

Yellow Dot



SPECIAL EDITION: REVIEW OF CLUB PRACTICE ARRANGEMENTS

In the May 2013 Yellow Dot, we indicated that a review was underway 'to ensure that everyone gets a fair go, and receives the valuable practice that it sets out to provide.'

That review has progressed to a point where initial decisions have been made, hence issuing this Special Edition Yellow Dot.

After the 'Summary of Change...' section, we've provided detail to help you understand the some history, why the review was deemed necessary, and the considerations related to each change.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO TAKE EFFECT FROM 1 JULY 2013

1. Club Practice is to be kept at \$8 per player, with the proviso that guarantees the participant five singles matches and unlimited doubles matches.
2. If a participant wishes to play more than five singles matches, they will be moved to the 'back of the queue' in terms of availability for a singles rotation. They will only be allowed to participate in further singles rotations once a gap has opened up where all other players have completed their initial five game rotation.
3. There will only be one designated doubles court. This will commence at the end of the period when the first singles rotation is completed.
4. Members who play competition for other (Canberra based) clubs against DSC will be unable to participate in Club Practice.
5. The practice of offering 'temporary' or 'discounted' memberships will cease from 1 July 2013.
6. 'Shoelace tokens' will be reinstated to identify current members at practice.
7. A new player whiteboard will be purchased and set up to manage the new rotation system.

8. Club Practice hours will be extended from 2-6pm to become 1-6pm. Duty shifts will be 1-3pm and 3-5pm, with 5-6pm being self-organised by remaining participants.

CLUB PRACTICE: A BRIEF HISTORY

Club Practice has been run on Sunday afternoon for innumerable years. It provides the opportunity for members to practice squash in a low cost, social and organised environment. The Club Practice differs from the practice open to all players on Saturday afternoon in two major ways:

1. It is only open to members of the Club.
2. The matches are structured, in 20 minute rotations, with duty staff organising the respective matches.

Club Practice is almost entirely the love child of Doug Lean, who (with Petra's strong support) has single handedly organised the duty roster over many years. Regular attendees will also be used to seeing Doug and Petra rostering the board on Sunday afternoons when a volunteer cannot be found.

Club Practice runs from 2-6pm on Sundays. The duty roster requires two volunteers per week, with shifts running from 2-4 and 4-6. In previous years the hours were adjusted during daylight saving, starting and finishing later.

Where a member wishes to be play, they show up, pay \$8 and the duty organiser places their name tag on the board. The name tags are coloured, signifying the different grades of players, allowing the organiser to provide them with as many 'even' matches as possible. This is not always possible, depending on the number and level of players in attendance on any given day.

With six courts available, the maximum number of singles players that can be accommodated at any given rotation is 12. Where there are more than 12 players seeking a match, it is necessary for players to 'sit out' a rotation or for the organiser to arrange doubles matches.

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Although some players specifically request to participate in doubles matches, they are predominantly run to 'soak up' excess players.

THE REASONS FOR A REVIEW

Club Practice has become a victim of its own success. Over recent times (particularly the last 12-18 months), the number of players wishing to participate has well exceeded the available court capacity, meaning that players spend considerable time sitting out rotations or participating in doubles matches.

Although most are likely to view playing doubles as preferable to sitting out, it is also clear that the vast majority attending would rather be playing singles. It is also true to say that over recent time, players from lower levels, whose style and ability is not suited to the close proximity of having four on a court, have been forced to play doubles. This is far from ideal.

CONSIDERATION OF FACTORS

A. COST

The cost to participate is \$8 per player. This cost recently rose from \$5. The \$8 is charged regardless of whether the player participates in one rotation or plays the entire afternoon. There are several options that could be considered in relation to this current arrangement.

The first is to simply raise the cost.

Even after the recent increase from \$5 to \$8, this cost is very reasonable given that court hire outside of Club Practice is around \$25 per hour. One could argue that by increasing Club Practice fees to (say) \$15 per player, then Adam Smith's invisible hand will do the work for us, decreasing demand against a set supply of courts.

However, the Committee is of the view that this is not the DSC way. Our primary focus is to encourage the participation of squash and pricing some individuals out of practice has to be a last resort.

An alternative approach would be to ensure that the participants all get a "fair go" and not allow any individuals to stay on courts all afternoon.

B. WHAT'S A "FAIR GO"?

Over a four hour practice session it is possible for 144 'units of play' to take place (with a unit prescribed as a single player on a 20 minute singles rotation). If a player chooses to play all afternoon, they will have used up 12 of these units themselves. Although it is rare to have someone play all afternoon, it is not uncommon to see players spend 2.5 - 3 hours at Club Practice.

At the centre of this, we need to consider what is 'reasonable'. The Committee holds the view that if an individual has had five singles matches (representing 100 minutes of playing time), then they should be reasonably satisfied that they have had a fair go. While we accept that some may argue that this number should be higher, there is no doubt that if we could discourage people from playing for extended periods there would be a greater availability of courts for other players. Having said this, if a player really does wish to play on, then, they should be allowed to do so, but their access to courts will be at a lower priority (see below).

C. PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

It is therefore necessary to instigate a preference system, where a player who has had their five rotations must wait for a court to become available. By this, we mean that where there are players who have played their five matches and are wishing to play on, yet the courts are filled with players who are yet to play their five rotations, then the fore-mentioned player must sit out until such time that a court is available. In other words, no player that has had five rotations will be given a priority over a player who is still to complete their five rotations.

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D. ACCESS TO CLUB PRACTICE

Anyone who is a member of the DSC is currently eligible to participate in Club Practice. Our membership is essentially categorised as follows:

1. Club members who play competition for DSC, including the in house competitions. Most members fit into this category.
2. Club members who do not play competition for DSC, but contribute to the Club spirit in other ways, for example, as serving on the Committee, participating in Club Championships, attending other Club events, and helping with Bar Duty. Many long term members fit into this category.
3. Temporary club members who sign up for membership purely for Club Practice. Anecdotally, the number of these members is increasing from a very low base as other courts (such as National) have become unavailable.
4. Club members who have paid their registration to be a DSC member, yet are primarily tied to another Club and play pennant competition for that other Club. Again, there seem to be more people in this category than in the past.

Several years ago, we had a similar issue to #4 with our Club Championships. It was decided then that the Club Championships would not be available to any member who plays competition for another club. The Committee strongly believes that this should apply to Club Practice as well. Accordingly, from 1 July 2013, individuals wishing to become members of the DSC will be advised that if they are playing competition with another Club, they will not be allowed to attend Sunday Club Practice.

Category #3 remains problematic. When doing duty there is no way of knowing who is a DSC member and who is not. As part of these reforms, DSC members will be issued with a shoelace token which they will be required to present to the organiser at Club Practice before they will be rostered onto the courts. **No token, no play.**

Additionally, the Club will stop the process of offering temporary membership at \$2 for a single practice session. This type of membership has been intended for use by people from out of town who are looking for a hit while they are here, and then move on. Quite frankly, our willingness to accommodate 'drifters' at the expense of our core members has been misfounded. It does not make sense to have core members sitting on the sidelines while temporary members enjoy the facilities. To the same extent, the practice of offering \$10 memberships in the last half of the financial year will also cease. If people want to be a member of the DSC and have equal rights to court usage, they should pay the same.

We anticipate that these changes will not cut out category #3 members altogether, but we note that the line between the categories #2 and #3 is hazy, and we do not wish to discourage potential 'legitimate members'. We hope that these new arrangements will alleviate the problems.

E. HOURS OF CLUB PRACTICE

Another obvious solution is for the hours to be extended. This may not alleviate all the issues, as it would still not prevent players arriving en masse at peak times. However, the extension of Club Practice by one hour would add another 36 'units of play' to the roster, potentially alleviating congestion. There are additional strategies (see below) which we intend to incorporate to help distribute players more evenly.

In extending Club Practice by one hour, it is logical to have it commence at 1pm, rather than extending it beyond 6pm. This will enable the start to coincide with the closure of Northside Fitness Centre, making the handover more efficient for all parties.

The extension could mean that the duty officers of the day would be required to do a 2.5 hour shift rather than the present 2 hour shift. Rather than doing this, the duty shifts will instead run from 1- 3pm and 3-5pm. In the last hour of practice (the historically quieter period of 5-6pm), the doors will be locked with remaining participants organising their own matches.



F. ROLE OF DOUBLES

Although some players specifically request to play doubles, we have traditionally used it as a means of coping with more players than we can handle. It is hoped that these measures will alleviate the need to have doubles running as often.

It will however be necessary to accommodate those who wish to play doubles. Additionally, if a player has had their five singles rotations and is waiting for a gap in the board to play additional rotations, then they should have the opportunity of playing doubles while they wait.

When Club Practice commences at 1pm, the Committee has decided to make doubles available from 2.40pm. This would allow all courts to be used for singles to allow as many players as possible to achieve their maximum five rotations.

Unless the utilisation is low, the Committee has decided that only one court will be available for doubles, from the commencement time outlined above, until the close of practice. The objective should be to maximise singles play and only offer doubles on a limited basis.

G. NEW PLAYER ROTATION BOARD

The present player board is of little use in Club Practice, as it only shows the 'real time' matches. It does not show which match ups have previously taken place, nor does it show how many rotations or times an individual has sat out. Both of these factors are going to be instrumental in managing new arrangements. Under current arrangements, the duty officer has to keep a separate sheet, trying to keep track of these issues. Hence, we are operating dual systems, which is inefficient and potentially creating gaps between the two.

The Club will purchase a new white board, and have a simple matrix drawn up enabling the duty officer to know:

1. what match-ups have already taken place.
2. how many rotations each player has had.

In tracking these details, the board would show the names of players who are waiting to commence their rotations, as well as showing the names of those who have finished their five rotations and are wishing to play again. In accordance with the suggestions above, this latter group have to wait for a 'clear space' to open up before they are placed on the board again.

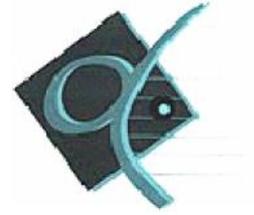
This will be a key aspect of this proposed new system. A player who has finished their five rotations is always at the back of the queue when there are players who have yet to complete their five rotations. A player (who has already played their five rotations) may have to sit out two or three consecutive rotations waiting for a gap, when new players arrive and wishes to commence their rotations. The new players would have the priority to the court.

H. ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITIES TO AVOID BOTTLENECKS

The Committee recognised that none of the above measures will be of any use unless a more even arrival of players occurs throughout the entire practice session. The current primary difficulty is that there are 'peak periods' where there can be 20+ players arriving within a concentrated period, causing enormous bottlenecks and multiple courts of doubles.

One good thing about the proposed new white board is that a player could effectively 'make a booking'. As players who are yet to play their rotations will have priority, it will be obvious, from looking at the board, as to when the first gap will take place.

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In a simplified example, say 12 players arrive at 1pm, then we will know straight away that there will not be a gap until 2.40, when they have finished their five rotations. Rather than wait around, the 13th player could be placed on the board in a 2.40 time slot, giving them surety in the knowledge that they can (eg) go do their grocery shopping knowing they will be starting their rotation at that time.

The Committee is also considering the use of technology to extend this concept. Players could potentially phone the duty officer to 'book in' to arrive at a certain time. Options in this area are still under consideration.

TRANSITION AND DIFFICULTIES WITH IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

The logical time to implement change is when memberships are subject to renewal, ie from 1 July. That way, any current members who would not qualify in the next year would not be aggrieved by having the change made retrospective. In this regard, the majority of these changes will take effect in the first practice after 1 July 2013.

Further, situations will arise where a player does not want to play their five rotations; or that they wish to take a break (say) between their second and third rotations. Common sense would apply in these cases: if there was a player wishing to start their rotations, they could be slotted in to the vacancy and then they could wait until their gap to complete their other four rotations.

Of course, there will be some teething issues, but the Committee expects that the new board will give everyone a very clear visual of where they are in the 'queue'.

As well as this Yellow Dot Special Edition, the Club will publish a one-page poster advertising the changes. This poster will be emailed to Club members, and be promoted around the courts.

OPTIONS EXCLUDED

The committee have deliberately excluded two options from our deliberations:

- Changing the nature of Sunday practice to something more akin to Saturday practice, which favours more assertive players who can navigate their way onto a court. Sunday's format presents a level playing field managed by a neutral party.
- Changing the time of rotations from 20 minutes. By extending the practice from four to five hours, we move from 144 to 180 playing units if we maintain 20 minute rotations. If the rotations were extended to 25 minutes, we are dealing with 144 playing units, which is no better than our present four hour, 20 minute cycles.

SUCCESS OR NAY?

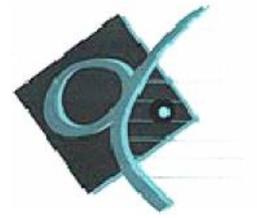
To ensure these changes are having the desired effect, without undue impact on members, the Committee will closely monitor Club Practice through the 2013-2014 year. During that ongoing review, the Committee will seek feedback from members, and look to 'tweak' the arrangements if required.

So what's your view?

As always, we your committee exists to serve your interests, **particularly when we face making such changes to a long standing institution like Club Practice.**

Please contact anyone on the committee, at any time, if you have questions, suggestions or comments about these changes, or any other aspect of the Club's operations.

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Newsletter of the Dickson Squash Club

June 2013

The committee is:

President: Stephen Barnett

Vice President: Len Early

Secretary: Pam Price

Treasurer: Dick O'Rourke

General Members:

Leanna Davey Paul Cartwright

Julie Polson Doug Lean

Anthony Burgess Dominic Cooper