

Exeter Squash at 75: Simply Smashing

By Ken Belbin



The Maruca brothers—Tony '04 (left) and Mike '07, both top-seeded players while at Exeter—are part of the long line of exceptional athletes and coaches that make up the Exeter squash program, now in its 75th year.

Rob Dinerman '72 was never a member of the Academy squash team. A club basketball player at Exeter, he didn't pick up a squash racquet until late in his senior year. Yet you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone better versed in the 75-year history of the Exeter squash program, nor a greater advocate of its many championship teams and the coaches who've led them.

"This is a sport with an amazing history at Exeter, and it creates an extraordinary experience for the Exeter student-athlete," says Dinerman. "A number of people who played squash at Exeter have achieved remarkable things in the sport," from the late Germain Glidden '32, a member of Exeter's very first varsity squash team who went on to win six national titles and a first-ballot spot in the U.S. Squash Racquets Hall of Fame, to Demer Holleran '85, another Hall of Fame honoree who won an astounding 31 national singles and doubles championships, making her, by Dinerman's reckoning, "statistically the greatest woman squash player in U.S. history."

Both Glidden and Holleran have a featured place in "The History of Squash at Phillips Exeter Academy," a detailed account of the boys and girls squash programs (founded in 1931 and 1973, respectively) that Dinerman presented to the Academy just in time for distribution at last fall's celebration of the first phase of the Fisher Squash Center. With its 10 international-regulation courts, each with glass back-walls, and with gallery space for 400 spectators, the Fisher Squash Center is "a squash paradise in the very heart of the George H. Love Gymnasium," says Dinerman. It also constitutes "a benchmark moment, not only for the program but for the Academy. It is definitely a world-class facility and by far the best prep school facility I have ever seen."

That's not just school pride talking. Dinerman is a recognized authority within the squash world, a columnist and historian of the sport, as well as a very accomplished player. Having discovered squash late in his Exeter career, he quickly made up for lost time, playing all four years for Yale's varsity team and then

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embarking on a professional career. His career highlights include a top-10 World Pro Squash Association (WPSA) ranking and reaching the final round of the U.S. Hardball National Championship in 2004 and 2005.

This first phase of Fisher Squash Center is, Dinerman notes in his history of Exeter squash, a far cry from the humble facility that was home to the squash program in its early years, eight primitive courts located in Thompson Gymnasium at the end of a "25-yard-long frigid and pitch-black tunnel."

But if the early facility left something to be desired, Exeter's coaching seldom has, beginning with the man who founded the program, George Bennett '23. A much-revered member of the English department from 1929 until his death in 1965, Bennett was varsity squash coach for 30 of those years. He was known for "his absolute fairness," writes Dinerman, and for "his advocacy of the slice as a weapon to enable his players' shots to die quickly on the cold courts that were the norm during his tenure."

The coaching standard Bennett established has been upheld by a series of skilled and enthusiastic coaches, notes Dinerman, including director of scholarship students Hammy Bissell '29, who served variously as "assistant coach, JV coach, unofficial cheerleader, godfather (in the good sense of the word), historian and mentor" for close to six decades; German instructor Werner Brandes '66, '84 (Hon.), who took up the sport only after arriving at Exeter and went on to coach the boys varsity team for 24 years, exerting a "profound and enduring" impact on the program; and mathematics instructor Spruill Kilgore, "a true pioneer of New England girls prep school squash," who coached the girls varsity from 1974 to 1995, compiling a 210-97 record in the process, including a four-year undefeated run from 1991 to 1994.

Since 1999, both the boys and girls varsity teams have been coached by Kirk Randall, who previously coached teams at both MIT and Dartmouth and who served for 18 years as the head squash pro at the University Club of Boston.

Dinerman's respect for what he calls "the proud and storied tradition" of Exeter squash is matched only by his excitement about what lies ahead. When it is funded, the second phase of Fisher Squash Center will bring the total number of courts to 16, and "Exeter athletes will have the best facility, bar none," he declares, one likely to attract a new generation of squash players who will make some history of their own. ■

To read Rob Dinerman's "History of Squash at Phillips Exeter Academy," go to squashtalk.com/history/dinerman/exeter1.htm

(A) Exeter's strong squash tradition got even stronger with the opening of the first phase of the Fisher Squash Center. "It's by far the best prep school facility I have ever seen," says squash historian Rob Dinerman '72, of the center's 10 international-regulation courts.

(B) Many alumni/ae squash players returned to campus on October 29, 2005, to celebrate the squash center's



first phase, including three who helped serve as catalysts for the center: brothers Bill Fisher '75 (left), John Fisher '79 and Bob Fisher '72.

When funded, the squash center's second phase will add six more courts, enhancing opportunities for team practices and enabling Exeter to host national competitions.

(C) Also on hand for the celebration were some of the dedicated coaches who've led the squash program, including (from left) Tony Greene, Spruill Kilgore, Don Dunbar, Werner Brandes, Chuck Kinyon, David Thomas and current coach Kirk Randall.