

LM
FITPICKING UP
PICKLEBALLHybrid sport attracts all ages
and keeps the rallies coming**PICKLEBALL POPULARITY**

The pop! Pop! Pop! sound pours out of parks throughout town, across the state and around the nation. But the rhythmic plunk of plastic paddles pounding pickleballs is no match for the predominant sound of the sport: laughter.

“Probably one of the best things is just the camaraderie,” says Paige Carney, retired physical education teacher and one of Lawrence’s active pickleball players. “There are enough teachers and coaches to help you get better, but it’s not the goal. The goal is to play. Be active and have fun.”

Pickleball, a combination of ping-pong and tennis, originated in the United States in 1965 and locally in 2007 at the Lawrence Senior Center. The sport is open to all ages but caters to seniors.

Carney believes the low-impact reaching and stretching movements associated with the sport have helped her body recover following two knee surgeries and returned the fun of competitive sport to her life.

“After being retired for 10 years, I then found something to play. I almost had this need to play. Even though you’re old you still want to play,” says Carney. “The court’s narrower and not so long, so you can cover it with bad knees, bad hips, and we have those. I was just hooked.”

With calculations from a measuring device, Carney estimates two hours of pickleball allow her to accumulate 9,000 steps simply from having fun.

“It’s kind of a lifestyle change,” says Carney. “Instead of getting older you feel like you’ve still got some life in you. It’s been rejuvenating.”

PICKLEBALL PLAYERS

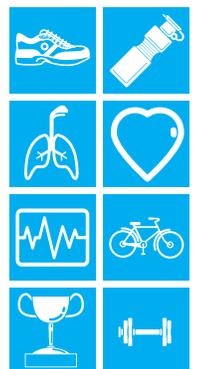
Evan Jorn, another local pickleball enthusiast, notes the sport’s popularity continues to expand because it offers activity minus excessive mental or physical drain.

“You get a lot of exercise, and you don’t feel like you’re working at all,” says Jorn. “The main thing is it’s a lot of fun, and it’s easy to learn.”

Once those skills are learned, pickleball can be a fairly even contest across all levels and ages. That is one of the reasons, says Jorn, that pickleball is a better senior sport than tennis. “As you get older, tennis is very hard to play. Certainly, if you didn’t learn it when you were young—forget it,” says Jorn.

In fact, some retirement communities have abandoned their tennis programs entirely and replaced them with pickleball in order to accommodate the sport’s growing popularity.

In Lawrence, Jorn maintains an email list of 60 participants. Anywhere from 15 to 20 people show



up on a regular basis to play mostly doubles but sometimes singles matches indoors at the East Lawrence Recreation Center during the colder months and outdoors at Holcom or Lyons Park in the warmer months.

The Lawrence group has helped programs in Eudora and Baldwin grow and also travels to play at tournaments in Johnson County, Iola, Wichita and Topeka. The biggest singles and doubles events are the Sunflower Games in July and the Senior Olympics in September, both in Topeka.

PICKLEBALL PARTICULARS

Experienced pickleball players incorporate strategy and have mastered techniques, but the sport is really more about equal opportunity for beginners and veterans alike. Jorn says pickleball rules “are set up to make it an even game between the two sides.”

The game, right off the paddle, begins fairly with an underhand, not overhand, serve. Jorn says the idea is not to ace it but simply to start play. Then, each team must apply the “double bounce rule” and allow the ball to bounce once on each side before playing it out of the air, creating longer rallies. When a player does volley, they must do so behind the no-volley zone, which is 7 feet from the net and also referred to as the kitchen. The zone prevents players from smashing the ball right at the net. Points can only be won on the serve. Games are played to 11 and must be won by two points.

Cost to play is minimal. Paddles run anywhere from \$25 to \$75. For league play in Lawrence, balls are provided, and voluntarily contributions from \$15 to \$40 are welcomed.

The city of Lawrence has painted pickleball lines, which are the same dimensions as a badminton court, on the tennis courts of Holcom and Lyons Park. The city does not charge for the use of outdoor courts or the use of the gym at the East Lawrence Recreation Center. Beyond Lawrence it is simple to join a game through the United States of America Pickleball Association, whose website identifies pickleball courts and players across the nation. Jorn has played in five states, and the Lawrence group has competed with visitors from New Mexico, Minnesota, Washington and Utah. **LM**



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