

As we move towards Christmas, all will be inundated with Lists. Christmas Wish Lists, lists of dreams, targets and goals, shopping lists, stationery lists and school uniform lists and the lists will go on.

So why not a list of all the things we love... and hate... about Squash

I love:

- Packing my squash bag in anticipation of a match.
- Planning the game and how to counter my opponent's strengths and attack possible weaknesses.
- The pre-match change room banter – some bold, some brave, others quietly confident.
- The tightness and tension of the stretch as mind and body synch into preparation for battle.
- The whack-smack of the ball as it warms, waiting to be bliksemmed.
- The floated lob serve, high, no pace, tantalising, dropping as opponent flounders, and “vloeks” silently.
- A fired hard serve, straight at opponent's heart and the jabbed response. With me, waiting.
- That drilling drive, clinging to the wall, dying in the distant corner.
- The exhilaration of the volley, zinging into the nick, and rolling.
- The softness of the drop shot, teasing... whispering.
- The lift and lilt of the lob, the outstretched racquet reaching... not quite.
- My opponent chasing, fetching, stretching himself into a dribble of sweat.
- The tussle of mind, out-thinking. Body, out-muscling. The ebb and flow of concentration conflicting.
- A cursing, cussing, combusting opponent. Imploding.
- The relief and joy, eyes closed, as the final point is won, body tired.
- The handshake and friendly meeting of eyes between two who have competed, and forgotten frustrations of the day.
- The shared beer(s), cold and comfortable in hand... analysis, advice and commiserations.
- Sitting naked, towel-wrapped, reflecting. The blob of wet, sweaty clothes lying limp below your nose, as perspiration drips.

- The poste-match change room banter of brilliance, others quietly gloating, knowing that The Best Man Won.
- The spikey warmth of the shower as it massages body, battered from contesting.
- The camaraderie of the league team, season's soul mates.
- Watching the top players, seemingly effortless movement, their control, skills, anticipation and retrieving.
- Watching social players whack, hack and woer themselves around the court, where danger of being beheaded or bruised lurks but so much fun is had.
- Tournaments and Tours. Friendships found and renewed.
- The coach's inner reward of seeing a pupil growing, gradually, as a player and as a person.
- The endorphic release and saturated joy after a tough training session.
- The stiff and sore after-match, morning-after bum.

I hate:

- Non-response from sms-ed potential opponents.
- Arriving at the courts, in anticipation and the realisation that shoes/shorts have not been packed. No underwear is ok, in fact, quite nice, sometimes!!
- Non-arrival of opponent.
- Courts booked and not played.
- Eskom interruptions and slippery floors.
- That opponent who smacks the ball 5 times to self and occasionally to you.
- Those days when bad bio-rhythms make the racquet feel like a beach bat.
- Pre-match excuses, in-match excuses, post-match excuses.
- That zingy, stingy pain as smoking rubber burns into fleshy thigh, drilling down to bone, leaving bluey-brown-yellow memories.
- The cold sweat and swelling realisation that the twisted ankle is something more serious.
- The clunking noise of ball meeting tin.

- The internal anger of allowing opponent to creep back from a 4-10 deficit.
- Cursing and cussing players who think all refs are idiots, with personal vendettas and pre-planned strategies to spoil a perfectly normal game of squash.
- Cold Showers.
- Warm beers – but they'll still be drunk.
- League players who play-and-go for no-rhyme-or-reason.

For those looking for something a little different for your Squashaholic partner, ***Shot and a Ghost***, the debut book by leading English squash player **James Willstrop**, could be your answer. Shortlisted for this year's William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award, this is no ordinary squash book.

Purely from a squash perspective, the book is intriguing as it takes you behind the scenes into the loneliness of squash in the limelight. Through a year in the life, you feel the exhilaration of victory, the anguish, anger and introspection of losses, the tears, the trauma of injury, the toughness of the training, the fears. Quite starkly, the life of a Professional Squash Player, is portrayed and it is not always pretty.

But this is not just about squash. This is about an individual and relationships. Born into a squash family, his father, Malcolm, is one of the leading squash coaches in the world. Both are forthright individuals, not scared to say their say. So theirs is not an easy relationship, but built on respect, they survive and grow. Sadly, the tale of mom, Lesley's battle with a tougher challenge, cancer, runs parallel with his year of squash challenges. And then the relationships between players, living and competing together, the support of his partner, leading Dutch player, Vanessa Atkinson, and the team who work with him.

Through the diarized format, you are invited into the mind of Willstrop, the man, the individual and his almost schizophrenic existence. A vegetarian, lover of arts, and theatre, a party animal chained by the disciplines of a champion, a writer, and a fighter, a sensitive soul clashing with the brutal needs of

professional sport. In a sport blighted by bad behavior on court, Willstrop, despite being 6 ft 4, and not ideally suited to squash, is a sportsman to the fingertips, and one, from whom squash players can learn many lessons, about squash, and about life.

This book is a Goodie.

To those not initiated into the wonderful world of squash, the list of other sports books nominated for the William Hill Sports Book Award are:

- That Near-Death Thing – Inside the TT: The World's Most Dangerous Race - Rick Broadbent
- Running with the Kenyans – Discovering the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth - Adharanand Finn
- Iron War – Dave Scott, Mark Allen & the Greatest Race Ever Run - Matt Fitzgerald
- The Footballer Who Could Fly - Duncan Hamilton
- The Secret Race – Inside the Hidden World of the Tour de France - Tyler Hamilton and Daniel Coyle
- A Weight Off My Mind – My Autobiography - Richard Hughes
- Be Careful What You Wish For - Simon Jordan
- Fibber in the Heat - Miles Jupp
- The Dirtiest Race in History – Ben Johnson, Carl Lewis and the 1988 Olympic 100m Final - Richard Moore
- Between the Lines: The Autobiography - Victoria Pendleton
- Swimming Studies - Leanne Shapton
- A Life Without Limits – A World Champion's Journey - Chrissie Wellington,
- Jonny: My Autobiography - Jonny Wilkinson,
- Shot and a Ghost: A Year in the Brutal World of Professional Squash - James Willstrop