

# Alternative Uses Reenergize Courts

By **Stephen Wallenfels**

**F**or racquetball enthusiasts, and I count myself among them, there's nothing more tragic, in a club setting, than watching beloved courts be double-decked and converted to other uses. Certainly, club owners need to be concerned about maximizing the value, per square foot, of these areas, but there are innovative, and effective, ways to keep the precious space buzzing with activity without eliminating racquetball facilities.

Several exciting game formats, including Wallyball, Squish, and International Court Soccer, are reinventing fun within the traditional 20' x 20' x 40' box. All of them appeal to both new and old players, and to a variety of populations, and can be implemented at a very low cost—particularly when compared with remodeling. If yours is among the 37% of IHRSA facilities that have racquetball courts—that should come as very good news.

## **Wallyball**

Wallyball—i.e., volleyball adapted for a racquetball court—is one of the older and most popular alternative court sports around. Rudy Morel, the CEO of the American Wallyball Association (AWA), reports that, today, the sport is played in 39 countries by more than 2 million registered AWA members.

Since its introduction to clubs in 1979 by its inventor, Joe Garcia, Wallyball has vastly expanded the programming opportunities for underutilized racquetball courts. As the name implies, the walls, as well as the ceiling, are an essential part of play. Teams of two, three, or four players serve, hit, block, spike and deflect the ball, according to a specific set of rules created for racquetball courts.

“You can play with up to eight people per court,” explains Morel, “which represents a very efficient use of the space.” (In racquetball games, a maximum of four players use the court at one time.)

A regulation Wallyball net costs \$59 or \$89, depending on the model, and a specially coated Wallyball retails for \$27.

## **Squish**

Honoring the policy of full disclosure, let me acknowledge, before explaining Squish, that I invented this game, with the help of my racquetball friends, to introduce young players to racquetball.

First played at the Tri-City Court Club in Kennewick, Washington, in 1999, the unique sport combines elements of racquetball, squash, tennis, and even ping-pong. It's played on a racquetball court with racquetball racquets, a beginner's-level squash ball, and a Squish net. Over the years, it's evolved into a legitimate, fast-paced racquet sport for kids and adults, with ongoing leagues and tournaments.

“The game has a very short learning curve, the points are long, strategically interesting, and, at 500 calories per hour, it provides a great workout,” says Carl Cadwell, the owner of Tri-City.

Cadwell began selling Squish kits, which include rules, a net, mounting hardware, and balls, nationwide last month; the cost, under \$400. In addition to Squish, the net, at different heights, functions for two other games on the racquetball court: Tracketball, a variation on tennis and Pickleball, using the walls, a special foam ball, and Pickleball paddles; and a variation on badminton, called Wallyminton, using specially designed shuttlecocks that bounce off the walls and floor.

## **International Court Soccer**

While it may not involve racquets, International Court Soccer (ICS) makes full use of the court and has unlimited growth potential, since it draws players and fans of the most popular sport in the world.

John Birks and Ron Wagner developed and copyrighted ICS at a YMCA in Portland, Oregon, in 1986; it was introduced to the general public in 2002. Today, ICS has a Website in two languages, its own line of balls (\$35 each) and apparel, and an active fan base that crosses international borders.

The rules of Indoor Court Soccer are similar to racquetball, except players use their feet and various other body parts instead of racquets. A player is allowed three touches, or “juggles” using the head, shoulders, chest, knees, and feet to control the ball before making the return play. “It's easy to learn, particularly if you have soccer skills,” notes Birks, “but half of our best players are racquetball people with no soccer background at all.”

To help promote the game, a Player's Tour travels the U.S., introducing ICS and helping clubs, universities, and recreation centers launch grass-roots programs. “With ICS,” Birks notes, “we're helping clubs to keep utilization up on the courts they still have.” ■



**Squish** action at Tri-City