

Court Sports: It's Academic!

Strategies for Helping Students and Graduates Make Transitions to Long-Term Club Memberships

"Jill" recently graduated from college, and she's walked into a whole new world. She doesn't live at home anymore, she's no longer living on campus, and she no longer has access to her campus recreation/fitness center. She's starting an entry-level position with a company in a town near her *alma mater*. Jill is now on her own, and she knows that. While she doesn't have a lot of discretionary income, she really wants to stay fit and meet some new friends. Maybe check out a few health clubs? She loved being part of the recreational and competitive court sports scene at her university. Maybe a health club with courts...

Greetings From USA Racquetball and U.S. Handball

In truth, we don't know "Jill!" We made her up, but we didn't make up this scenario, which continually plays itself out across the country. We often say we wish we had a dollar for every time someone says, "I used to play _____ (fill in the court sport) in college." The follow-up question from us is, "Well, why don't you still play?" and the answer is some variation of, "Life took over, and I moved on to other things."

We think playing handball and racquetball are fine things to include in a full and enjoyable life, and we'll get right to the point. For recent college graduates, could their new "third place," ala their "Cheers-style home away from home," be your club? And, are there ways to create partnerships with local colleges and universities even before players graduate and move on in

their lives?

Q&A: Ideas to Create Connections Between Clubs and Colleges/Universities

Q. Might clubs consider a discounted membership or program to bring recent graduates into the fold?

A. Eric Hillgren, President of the Hinder Club in St. Louis, shared, "The Missouri State University Handball team has always produced lifelong Handball players that seem to end up around the St. Louis area. We are quick to reach out to them and offer them a 50% discount on a membership at the Hinder Club for their first two years out of college. This has worked out so well for us as many of them have continued on as full-time members after their two years and have become lifelong members at our club."

Ross Colyer, Missouri State Graduate now in St. Louis in his first year out of college, adds, "It would have been tough for me to afford a gym membership out of college, but because the Hinder club offered me a discount to join their club, it made it much more manageable and has allowed me to continue to play Handball."

Q. How can clubs connect with collegiate coaches/athletic directors and vice versa?

A. Start with reaching out to them in your own neck of the woods! We're pretty excited about what Rene Sitter of the *Tucson Racquet Club* had to say: "TRC reaches out to Club Sports teams (racquetball and/or handball) at the local colleges and extends

an offer for them to join the racquetball or handball leagues. All they do is pay the league fee (\$20-\$25 per season). This is a great way to get college students involved with the local players' groups, find that possible 'third place,' and benefit from the opportunity to increase their skills."

Matt Krueger, U.S. Handball's Executive Director, comments, "I certainly wish more clubs would do this! Not only to draw in more prospective members, but it also brings in new players to interact with current members and enhances their league experience. It all equates to retaining long-term members, because we know players who require courts to pursue their passion will stick around for a long time."

Q. Could state associations and collegiate councils work with clubs to assist with making connections with colleges/universities, perhaps via the national organization?

A. Yes, of course! For example, in USA Racquetball's structure, which includes Regional organized councils that concentrate solely on collegiate racquetball, they host an annual USA Racquetball Intercollegiate Championships. Clubs from colleges and universities across the country compete for top honors, and the top male and female gold medalists earn a position on the U.S. National Racquetball Team.

For more information, please visit bit.ly/clubinsider134.

Similarly, USHA's Collegiate Program Mission Statement reads: "It is the mission of the United States Handball Association's Collegiate Program to

promote, develop, and expand the sport of handball at the collegiate level. Our goal is to increase awareness of handball's lifelong benefits to university administrators and student-athletes; and support recruitment and participation in a yearly intercollegiate competition."

Please visit bit.ly/clubinsider135 for more details on USHA's collegiate focus, including a number of established scholarships to support collegiate players.

We believe it's all about outreach and connections. By way of sharing this information on collegiate programs in both of our organizations, we offer that if fitness facilities are looking for connections with racquetball clubs in colleges and universities, or if collegiate coaches and advisors are searching for ways to keep their current athletes playing these great lifetime sports as they embark upon the next phase in their lives, we are happy to help in any and every way we can. We're just an email message away!

■ ■ ■

Is your club already running a collegiate program? Do you have ideas or thoughts to share on the joys and challenges of maintaining connections with your local university? We would love to hear more about it. Please contact **Mike** or **Matt** at the email addresses on **This Page (See Ad)**.

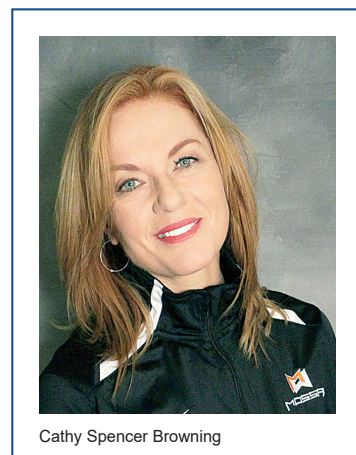
Contributors: LeaAnn Martin and Sam Esser, U.S. Handball Association; Cheryl Kirk, USA Racquetball

Are You REALLY Ready to Get People Moving?

By: **Cathy Spencer Browning**

Our oldest daughter, Riley, is learning to drive. My husband is in charge because I discovered early on that it was not my forte. He is patient, assuring and not as much of a catastrophizer as I am. He did his due diligence before he started, looking for information on the web on how you go about teaching someone to drive. What he learned and what followed with driving lesson number one is a lesson that we all could learn, whether we are teaching someone to start driving or teaching someone to start exercising.

I wished them well on their first lesson together as they went down the stairs (secretly thanking goodness that I didn't have to do it). After sitting in the car in the garage for over an hour, I was surprised when they both came back upstairs. "You didn't go anywhere?" I said, perplexed. My husband was quick to respond, "Well, no, she's not ready to drive yet. Step one is to learn all about the car." They had actively



Cathy Spencer Browning

worked their way through a comprehensive checklist of all the things that you need to know about the car before the car even moves.

The idea of "readiness to drive" (See **Cathy Spencer Browning** Page 22)



Mike Wedel
Executive Director
USA Racquetball
719-635-5936 #5
mwedel@usaracquetball.com
WWW.TEAMUSA.ORG/USA-RACQUETBALL



Matthew Krueger
Executive Director
U.S. Handball Association
520-795-0434
mkrueger@ushandball.org
WWW.USHANDBALL.ORG

WE WANT TO HELP BRING
FITNESS, EXCITEMENT, AND PROFITABILITY
TO CLUBS AND COURTS ACROSS THE NATION!