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The Good Life

The Good Life: Home Court Advantage

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This winter, when the weather turns brutal in many parts of the country, middle-age adults with a love for basketball will be doing more than watching the NBA and NCAA on television. They'll be perfecting their jump shots in the private indoor basketball courts they've built as additions to their homes.

That's right, in case you missed it, nailing a hoop to your garage just doesn't cut it anymore. Across the country, flashy indoor half-court basketball rooms with 20-foot ceilings, high-tech lighting and slick maple flooring are becoming fixtures of suburbia.

"Five years ago, it was very unusual to build a gymnasium in somebody's house unless it was a full-size gym for some celebrity or some wealthy businessman," says Randy Stafford, president of The Court Company of Germantown, Tenn. "Now there's not a week that goes by that we're not working on someone's athletic room in their house."

By this coming February, Larry, a 39-year-old lawyer who asked that his surname not be used, expects to have a custom indoor basketball half-court completed off an addition to his Sands Point, N.Y. home. "I generally love to play basketball and play three times a week when I can," says Larry.

The 30-foot-by-50-foot court will allow him and his friends to shoot hoops at odd hours after or before work, on NBA-quality wood floors, which will help preserve their aging knees. "I played ever since I was a little kid," he says. "Now I have kids of my own, and I thought it was a great idea to have for when the weather is bad. Everyone can just go to the gym and shoot hoops."

After a pause, he adds, "even though my wife says it's my thing, it's just a great thing for the family to have."

While basketball courts are surely something nice for the family to use -- to play in and have parties in -- the rooms are definitely being built with the parents in mind, says Joseph Scarpulla, a Huntington, N.Y.-based architect who has designed several courts over the past few years for wealthy homeowners on Long Island.

"No one is paying this kind of money to give their kids a play room. It's definitely wealthy men who are looking for a place to play at home," he says, adding that recent courts he's helped design, such as Larry's, have ended up costing between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Building costs will vary considerably in other parts of the country. Stafford, whose firm specializes in building courts for basketball, racquetball and other sports in commercial and residential buildings, says courts can be built for less than \$150,000 in the Memphis, Tenn., area, where he is based.

If you're looking to build a court in your home, there are certain things to consider. To play sports like

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basketball and racquetball in your indoor court, you'll need ceilings that are at least 18-to-20-feet high. A standard racquetball court is 20-feet high, 20-feet wide and 40-feet long. To properly play half-court basketball inside, you'll need to add some width and length. A 30-by-50 foot court would generally be comfortable.

The major consideration is whether you want the court below or above ground. Above-ground is generally best if you have the room to add such an extensive addition to your home.

"Below ground, it's always going to be more uncomfortable to play in because it's going to be very hard to get the moisture out of it" and will require extensive dehumidifiers, says Jim Thornton, an architectural intern and design consultant who worked on some of Scarpulla's sports court projects. Going below ground can also become more expensive because of concrete costs. Either way, below or above ground, the court will need an system to handle cooling and heating.

And as with all construction, be prepared for more remodeling, as one planned project often begets another. Says ballplayer and homeowner Larry: "I went into this thinking it would just be building this gym on the side of my house, and it morphed into a big renovation of the house," including a new kitchen.
