

LETTER FROM AMERICA



James Zug reports on an impressive growth of squash courts in the Midwest and South of the USA

Squash in America has always been concentrated along the Eastern Seaboard, and in parts of the Midwest and South there are still a few pockets where you cannot find a court. A common trivia question is what was the last state in the union to get squash courts. The answer? Arkansas (at WalMart's offices).

Lately, however, there has been impressive growth in those two regions. Three urban after-school youth enrichment programs have their own, purpose-built, stand-alone facilities (in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, the three biggest U.S. squash cities), but now there is a fourth.

In April, Chicago's MetroSquash program finished an \$8million facility on the south side of the city. It is 21,000 square feet, with four classrooms, locker rooms, seven singles courts and one hardball doubles court. One of the singles courts has an innovative front wall that looks out onto the street. Coupled with the return of the Windy City Open to World Series status on the PSA Tour, Chicago is now as vibrant a squash city as possible. Indeed, in the spring MetroSquash helped host the 17th World Doubles Championships, the bi-annual WSF-sanctioned

hardball event that featured players from 17 nations.

The Carolinas are a sports-mad part of the U.S., but until recently they have been squash-poor (Atlanta was really the only squash hub between Florida and Virginia). However, the Charlotte Squash Club – a new, four-court facility – opened last autumn in a shopping center in Charlotte,



MARIAN KRAUS

The MetroSquash court in Chicago features on the cover of *Squash Magazine*

North Carolina (David Palmer, based a bit down the coast in Orlando, Florida, helped with the ceremonies). It is the first squash-centric club in the state.

Two years ago the University of Virginia, an Atlantic Coast Conference powerhouse, built a magnificent 11-court facility, where Mark Allen is the head coach. This in turn accelerated the spread of squash at universities in the ACC, one of the country's major collegiate sports conferences. In March, Duke University, another ACC school, built two new courts, giving new energy to the Blue Devils nascent squash club.

Collegiate squash, historically one of the two core engines of growth in the U.S., is finally making serious inroads at the major sports universities with their multi-million dollar budgets, top-notch facilities and high-profile programs.