

# CEREBRAL SQUASH

By Gerry Shugar



**TRAIN CLOSE  
TO YOUR  
SPORT**

I told a friend I was writing an article entitled "Train Close To Your Sport" and he suggested that I submit the title... and target the article. He said the title was pretty well self-explanatory. "Squash and fitness go together. You can't play good squash unless you're fit and playing squash is a great way to get fit."

Some of you will agree, saying, "Squash is the only exercise I do and for me it's an effective and enjoyable way of getting fit." That's almost true. For recreational players, squash is the best 40-minute workout in sports. As long as you play three or more times a week, you will meet minimal national standards for exercise. But you may not be fit.

**FITNESS** has five basic components.

**Cardiovascular Fitness** is the ability to supply large amounts of oxygen to your muscles and to remove waste materials from them. It depends on the efficiency of your lungs, heart and circulation.

**Muscular Endurance** is the ability of muscles to keep working for long periods of time.

**Muscular Strength** gives you power-to push off to the ball and to hit the ball.

**Flexibility** permits a wide range of movement around joints. Flexible players are more mobile on the court and less prone to injury.

**Body Composition** is the ratio of fat to muscle and bone. Squash players should be lean. The ideal ratio is 13 to 18 percent for women and 10 to 13 percent for men. If you can pinch an inch or more, you're above these levels.

Defining fitness is easy, getting there is a bit tougher. And tournament squash demands high levels of fitness. The serious player has to train to get it for squash.

## HOW TO TRAIN

Here are three ways to "train close to your sport:"

1. Train on the court.
2. Train right after your match.
3. Match your training to the demands of squash.

### 1. TRAIN ON THE COURT

A few top squash players have trained entirely on the court. The grand master, Hashim Khan, grew up in Peshawar, Pakistan, and spent all his developing years in and around squash courts. His son, Sharif, who is the dominant figure in the history of North American squash, did all his training on court, playing matches a day against a stream of lesser opponents.

Yet he was less fit than many of the competitors he defeated. He won tournaments because of his superior racquet skills, his intense competitive instincts and an indomitable pride which drove him to push himself far beyond the pain threshold of most players. However, when

Sharif crossed the pond to play international squash in the British Open, he would play brilliantly in the early games, but eventually lose to players with less ability who were more fit.

Still, it is possible to train to a very high level on the court. But you must push yourself every rally against opponents at your level. Against opponents with less skill, you can get a quality workout by removing specific shots from your game. This way you play with a reduced arsenal which evens competition. You may, for example, decide to hit every shot deep, foregoing drops and boasts. But your opponent can make you cover the entire court. Or, you may decide to hit every shot to your partner's strong side, both deep and short. While he uses the entire court. Do this and you will get the best possible workout for your 40 minutes and you will enjoy the added benefit of disciplining yourself to stay within your shot selection and game plan.

### 2. TRAIN RIGHT AFTER YOUR MATCH

Many of my friends ask what else they can do to build their fitness. I tell them that the best thing they can do is to tack on an additional workout immediately after their squash match. My old track coach often told me that the first half hour of my gruelling workouts didn't count. "The first 30 minutes is only to get you tired enough that you can benefit from the last 60." I tell my friends to look at squash this way. When their match is over they should stay on court alone or with their partner and do court sprints or high intensity squash drills, I which are high speed repetitions of game situations. Eight, twelve or eighteen minutes of this is the best way to build your endurance if you don't have lots of time to train. If a court isn't available, try the track, the bicycle or the rowing machine right after you play.

### 3. TAILOR YOUR TRAINING TO SQUASH

You're taking a day off squash and you want a workout. Keep that workout relevant. How do you do that? The first step is to build your endurance, whether you're running, doing aerobics or cross country skiing, so that you can work hard for 40 minutes. Why 40 minutes? Because that's the length of the average squash match.

If you are out of shape, start with a one mile run and gradually build up to a 40-minute workout. You should exercise at a heart-rate around 75 percent of your theoretical maximum. Calculate this by subtracting your age from 220 and multiplying by 75 percent. If you are 40, your training heart-rate is  $220 - 40 = 180$  x 75 percent = 135 beats per minute.

You can't get fit in one day. Build your endurance gradually. In the early phases of your training, you probably want to burn fat. Work within your target rate. That way you will not become exhausted quickly, you will run farther, and burn off more fat. Remember, it takes the same energy (and calories) to run a mile slowly, as quickly.

How much? A 180 pound man burns 150 calories a mile, whether he walks it, jogs it or

**And a few  
tortured  
fanatics push  
themselves to  
surpass the  
workout they  
imagine their  
major rival is  
doing that  
very day.**

sprints it. Twenty miles burns 3000 calories and that is equal to one pound of fat. For

comparison, a slice of bread or an apple provides 100 calories. That's right! The body is a darned efficient machine. It can run a marathon on two small apple pies.

Is this bad? Not really. Since you can't get fit in a day or a week, the process of gradually getting fit and gradually burning off those fat pounds goes hand in hand. It takes six to ten weeks to get fully fit and, if you keep your diet constant, you can lose six to ten pounds in the process.

Older players should vary their training on successive days. An intense workout produces muscle breakdown. The rebuilding process occurs within 24 hours in young athletes, but takes longer in older athletes. Varying your workout will bring different muscle fibers into play and give each group a chance to recuperate before they're used again.

All players should stretch before and **after** workouts. Squash is tough on backs. Stretching will protect yours.

### **ADVANCED TRAINING**

Running or riding at a steady pace is aerobic work: i.e. your effort doesn't outstrip your oxygen supply. This will extend your general conditioning and burn off fat. But real squash fitness requires a second daily workout and anaerobic drills. **This will catapult you to a new level.** Anaerobic drills are bursts of activity in which your effort

I outstrips your oxygen supply. They will mimic the gut wrenching rallies in squash that leave you Panting .or breath. They will build your tolerance for these rallies. After you build up to a 40-minute workout, introduce repeated sprints on the track. court, bicycle or rower. On the track, for' example, sprint 220 yards and jog 110 yards to duplicate repeated 20-stroke rallies.

## **MOTIVATING YOUR**

### **TRAINING**

"I should do it" you may say, "but training is boring." Agreed. You have to find motivators to train. Some players propel themselves with the thought of their next squash goal. Others run against the clock. Others spur themselves on with pet aphorisms, like "quit on the track and you'll quit on the court." And a few tortured fanatics push themselves to surpass the workout they imagine their major rival is doing that very day.

In a recent column I discussed five ingredients that make up the good squash player. Of these, fitness is the one any player can achieve. But for best results you should focus your training and make it relevant to squash. In other words, train close to your sport.