



CASE STUDY:

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF INCREASING
PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP

OTAUTAU SQUASH CLUB



SQUASH
NEW ZEALAND

OVERVIEW

Rural squash clubs face difficult challenges with increasing urbanisation and limited means with which to increase income due to lower populations. This means the long-term sustainability of rural squash clubs is dependent upon innovation and differentiation in developing and delivering squash experiences so that the income base can be broadened. All of which requires 'market facing' structures and culture.

Back in the early 2000's the Otautau Squash Club's numbers were dwindling around 15. After many years hard work, a major focus on reducing costs and listening to its' members needs, the club is now seen as a key hub within its' local community and now has a healthy membership of around 55.

CHALLENGES

Community Perception

A lot of sports struggle to make their facility and club appear accessible to potential new members. How can you provide a place that people want to visit?

Rural Lifestyle

Research shows adults in rural communities participate less in sport than all adults. This is especially the case during the peak of farming and forestry seasons in the South Island.

Outgoing Costs

Financial sustainability is a massive part of all clubs futures. A lot of clubs' facilities have poor heating systems which creates a cold and damp place to be that isn't very welcoming. Plus there is all the day to day overheads to consider too. How to keep these down without increasing fees all the time?

SOLUTIONS

Facility Maintenance

From 2013 there were several upgrades performed on the club's facility: The outside of the building was water blasted, the court walls scrubbed, the club sign repainted, heat pumps installed and ventilation improved, court lights replaced and a part-time cleaner hired.

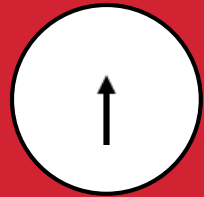
Programmes and Scheduling

A junior coordinator was reinstated, interclub teams require multiple reserves, club champs are held before calving and lambing seasons start and there are programmes on every night of the week to allow people to play when it suits their schedule.

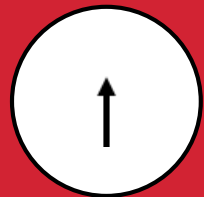
Fundraising

The club are always looking for new ways to raise funds. Technology is used to communicate where possible and income is generated from membership fees, bar revenue and business sponsorships. Raffles are run at open tournaments and the 20 members fundraised by pulling wild turnips out of fodder beet paddocks. All of which was invested back into making the club better.

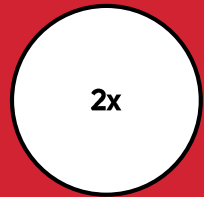
RESULTS



Facility warmth, cleanliness and use.



In social members and all interclub teams – male, female and juniors.



More income generated between 2013-2016.

CONCLUSION

The Otautau Squash Club have shown the ability to look outwards, understand the people within their rural community and provide squash to meet their needs. This has seen the club transform itself into a social and sports hub for the entire family on every night of the week. The club is now well-lit, clean and is attractive to members and visitors. As a result it has helped provide operating efficiencies, it has increased facility utilisation, has attracted new market segments to the club and prolonged the life of the club's financial position.

Former Club President Luke Mason said "we had to look at the surrounding area and the changing way people live. In our very rural environment where the majority of our player base comes from the farming community, we had to adapt. Our initial focus was on creating a social, community environment for new members and then providing opportunities for those who want to play more competitively".

RURAL SQUASH CLUB OPPORTUNITIES

New Zealand's population continues to shift towards living in the bigger urban centres. However, there are around 40% of all squash facilities located in rural areas. These different environments present challenges for rural squash clubs due to variations in low population density, different household demographics, minimal corporate opportunities, less income diversity and higher levels of volunteerism compared to urban clubs.

Several options exist for rural squash clubs to improve court utilisation, grow memberships and increase income:

- Partnering with local schools and providing additional recreation facilities that the schools would not otherwise have.
- Providing programmes or services which the local community lacks.
- Offering community amenities.
- Creating a community focal point and a family environment.
- Partnering with local businesses, for example: vineyards, hotels and touring companies.
- Innovative ideas that attract domestic players to travel to play at the facility, for example: spot prizes.
- Consider merging governance structures with other squash clubs and operating out of multiple facilities.

