

## Starting a Collegiate Racquetball Program

I have received several e-mails and phone calls in the last month or so from students that already play racquetball and would like to learn about how to go about getting a full team or program started. Below are the basic steps that you need to do get your program up and running. Playing Collegiate Racquetball is great. Playing Collegiate Racquetball as a Team is unforgettable.

The first step is to get your core group of players. Many Colleges/Universities have a Club or Activity Fair that is run by the Student Government Association (SGA) within the first couple weeks of classes. Find out when and where this Fair is and get yourselves involved so you can bring in new players. By the time you go this Club Fair, you should have already established a meeting place and time so that you can all get together and discuss how this is going to work. Relay this meeting to the participants you meet at the Club Fair so that you can get as much interest as possible. Also be sure to post as many signs and notices as you can at the courts, dorms, gym, dining hall, or anywhere that creates a lot of traffic where students will see your posters.

At the meeting, make sure that you work with everybody to set a solid practice schedule. Many students take night classes, so you'll have to work with everybody to find out what nights work best. Make sure that you set a start date for practices within one week after the meeting (at the latest) while you still have a lot of interest.

The first practice will be time spent to make sure that everybody knows the rules. Go into them with limited detail, but enough that the players are ready to get out there and start. Spend a little time on stroke mechanics and the basics, but you need to capture their attention, so keep them on the court hitting and playing as much as possible. Your focus at this point should be to eliminate bad habits instead of lecturing for an hour on the fine details and mechanics of the forehand and backhand.

The next 2 practices should be "placement nights" for the ladder that you are ready to put together. The ladder is simply a list of the players in order from #1 down for both men and women. This will be used all year to determine their placement on the team. As the year goes on, each player will have the opportunity to challenge players above him or her on the ladder and continue to move up. It is important that you get this ladder working right off the bat, as you will find this as the number one motivator for the athletes to continue to come to practices and work hard.

From there, continue to teach the mechanics and focus your time to ensure that everybody is swinging properly, avoiding injuries, and eliminating bad habits (not gaining center court, swinging with feet facing the front wall, etc.). A good plan is to have a couple of practices a week where everybody is learning a new tool, and one practice a week designated for challenge matches.

Now for the tricky part, being recognized by the College/University as a Club Sport. First step is to talk to your professors, guidance counselors, Athletic faculty, or anyone that works for the school to see if anyone is interested in supporting your program as an Advisor. Once that is in place, you need to find the Director of SGA to look into the next steps of forming a Club Sport. No doubt this will include quite a bit of paperwork at the start, but remember that once recognized, you may be eligible to receive funding from the school that would enable you to

expand the program and possibly travel to tournaments. Continue to work with SGA and they will lead you in the right direction to getting all of this accomplished.

This may all seem like a lot, but I can assure you it's possible. When I went to College, I worked with a friend of mine that was attending the same school, and we followed the simple steps I have laid out above. We were able to gather a team and take home a Division I National Championship Trophy that year for a school of only 550 students. It was easily my proudest and most memorable tournament over my career, and it's as easy to do as I've planned out above.

As you all know, I am more than willing to work individually with every one of you that is truly interested in starting a program. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (508) 479-6597, or e-mail me at [racquetballchamp@hotmail.com](mailto:racquetballchamp@hotmail.com).

Look forward to seeing you and your team at the 2005 ECRC Meets!

Shane Wood, Executive Director  
Eastern Collegiate Racquetball Conference (ECRC)