
A History of Harvard Squash during the

DAVE FISH

COACHING ERA 1976-1989



INTRODUCTION

During the 65-year period from 1924 through 1989, only three men held the head coaching position of the Harvard men's squash team, namely Harry Lee Cowles, who led the program from 1923-36, during which time Harvard men won 11 national championships and 19 of the 20 formal intercollegiate matches they played during his tenure; John Morton Barnaby II, class of 1932, universally known as Jack, during whose 37 seasons of coaching from 1936-76 (there was a World War II-caused three-year hiatus in formal athletics at Harvard from 1943-46) the team won 16 Ivy League titles, 10 postseason six-man college crowns and 17 national titles; and David Robinson Fish, class of 1972, a two-time first-team all-American who served as team captain as a senior, whose teams during his playing career won the Ivy League and national college championships in all three of his varsity seasons and whose 13-year coaching career from 1976-89 featured a Crimson winning percentage of .912 (122-9, with only one non-Ivy League loss), eight Ivy League titles, seven postseason six-man titles, seven national championships and the USSRA Five-Man Team Championship in 1983, 1985 and 1988.



USSRA Five-Man Team: 1985

Though forced especially throughout his first few years at the head coaching position after a two-year apprenticeship as Coach Barnaby's assistant to deal with the de facto pressure of trying to emulate his pair of iconic predecessors, especially Barnaby, Fish in his own low-key way forged a record fully in keeping with the weighty legacy he inherited, even out-doing both Cowles and Barnaby in terms of sheer concentration of excellence, as witness the six consecutive undefeated seasons Harvard amassed from 1982-83 through 1987-88 (even Barnaby never had more than four such seasons in a row); the three USSRA Five-Man team triumphs in just six years, a feat accomplished by no college team either before or since in so brief a span; and the also-record 72 consecutive dual-meet victories during the seven-year period nearly to the day between losses to Princeton on February 6, 1982, and February 4, 1989.

Realizing by the end of the 1980's that he could no longer coach both the squash and tennis teams (the seasons having become increasingly travel-demanding, time-consuming and overlapping) and faced with having to choose one or the other, Fish entrusted the squash program to his highly capable former assistant coach Steve Piltch, who would guide the team to Ivy League crowns in two of his three seasons before becoming Head Of School at the Shipley School in suburban Philadelphia in September 1992. Fish has continued to this very day as coach of the tennis team (37 years'

worth and counting), which just this past spring won its 20th Ivy League title, and second in a row, in the last 32 years, a triumphant manner in which to mark FORTY-FIVE YEARS of virtually continuous high-level involvement with Harvard racquet sports since Fish first trod the Cambridge campus as a freshman in the autumn of 1968.

By that time Fish, a Newton, Massachusetts, native who had never played squash before entering the Phillips Exeter Academy in southern New Hampshire as a 10th-grader, had become that prep school's top player and captain in both tennis (where as a high-school senior he achieved the No. 1 ranking in the 18-and-under category in New England) and squash, demonstrating a comprehensiveness in applying his tennis experience to his new sport that made a lasting impression on his teammates and coaches, several of whom, including his classmate (and later Crimson varsity teammate) Rob Shapiro, noted years later that they came to regard him as a "coach on the floor" even way back then.

The 1968-69 Harvard freshman squash team (freshman were not eligible to play on varsity teams until the early 1970's), coached by Barnaby's longtime assistant Corey Wynn, was very strong, with Fish, Shapiro, Alan Quasha and Andover's top two 1968 players Rick Devereux and Paul Brown all being part of a squad that breezed through their schedule against other college freshman teams and the New England prep schools. Fish's strongest memory of that season was of how inspirational it was for him to watch Harvard's top two varsity players, senior Anil Nayar, who at the end of that season would win both his third straight Intercollegiate title and his first U. S. Nationals (with a successful defense to follow in 1970) and junior Larry Terrell, have intense challenge matches and practice sessions on Hemenway Gymnasium's regal exhibition courts.

CAPTAIN

The early 1970's was a positive but turbulent time for college campuses nation-wide, including Harvard (two of Fish's four years ended with student strikes and the campus shut down, with no exams), but the squash team itself continued to fly high, unfazed by the ferment. In Fish's entire three-year varsity career, only one match was as close as 5-4, namely his sophomore year against Penn, when the team was bailed out in the deciding match by junior Eddie Atwood, who rallied from two-love down to handily win the last three games against Penn's Jeff Condon, who had dominated his matches with Atwood throughout their high-school years in the tough Philadelphia prep leagues and as collegians. Rescued by Atwood's heroics, the team, led at various times by Terrell, Atwood, Fish --- who won the C Division for Nos. 5 and 6 players as a sophomore and recovered sufficiently from a bad midseason case of tennis elbow his senior year to lead Williams College star Tyler Griffin two games to one in the semifinals of the 1972 Intercollegiate Individuals before being edged in five --- and Peter Briggs, swept to the Ivy League, nine-man regular-season and six-man postseason crowns in 1970, 1971 and 1972.

Upon graduation, Fish, who had been planning on attending medical school, worked a second summer as the Director of Junior Tennis for the N.E.L.T.A. (now called USTA New England) as the go-to person in charge of transporting the New England juniors to national events, consulting on player selections to regional teams and advising tournaments. He spent the following year coaching tennis first through Thanksgiving at John Gardiner's famous tennis ranch in Carmel Valley, California, and then during the winter at another tennis ranch in Scottsdale, Arizona. He completed his version of the proverbial "year off" after college by traveling in Europe that spring, having decided during the Christmas break to return to Harvard to pursue his pre-med studies once his trip to Europe was over.



Harvard Men's Squash 1971-1972

HAND-PICKED

He did come back to start summer school at Harvard as a special student in the summer of 1973, fully intending to follow up on his decision, but right on the eve of starting classes, Barnaby invited him over to dinner in what turned out to be a life-changing conversation during which he asked, indeed urged, Fish to be his assistant coach for a few years and then succeed him at the head position. Flattered at having been tapped in this fashion to follow the footsteps of someone he so admired, and with the coaching bit already firmly in his mouth from his highly fulfilling experience with the N.E.L.T.A., Fish became Barnaby's special assistant during the latter's last two years. Barnaby's final season in 1975-76 was the stuff of dreams, as Harvard engineered upset wins over highly-favored Princeton teams first in squash, a 6-3 ambush at Hemenway at the expense of a powerful Princeton squad that had emphatically out-played Harvard the season before, and then in tennis over the No. 9 nationally ranked Tiger contingent as a two-part best possible good-bye present to their revered coach. Barnaby always gave Fish a major amount of credit for both of those wins, especially the squash outcome, noting that Fish had put the team on a conditioning program that winter for the first time, citing the beneficial impact it had had (several of Harvard's wins had been long five-gamers) and generously concluding that "a combination of inspiration and perspiration had done the trick."

Barnaby thus rode off into the sunset in a blaze of glory, just as his college-basketball counterpart and contemporary John Wooden had done when his UCLA team had defeated Kentucky in the 1975 NCAA final a year earlier, leaving behind both a legend under whose huge shadow Fish would be forced to labor for years (beginning with a stack of summer-1976 gallows-humor letters of the "Good luck filling the biggest shoes around" variety) and a college squash scene in the throes of a major measure of transition. The truth is that there had been fissures in Harvard's decades of dominance even during Barnaby's last few years --- Penn had led Harvard 4-1 after the odd-numbered matches had ended in '73 and only a Harvard sweep of the four even matches had salvaged that meet. Princeton had defeated Harvard in both '74 (before losing a week later to Penn, whom Harvard had then beaten, resulting in a three-way tie atop the Ivy League) and '75, though Harvard had rebounded to win the six-man postseason event on Princeton's home turf at Jadwin Gymnasium. As noted, Harvard had upset Princeton in '76, though a chastened Tiger squad had taken the six-man event to end that season. So Harvard had had to share the intercollegiate team bounty for several years, and perhaps been fortunate to come away with even that.



Harvard Men's Squash 1976-1977

EYE OF THE TIGER

By the mid-1970's period when Fish took full charge, Princeton had emerged as a truly formidable adversary, driven by their ambitious and innovative coach David Benjamin, a Barnaby product himself who in the mid-1960's had lettered in squash and captained the 1966 tennis team, and his squash co-coach Norm Peck, known as a brilliant squash strategist and tactician, who meticulously charted his players' matches, diagramming exactly in which part of the court each point was decided for future reference on an ever-present note pad. The Princeton onslaught was partly fueled by a no-apologies commitment to recruiting, which Harvard had never had to do during Barnaby's coaching career, throughout most of which the nearby New England prep schools had provided a reliable pipeline to Cambridge; indeed, there was a period covering nearly three decades, from 1932-1960, when the slice-oriented racquet genealogy of both Exeter coach George Bennett and Barnaby stemmed from Cowles, their common mentor, making it much easier for Exeter alums to transition into the Harvard program.

But by the early-1970's, the Philadelphia prep school leagues, bolstered by the vaunted junior-squash program at the Merion Cricket Club, had surpassed its New England counterpart in terms of the quality of its best players, contributing in part to two significant and slightly overlapping waves that impelled Princeton's ascent. The first resulted from the disproportionate number of the players on the powerhouse early-1970's teams representing Episcopal Academy in suburban Philadelphia that chose to matriculate at Princeton (the Bottger brothers, John and Dave, the Page brothers, David and Tommy, and Bob Callahan, who later became the Princeton coach for 32 years starting in 1981, were all among this number), and the second stemmed from the arrival of a freshman contingent in the 1975-76 academic year featuring no fewer than five exceptional players, namely Tommy Page, a Merion product regarded as the most talented American junior in many years, almost a prodigy; Frank Brosens, the 1975 New England Interscholastic champion from Belmont Hill; Bill Fisher, the middle of the three tennis/squash brothers from Exeter; Peter Thompson of Penn Charter, who years later would coach Princeton to the 1980-81 national championship, by which time Benjamin had chosen to concentrate on tennis and Peck was away on sabbatical; and Bob Bolling, a high-school baseball star who became a stand-out squash player as well.

Page, who as a freshman dethroned the two-time defending Intercollegiate champion Juan deVillafranca en route to the finals of that tourney in '76 as a major part of Princeton's six-man triumph that year, had departed the college scene before his sophomore year had ended, but the Brosens/Fisher/Thompson/Bolling quartet, their resolve if anything steeled rather than weakened by the '76 defeat they had suffered as freshmen at Hemenway, formed the rock-solid foundation of a Princeton team that swept to three-straight Ivy League titles from 1977-79 and laid the groundwork for national-championship runs in 1981 and 1982 as well.

The 1977 Harvard-Princeton meet at Jadwin was the real jumping-off point, both chronologically and psychologically, for the years of Princeton success that would follow. As noted, the teams, both of which were a full level at least above the rest of the Ivy League, had exchanged regular-season and six-man postseason wins, the two major prizes in college squash, over the previous two years, and, with this undulating back drop and both Fish and Harvard freshman sensation Michael Desaulniers making their debuts as head coach and No. 1 player respectively in Big Three competition, this meet had an era-defining feel to it.



Michael Desaulniers '80

With the score tied at three matches apiece (including Desaulniers's straight-set win over Callahan) and Princeton well ahead in one of the remaining matches while Harvard similarly led in the other, much of the attention became focused on No. 2 players Brosens and Harvard senior captain and first-team all-American Bill Kaplan, one of the heroes of Harvard's '76 win over Princeton with his victory at No. 1 over Callahan, and, like Brosens a former New England Interschols champ. Kaplan, fully exploiting the harshly-angled serves and drives that had undone so many opponents over his praiseworthy career, resulting in a top-15 ranking on the World Professional Squash Association (WPSA) hardball tour in the early-1980's, took the first game in a tiebreaker, then routed Brosens so thoroughly in the 15-2 second that the spacious gallery of the main Jadwin Gymnasium exhibition court nearly emptied as the disappointed Princeton spectators left to view the other matches, having given up on that one. With nothing to lose at that stage, and just hoping to avoid another humiliation in the third game, Brosens went for broke on a series of successful shot-making forays that gave him that game 15-6, after which, spurred on by a confidence-building "you-can-do-this" pep talk by Benjamin and some tactical suggestions from Peck during the ensuing between-games break, Brosens carried his momentum through the fourth and fifth games as Princeton, which also got two other wins when its players rallied after trailing two games to one (a total of seven match-games-against saved over those three matches), wound up with a 6-3 triumph that served as the launch-pad for the three-year Tiger championship run that ensued.



Harvard Men's Squash 1977-1978

It should be noted that Harvard DID have excellent teams throughout that time frame, their only non-Princeton losses coming at the hands of a '79 Penn team whose top two players, Ned Edwards and Jon Foster, future WPSA top-10 pros, met in that year's Intercollegiate final, and a '78 Western Ontario squad whose narrow 5-4 margin constituted the only Harvard loss in Fish's entire tenure to a non-Ivy League opponent. Page's Episcopal classmate John Havens went undefeated at No. 2 as a freshman, John Stubbs of Milton and Mitch Reese of Exeter were both New England Interschols champs, and Ned Bacon and the '78 captain Mark Panarese (who served as Fish's assistant coach for several years after his graduation) were both exceptional players as well whose luckless fate it was to have their college careers intersect with Princeton's most prolonged period of squash success in the school's history. Benjamin compiled an outstanding 39-1 mark during his four years (from 1974-78) as head coach of the squash team, Peck took the reins without the team missing a beat, Thompson did a remarkable job of coaching players several of whom had so recently been his teammates in his one-year stint, following which Callahan took the position, ostensibly for only that one 1981-82 year while on a break from his regular job at IBM, and wound up at the Princeton helm for 32 years until his retirement as a legendary figure in his own right in the spring of 2013.

All told, during the eight-year period from 1974-1982, Princeton went 81-2, their sole losses coming to Harvard, first in the memorable Barnaby send-off in '76 and then in 1980, Fish's fourth year as head coach, when the Crimson, led by their superstar senior Michael Desaulniers, who never came close to losing a single match while winning three Intercollegiate championships (assuredly there would have been a fourth were it not for the fractured foot that sidelined him from the 1979 event his junior year), won a tense 5-4 decision at Hemenway. Desaulniers held Princeton all-American Gary Fogler to single figures in each game, Clark Bain did the same to Jon Moore at No. 7, and Harvard earned a trio of five-game victories, from Stubbs over Chris Sherry at No. 3, from Rob Blake in a fifth-set best-of-nine tiebreaker with Bob Clothier at No. 8, and from sophomore Chip Robie at the No. 5 position.



Harvard Men's Squash 1978-1979

WINNING CHIP

Robie's opponent for the second straight year in the Harvard-Princeton dual meet was Jason Fish (no relation to Dave), who had won their '79 meeting, 18-17 in the fifth. In the rematch, by the last few games of which the team score stood at 4-all, hence with the overall outcome firmly on the line, the Princeton senior courageously saved FIVE fourth-game match-points against him (by rallying from deficits of 14-12 and two-love, set-three in the subsequent best-of-five tiebreaker), then surged from 8-13 in the fifth to 13-14, leading to a lengthy and riveting exchange that ended on a Fish backhand drop shot that clanged off the tin, giving an understandably relieved Robie a 15-13 win (on his seventh match-ball opportunity) and presenting Dave Fish with the first Ivy League and national championships of his Harvard head coaching career. A few weeks later, Desaulniers capped off his college career by winning both the U. S. Nationals (as he had also done two years earlier as a sophomore, when the event was held at Hemenway) and the Intercollegiates, each time decisively defeating Edwards in the final, then turned pro and became the North American Open champion and the No. 1 player on the WPSA pro hardball tour within two years.

Princeton, led by its senior captain, 1981 Intercollegiate champion and future WPSA top-three John Nimick, would reclaim the Ivy League title both that year and in 1982, but Harvard would build on its 1980 breakthrough and set the stage for the unprecedented period of dominance that would follow, beginning with an unexpected triumph in the 1981 six-man event that Fish would term "the greatest comeback ever in the history of Harvard squash." Team captain Bain, dealing in the C final against top seed Dennis Hisey with both a pulled leg muscle and a 7-3 fifth-game deficit, ended his college career on a triumphant note with a perfect three-wall at 14-12. 1979 New England Interschols champ Geordie Lemmon, winless in all of his prior career matches against Princeton star Steve Loughran, reversed that history with a solid four-game win in the B finals. Robie, playing with a sprained ankle, Reese and Charlie Duffy all garnered crucial points in the feed-in consolation draws (with Reese out-playing both Yale's Dave Barrett and Penn No. 1 Brian Roberts of later Comcast fame as two of his four Consolation-draw wins) and freshman Brad Desaulniers, Michael's precocious younger brother, advanced to the final of the A flight, all of which enabled Harvard to undo its early-tournament deficit and surpass Princeton in the final point standings.



Harvard Men's Squash 1979-1980



Harvard Men's Squash 1980-1981



Michael Desaulniers vs. Ned Edwards

CRIMSON DYNASTY

David Boyum, the highly-touted junior player from the Heights Casino club in Brooklyn whose cerebral approach so impressed Fish that he would praise his new star as having “the most accomplished squash mind since Victor Niederhoffer,” the five-time U. S. National champion who had attended Harvard in the early 1960’s, would arrive on campus the following autumn, immediately seizing the No. 1 position ahead of the younger Desaulniers, captain Robie, Lemmon and Reese, and reaching the finals of the U. S. National Juniors in December. Harvard’s strong top-of-the-lineup took four of the top five positions in the Princeton meet, even though Brad Desaulniers missed that match, but Princeton’s depth enabled the Tigers to sweep the Nos. 6-9 slots and escape town with a 5-4 win, when Harvard sophomore Spencer Brog was unable to convert a third-game match-ball opportunity against Rich Zabel at No. 6 and wound up losing in five. However, when Kenton Jernigan, Boyum’s conqueror in that ’81 Juniors final, joined him in Cambridge the following year, Harvard had become a monster that devoured every team that it faced during that 1982-83 season and throughout the five that followed in the greatest prolonged demonstration of blemish-free domination in the history of Ivy League squash.



Harvard Men's Squash 1981-1982

Jernigan and Boyum, for years the crown jewels of the USSRA’s Junior programs and later top-echelon WPSA pros who also for several late-1980’s years formed one of that tour’s better doubles teams, opposed each other that 1982-83 year in the finals of the Harry Cowles Invitational, a high-end tournament for the top amateur players in the country hosted by the Harvard Club Of New York in late January; the U. S. Nationals in San Francisco in mid-February (after a great Jernigan rally from a 10-4 fifth-game semifinal deficit against Gil Mateer); and the Intercollegiate Championship in early March, where a Jadwin Gymnasium gallery half-filled with dejected Princetonians (who a few weeks earlier had seen Harvard sweep the top seven positions in a 7-2 victory) had to watch two Harvard players vie for the college game’s greatest individual prize. Boyum prevailed in the Cowles, and played much of the season at No. 1, but Jernigan won the first of his three-straight U. S. Nationals in San Francisco and the first of three Intercollegiate crowns in their rubber match at Jadwin.



Harvard Men's Squash 1982-1983

The other members of Harvard's top tier during that mid-1980's period --- Brad Desaulniers, Canadian National Juniors champion Richard Jackson, who transferred to Harvard as a sophomore in September 1983, and Lemmon --- were so strong that there were actually a few team meets during that time in which Jernigan, the reigning national champion, was playing at No. 3 on his own college team! And the rest of the varsity --- Jim Lubowitz, the Dinneen brothers, John and Peter, both former Deerfield Academy stand-outs, and Spencer Brog --- was good enough for Harvard to win the USSRA Five-Man Team tournament that weekend in San Francisco, even though Boyum and Jernigan were entered in the singles and hence weren't eligible to play in the team event.

Reinforcing this intimidating group one year later was a stellar class of 1987 that included Joe Dowling, a star on Choate's 1983 New England Interschols championship squad, who would go undefeated in dual-meet play throughout his Crimson career; Kenton Jernigan's younger brother Kevin; Will Iselin and his twin brother Nick, later (from 2010-12) the president of the Harvard Club Of Boston; and Greg Lee, an early-1980's New England Interschols standout whose younger brother Ernie would follow his footsteps from a strong St. Paul's team into the Harvard program several years afterwards. They were joined by Philadelphia prep star Russ Ball, the lithe Indian Darius Pandole (who as a Harvard underclassman won the Yale Club Invitational, the Gold Racquets and the Cowles) and Jack Polsky as the lead figures in the equally-strong class of 1988. Princeton continued to provide the stiffest opposition (three of the Nos. 1-4 matches in the '85 dual meet at Jadwin extended to a fifth game) but Harvard won all of its matches against Princeton and everyone else by scores of 6-3 or greater from 1983-88 until a Franklin & Marshall team composed of a number of prominent members of Haverford School's powerful mid-1980's squads pushed the Crimson to 5-4 (with Harvard No. 9 Seth Handy having to fend off a match-ball-against) midway through the 1987-88 season, a meet that co-captain Ball had been forced to miss due to a groin injury incurred the day before in Harvard's 6-3 win over Princeton. The '84 team dealt with a brief Jernigan slump and a bad late-January wrist injury that sidelined Boyum, yet barged through the schedule, with Jernigan regaining his form in time to successfully defend the U. S. Nationals and Intercollegiate titles he had earned one year earlier as a freshman.

He would win the U. S. Nationals the following year (i.e. in 1985) at Yale's Payne Whitney Gymnasium (a weekend that saw the Crimson again walk away with the USSRA Five-Man team trophy as well), then lose in the '86 final to Yale's senior captain Hugh Labossier, creating a rare situation two weeks later in the Harvard-Yale meet in New Haven in which the two No. 1 players were having a rematch of the U. S. Nationals final. Labossier won the first two games, but Jernigan rallied to

a five-game win, then capped off his college career in triumphant fashion by winning his third Intercollegiate crown ahead of a WPSA pro career in which he rose to as high as No. 2 and captured the 1990 WPSA Championship. For all the marquee value implicit in the backdrop of the Jernigan-Labossier match, it should be noted that Harvard left New Haven that night with an 8-1 tally and went undefeated and mostly unthreatened in both 1986-87 and 1987-88, when Ball advanced to the finals of the U. S. Nationals and Harvard also left Denver having won the USSRA Five-Man Team title for the third time in six years, as noted the most by any college team in such a compressed time frame in the history of that tournament.

Throughout that heady 1980's era, as the wins kept coming and, eventually, the records (even those attained by Barnaby) started falling, Fish continued to blossom as a coach, fully secure in the comforting knowledge that he had solidly established his own persona as a top-echelon coach apart from the Harvard legacy established by Cowles and Barnaby. Indeed, far from merely adopting and continuing the principles ingrained in him by Barnaby, he had built upon them, expanding and enhancing them, furthering the entire coaching profession in the process and raising it to a whole new level. The racquet company Snauwaert went so far as to hire him as a consultant to improve its product's balance and grip (Fish felt that beveling one side of the grip and rounding off the other would benefit one's stroke production), even producing a poster featuring Fish executing a drop shot.



Harvard Men's Squash 1983-1984



Harvard Men's Squash 1984-1985

SQUASH'S PHIL JACKSON

As extraordinary as the statistics his squads relentlessly compiled were, Fish was better known by those close to him, including especially his coaching counterparts from the other schools, as a highly analytical and intellectual coach, “the greatest creative mind in squash,” according to one of his longtime rivals, and almost a genius in the mechanics and strategy of the sport, someone whose imagination could embrace squash’s ethereal and esoteric side while also grounding those in enough practical reality to be tangibly applicable to his young charges. If Barnaby’s closest coaching counterpart of that era was John Wooden, Fish’s may well have been another record-shattering basketball coach, namely Phil Jackson, who during the decades of the 1990’s and 2000’s guided first the Michael Jordan/Scottie Pippen Chicago Bulls and then the Shaquille O’Neal/Kobe Bryant Los Angeles Lakers to a record 11 NBA championships.

Both Fish and Jackson played major roles on championship teams themselves, both out-did their higher-profile teammates in what they accomplished after their playing careers ended, both dealt highly productively with the powerful egos of their top players and both thoughtfully and convincingly conveyed the time-tested pathways to competitive success while simultaneously venturing well out of the box when circumstances warranted their doing so, open-mindedly drawing upon successful models from other sports and philosophical traditions to expand the mental and physical abilities of their players and to bring out the best in each of them.

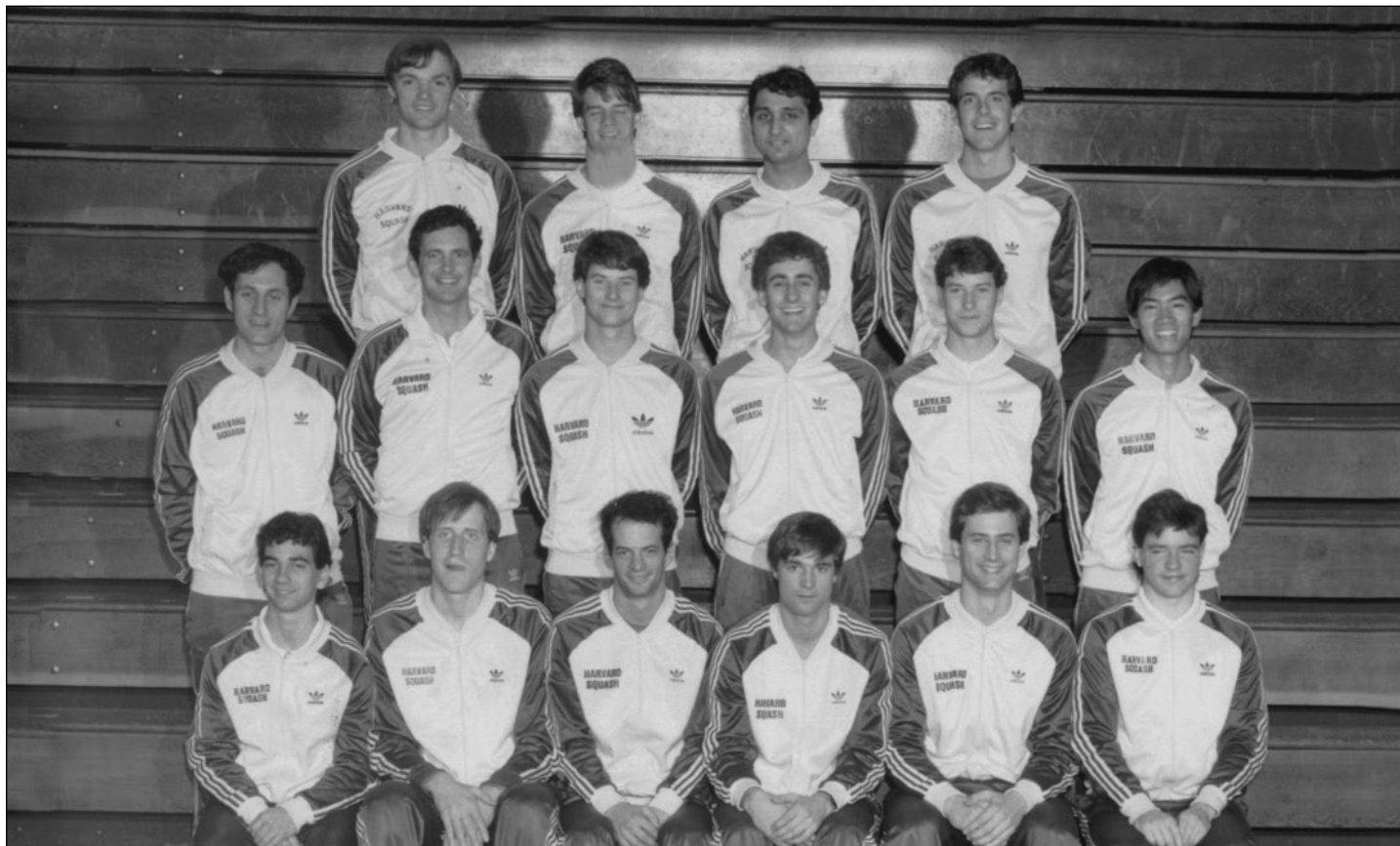
Fish possessed a noteworthy knack for developing practice patterns --- much harder to do with the hardball than with the current-era softball --- that equipped his players both with the ability to execute the important front-court hardball shots (to lay down a drop shot and reverse-corner and to spin a three-wall into the nick) and to select the most effective one at any given time. He was able to tailor his advice to each player based on the characteristics of their games and athletic capacities, and, for that matter, to the challenge of the match immediately ahead of them; there was a memorable pre-match drilling session before Jernigan had to play an important match in the Intercollegiate against a power-hitting opponent who however Fish viewed as vulnerable to the three-wall. Fish made sure that Jernigan was spinning his three-wall properly, then watched from the gallery as Jernigan three-wall-nicked his opponent into oblivion en route to one of his three Intercollegiate crowns.

Fish similarly played a major role in Ball’s remarkable advance to the ’88 U. S. Nationals final, the highlight of which was his quarterfinal win over Princeton star and future WPSA top-five Jeff Stanley, who had annexed both the U. S. Nationals and Intercollegiate Individual titles in 1987. Ball vividly remembers how Fish, wary of Stanley’s extraordinary athleticism (which had overwhelmed Ball in their prior meetings), devised a game plan predicated on keeping the ball tight to the walls, thereby crimping Stanley’s superior firepower and forcing him into tight spots, constrained swings and limited opportunities, which allowed Ball (who executed this stratagem flawlessly) to play the match much more on HIS terms than on Stanley’s and resulted in an eyebrow-raising but convincing straight-set victory, following which Ball defeated Western Ontario’s Mark Barber in the semis and pushed the eventual champ Scott Dulmage, a future WPSA top-five himself, all the way to a fifth game in the final.

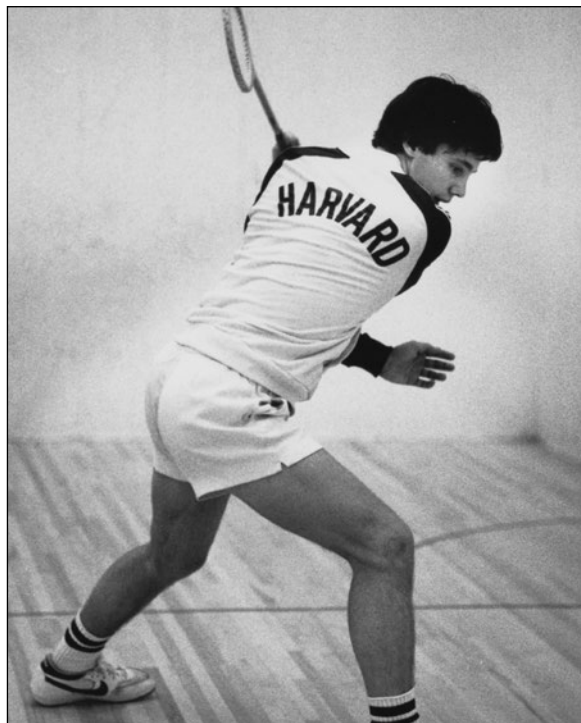
As well, knowing that Michael Desaulniers’s greatest advantage was the way he could accelerate the pace beyond his opponent’s limits, Fish invented drills designed to make Desaulniers play at an even faster tempo, creating an energy zone that melted the willpower of anyone who played him. Because no two players had precisely the same mix of skills and limitations, Fish’s prescription to each player was unique, reflecting as it did the coach’s attempt to identify the stubbornly elusive solution of unlocking the potential that he felt lay in each of his players. There were definitely some stroking principles that he felt had a certain universality in the hardball game, however, among which were (1) “holding” the ball to keep the opponent from anticipating the upcoming shot for as long as possible, (2) shortening the swing, again to make it harder to “read,” (3) laying the ball down with severe backspin, and (4) “pulling across” the three-wall with side-spin to draw it into the nick.

In addition, Fish developed what he regarded as the most efficient way to initiate ball-retrievals, namely a “unit turn” in accordance with which the nearest foot (i.e. the right foot when preparing for a ball hit to the player’s right) swivels as the racquet is raised with the knuckles up and the shoulder swiveling out. Realizing that with the advent of the seventy-plus ball in the late 1970’s a greater premium would be placed on fitness, stamina and conditioning than had been the case with the old, much bigger hardball on the colder courts of yesteryear, Fish took up yoga, immersed himself in a book entitled “Total Body Conditioning” by Richard Dominguez and Robert Gajda, conveying many of its principles

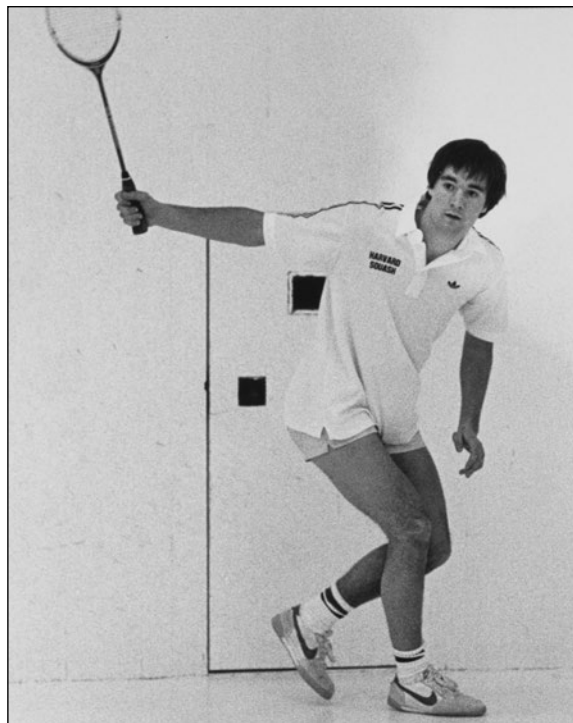
to his young charges and making it “their conditioning Bible” of sorts, and, in November 1982, with the total support of the co-captains Lemmon and John Dinneen, arranged for the team to travel to London to play a series of practice matches against clubs and English colleges with the softball.



Harvard Men's Squash 1985-1986



David Boyum '85



Kenton Jernigan '86

PIONEER

This latter excursion was yet another case of Fish pioneering what would eventually become an accepted and valuable aspect of a college squash season. All top-tier college programs make this type of late-autumn trip prior to the start of the schedule nowadays, but at the time it was viewed as controversial, even representing a potential peril to the dynamics of the upcoming campaign --- why spend 10 days playing SOFTBALL (as well as several weeks practicing with the softball before departing for Europe) on the eve of and in preparation for a HARDBALL season?

The question was even posed directly to Fish in an interview, and his response was measured, thoughtful and totally compelling as he cited the personal-growth value to visiting other cultures, noted that it would give the team something to point for in their fall conditioning program, asserted that there are elements of squash that are more fully and easily learned by playing softball than hardball, lamented his own tardiness in taking note of this latter point, and concluded that the overall benefits would more than compensate for the small amount of difficulty that the players would have in changing back to hardball upon their return. The trip itself was a total success, with many players fondly remembering it as a true high point of their years at Harvard and with the team, as mentioned, then embarking on the first of six consecutive undefeated seasons.



Kenton Jernigan '86, Dave Fish '72, Darius Pandole '88

For all the foresight, technical/tactical acumen and insight into squash's psychological side that characterized Fish as a coach (areas in which the pretty universal view by the end of his career had become that he was even Barnaby's superior), his greatest strength, and the one that made opposing coaches and players alike the most wary, was his ability to hit precisely the optimum note in those five-minute sessions between the third game and the fourth which during his era was the only time that coaches were allowed to offer in-match counsel to their players.

In that highly-fraught, extended between-games break in the action, where so many well-intentioned coaches fall prey to the temptation to overload their players with advice, failing to fully take into account the player's emotional state, exhaustion level and/or ability to process so much instruction, Fish was an absolute master at synthesizing the most relevant elements of any given match situation and at calmly but convincingly imparting just enough clearly-presented perspective and advice to be fully understood and effectively executed. Harvard players could always be counted upon to play better at the outset of the fourth game than they had at the end of the third, and the number of Crimson wins from two games to one down is a graphic testament to Fish's expertise in this crucial department.



Harvard Men's Squash 1986-1987



Harvard Men's Squash 1987-1988

By the end of the banner 1987-88 season, however, and with the graduation that spring of five members of the starting nine in Ball, Pandole (whose younger brother Faroukh would arrive the following September), Polsky, Jack Colbourne and James Gilfillan, Harvard finally looked vulnerable entering the 1988-89 season both to a revived Princeton team led by '87 U. S. Nationals champ Jeff Stanley and to an emergent powerhouse in New Haven, where an aggressive recruiting effort throughout the prior few years by their dynamic young coach Dave Talbott --- who had edged Fish in a fifth-set tiebreaker when the two met in the No. 1 match of the 1968 Exeter-Deerfield meet, and whose younger brother Mark, the No. 1 player in North America, frequently practiced with the team and later, as Yale women's coach, led the Elis to the 2004 Howe Cup championship --- drawing much of its impetus from the vaunted Heights Casino junior program, had landed Yale with the most talented squad that it had fielded in decades.

Yale entered that year having lost 27 consecutive dual meets to Harvard (including seven-straight 9-0 shut-outs from 1969-75), which it had last defeated in 1961, but when Princeton forcefully ended Harvard's 72-match winning streak in early February by an 8-1 score and Yale subsequently pinned an almost equally one-sided 7-2 number on Princeton, that pair of tallies engendered the near-universal expectation that Harvard's extraordinarily lengthy domination of Yale would finally and emphatically come to an end at Hemenway Gymnasium on the frigid evening of February 22nd.

Fish had already announced several months earlier that that 13th season would be his last as Harvard's squash coach and that he would be thereafter be focusing solely on tennis. The college racquet-sports paradigm had evolved to the point where the squash and tennis seasons each imposed too great a burden in terms of energy and time for one person to coach both sports, the travel demands of the increasingly overlapping seasons were depriving him of the chance to see his young children, Alex and Ashley, grow up, and he was confident in the knowledge that Steve Piltch, his top assistant during the mid-1980's and head coach of the Harvard women's team since 1986, was fully capable of assuming the reins of the squash program. In the face of the dire predictions for the Yale match, Fish characteristically maintained his cool, acknowledging the strength Yale had exhibited but politely insisting that his team would show up to play that night as planned. Whatever resentment he may have felt at the disrespect shown the Crimson varsity in the lead-up to the dual meet was kept carefully under wraps.

Meanwhile the Yale convoy that rolled up the Massachusetts Turnpike to northern New England that afternoon was brimming with confidence, maybe to excess. The squad was accompanied by several busloads of fans, friends and supporters who badly wanted to witness first-hand the seemingly certain transfer of supremacy from the longtime incumbent to the finally superior insurgent, pervading the traveling caravan with a sense of celebratory coronation rather than what the Blue-clad invaders should have realized would instead by all odds be a stern competition in a hostile setting in which so many bad outcomes had befallen Yale teams for decades past. The still-powerful Crimson men had no intention of meekly playing the role of a compliant foil, least of all on their cherished home turf. Galvanized rather than deflated by the prior Big Three results and desperately wanting to send their revered coach out on a winning note, they realized their goal that night with a vengeance that reverberated throughout the squash world.

In the aftermath of the stunning 6-3 defeat they suffered that wayward full-moon evening, various Yalies had varying views on its cause. Some players mentioned the festive afternoon mood and its disquieting contrast to the worried silence in their locker room immediately before the matches began. Others pointed to the intensity and volume of the noise that emanated from the packed and raucously pro-Harvard crowd, which sensed their potential impact right from the start and bellowed their approval as the unexpected rout was unfolding. Recalling that misadventurous night many years later, Coach Talbott himself lamented the fact that his team arrived in Cambridge so early that the players had more than an hour to kill after their pre-match practice session had ended and lost an edge they would never regain while catching a post-practice nap on the team bus.

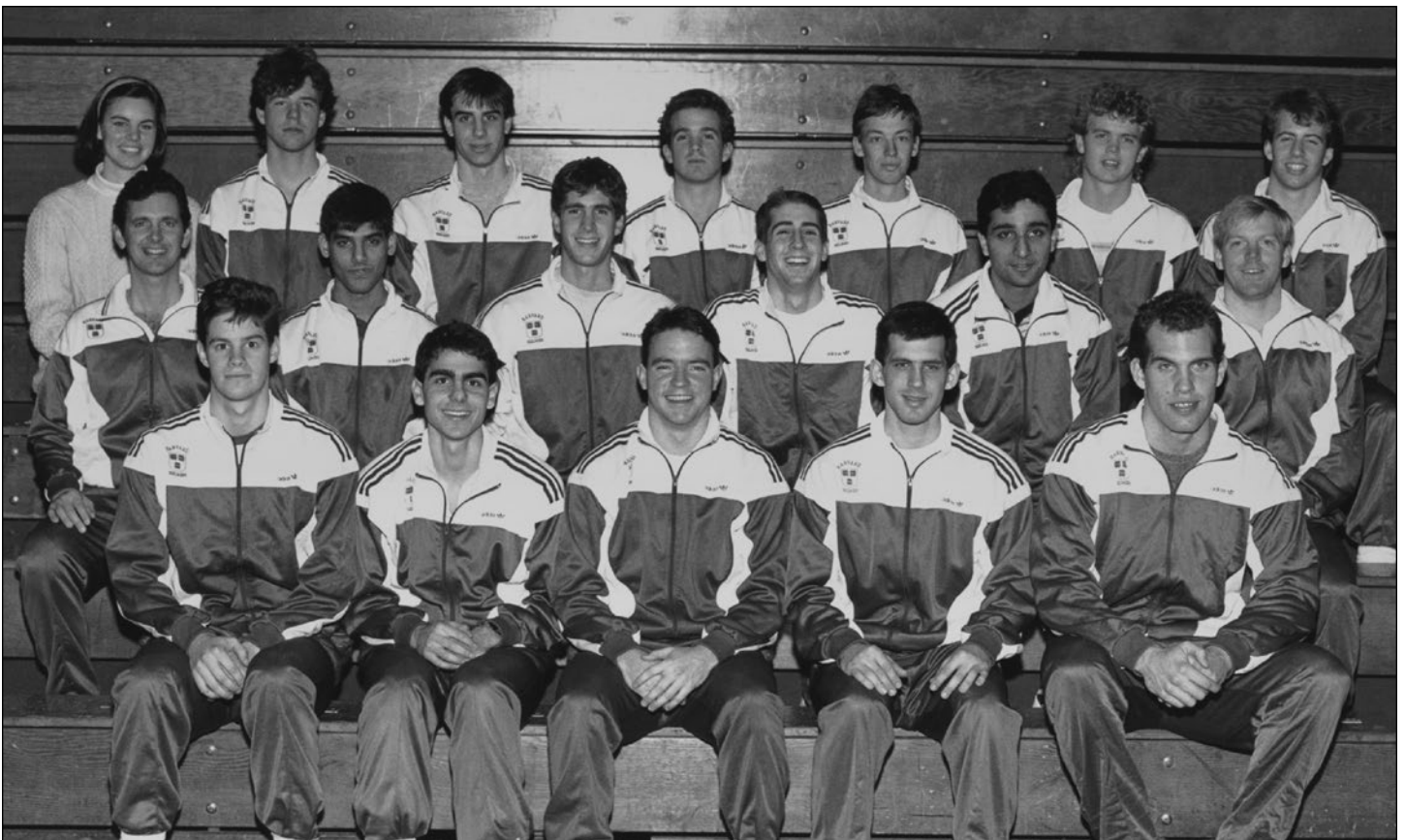
Cambridge karma, scheduling miscue or perfect storm, a determined and inspired Harvard squad turned the aging mausoleum that was Hemenway Gymnasium into an infernal snake-pit in which Yale's year-long hopes for an undefeated season were destroyed in three torrid hours of madness and mayhem. With the "evens" on first, Israeli-born Jonny Kaye got the meet started with a decisive straight-game victory at No. 4 over the favored Alex Dean (reversing their outcome of a few months earlier in an invitational tournament) and the momentum he thereby generated would never

be quelled. At Nos. 6 and 8, Harvard got crucial five-game wins from George Polsky over Erik Wohlgemuth and from Jon Masland over Tuffy Kingsbury, and when Crimson freshman Faroukh Pandole out-played Yale captain Tom Clayton at No. 3 in the first of the “odd” matches, Harvard was suddenly just one win away from the five that it needed.

Yale No. 1 John Musto, who had played brilliantly the weekend before in reaching the semis of the U. S. Nationals, was ironically undone by the very magnitude of this performance, which left him so depleted for his match with Jonny Bernheimer just three days later that by early in the third game, having by a single point (a perfect Bernheimer three-wall) dropped a second-set tiebreaker the winning of which would have given him a two games to love lead, he was completely exhausted. Bernheimer’s four-game first-ever win over Musto, coming atop the Kaye victory and the trio of Crimson wins in the middle of the lineup, sealed the team outcome (thereby giving Harvard a share as well of the Ivy League title, which it had won outright the prior six years), which an understandably elated Bernheimer punctuated by repeatedly jumping for joy and brandishing his fist on court in front of a delirious crowd.



Jonathan Bernheimer '90



Harvard Men's Squash 1988-1989

VINDICATION

By midnight, a chastened Yale squad was sitting in stunned silence through an agonizing three-hour bus ride home to New Haven while a euphoric Harvard crew had presented a poignant triumph as the best possible going-away gift to their beaming coach, just as their Crimson-clad counterparts had done 13 years earlier in the same arena and by the same 6-3 score to THEIR coach, Barnaby, with whom (along with assistant coach John Anz and Michael Lartigue, an undergraduate reporter for the school newspaper, *The Crimson*) Fish spent several post-match hours in understated but genuine celebration. After expressing admiration for the way his players had “put all of their energy into that match,” and saluting them for the “win one for the coach” battle cry that clearly had played a significant role in the victory, Fish allowed himself a rare explicit moment of vindication, not only of the triumphant evening but of his entire career, when he admitted late that night just before heading home that “I think we really did get the program back to the standard that Jack Barnaby and Harry Cowles established,” thereby acknowledging the elephant that had silently but persistently accompanied him throughout the entire 13-year odyssey, namely that following in Barnaby’s footsteps had been both a major blessing and, through no fault of either man, a complex burden.

Yale would reverse that night’s result three days later by defeating Harvard in the semifinal round of the first-ever nine-man team postseason tournament (prior to 1989 the postseason tourney had always involved six players whose aggregate points in three individual categories would contribute to an overall team tally), the Art Potter Trophy, then go on to out-play Princeton in the final. But nothing that happened during that anticlimactic weekend could diminish what the 1988-89 Harvard team accomplished. In the remaining five years of intercollegiate squash leading up to the switch to softball beginning with the 1994-95 season, Harvard and Yale would continually meet in late February for supremacy, with the results going both ways and three of those matches being decided by 5-4 margins, right up to the very last hardball Harvard-Yale match on the snowy New Haven evening of February 23rd, 1994, with the Ivy League and national title at stake, which would careen literally to a simultaneous-championship-point culmination with both sides having four wins in the bank and the No. 3 match between Yale’s Jamie Dean and Harvard’s Tal Ben-Shachar going to 17-all in the fifth, whereupon Dean loudly bashed the tin in attempting a serve-return winner.

By that time Fish, whose current official title is the Scott Mead Family Head Coach For Harvard Men’s Tennis (current Crimson men’s and women’s coach Mike Way is the first holder of the Gregory Lee ’87 And Russell Ball ’88 Endowed Coach For Squash position, established in 2010), was well on his way to becoming, as he currently is by a wide margin, the winningest tennis coach in Harvard’s history, and to racking up Intercollegiate Tennis Association Regional Coach Of The Year citations (FOUR of them over the past 20 years) for himself and Ivy League titles (20 of the last 32, including each of the past two years) for his teams. His tennis position was endowed in 2009 by Scott Mead, class of 1977, a multi-year squash and lacrosse letterman at Harvard, current Chairman of the trustees at the famed Queens Club in London and a Director of the Harvard Alumni Association, who, like his former Andover teammate Bill Kaplan, contributed a key win in the 1976 Crimson squash team’s upset victory over Princeton his junior year, and who, starting in the late 1980’s, became an active member of Larry Scott’s Advisory Board when Scott was first the COO of the ATP men’s pro tennis tour and then the CEO of the WTA women’s pro tennis tour.

In addition to coaching the Harvard men’s tennis team, Fish is currently heavily involved in promoting the adoption of a Universal Tennis Rating system that he views as an innovation with the potential to transform the level, culture and affordability of American tennis. He was the keynote speaker at the 1992 Harry Cowles Invitational dinner and in February 2008 he, along with Piltch and Bill Doyle, the Harvard men’s and women’s squash coach from 1992-99, were the honorees at a huge party at the Harvard Club Of New York, where many of their grateful former players took turns at the podium extolling the contributions that these three men had made to their Harvard experience and subsequent lives.

Having just turned 63 years old as of this early-May 2013 writing, Fish lives in Newton, the town he was born and grew up in, with his wife, Bonnie, a clinical psychologist who practiced for 25 years and now runs The Tennis Academy at Harvard full-time. Alex and Ashley, both in their early 30’s, live in New York where Alex, a former Belmont Hill squash captain, is head of U. S. Development for Pulse Radio.net and a world-traveling disc jockey, and Ashley is a buyer in the fashion industry, currently for the Century 21 Department stores.

Fish himself continues to maintain his good health and good spirits, never allowing himself to savor what he has achieved for too long or to become overly impressed with his universal reputation as a racquet-sports guru and always pursuing a never-ending curiosity with his players, current and former, their games and the relationship between their experiences on the court and their lives beyond it.



REFLECTIONS FROM DAVE FISH

How fortunate we all are to have been a part of such a rich period for Harvard Squash! It was my privilege to oversee the Harvard Squash program during those years. It was an honor to coach so many fine champions, but an even greater honor to have coached so many fine young men.

Just looking at the team photos of players during these years has brought back a flood of fond memories for me, as I hope it has for you. It is of course our relationships - not our deeds - that have the most lasting impact on our lives. I am blessed beyond words.

In particular, as any Head Coach knows, he or she can never hope to bring a team to its full potential without able assistant coaches. Together, we faced the formidable task of meeting “triumph and disaster and treating those two impostors just the same.” My great gratitude to Mark Panarese ‘78, Bill Austin, Peter Dinneen ‘85, John Anz, and of course, Steve Piltch.

Special thanks to our good friend and former Varsity standout and Captain, Joe Dowling ‘87, for ensuring that this retrospective was researched and written by one of the finest writers in the squash world, Rob Dinerman, Yale ‘76. Rob’s attention to detail has brought this period to life. Thank you, Rob, on behalf of all of Harvard Squash, past, present and future. You’ve left us a wonderful “time capsule” of Harvard Squash during these years.

Thanks also to Hope Nichols Prockop ‘90 and Bill Kaplan ‘77, under whose leadership the Friends of Harvard Squash seems to get stronger all the time.

A word about the Friends. Each one of us has been “befriended” by the Friends of Harvard Squash in some way. I was privileged to have the support of Dick Chute ‘60, who chaired the Friends for 17 years, and after whom we named a special “Community Service” award that hangs in the Barnaby Gallery in the Murr Center. So many other “Harvard Greats” gave so much as well: Germain Glidden ‘36, Charlie Ufford ‘53, Dinny Adams ‘66 the list goes on. These men were or still are “life” champions. They have been lighthouses to me throughout.

We usually have no way to repay those who have helped us personally except by “paying it forward.” Jack Barnaby did when he started the Friends out of necessity during the post-WW II belt-tightening years for Harvard Athletics. (The tennis boom had not yet hit, and since so many of us still played both tennis and squash, it remained the “Friends of Harvard Tennis and Squash” until the late ‘80s.) Without Jack’s efforts to compile the names and addresses of hundreds of former players - unaided by the technology that we now take for granted - where would we be now?

We offer our best wishes to members of present and future editions of Harvard Squash, now under the most capable care of our own world-renowned Michael Way. Harvard Squash is fortunate indeed to have his “Barnaby-like” enthusiasm and insights. Mike is fortunate indeed to have a great staff and a secret weapon in his wife, Beth Zeitlin, under whose exceptional conditioning and recovery care the members of the squash teams (and now tennis teams) find themselves. Win or lose, in seasons to come, we’re behind you!

I look forward to reading future retrospectives on equally successful eras of Harvard Squash, still yet to come.

In gratitude and humility,

Dave Fish ‘72

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Squash archivist Rob Dinerman has written numerous squash histories over the years, including a History of Yale Squash During The Dave Talbott Era and, more recently, a Tribute To The Princeton Coaching Career of Bob Callahan. As a four-year varsity member of the Yale class of 1976, his college playing career occurred right in the middle of Harvard's 27-match winning streak against the Elis from 1962-89, though he did subsequently earn a top-10 WPSA ranking while winning more than 50 Open hardball tournaments and reaching the finals of the U. S. Nationals twice. He recently published a prep-school memoir, "Chasing The Lion: An Unresolved Journey Through The Phillips Exeter Academy," passages of which can be found in the Excerpts section of the web site RobDinerman.com. For the past two years, he has been the Editor of Dailysquashreport.com.

Mr. Dinerman wishes to thank the Harvard Sports Information Department, especially Assistant Director of Athletic Communications Brett Moore; Harvard Varsity Club Trevor MacDonald; Friends of Harvard Squash co-chairs Bill Kaplan '77 and Hope Nichols Prockop '90; Joe Dowling '87, who coordinated this project; former USSRA Presidents Len Bernheimer and Jack Herrick for their major assistance in providing much of the documentation required to research this project; as well as Harvard squash alums Dinny Adams '66, Rob Shapiro '72, Michael Desaulniers '80, David Boyum '85, Mark Panarese '78, Greg Lee '87, Russ Ball '88 and Chip Robie '82; Princeton squash alums Frank Brosens, Bill Fisher, John Nimick, Rob Hill, Jason Fish and Peter Thompson; and college squash coaches Bob Callahan (Princeton), Dave Talbott (Yale), Paul Assaiante (Trinity College) and David Benjamin (Princeton), each a coaching legend in his own right, for the extensive phone interviews they generously granted.
