

Balls to the Wall: Snow White and her 7 Squash Players

Once upon a time, there lived a Squash Queen who ruled the Squash Castles playing a bashing, running game. But her boobs had begun to droop and varicose veins streaked her running legs. Despite this, daily she would peer into the Change Room mirror and ask, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, who is the best Squash Player of us all?" Routinely, the mirror had answered, "You are, O Queen"

Meanwhile, a young girl, named Snow White had been quietly practising and playing better players and improving and improving. One day, again, the Queen asked the dreaded question. The mirror cracked, and stuttering, replied "I cannot lie, O Queen. Snow White is the Best Squash Player of us all"

The Queen was enraged. Angrily she smashed her sponsored racquets against the wall. Then she called for Snow White and banished her to a distant squash castle, a run-down little centre with slippery floors, and cracked walls. Snow White was devastated. Her dreams were shattered. When she arrived at the castle, Snow White found 7 Squash Players, happily playing on their own. Talent wafted through the courts, but there was very little coaching. Immediately, she set about pretty-fying the courts. Together they painted, swept and fixed the walls. They cleaned the change rooms and brought in training equipment - exercise bikes, rowing machines and boxing bags. Then they pasted squash posters and motivational affirmations on the noticeboards, and even built a little bar at the courts. People heard about the changes and squash boomed in the area.

But the 7 Squash Players were Snow White's focus. They had different strengths and different weaknesses but by coaching them and playing against them, she could help them, and take her own game to new heights.

Bashful, was not bashful. But he loved to bash. He smashed, bashed, huffed and puffed as if he wanted to blast the walls down. While he hit the ball hard, he was very loose and he was not a great thinker. Often he would lose because players slowed him down, and waited for him to make mistakes. By developing his skill-levels and hitting the ball a little softer, with more control, he became a far better player.

Dopey hit the ball beautifully but he was lazy. His racquet preparation and recovery to the tee was poor. Snow White taught Dopey how to "ghost" – moving around the court, without a ball, racquet in hand, visualizing as he ran, preparing his racquet as he moved quickly through the tee, balancing himself as he played each imaginary shot. Magically, his game improved and soon he was top of the ladder.

Sneezy trained, and then trained some more. But, if there was an injury he would find it. His flu was always worse than others. If he lost, he had an injury. Before, he played, he was already making excuses about an injury. Snow White encouraged him to slow down, develop some skills, worry more about how he played, rather than the result. Sneezy was just so scared of losing that he built walls of excuses around himself. If only he would realize that, sometimes, you learn more from losing than winning.

Doc was a serious practitioner, a student of the game with good tactical awareness. But Doc over-analyzed. Often he would take a commanding lead, and then "freeze". Snow White played lots of matches with Doc, sometimes, using tennis scoring to practise in pressure situations. She taught him to breathe, relax, play point-for-point and to stick to his game plan. Before every serve, he would mutter to himself, "Still a long way to go"

Super-competitive, Grumpy was his own worst enemy. When things went well, all was fine, but let there be a bad decision, a stupid or lucky, shot and Grumpy would start shouting at himself, beating himself with his racquet. Nobody liked playing against him. And yet, off the court, he was a friendly fellow. Snow White spent time with Grumpy off court, making him realize how his anger affected his game. The change was amazing, and now Grumpy just smiled at the ref's "funny" decisions.

Happy just loved to play, and didn't care if he won or lost. As long as he had a good sweat, and a chat afterwards, he was happy. Snow White tried to get Happy to set some goals but she was careful not to push him too hard. He was great for the group as he was content, hitting and doing routines with them. He also loved helping, doing admin, and it was he, who actually ran the bar.

Sleepy had beautiful touch but lacked confidence. Often he would lose because he was drawn into his opponent's style of play. Snow White gave him routines which gradually developed his confidence and concentration. The routines revolved around his varying his pace. They played conditioned games, and she videoed him. Gradually his confidence grew and he developed the most exquisite lob-and-drop game.

One day, a visitor brought news of a tournament, sponsored by the Handsome Prince, which was to be held at the Queen's Castle. Here was a chance to test themselves against different opponents. But Snow White realized that she would have to go in disguise as the Queen would never allow her to play. So, she cut, and dyed her hair and entered under a pseudonym. Day and night, they practised with purpose and devised match plans to counter different styles of play. The Queen was seeded one and she had organized that her path to the final was littered with unknowns. Happy, Grumpy, Dopey and Doc were all scheduled to meet her. Fortunately Snow White was on the opposite side of the draw.

But the Queen was in for a surprise. The players knew how she played and they countered all her strengths. But her experience carried her through 4 long 5-setters. Snow White sailed through, winning all her matches 3 - 0. The finals beckoned, with Snow White still fresh and The Queen battered from the tough matches against Snow White's protégé's. In the final, Snow White out-manuevered The Queen, who still continued her mad bashing ways. As she guided the final volley into the nick for a 3-0 win, Snow White raised her racquet in triumph and smiled at The Queen. "Who is the Best Squash Player of us all?" she asked.

Only then, did The Queen realize who her opponent, really was. Now, it was The Queen who was devastated.

The Handsome Prince was totally taken by Snow White's elegant beauty, sportsmanship and friendly personality, As the Handsome Prince handed her The Golden Apple trophy, he asked for her hand in marriage. The beaten Queen, forlorn, apologized to Snow White and begged forgiveness. Ever-gracious, Snow White accepted, on one condition - that The Queen allocate funds for them to renovate their courts, travel to tournaments and once a month, visit and practise and help the 7 players achieve their dreams.

Snow White and The Prince married, and they all lived happily ever after, playing their beautiful game and producing happy little squash players.