

# Smash hit: welcoming Scots women to fun world of squash



Sport is aiming to shed its macho, ultra-competitive image and broaden its appeal, writes **Maggie Ritchie**

SQUASH has long been regarded as a tough and sweaty on-court battle between two rugged men desperate to thrash their opponent and gain bragging rights in the changing room.

Just think of Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko challenging a young Charlie Sheen to a super-charged game in the 1987 film *Wall Street*.

It's an image the sport is desperate to shed and Scottish Squash is involved in a major effort to attract women and girls to this fast and furious game.

Scottish Squash is getting ready to roll out their HIIT Squash programme for women and girls nationally after a successful pilot last year.

"Women and girls' participation in squash is low with only 23 per cent of females represented in clubs across Scotland," said David Fallon, head of development at Scottish Squash.

"Investments from the Scottish Government's women and girls fund allowed us to develop HIIT Squash, designed by females for females in partnership with Women in Sport. As soon as restrictions on indoor sports are lifted, it will be available in all 85 squash clubs around Scotland."

The 10-week free programme

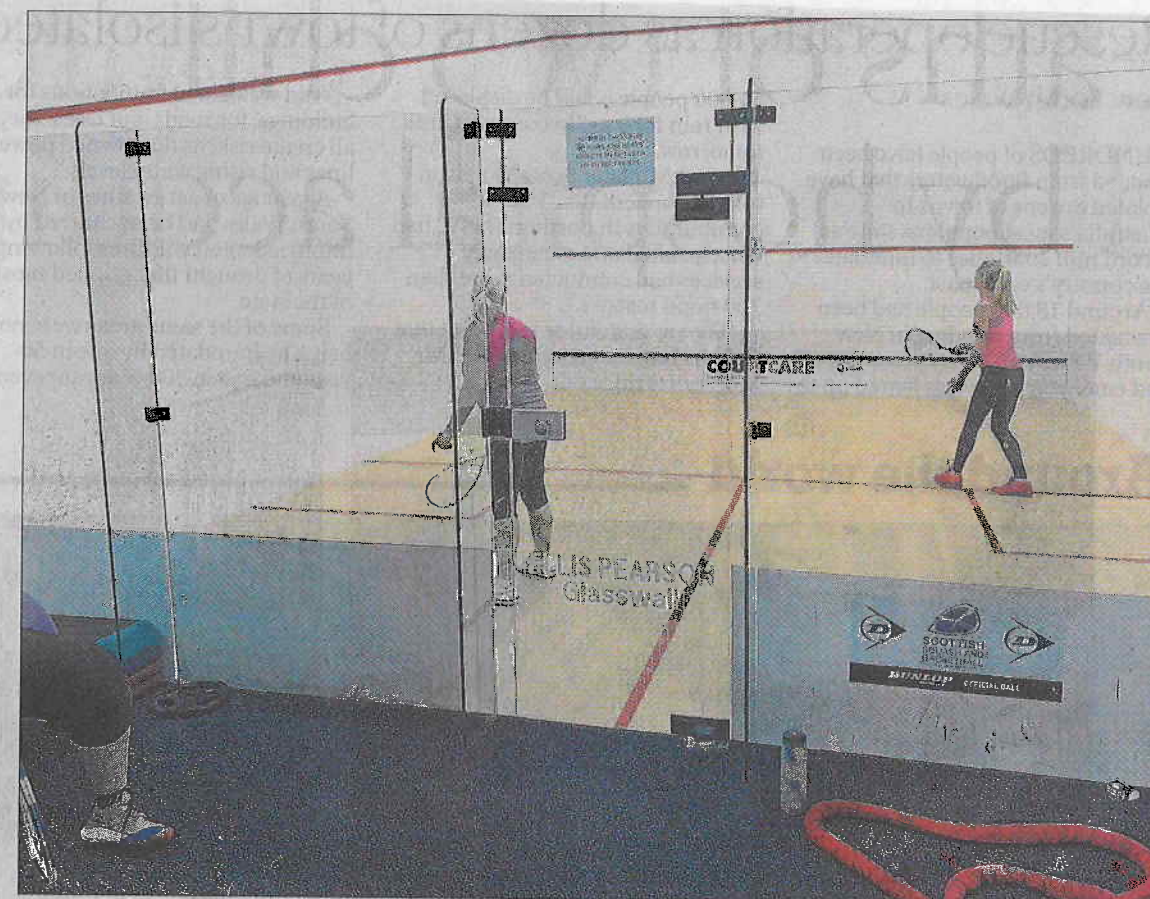
alternates seven minutes of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) with 10 minutes of squash training and is designed to appeal to women of all levels of fitness, those who have never picked up a racquet, as well as those with experience.

"It's a sociable introduction to squash, which is a demanding sport to the untrained eye. We wanted to break it down and give women the skills and fitness level required," added Mr Fallon.

The drive for more women to play squash comes at a time when Scottish elite women players are excelling. Scottish Squash has progressed in four years from not entering a women's team to having the fourth best women's team in Europe.

Squash came out top in Forbes Magazine's list of the Top 10 Healthiest Sports, based on cardio endurance, strength, muscle endurance, flexibility, calories burned, and injury risk, but players do need a certain level of fitness, which is where the HIIT element comes into the programme.

Squash coach Jenn Saldanha is one of the HIIT activators who lead the pilot in Glasgow. "We spread the word



The programme alternates high intensity interval training with squash and is designed to appeal to women



Jenn Saldanha, Scottish Over-40s National Team player, Lisa Aitken, Scottish Women's National Team, and Kylie Lindsay, squash coach

on social media groups and saw women aged 18 to 63 take part, of all different fitness and ability levels. We didn't want just to attract sporty types but to encourage people to try out squash and see what fun it can be," said Jenn, who designed the programme.

"As a mum, I know how busy women are and that sport must be accessible and a good laugh – something you really look forward to, where you can make friends. We combined it with HIIT because it's a great way to achieve what a lot of women want from exercise – to be

healthier, fitter and slimmer."

HIIT Squash was a success, with all participants carrying on with squash, until lockdown closed the courts.

Kiran Gallacher, 49, from Giffnock, East Renfrewshire, was one of them.

"I had played squash with my husband before I had children – I have twin 16-year-old girls and a 12-year-old son – but he was really good at it and I was rubbish, so it put me off.

"I thought if I took up squash, it would encourage my husband to go back to playing sport, and that it would be a sociable way for me to keep fit, aside from my usual walking and running.

"But my goodness, it was hard work. During the first class I was sweating buckets and after two days my muscles were still sore.

"But it was great – the HIIT was the most challenging and the squash was like a wee break."

Photographer Laura Harrison, 41, a mother-of-two from Giffnock, is another squash convert.

She said: "I never took it up as a teenager because I always thought it was a sport for men my dad's age – quite exclusive and not for women. I'm glad Scottish Squash is changing that."

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