

2024 Junior Policy Update

Introduction

US Squash is dedicated to continuously enhancing its initiatives to foster a safe, equitable, and dynamic environment for the community. Ensuring a secure platform for junior squash not only facilitates competition but also prioritizes player well-being by preventing injuries. Maintaining balance is key, offering opportunities across all skill levels while ensuring squash fits with players' broader commitments.

US Squash also remains vigilant in its efforts to analyze and adapt to the rapidly evolving landscape of the sport. With junior participation experiencing growth, the organization is committed to evolving its tournament and ranking structures to accommodate this increasing demand.

US Squash continually monitors the junior tournament system, identifying potential areas for refinement. Data collection methods, including direct observation, surveys, and extensive communication with stakeholders such as tournament directors, coaches, and parents, inform this ongoing process of evaluation and modification.

As a result of this feedback the following enhancements will be implemented for the 2024-2025 Season, starting August 30, 2024. Each enhancement is described below with an explanation of what is happening now and rationale for the change.

Tournament Structure

The aim of the junior points based ranking system is to ensure player mobility is possible, up or down, through performance in junior accredited tournaments. This system is regulated meaning that there are a set number of tournaments at each level and US Squash aims to allocate these tournaments across the country such that players have the opportunity to compete at the level appropriate to their ability, as locally as possible. That said all tournaments are open to any player, regardless of residency, qualification into that tournament being solely on a points basis. For further insights into participation metrics, please refer to the detailed data provided in Appendix A.

- ***Regional Gold Level Events***

Current Situation

Emerging regions advocate for local tournaments at all levels to support their players as this mitigates the high expenses associated with extensive travel. However, concerns arise particularly at the Gold level. Emerging regions argue that local opportunities at this level are compromised by players traveling from other regions. This therefore diminishes the available playing positions for local players, unfairly placing them at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts from more densely populated squash-playing areas of the country.

Adjustment

Regional Gold level tournaments will be introduced to acknowledge that junior squash has a growing number of players from different areas of the county. This will allow players to be able to compete at that level with others from the same region only, exposing more players to the higher-level tournament. This in turn will improve mobility potential for players from all regions.

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The United States will be divided into three “Hubs” of play; Northeast, Southeast, Central and West with two weekends a year dedicated to the Regional Gold tournaments in these areas.

The States assigned to the Hubs are:

Northeast

- CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, RI

Southeast

- DC, DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, PA, TN, VA

Central and West

- CA, CO, HI, IL, IN, KY, MI, MN, MO, NV, OH, OR, TX, WA

- ***Summer Junior Open/JCT***

Current Situation

Squash has traditionally been regarded as a Winter sport, particularly among scholastic programs,. The junior squash tournament structure over the last two decades has largely worked within this “season” typically stretching from September through to Nationals in March. During this timeframe, players anticipate the five JCTs, which represent the pinnacle of points-earning tournaments. However, as the the scholastic squash team leagues have become increasingly competitive, and the caliber of junior competition has continually improved at the highest levels, more differentiation is required in the overall competitive tournament structure.

In effect, the highest level junior players, particularly as they get older, compete in squash year-round and there is a gap in the calendar outside of the the traditional season, leaving top-ranked players without a high-level competitive outlet outside of the main season, and artificially compacting the varied opportunities to compete.

While US Squash emphasizes the importance of taking breaks for health and safety reasons, particularly during the summer months, it acknowledges that players should have the autonomy to choose when to take these breaks.

Recognizing this shift in player dynamics, the introduction of an additional high points-earning tournament outside of the traditional season will align with the changing needs of players and ensure that opportunities for competitive play remain robust throughout the year.

Adjustment

An additional Summer JCT will be scheduled in late June, starting in 2025, giving players time to take a break after Nationals, but also providing a new opportunity to earn the highest-level points possible during a historically quiet competition period.

Further this JCT will be open to more players than a typical JCT with draws of 64 players offered. This tournament will also be points optional, allowing players a softer onramp to competitive play after their break.

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- **Seeding**

US Squash endeavors to always provide fair and balanced draws for all its tournaments and has seeding policies in place for all tournaments which are embedded into our processes. Seeding for junior accredited tournaments is based on the seeding points calculation which is described in the junior policies and only in specific and very exceptional circumstances will this calculation not be followed. That said, seeding is inherently anxiety-provoking for junior squash families and it can be challenging to navigate the junior ranking system when seedings are not as expected the question of fairness is raised.

Adjustment

In an effort to make seeding more transparent US Squash has revised its seeding policies to try to ensure more clarity around how seeding is applied in its tournaments and highlighting what is automated in the process. Specifically: -

- U.S. Junior Open seeding for US players and players who are active in the US Junior ranking system, has been clarified with respect to the use of seeding points, and rating.
- US Nationals seeding process now includes a comment period for families to highlight any potential concerns.
- The public view of the entrants list on Club Locker will state how players are ordered.

Eligibility

- **Residency and Citizenship**

Current Situation

The junior points-based ranking system operates under the premise of equal opportunity for players from all countries, adhering to the same set of rules. However, there are notable exceptions at the JCT and Nationals level, where residency and citizenship requirements come into play. Participation in JCTs necessitates residency, while Nationals requires citizenship.

Historically, this framework has functioned effectively. However, there are an increasing number of high-level junior players, who hold U.S. citizenship however are not residents, and who have expressed an interest in qualifying for national team events.

The junior points-based ranking system serves as the primary method for selecting Team USA members. Therefore, the restriction barring non-resident citizens from participating at the JCT level presents a significant barrier for these players. Despite their potential skill and talent, they are unable to qualify for Team USA representation due to this limitation.

Adjustment

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All U.S. citizens, regardless of residency, will be eligible to participate in all levels of the Junior points-based tournaments, including JCTs. This allows them the chance to compete alongside the best U.S. resident citizens to earn a place on Team USA. By addressing this issue, a pathway is provided for all aspiring athletes to achieve their goals in the world of junior squash.

- ***Discretionary playing positions at JCTs***

Current Situation

The current policy dictates that all players who are new to the U.S. junior points based ranking system, regardless of their playing level, must adhere to all regulations, which means starting from the lower tiers of play and working their way up. While this process is intended to be equitable, it is not necessarily beneficial for high level players or their opponents, particularly at the Bronze or Silver levels.

With Team USA selection solely based on junior rankings, this system disadvantages those who are at a high level of play but are limited in their ability to participate in the tournament system.

Adjustment

Two playing positions will be made available at the JCT level to potentially assign to qualified players on a discretionary basis to quick start their junior points-based ranking. These positions must be applied for by petitioning US Squash and are intended only for US Citizen players who have demonstrated a high level of play in international competition and who meet the ratings threshold for qualification.

Players will only be allowed to take a maximum of two discretionary spots and must earn their full ranking through sustained play.

Health and Safety

- ***Duration between scheduled start times where more than one match played in a day***

Current Situation

The existing policy stipulates minimum time intervals between matches in tournaments, with specific durations allocated for Bronze, Silver, and Gold level tournaments. Players, however, often find themselves with insufficient time for adequate recovery between matches. The intensity and duration of individual matches can necessitate longer recovery periods for optimal physical well-being.

Adjustment

In the effort to ensure a healthy and safe environment for our players the time between scheduled matches for a Gold, JCT or National Championships will be increased to 4 hours for the U17 and U19 age groups. The full recommendation is below. By allowing for extended recovery periods, the health and safety of players is prioritized, mitigating the risk of injuries, and ensuring that participants are able to perform at their best throughout the duration of tournaments.

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- Gold tournaments, JCTs and National Championships
 - U17 and U19 – 4 hours
 - U11-U15 – 3 hours
 - Silver Tournaments
 - U17 and U19 - 3 hours
 - U11-U15 – 2 hours
 - Bronze Tournaments
 - All divisions 1.5 hours
- **Maximum Number of Matches per Day**

Current Situation

The absence of a specific policy regarding the maximum number of matches played by a single player in one day has raised concerns, particularly at the highest levels of play in older age groups. Without clear guidelines in place, players may find themselves scheduled for three matches in a single day, which can pose significant health risks and increase the likelihood of injury.

Given the physical demands and intensity of matches, especially at advanced levels of competition, such a schedule can be detrimental to players' well-being and performance. Overexertion and fatigue increase the susceptibility to injuries, impacting both short-term participation and long-term athletic development.

Adjustment

The maximum number of matches scheduled per day will be adjusted as listed below. In order to implement this requirement, where necessary some sub draws may not complete to the final and more shared positions will result. For instance, in a 32 draw the consolation will play out to the 9-12 position only. Ultimately safety is of paramount importance to the players and the risk of injury is very high if players at the highest level are required to complete 3 matches in one day.

- Gold tournaments, JCTs and National Championships
 - U17 and U19 - 2 matches per day
 - U11-U15 – 3 matches per day
- Silver Tournaments
 - All divisions – 3 matches per day
- Bronze Tournaments
 - All divisions – 4 matches per day

Other Policy Adjustments

- **White clothing policy**
Junior accredited tournaments will only be scheduled at facilities which do not mandate white clothing on court at junior accredited tournaments. Where a facility does have such a policy in place it must be waived in order for the tournament to be accredited.
- **Scholastic/Closed Tournaments**

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Scholastic or Closed junior tournaments will no longer be eligible for ranking point allocation. Since these tournaments are not open to all and have a playing level which is not similar to a junior points-based tournament, they do not fulfil the criteria to be eligible for points.