



## Players Celebrate Urban Programs

July 1, 2004, By Alex Osterneck and Steve Gregg, SquashSmarts, Philadelphia;  
SquashTalk [Independent News Service](#) © 2004

### 2004 Urban Squash Individual Nationals Groton, Massachusetts June 11-13

What do you get when you bring together four urban squash teams featuring 130 kids from urban neighborhoods in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, and place them at one of the nation's most elite prep schools for the weekend? The 2nd Annual Urban Squash Nationals hosted at The Groton School.

Last weekend's pilgrimage to Groton, MA (June 11-13), showcasing 'hip hop' meets the 'tip top', generated a perfect finish to the season for SquashBusters (Boston) CitySquash (NYC) StreetSquash (NYC) and SquashSmarts (Philadelphia). All four of these magnificent programs assist inner-city students age 11-17 through a structured program of squash, academics and mentoring. The drama, inspiration and stories unfolding over three days at Groton were a tribute to the founders of these programs,

to the kids who are the beneficiaries, and to the staff, families, board members and friends who work daily to make urban squash a reality.



Photo courtesy SquashBusters © 2004

Following is a synopsis of each program, followed by results from the 2004 Urban Individual Nationals. Although this was a competitive event with players trying their best to win, at the end of the day all of the kids were winners. The attention, compassion and focus they receive, not to mention the hurdles they strive to overcome, is the true victory.

#### SquashBusters

Boston, MA; est. 1996  
[www.squashbusters.org](http://www.squashbusters.org)

#### "The Original"

Historically speaking, urban squash did not exist ten years ago. And if it weren't for Boston's Greg Zaff -- followed closely by New York's George Polsky and interested parents from Philadelphia and Westchester, NY -- urban squash would not exist today.

Greg Zaff, the godfather of urban squash, played high school, college and professional squash. He had a dream, a desire and a commitment to get more people involved in the sport. He also wanted to help kids. In 1995 he came up with the idea for what is now SquashBusters. What is not well known about this story is

that he traveled that year to New York City to track down a man, Carlos Morales, who had been running his own small version of an outreach program and spoke with him at length. From Greg's original idea and his conversation with Carlos, the genesis of urban squash as we know it today was born.

Squash Busters has eight staff members who continue to improve the lives of urban youths and impress upon them the importance of self esteem. A lot of this self esteem and individuality came out during the matches at Groton.



Common among the players was their own unique attitude and personal fashion statements, with various urban expressions of individuality on display. Many wore striped tube socks pulled knee high and ultra long, ultra baggy court shorts more often

seen in the NBA then on the squash court. Many Squash Busters players hope to

follow in the footsteps of a former team member who is now a sophomore at Bates

College and plays on their varsity squash team. At the awards ceremony in Groton, the "Greg Zaff" Award for sportsmanship, empathy and care for others was awarded to Vicky Flamenco, it was obvious that the recipient had consistently displayed deep passion and concern for those around her, while simultaneously dealing with her demanding circumstances.

**Photo courtesy SquashBusters © 2004**

#### StreetSquash

New York, NY; est. 1999

[www.streetsquash.org](http://www.streetsquash.org)

#### "Enter George Polsky"

In 1997 Greg Zaff was coaching George Polsky at the Maccabiah Games in Israel and spoke to him about launching an urban program in Manhattan. The program George created, StreetSquash, assists 120 kids and will be adding an additional 15 spots this fall.

StreetSquash has seven full time staff, an operating budget of \$660,000

and is exploring the possibility of a new \$10 million building in Harlem. George and his staff ooze educational pedigree, extraordinary leadership in academics and athletics and bring huge hearts to the courts and classroom for their students.

StreetSquash students rose to the occasion at the Urban Nationals. According to Groton squash coach, Hoyt Taylor, who so generously made it possible for the tournament to be held on Groton's campus, "the important thing we witnessed today was how kids react to the tough plays, the tough calls... this is the true test."

Admittedly, not every player from every program passed the test all the time.

Some allowed their emotions to get the better of them. But coaches and staff were quick to step in and teach them the value of sportsmanship and self-control in the face of adversity. The StreetSquash kids played their hearts out and, like the other programs, rallied around their teammates with great gusto and energy. The immense pride and sense of accomplishment in each player was clear during the awards ceremony, every reaction and display of joy unique, including dances, music video imitations, street hand gestures and victory walks that were extreme

saunters. If nothing else, the weekend was an intersection of two different worlds uniting over the common theme of squash and all the good it stands for.

**SquashSmarts**  
Philadelphia, PA; est. 2000  
[www.squashsmarts.org](http://www.squashsmarts.org)

**"The Mouse That Roared!"**

In 2000, Pam Ende, Matt Stern, Lisa Stokes & Ben Desombre began Squash Smarts in Philadelphia. Their mission was to bring to West Philadelphia middle school children what their counter parts in Boston and New York were receiving. With 12 kids currently in the program and 9 present at this year's event, Squash Smarts had the smallest fielding of the four teams, but from the cheering and support the kids gave each other, it was obvious they had no shortage of spirit and camaraderie, and will continue to grow both on and off the court.



**Photo courtesy SquashBusters © 2004**

Julie Williams, Executive Director for the past three seasons, has done a remarkable job building and growing the program to its present level. She has overcome much in the last two years and almost single-handedly built the program from scratch. The recent addition of Stephen Gregg has already made a powerful impact. Steve, alongside Chris Smith of SquashBusters, could be seen full force handling much of the tournament scheduling while also juggling coaching and organizational duties from sun-up to sun-down. In all, 185 matches on Saturday and 78 matches on Sunday were contested and, on both days, managed to finish ahead of schedule.

The countless hours Julie has put into to her students has paid off nicely. We are going to see great things from this program, its kids and its very focused board. One of the standouts on the board is Chase Lenfest who gives much of his time and resources and goes out of his way on Saturdays to volunteer with the kids, while simultaneously donating resources to sustain the program well beyond the call of duty. This summer, he will make it possible for the SquashSmarts team to attend Outward Bound as a supplement to the standard curriculum they attend during the season. Despite a small team, Philadelphia managed to bring home trophies for three of their nine players, and will continue to be exemplary.

**CitySquash**  
New York City; est. 2001  
[www.citysquash.org](http://www.citysquash.org)

**"Improving the Model... Getting Results"**

The CitySquash program grew out of an impromptu meeting between Sanford Schwartz and Greg Zaff in 1997 at a junior squash tournament. Since 2001 Dr. Schwartz has helped fund and build a top program in record time. To date over 1000 people have contributed their time, their financial support, or both, to the program. Sanford emphasizes the great assistance each of the other programs has offered in helping launch CitySquash and making it a successful organization. And like Street Squash, his staff is comprised of top ranked squash players from the Ivy League, including Brown, Cornell and Harvard. CitySquash was very much 'represented' at the tournament, with its 23 players wearing all black track suits and tee-shirts, and a sizable number taking home trophies.

CitySquash utilizes management and business skills to reach out to its students. These kids, like those in each of the other urban programs, face daily struggles and pressures the majority of us will never know. The hurdles they've overcome have already begun to pay off in better grades and better relations with their parents and teachers. Tim Wyant, Executive Director, puts it this way: "Our team members are working very hard to reach their potential as students, squash players and people. We look forward to seeing them- and we will do everything to help them-go on to college. It is exciting that many will choose to continue with squash after high school.

Each day presents new obstacles and new challenges for the staff of these programs: last minute drives at day's end to get kids home, supplementing meals

out of pocket, board members who unselfishly donate time and financial support. The best of attention from staff members like Peter Karlen, Lindsay Sullivan and Sage Ramadge (StreetSquash), Chris Smith, Orla Doherty and Quaco Cloutterbuck (SquashBusters), Julie Williams and Steve Gregg (Squash Smarts) and Brian Mathias, Sarah Petrie and (CitySquash), to name just a few, keeps these kids active and enrolled. Day in and day out these directors give their heart and souls to the kids, and the results were on full display at the Nationals in Groton.

## The Tournament

For the Urban Individual Nationals, players were divided by gender into four age groups: Under 19, 17, 15, 13 (complete tournament results below). One of the most memorable matches that typified the event was the Boys Under 19 final. A back-and-forth match between a SquashBuster and StreetSquash player featured all the drama of a true Boston-New York rivalry; a prize fight with many handlers, onlookers and with both team's entourage surrounding the court. The match was finally captured by #3 seed and underdog Omar Corona of SquashBusters edging out Davian Suckoo 9-7,5-9,6-9, 9-7 9-7.

At all times during the event, it was emphasized that, win or lose, all players were winners for participating. Being sportsmen, thanking their opponent and referee, and conducting themselves in a positive manner was the true mark of a champion. As Brian Mathias observed, priceless moments were gathered just by watching player rituals: kissing a racquet twice; tapping the side wall five times with the racquet; inhaling and exhaling; tapping the court floor twice before serving. The street culture, subtle and not so subtle, and the nuances on display were both precious and fascinating to the outside observer.

There are many themes and forces at play with respect to the phenomenon and ground swell occurring in today's urban programs. A true paradigm shift is occurring. In the thoughts of Greg Zaff, there should be increased focus by the national association (the USSRA) on supporting existing programs and growing new ones. In actuality, based solely on sheer numbers, there is an enormous pool of talent in the nation's urban areas.

The whole urban 'movement', for it is truly a movement we are experiencing, is swelling like a tsunami. Programs are growing, and they are poised for even greater growth and involvement. Not enough can be said for the people who make urban squash, and events like the Urban Squash Nationals, a reality. The weekend in Groton of 'hip hop' meets the 'tip top' allowed for many priceless moments and memories for all.

### 2004 Urban Individual National Champions [\[for more results\]](#)

Girls U19/17 Shanita Williams SquashBusters Girls  
U15 Tanesha Jackson CitySquash  
Girls U13 Maylin Colon CitySquash

Boys U19 Omar Corona SquashBusters Boys  
U17 Justin Martin StreetSquash Boys U15  
Patrick Williams SquashBusters Boys U13  
Prince Mensah CitySquash