

VANITY FAIR

SPORTS

The Greatest Place to Play Squash?

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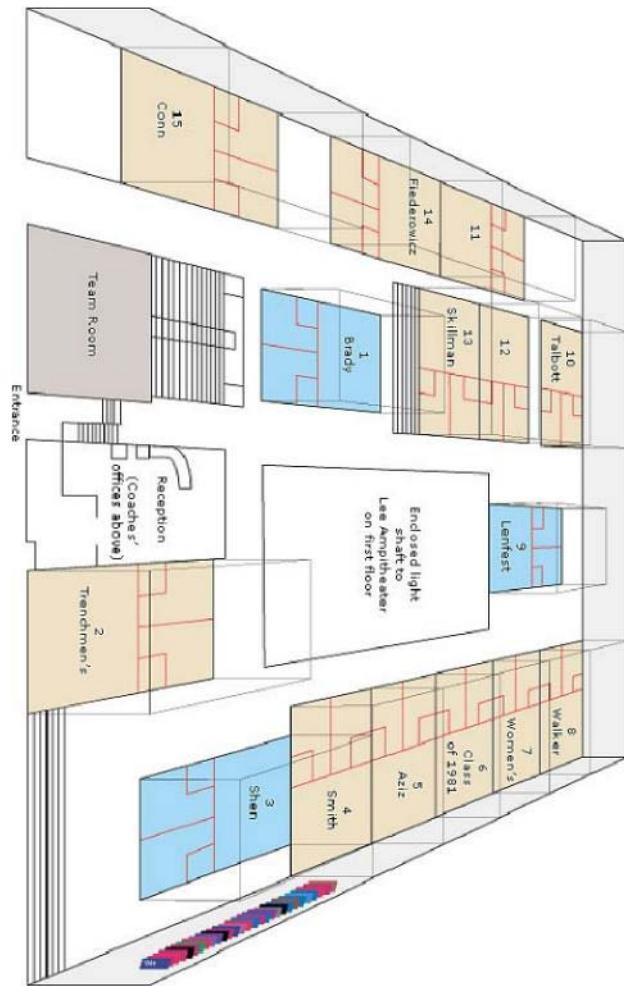
I have seen a few of the country's grand Squash Palaces, but I had always been told that I hadn't seen anything until I saw Yale's Nicholas Brady Squash Center. I thought Trinity College in Hartford had a pretty posh set-up; they've engineered a successful "squash-in-the-round" concept—a bit like an avant-garde theater set from the 1960's—that lets you roam around the spectator galleries and watch several different matches at a time. But Yale has gone them one better.

This picture starts to tell the story of this thousand-word post:



That's Yale coach Dave Talbott on the right, making nice with Chris Smith, the former Northeastern University coach and now Harvard's number two. Behind them is Yale's main exhibition court—pretty nice, but everyone has one of those. Uh, except Harvard... But over Smith's right shoulder you can see a gallery leading to more squash courts. Unseen, to Talbott's left, is another gallery that snakes around to two more open-design exhibition courts, and links all 15 of the Brady courts.

Here is a schematic of the layout (rotated 90 degrees clockwise, because otherwise it won't legibly fit into this blog):



If you are into squash trivia—and why else would you be reading this blog?—you have already spotted the poster with Mark Talbott, Dave's younger brother, in the gallery entryway over to the left. Dave and Mark used to coach Yale's men's and women's teams, respectively, until Stanford lured Mark away to coach its brand-new, Title-IX-complying women's team. You'll want to read my ferocious puff piece about Mark here.

Both Talbotts are spectacularly friendly and fun to be around. In the 1980s, they played exhibition matches against each other, sometimes dressed in formal wear, sometimes dressed in swimsuits. The day I stopped in to meet Dave, he characteristically kept several important college coaches and assorted squash nabobs waiting while he walked me around the Brady. We had all been booked in at the same 10 a.m. time slot: No worries!

What's amazing about Brady is that it was entirely retrofitted inside of Yale's ghastly, sarcophagal Payne Whitney gymnasium, not to be confused with Manhattan's ghastly, sarcophagal Payne Whitney psychiatric clinic, temporary abode of Marilyn Monroe, poet Robert Lowell, and novelist Mary McCarthy. The way Talbott tells it, Yale's fundraising pros said that Brady, captain of the 1952 varsity squash team and treasury secretary under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush¹, wouldn't come across with the dough.

But he *did* come across, with \$3.5 million of the \$7 million that would eventually be needed. Yale will name a facility after you if you donate half or more of the money needed, hence, the Brady Squash Center. The Talbotts and other Eli squash groupies raised the remaining \$3.5 million court by court. During our tour, Dave was enthusing about one of his exhibition courts ("Lenfest" on the map), which allowed for ground-level viewing, bleacher viewing, and

also had an elevated catwalk for spectators to peer down at the match.

'My buddy Chase ² built this one,' Talbott explains, waving his arms, clearly enamored of the court. 'He gave \$300,000. This is the greatest place to play squash.' Talbott points up to the spectator catwalks. 'You get the frat guys up there howling, screaming down into the court. It can be bedlam in here. Even the visiting players love it—it's just like a hockey game.'

Notes:

1. We know that squashomane Richard Fuld torpedoed the U.S. economy. Is it possible that Nicholas Brady saved it? Well, he tried, according to economics columnist David Warsh, and David Brooks, among others. Brady co-authored an influential *Wall Street Journal* editorial with former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker that advocated dramatic government intervention into the failing credit markets—advice that Paulson, Bernanke, et al took to heart, for better or worse. Warsh says Brady 'represent(s) what in the 1950s was confidently called the Establishment, a shadowy and shifting alliance of long-term stakeholders in American society whose demise has regularly—and misleadingly—been reported over the years.' Right—squash players!

2. Talbott elaborates: 'Chase Lenfest played for Yale and graduated in 1986, same year as my brother in law Ming Tsai. [This is the famous PBS chef, a former Yale number one player, who is married to Dave's sister Polly.] He played varsity all four years and still plays. He was a second team all American in college. Chase is also the man behind Squash Smarts in Philadelphia and is the major benefactor in their \$10 million center which was built in downtown Philly. You can see the details on their Web site.

Keywords:
[SQUASH](#)