

ESC – 1989 Telesquash tournament background

Dave Ferguson retrieved some information about this tournament from Andy Speight, one of the sponsors, Alastair A augmented it with financial information from the contemporary annual Reports, and Alastair McIntosh, a Director at the time threw in his pennyworth.

Alastair A had some information from ESC records around 1989 about “a Telesquash event” due to take place at the club, but there was no confirmation in the following year’s records that it had in fact happened. George Mieras, however, remembered seeing one. George Tierney, senior referee from Aberdeen, remembered refereeing such an event in Dyce, along with top Scottish referee Ian Allanach, in 1987. The Telesquash format had been the idea of Eric Farr of Ellon Squash Club and was an attempt to make squash more appealing to a TV audience. Alastair knew that Andy Speight of Abercorn had been heavily involved so, having been friendly with Andy for years, I phoned him on 8 October. He remembered a great deal.

Andy Speight

There was a Telesquash test event in 1987 at the Sgian Dubh Hotel in Dyce, on a normal squash court. It was sponsored by Globespan Telesquash International and shown on BBC. He thinks it was won by Mark Maclean and his final opponent was possibly Ashley Naylor.

The next event was held at ESC in April or May 1989 and sponsored by Standard Life, who gave £50,000. This was used to pay the club for 3 days’ court use (£5,000), expenses to the BBC presenter and prize money for the players. Unfortunately Derek Dolphin was very rude to the sponsors and the club gave Andy a partial refund. Andy thinks there may have been 8 players in the tournament, including the winner Jansher Khan and Chris Dittmar, Ross Norman and Mark Maclean. Telesquash was the first to use “PAR” – point-a-rally – and rallies were restricted. If they went beyond 15 shots, the server won the point. A buzzer would go off to warn that the next shot in the rally would be the last. The court walls (court 7 ?) were painted grey and a white ball was used. The adjoining court (6 ?) held the temporary spectator seating. The Saturday final was shown live on Grandstand. IMG, who also had a TV channel, sold VHS copies and photographer Steven Line took pictures for Squash Magazine.

Changes required to the above (per AA):

1. The event was held in February 1989
2. The fee received for court use was £4,750 (this might have included the reduction mentioned)
3. Court 7 housed the temporary seating (see the drawing plan on the history website at eschistory.org/plans/#1986)
4. Court 6 was the playing venue, repainted, the floor dark-ish green and the walls medium blue. It took years to get rid of the colour from the floor...
5. As an aside, Derek Dolphin got an official warning from the board, but laughed it off.

The reconstruction of courts 6 and 7, allied with the camera cottage (as Alastair McIntosh calls it) most likely cost between £50K and £60K, a component of the £68K figure recorded in the 1988 accounts as ‘addition to heritable property’. Some of that was attributable to a new gas boiler. The Annual Report notes for 1988, page 5 note ‘... the capital expenditure programme for the year was completed at a cost much greater than originally anticipated’.

Alastair McIntosh

Alastair (who was on the Board at the time), had a gut feeling that it was called off. Evidence shown above from Dave Ferguson and Andy Speight tend to countermand that opinion, but the whole affair remains shrouded in mystery.