

SPORTS

Playing Inside the Box

THE J.P. MORGAN TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS BRINGS WORLD-CLASS SQUASH TO GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL



Spectators enjoy professional squash in Grand Central Terminal

For the commuters and tourists bustling through Grand Central Terminal, it will be a rather surprising sight: a 672-square-foot glass box, containing two of the world's best squash players.

The annual J.P. Morgan Tournament of Champions is one of the top events in professional squash, played in one of the most unusual venues in sports. From Jan. 16–23, 48 players will compete for \$210,000 in prize money.

The tournament takes place in the grand Vanderbilt Hall, which connects the main concourse to 42nd Street. On a typical day, as many as 750,000 people visit the terminal, built in 1913.

The court is surrounded by bleacher seats for about 450 ticketed fans, but anyone walking by can stop and watch for free, says John Nimick, a former professional squash player and the founder

and president of Event Engine Inc., which runs the event.

"It's an electric atmosphere," says Nimick, who brought the tournament to the terminal in 1995. "The environment that is created by this modern, glistening glass cube set up in this iconic train station with thousands and thousands of passing spectators who are often seeing squash for the first time makes it very festive."

If the hall's 48-foot-high marble ceilings and five gold chandeliers impress, so will the high-tech capabilities of the court. The glass reflects light differently depending on the vantage point: The players inside the court see walls, not the fans beyond them, but spectators can

see right through the walls to the action. Only a net covers the top of the box, so fans can hear the *thwack* of the ball.

The tournament partners with the Professional Squash Association, the men's regulating body, and the Women's Squash Association. Players travel from as far as Europe, Asia and South America for a chance to improve their world ranking.

Englishman James Willstrop, consistently one of the world's top eight players, called the Tournament of Champions his favorite event in an email sent from a competition in Hong Kong.

"The buzz of the crowd is like nowhere else," wrote Willstrop, who won the tournament in 2010. "It's one of the world's biggest squash tournaments, in one of the world's most exciting cities, played in one of the world's most iconic spaces." tocsquash.com —Meredith Heagney



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