IN THE NICK

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What SMUfit Ladies Monday Night Squash Is Doing For The Sport

By Judy Myrden

Ladies Monday Night Squash at **SMUfit** in Halifax has wrapped up another successful season.

The program has been recognized nationally for its success in promoting the participation of women and girls in squash.

"The level of participation in squash by women and girls in Nova Scotia on a per capita basis when compared to the rest of the provinces and territories is remarkable, due in very large part to the incredible success of the SMUfit Ladies Monday Night Squash program," **Squash Nova Scotia Vice-President Craig Potts** told the group at a recent squash tournament.

Upcoming Events

May 8: **Squash NS AGM**
(7 PM - Gorsebrook Lounge, SMU Campus)

May 21-24: KCSC Tournament for Education

Ladies Night Squash re-started in September 2023 encouraging females to try out the healthiest sport in the world, and to encourage those who have taken a break to get back on the court.

The two-hour session every Monday provides a welcoming and social introduction for beginner players - which in turn builds a strong community of women's players.



SMUfit Ladies Monday Night players following a clinic hosted by SMU President Michael Khan on March 23, 2026.

This year there were **13 sessions** in the Fall and **13** this Winter and Spring. (Despite having three snowstorm cancellations - the sessions were made up with extending the season!)

A Christmas tournament was held on December 8. It was the "largest-ever" turnout for the annual tournament with 24 players competing across three divisions and 36 matches played. The winners were: Div. 1 **Darlene Acton**, Div. 2 **Shelley Joyce** and Div. 3 **Cecilia Fritz**.

On April 27, the last session until it resumes in September, the third annual Spring Cut-Throat Calcutta was held at SMUfit.

Sara Stout-Grandy emerged as champion after five rounds of matches. With 18 women and girls participating. Again the numbers keep growing with the largest number playing in this event. (See group photo below with a beaming Sara Stout-Grandy in the front row on the left.)

The email list of participants continues to grow from 25 names in 2021 to over 75 names as of April 2026.

Turnout this season has been amazing with a full house each week doing drills, receiving instruction and playing recreational games. In the Fall session 30 registered and in the Spring session 26.

New players came out to try the sport, and others got back into the game, all helping to increase participation in the **Halifax Squash League** and tournaments - including; the **BlackKnight SMUfit 2025 Squash Tournament** in **October** with many women and girls from Monday night competing in the tournament.

In early February, fourteen Nova Scotians made the winter trek to **Charlottetown**, **P.E.I.**, to play in the **Squash DIVA 2026 Tournament** with 10 from the SMUfit Ladies Monday Night Squash. Along with family and friends who came out to support the players.



Sara Stout-Grandy, center, won the Calcutta beating Cecilia Fritz, left, and Nell Den Heyer. (Photo by Judy Myrden)

The tournament attracted 55 women from five provinces.

It was also an opportunity to watch the 2025 Canadian Women's Squash Champion **Nicole Bunyan** play in an exhibition match against Islander **Emma Jinks**.

It was a weekend of competition and fun.

Zoe Boody, 16, - a regular and enthusiastic member of the **SMUfit Ladies Monday Night Squash**, won her **FIRST** squash tournament taking the title of Women's Division 4 Championship at the tournament. Congratulations Zoe.

In both the **Ray Souchereau Memorial Squash Classic Tournament** in February and the **2026 ReCar Nova Scotia Open** a large number of women and girls participated.

These Monday nights are successful with the incredible support from many people helping to motivate women and girls to play.

SMU President Michael Khan, a former professional squash player and coach, volunteered his time on two occasions during the 2025-2026 season to conduct a clinic on the basics of squash, including the correct grip and another in February on the risky "drop shot."

Provincial Squash Coach Janet MacLeod, of **Wolfville**, conducted an excellent two-hour squash clinic on Easter Monday. She discussed the five pillars of squash and the four big ideas: mental mindset, movement, defend and rally, force and attack.

Sonja Esber, a **Halifax-based Holistic Lifestyle Coach, Personal Trainer, & Yoga Instructor**, returned again this year to lead the group in a dynamic warm-up for playing squash, and conducted four sessions on muscle strengthening designed for squash.

Squash Nova Scotia Vice-President and **tournament organizer extraordinaire Craig Potts** assisted in doing drills on occasions throughout the year, and making the draw for the December tournament and the Spring Cut-throat Calcutta.

Veronica Todd of **Sport Nova Scotia** who is squash representative ensures new Dunlop squash balls are provided throughout the year.

Also thanks for the support of **Saint Mary's University Fitness Coordinator Lindsay McFarlane** who ensures the courts are booked each week. (Lindsay is taking a new job as the Facility Manager at the **Prospect Road Community Centre**. Her last day at SMU is May 5.)

Dalhousie Squash Club New Executives

The **Dalhousie Squash Club** has a new slate of executive officers.

About 26 members of the club attended the Annual General Meeting at **Freeman's Little New York** in Halifax in late April.

The new executive includes: President **Sukhpreet Singh Aujla**, Vice-President **Alex Chin**, Treasurer **Will Garvey**, and Drop-In Representatives, **Dan Hasselman**, **Marybeth Stewart**, and **Nathan Purvis**.

The AGM highlighted key accomplishments from the past year, including three successful tournaments; **November a Beginner's One Day Tournament**, the annual **Dalhousie 2026 Squash Open** and the inaugural **Emily Byron Memorial Calcutta**.

Justin Ching-Johnson is on a Winning Streak

By Judy Myrden

Justin Ching-Johnson, a **SMUfit** squash player, is having a stellar year on the squash circuit.

The 30-year-old won the **iQ Commercial 2026 Atlantics Squash Tournament** Division 3 title, held April 9 to April 12 in **Moncton**, defeating **New Brunswick** player **Kieran Murphy** in a thrilling five game match.

Ching-Johnson personified grit and mental strength all weekend, playing four matches across 40 hours, coming back from being down 2-0 in both his quarter and semi round matches, and then from 2-1 in the final.

He also placed second in his division at the **P.E.I. Fall Classic** in November 2025

This latest win comes just two weeks after Ching-Johnson won the **ReCar 2026 Nova Scotia Squash Open** Division 2 title in Halifax, held March 26 to March 29 at **Saint Mary's University**.

"I'm both happy and surprised," Ching-Johnson told **In The Nick**. "I'm just super glad to have the opportunity to play so much friendly, yet competitive squash."

Ching-Johnson said he has been focusing on improving his game.

"I've tried implementing the advice of experienced mentors in the community - be more willing to work the rally/my opponent before going for my usual - kills or drops."

Just days before his win in Moncton, Ching-Johnson's **Halifax Squash League** (HSL) team won the 2025-2026 championship at SMUfit.



Justin-Ching Johnson at the SMUfit squash courts in Halifax. (Photo by Judy Myrden)

Ching-Johnson moved to Halifax in 2024 from **London**, **Ontario**, and since arriving, playing and volunteering in the squash community. He's the Layout Editor of **In The Nick** and Convenor of the HSL.

A competitive badminton player, he switched to squash in his second year of university at the **Western University Squash Club**.

Besides Ching-Johnson three other Nova Scotia squash players won titles at the iQ Commercial Atlantics held at Moncton Squash Club with 176 players across 16 divisions.

Matt Bishop, of Halifax, won the Mixed Division 1 title defeating **Liam Jinks**, of **P.E.I.**, in five games.

Saint Mary's University student **Victor Onyebuchi** won the Mixed Division 4 championship beating fellow SMUfit player **Bill Milliken**. Onyebuchi was unseeded in the division and defeated 2nd seed Milliken.

Valley squash player **Jeremi LeBlanc**, of Canaan, won the Junior Division 1 title defeating **Zakareeah "Zaki" Hussein**, a SMUfit player, 3-1.



(Photo by Darlene Acton)

2025/2026 HSL Winners

Cloudy with a Chance of Drops placed first in the 2025-2026 Halifax Squash League. Team members from left to right: **Victor Onyebuchi**, **Sara Stout Grandy**, **Jill Moore**, **Heather MacElwee** and Team Captain **Justin Ching-Johnson**. Ten teams competed in the league played out of **SMUfit** for the season.

NS at Canadian Junior Nationals

Two Nova Scotians played in the Canadian Junior Championships in **Vancouver**, **B.C.**, from April 25-28 held for the first-time at the Arbutus Club. On the left playing in the Under 17 Boys Division **Jeremi LeBlanc**, of **Canaan**, and **Luke Boody** (right), of **Halifax**, participated in the Under 15 Boys Division.



(Photo by Leah Boody)

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