up and leave, they stay for a coffee and socialise which keeps them coming back. They now socialise in their racketball groups outside of the club and book courts outside of the session in their own time.

4 U3A

The 'Université de la Troisième Âge' (U3A) was started at Toulouse University in 1973, with the objective of providing 'education and stimulation' to retired members of the community. It is now an international organisation.

U3A UK operates as a self help organisation, where individual members organise activities – physical, intellectual, cultural etc – for other U3A members. There are around 1000 geographical based U3A groups in the UK, involving around 350,000 participants. There is no lower age limit for U3A membership, so that part time workers and those who do not work can also join.

A list of U3A groups in Yorkshire can be sourced here: yahru3a.co.uk/u3as-in-our-region/

5 Contacts for further advice – our Yorkshire experts

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