

'Could be the next big thing': how pickleball is courting a new generation of players

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Test your knowledge. Select all the statements about pickleball that are true.

1. A pickleball has more than 20 holes in it.
2. In pickleball, if you've lost, you've "pickled".
3. Pickleball paddles (what you use to hit the ball) are almost like ping-pong paddles.
4. Wheelchair users can play pickleball.
5. The net is lower than the net in tennis.

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. Then, use the words in the example sentences.

challenge

court

mix

net

solution

1. A _____ is a combination.
This is a _____ of orange and carrot juice.
2. A _____ is something difficult to do.
It is a _____ to learn to swim as an adult.
3. A _____ is an area that is drawn with lines on the ground used for playing sports like basketball or tennis.
There are two tennis _____ at my school.
4. A _____ is a rectangular piece of material that is used to separate two sides of a court in different sports.
You have to try to hit the ball over the _____.
5. A _____ is the answer to a problem.
This maths question is difficult. I can't find the _____.

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complain

expect

investor

popular

support

6. To _____ means *to think or believe something will happen*.
We _____ *to graduate from university in June*.
7. To _____ means *to say something is not good enough or wrong*.
The soup was cold, so she _____.
8. To _____ means *to help someone to succeed or give them the money they need to do something*.
Jason's parents still _____ him while he is studying to become a doctor.
9. An _____ is someone who puts money into something to make a profit (more money).
We are meeting with an _____ who wants to buy the company.
10. If someone or something is _____, it is liked or enjoyed by many people.
Snow White and the Seven Dwarves was made in 1937, but it is still one of the most _____ animated films of all time.

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- Someone came up with pickleball in the US in 1965. It is a mix between ping pong, tennis and badminton.
- Many people play pickleball in Australia. Some people say it is now the fastest-growing sport in the country.
- There are about 20,000 pickleball players in Australia. The average player’s age is about 58 years old. Ron Shell, the chief executive of Australia’s National Pickleball League, believes in three years there will be at least 1 million players.
- But there is a challenge: finding pickleball courts. They are about a third the size of a tennis court, with a lower net.
- Fleming, who is 52 and is based in Sydney, started playing pickleball in 2019 after her tennis partner said: “I’ve found a new sport for us.” She says the usual solution is to tape down lines and string nets across tennis, netball or basketball courts. This sharing means players can’t always play.
- That is starting to change. In September 2023, the first pickleball-only courts were opened in Sydney. They used to be a multi-purpose tennis, basketball and netball court.
- It’s starting to catch on in the US. Players are expected to reach 22 million this year, and people are fighting about courts.
- US tennis players don’t want to give up their courts, and people who live by courts complain about the noise. Will picklers have the same problems in Australia?
- Shell thinks the noise is unlikely to be a problem because Australia’s sport centres aren’t usually in residential areas. Also, new types of less noisy rackets are starting to come out.
- Shell says they are talking with Tennis Australia to “work together”. A spokesperson for Tennis Australia says it supports the idea of people playing pickleball at tennis facilities but only where those courts are being under-used.
- Investors also realised that they could make money from pickleball. In November, an indoor pickleball centre will open in South Melbourne. Sydney may have a centre next year and, soon after, Brisbane and Perth.
- Shell hopes this will make pickleball popular among the young and people will realise it can be a sport for all ages.
- Up to now, it has been popular among older players because it is easier on the body compared to tennis.
- “It’s very social, so you can just hang out with family members, with friends. It’s really starting to grab the attention of a lot of younger people now, and it’s only going to grow,” says Sydneysider Mitch Hargreaves, 25, the World Pickleball Singles male Champion.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the best word to complete each statement.

- Pickleball is a mix between _____, tennis, and badminton.
a. squash b. ping pong
- In Australia, the average age of a pickleball player is _____ 50 years old.
a. over b. under
- There are about _____ pickleball players in Australia.
a. 20,000 b. 1 million
- It is difficult to find pickleball _____.
a. courts b. paddles
- In the US, _____ players don't want to give up their courts.
a. badminton b. tennis
- People who live by courts don't like the _____.
a. people who play b. noise
- In November, an indoor pickleball centre will open in _____.
a. Melbourne b. Sydney
- Pickleball is popular among older players because it is easier on the body compared to _____.
a. running b. tennis

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4 Key language

a. Match the phrasal verbs with their meanings.

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. come up with | a. become popular or fashionable |
| 2. catch on | b. spend time |
| 3. give up | c. stop using |
| 4. come out | d. think of a new idea |
| 5. hang out | e. become available |

b. Fill in the gaps with phrasal verbs from the previous activity. Then, ask and answer.

1. Should tennis players _____ their courts?
2. Will pickleball _____ in your area?
3. Who do you _____ when you have free time?
4. Is it difficult to _____ a new sport?

5 Discussion

a. Answer the questions.

- "Pickleball won't become popular everywhere."
- "I would like a pickleball court where I live."
- "Sports are good for everyone. Everyone should play sports."
- "The government should build more places where people of all ages can do sports."

6 In your own words

a. Discuss the following questions.

1. What sports facilities would you like to build or improve where you live? Where? Why?
2. What are the benefits of the sport you chose? (Think about how it affects your body, mind, etc.)
3. Who will benefit most from the new sports facilities?
4. Can other events take place at these facilities?