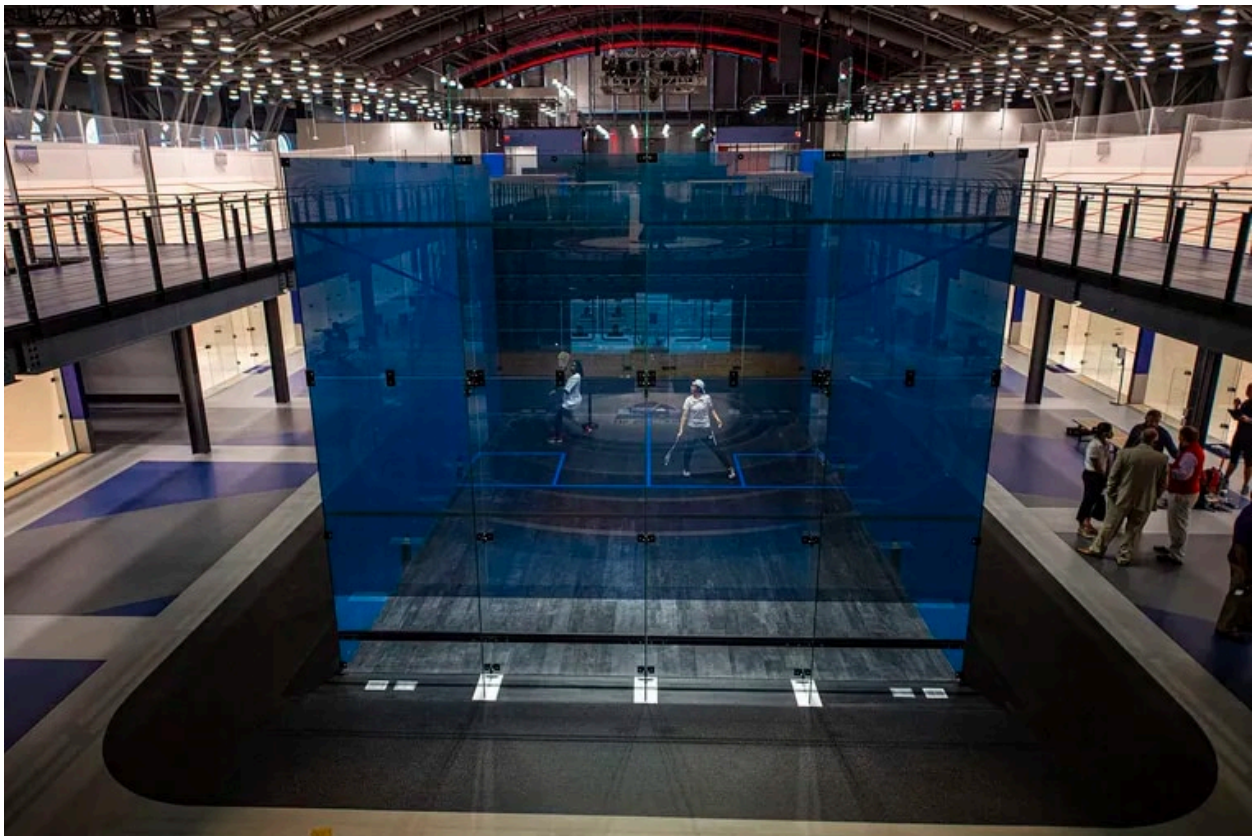


## Could squash help ‘save the youth of our city?’ Shanin Specter and U.S. Squash believe it can

West Philly's Arlen Specter U.S. Squash Center is out to produce more than the country's top athletes in the sport. It wants the city's youth to consider trying squash.



The Arlen Specter U.S. Squash Center on the campus of Drexel University has become the epicenter for the sport in the United States. Now, the goal is to infuse the sport into the community.

JOSE F. MORENO / MCT

by Ciara Richards

The Arlen Specter U.S. Squash Center is producing more than just professional squash in the heart of Philadelphia — there's a real goal to give back to the community through the sport.

That's why, in part, Philadelphia City Council created a resolution to rename North 33rd Street as "Squash Way."

The late U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, the namesake of the center, was an avid squash fan. That is why his son, **Shanin Specter**, and Drexel University president John Fry came together to make the city the home of squash in America.

Specter feels that the center is giving back to Philadelphia at a time when it is much needed.

"We have one of the most vibrant urban squash programs for youth in the world at the Specter Center in West Philadelphia, combined with the Lenfest Center in North Philadelphia," Specter told The Inquirer. "This comes at a time when we Philadelphians are desperately trying to save the youth of our city. The Specter Center is a shining light of hope against desperation."

The renaming of the street, Specter says, is a byproduct of the hard work the center has done to give back to the community through squash.

"We have a few streets in Philly that are named for significant events that have occurred there. North 33rd Street is the home of both Drexel's squash teams and the Arlen Specter U.S. Squash Center, so it is the center of squash in the Western Hemisphere. The street name should reflect that, and now it does."

The center works with five Philadelphia public and charter schools as the home base for their squash programs. Specter says the center intends to double that number.

"When you combine all the school programs with our urban squash programs, we are going to be introducing thousands of Philadelphians to squash," he said. "It's a very heartening development for our city."

With 18 singles courts, two all-glass show courts, and two of the first-ever blue North American hardball doubles courts, combined with a high-performance coaching center, it is no surprise that U.S. Squash chose the center created in 2021 as its home base.



Amanda Sobhy, the nation's No. 1-ranked women's player and the first U.S. woman to reach the top five in the Professional Squash Association world rankings, moved to Philly shortly after the center was built.

ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff Photographer

"Moving to Philly for the Specter Center was definitely the right move for me at this stage in my career as a professional athlete," Sobhy said. "I love the fact that all the U.S. players have slowly moved down here over the last two years for the Specter Center. It's great that we can all train together and push each other to keep improving. Squash can be really isolating at times, so it's nice to have a good community and group of players around us."

Since the completion of the facility, American women in particular are making waves in the squash world. There are currently four in the top 20 of the world rankings — a number that just a few years ago arguably was unheard of.





In addition to hosting some of the world's top players, the facility is open for anyone interested in learning how to play. STEVEN M. FALK / Staff Photographer

The Specter Center is also the home of the U.S. Open, one of the biggest events on the squash calendar. At this year's event in October, three American women made it into the round of 16 for the first time in tournament history.

Sobhy says the facility has made Philadelphia the center of the squash world. "When you think of squash in the U.S., you automatically think of Philadelphia now. There's no better place to be these days as a squash player."