

# Recreation MANAGEMENT

IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS FOR RECREATION, SPORTS AND FITNESS FACILITIES



## inPERSPECTIVE / PICKLEBALL

Get Ready for Pickleball

By Cory Corullo

This year, the sport of pickleball celebrates an important milestone—its 55th anniversary. With this milestone comes another year of popularity. In fact, the game of pickleball continues to be the fastest growing sport. According to the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA), pickleball currently has 3.3 million players in the country, and the total rate of growth in participation from 2015 to 2018 was 9.7%. There were a reported 7,928 documented places to play the sport at the end of 2019.

To meet the demand for high-quality pickleball courts in your area, you may be thinking of reconstructing your current hard-court flooring to adapt to both pickleball and tennis, or you might even be thinking of installing new courts all together. To help you decide on the next steps you should take, it's important to first understand why there is such an extreme increase in popularity in the sport of pickleball.

### All Ages Can Play

Pickleball was invented to entertain people of all ages, especially families. In fact, the sport was created when kids who were vacationing together complained of being bored. Back on that summer day in '65, a net was lowered on an existing badminton court, ping pong paddles and wiffle balls were brought out, and the game came to life. This simplicity is exactly what makes the game ideal. The equipment needed is minimal, and the rules are easy to understand. As kids become student athletes, pickleball offers the opportunity to continue playing a game they love while improving speed and hand-eye coordination, benefiting skills for other sports. Seniors and older adults love the sport for a variety of reasons, notably for the low-intensity exercise and camaraderie with others. Older advocates of the game are teaching young people how to play.

As you design or reconstruct your pickleball court, it's important to keep in mind that this sport is popular with all age groups and skill levels. Court floors designed with rubber mat material create a cushioned surface that reduces impact and stress on a player's body, regardless of age. For community use and well-being, a shock absorption level of 20% or higher is recommended, and ideally a minimum of 30% or higher for competitive play.



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### Social & Health Benefits

Pickleball is a social sport by nature. The game can be played as either singles or doubles, which is what makes it fun for couples to play together. As baby boomers continue to enter retirement and look for ways to socialize and stay physically fit, pickleball has been the answer.

There are many physical and mental benefits gained from playing pickleball. The game can improve cardiovascular health and help people achieve weight loss goals, thanks to the running from each square of the court to volley the ball back and forth. As with many forms of exercise, the game reduces stress due to the released endorphins.

Another benefit for adults and student athletes is that the sport allows participants who once enjoyed playing tennis to play a similar game despite injuries or other physical limitations. While pickleball can be fast-paced, it's also low-impact and takes place on a smaller surface area, making it easier for seniors or those who may be rehabbing from an injury to compete. Again, offering a court that provides shock absorption and energy restitution helps reduce the risk of injury, and the comfort of the court allows athletes to play for longer periods of time. Keep in mind that slip resistance is a key attribute of a good pickleball court, especially for outdoor courts where rainy weather might limit playability. The polyurethane topcoat surface provides a slip-resistance feature. This is important for all players and especially for older players with reduced flexibility.

### No Seasonality

Fortunately for people who live in both warm and cold climates, pickleball is a year-round sport that can be played on both indoor and outdoor courts. According to many core participants, playing indoors is ideal thanks to a consistent environment that is temperature-controlled and isn't affected by environmental factors, like wind. While indoor may be the favorite of some, many love the ability to play the game outdoors when the weather is nice.

Similar to other sports, pickleball is a game where people can easily create a court and play anywhere—an asphalt driveway or an existing concrete tennis court. While some courts are lined-out in any workable space, it's not always the best option for a quality playing experience, and a good experience leads to higher player retention. As the popularity of the sport increases, so do expectations of playing conditions offered at both indoor recreation areas and outdoor courts.

Regardless of your courts' location, they should be constructed with a cushioned surface that offers shock absorption (aka force reduction) to protect athletes' muscles, tendons and joints. Avoid court systems that have a hollow sound or "loose" dead spots that result in poor ball response/bounce. The strategy of the

game depends on the location of where the ball lands, so the court's ability to have a positive ball response is crucial.

There are essentially three important factors when deciding how to respond to the growing need for pickleball courts, regardless of the location of the court or age of the player: comfort, safety, and ball response. Using the proper materials and installation methods will help you provide courts that meet the needs of all age groups and help them enhance the health benefits they receive by playing the fastest-growing sport in the United States. Because even after 55 years, fans of the sport have shown that if you build it, they will come. RM

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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