Squash

Posted on

Rajpal Abeynayake



Like all cosmopolitan cities, Colombo too has been hit by the fitness craze, and ever since then squash has enjoyed a boom. Small wonder too.

Squash, to put it frankly, is preferred as a game where you can keep fit in comparative comfort. Though the concept might sound genteel to the panting jogger or the sweating golfer, the fact of the matter is that in most courts in

Colombo you can “squash around” in air-conditioned surroundings.

There is probably no game like squash if you want to keep fit in a relatively ·short period of time and enjoy it too. Besides, squash is ideal for different kinds of physiques, and the level of physical exertion will be relatively tougher or lighter, depending on the way you want it. The squash ball you use will see to that.

The red ball (actually it is the usual black squash ball with a red dot on it), is a toughie. The ball does not travel as much as the white ball, for instance, which means you need to jump around much more to reach it. Hence, the higher the level of physical effort. Beginners at Squash usually use the white ball, which carries far and fast, so that you don’t need to move around much, until you get the hang of the game.

The number of regular “squashers” in this town dispel any doubts about Colombo being a pretty “squash literate” city. Squash literate? Well, most players in this city know their “squash-speak”, what with two squash associations – one for men and one for women. For these regular squashers, to boast is not to brag and to kill is certainly not to murder. The “boast” is a shot made by a player, the ball first hitting the side wall and rebounding from this to the front – a “kill”, somewhat like a dash in tennis.

They say once into squash, always into squash. The heady allure of the game, the feel for the squashy sound of the racket hitting the small black hollow ball, and the resonant sound of the ball hitting the board will fairly linger on in a squash player’s mind. On a lazy day, these sounds will bob and echo inside his head, and no doubt he will feel like having a good game. Most of the squash courts in Colombo’s five-star hotels are glass fronted, enabling one to see the action outside while squashing around, not forgetting that who’s outside can also see you. Never mind.

For a game invented in England’s Harrow School – in the 1850s, squash did take a long time to be popular in Sri Lanka. The other British favourites of cricket, and rugby-football, and the all European favourite soccer, have been popular spectator sports in Sri Lanka for several decades, cricket having been played for more than a century and rugby and soccer for just a little less. But the delay in the introduction of the game, which really came through tourism and the five-star hotel , has been amply compensated for by its growing popularity. While the health clubs and fitness centres in the major hotels have contributed greatly to the popularity of squash, it has also been helped by several prominent social clubs in the city which provide

facilities for squash for their members and guests. The two squash associations in Sri Lanka have also been actively engaged in promoting the game and increasing the range of its fans and aficionados from business executives to students. In fact, squash is now very much an “in-game” in Colombo with several leading business houses encouraging their executives to play the game, and also talk business just like they do on the golf-course. The companes are satisfied that squash produces good results both in fit executives and profitable contracts.

The number of cars found at the parking lot of a five-star hotel in the early hours is a good indication of the number of squash players who have come for their early morning workout. The same is true at the city clubs which provide facilities for squash. According to officials of these clubs, the demand for membership is now so heavy that restrictions on admission are necessary to ensure the fair and best use of facilities available. Several more clubs in Colombo have also drawn up plans to add squash to their indoor sports facilities.

The popularity of the game and the keen competition has also helped in increasing the standards of performance. Sri Lankan squash players now compete in foreign tournaments. For a foreign visitor’ looking for a good opponent there is all the opportunity to meet highly skilled players at the various squash courts in the hotels -or social clubs. Similarly, those who wish to begin are also assured of good guidance at any of the city squash courts. Don’t be bothered at all by terminology, if you are one of those who want to begin squashing around for fitness and fun. Lot of the squash courts in Colombo can be identified before you get there by a resounding noise. It means the ball is hitting the board more often – a sure sign of beginners at play. Those who are not sure of the rules, should not feel intimidated by squash-speak or squash technicalities. Most courts employ markers, whose duty is to interpret the rules and call the score. Most five-star hotels charge around rupees sixty per half hour for the services of a marker. They also levy a nominal fee for the use of squash courts. The courts are open for members, member’s guests and hotel residents. The Hotel Ceylon Inter-Continental, the Taj Samudra and the Ramada Renaissance have facilities for squash. The Air Force and Army squash courts are also sometimes available on inquiry, and so are facilities at the Gymkhana Club (Tel: 91025) and the Otters Aquatic Club (Tel: 95070). For more squash information, contact Wing Commander Noel Fernando (Tel: 580141), the President of the Squash Federation, or Padmini Samarasinghe (Tel: 585895), President of the Sri Lanka ladies Squash Association.

Tournaments are sometimes organized by these various squash concerns; and

when these are on, you can see some virtuoso squash, with an umpire refereeing.