

Understanding Ratings and Rankings

In October 2020 US Squash introduced a ranking system using player rating. This replaced, on an interim basis, the previous points based ranking system that junior players and their families have been used to. The points-based system requires national competition for it to be accurate and therefore tournaments need to be equally available to all players in the country. The Coronavirus pandemic has led to localized youth sports guidelines, which differ from State to State. This together with travel restrictions between states has resulted in localized squash competition. Therefore, a ratings based ranking system which supports regionalized play has been set in place until national competition is possible and the points based system can resume.

Whilst both points-based and ratings-based systems order players by relative ability they are fundamentally different, using match results in different ways to predict relative playing level. The points-based system is specific to junior tournament play, is reactive and ranks active players by age group. The ratings-based system is more stable and crosses all squash players no matter their age or gender. Ratings are therefore an accurate reflection of a players long term ability (measured by results against individual players), whereas points allow for an accurate reflection of recent player performance in tournament play (measured by finishing position)

Whilst ratings are not new to players, using them as a basis for rankings, and using them for qualification into tournaments is new. This has raised many questions within the junior community. Below we try to address some of these concerns by explaining the two systems and their difference and then answering some of the most frequently asked questions that have been expressed to us.

Ultimately though, whatever the ranking system, in order to improve and to be the best they can be players just need to play, win or lose, against players of similar ability whether in a tournament situation, clinic or friendly match.

Points based ranking system

The points based ranking system is for junior players only and is a judge of players relative ability within tournament play only. It uses a series of events comprising age divisions by gender, aimed at different playing levels, and assigns players points based on the level of tournament, number of players participating, last round achieved and finishing position. The higher the level of tournament and the better the finishing position the more the points that are allocated. A win is a win, whether it is by a margin of 3-0 or 3-2 or a default. The points that are assigned are the same. The points allocation for tournament levels overlap to provide mobility. For instance, placing in the top positions in a lower level tournament will provide more points to players than placing in the lowest positions in a higher level tournament. Points are then used to assign a rank to a player within their age group and/or the age group in which they participate. Points roll off a player profile within a relatively short period of time and players have to therefore participate to maintain their rank. A player can only be ranked through accredited tournament play. No other type of play counts.

This ranking system provides players a basis to compare themselves against players who are actively competing in this system. A player choosing to not play, or who takes a break due to injury, for instance, will see their ranking decrease or disappear completely. A player improving quickly and who achieves

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good tournament results will see their rank increase to reflect their development. The system is able to adjust relatively quickly to a player's current playing level or situation.

Ratings based ranking

A rating based ranking system provides all squash players of any age and gender a common language to determine their relative playing level. It is a single framework to encourage level-based play and integrates juniors, college players, adults, school team players, and players from different geographical regions. A rating is a number ranging from 0 to 8 that is assigned to a player based on any recorded match they play. To be assigned a rating a player needs just one win and one loss and as match results are recorded the rating will adjust.

The rating-based system is a long-term indicator of level, using matches up to 45 months old, giving a heavier weight to those most recently played, specifically to those played in the previous 15 months. A player rating will be adjusted after each match and is not dependent on the level of event nor the round or finishing position. The type of organized play that produced that match, whether a tournament or league for instance is not a factor. Only that specific match and who played. The rating algorithm is therefore applied for each match independently and considers the reliability of each player's rating, the rating differential between players together with the actual match result in terms of games to calculate appropriate ratings adjustments for each player. A player with many recent match results would be considered to have a reliable rating and their rating would be expected to be accurate and move slowly, regardless of results. A player with few match results or who only has older results would be considered to have an unreliable rating. Their results could have a more significant effect on their rating. Each match effectively has an expected outcome and players need to meet that expectation for their rating to remain stable. Exceed the expectation and a rating will improve. To perform below expectations and a rating could decrease.

The ratings based ranking system is effective in helping players find competitive matches across all types of organized play. Matches do not need to be tournament based; friendlies, league, and ladder matches can all count.

Ways to improve your rating

In order to improve their rating a player will need to play often, play well and be patient.

Exceeding expectations is the easiest way for a player to improve their rating. Winning that extra game in a tough match against a higher rated player could help. Making sure to not let your opponent get that extra game could also help. Winning in itself may not be enough. Losing may not be a bad result. Players may need to win 3-0 rather than 3-1, or conversely lose 3-2 instead of 3-1 to see their rating improve.

Playing often ensures player ratings are accurate and stable and so any unexpected results will not have as significant an effect as they could. Large swings in rating are prevented since ratings are a weighted average of all results in past 45 months, so the more matches played, the smaller the impact of any one match, win or lose. Players can have that "bad" day. In order to be accurate though the algorithm needs to see wins and losses. Consider if a player only wins the system has no high bar to calibrate against. All

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it knows is that the player wins. It is important for players to balance matches for their rating to be accurate.

Since the rating algorithm uses the results of many matches to calculate rating, one result will not always have a significant effect. Even if it is a significant result where a player exceeds expectations. The rating reflects a trend in a player's ability, it will not react to one result but in the long term will adjust and be accurate.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if I have taken a break or am coming back from injury?

If a player has taken a break, due to injury say, the initial matches in the comeback will take on more significance and a player rating will likely be prone to short term volatility until it iterates to a stable and accurate position. Player ratings will remain on their profile for 45 months and so a player coming back from time off will remain on the rankings and in position until the system has new information. That new information becoming more important due to it being more recent.

Is there any benefit to playing against players who are rated below me?

Higher rated players can still improve their rating if they perform better than expected. A higher rated player will be expected to win, but the margin by which they win will matter. The closer players are in rating the more likely the match result will be 3-2.

What level of player should I play?

Any result between players who have more than 0.5 differential in rating will be discarded if the higher rated player wins. This protects any negative ratings change for the higher rated player.

If the lower rated player records the win US Squash will be alerted so that the result can be verified as this is expected to be a result in exceptional circumstances only.

Therefore, players should focus on competing with players who are within +/- 0.5 of their rating.

Is there a strategy to increase my rating?

Some players try to increase their rating by playing well against higher rated opponents. Some try by playing well against lower rated opponents. It is not about who you play per se, the key is to try to exceed the expectations for the match.

Do I need to play in tournaments for matches to count towards rating?

Any match recorded in Clublocker will count for rating. This could be a match played in a tournament but it could also be a ladder match, box match, league match or an agreed friendly match. Players can choose which method of play works for them.

How often are updates made to my rating?

Player ratings are calculated daily and show on player profiles in the Club ranking section. National rankings are recorded weekly on a Wednesday morning and are based on the daily rating update on that Wednesday.

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Are ratings the same across the country or ages?

The rating system measures players ability on a unified scale. Therefore, player ratings are consistent across all squash players. The rating algorithm relies on match information being logged from all sources. The more data the more accurate the information. While many players compete only within their group or club, those that play in many groups provide the cross over data that calibrates ratings across the country, ages and gender.

Can my rating change if I don't play?

Yes. The rating algorithm is processed daily and therefore the significance of each match is calculated daily. If you have played against a player who is active and improving, even if you aren't playing your rating could improve also. Conversely your rating could decrease if your opponents rating decreases.