

## Using Courts and Court Sports Programming as a Competitive Advantage

If you have 20' x 40' courts in your club/facility, you possess a competitive advantage that others don't. Their very existence is Part I. Part II is how that advantage can be leveraged for membership growth and retention. This second article offered by *USAR* and *USHA* introduces some court sports programming best practices and food for thought.

### Objectives for Win-Win Court Usage:

- Courts are playable and profitable;
- Use courts and court sport programs as a competitive strategy;
- Maximize courts' square footage for flexibility and versatility (outside the box thinking).

Last month, we said, "hello" and talked about *CPCs: Court Programming Coordinators*. This month, we've interviewed several individuals who embody the definition. This article content is abbreviated for space, but full interviews will be available soon on the USA Racquetball and US Handball websites.

Make no mistake, whatever their actual job titles and responsibilities are at their respective clubs, successful CPCs are also social directors, organizers, club ambassadors and business team members. They may be instructors, club pros and athletes as well. **Brian Ancheta** and **Wanda Collins** possess every one of the attributes of a CPC.

**BRIAN ANCHETA:** Assistant Manager/Racquetball Director/Coach (33 years, full-time); Racquetball player for 30 years;

Cascade Athletic Club, Gresham, Oregon; Opened in 1977; Nine courts, down from 11 in past years.

**WANDA COLLINS:** Racquetball and Court Sports Pro (38 years, part-time); Racquetball player for 45 years; Bellingham Athletic Club, Bellingham, Washington; Opened in 1976; Six courts, one utilized as a kids' club but intact for play.

Wanda and Brian agree that having someone (ideally an employee who is accountable for results) dedicated to managing court utilization, aka programming, is essential. To leave this to chance means a missed opportunity to use your courts and facility to create a *third place*\* culture at your club, i.e., a place beyond home and work that feels like *Cheers* (where everybody knows your name). That's a future article...

\*See *Celebrating the Third Place - Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities* by **Ray Oldenburg**

Whether your CPC turns out to be a volunteer or a paid employee, what attributes make a great CPC? Someone who is engaging, likeable, fun, and personable. Someone who cares about the club and its members!

Brian advises, "If you don't have a person managing or running this [i.e. keeping courts busy], you won't be successful. Someone has to drive it. You can't have a fitness class with no instructor. You need a leader."

**New Members - Use court sports to help them get comfortable with their "third place."** Everyone gets a free lesson when he joins the club; don't just offer it, book it! Take the lead to potentially change someone's life and retain that member potentially far longer than the typical fitness member.

Wanda shares, "I do a lot of handholding at first. It's a process that starts with the first free lesson. Then comes a clinic or more private or group lessons. I supply the equipment, show them how to reserve a court, and help them make connections with other players of similar skill levels."

Both Brian and Wanda provide equipment (racquet, eye protection) to get new players started. Wanda says, "The club pays me to teach that hour; about 25 - 30% will see the fun and fitness aspects and want to continue." Brian describes a process that begins with that first free lesson and often progresses to additional lessons, leagues, club shootouts, and perhaps on to bigger tournaments. Helping a player make connections with other players of their skill level begins to build another level of community at the club.

**Membership Revenue Built Through Court Programming -** Brian and Wanda agree that Junior and High School leagues, team competitions, lessons, and clinics help create that third place for kids but often bring in parents and families as new members. Why should the kids have all the fun?

**Charlie Ikard Brings Handball Spirit to Fellow Players -** A volunteer who

has contributed his spirit and leadership into creating that third place for Handball players is U.S. Handball Association's Volunteer of the Year, Charlie Ikard, of Salem, Oregon. Charlie has taken that opportunity at every club he has belonged to since his introduction to Handball in the early '70s. From offering an introductory lesson, managing competition ladders, and promoting pro exhibition matches, Charlie's main focus has consistently been targeted toward keeping the courts full through organized play while promoting handball as a fun activity and an excellent workout. To keep the courts in use over the past year, Charlie helped local players follow safety precautions and continue indoor play each week through coordination with his club manager.

### Concluding Thoughts and An Invitation

Please visit [bit.ly/clubinsider124](http://bit.ly/clubinsider124) for court programming resources and materials. And, visit [ushandball.org](http://ushandball.org) for information on how to get free equipment, instructional resources, and more for your club from the *First Ace Development Program!*

*Connect with us!* What creative ways do you use to leave courts intact for court sports and at the same time build additional revenue? Please write with your success stories and your perspectives! Contact **Matthew Kruger** (Handball) at [mkrueger@ushandball.org](mailto:mkrueger@ushandball.org) or **Mike Wedel** (Racquetball) at [mwedel@usaracquetball.com](mailto:mwedel@usaracquetball.com) with questions or comments.



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