

Pickleball participation explodes while injury knowledge, prevention lag behind

What do talk show host Stephen Colbert, quarterback greats Tom Brad and Drew Breese, NBA all-time scoring sensation Lebron James and millions of people in the United States have in common?

If you answer anything other than pickleball, you're wrong.

According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), in 2017 there were more than 2.8 million pickleball players in the U.S. Last year, *Statistica* reported 4.8 million players hit the courts making it the fastest growing sport in the country. By comparison,



there are approximately 22 million tennis players and 250,000 tennis courts, but only about 30,000 pickleball courts. The good thing for pickleball players, though, is they can play on tennis courts.

Like tennis, pickleball can be played indoors or out, but that is about where the similarity ends. A pickleball court is much smaller than a tennis court, 20 feet wide by 44 feet deep compared to 36 feet wide and 78 feet deep. The net for pickleball is also two inches shorter at the center at 34 inches compared to 36 inches for tennis.

The premise that pickleball is similar to other racquet sports also was assumed when it came to injuries. However, researchers didn't find any cases or reviews and only one editorial which caused them concern. "Medical providers need to be aware of possible injuries especially for a sport growing so quickly and involving "picklers" of all ages and skills, especially in masters athletes and older adults.

According to Dr. Steven Chudik, orthopaedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist, the key is for anyone experiencing pain, swelling and loss of movement is to have a prompt and immediate evaluation by a physician. "That's not to say injuries in pickleball and tennis can't be similar," Dr. Chudik said.

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Dr. Chudik provided examples of injuries that could be similar such as sprains/strains of the lower and upper extremities and possibly some torso and lower back muscle strains. But since pickleball is played more underhand than tennis, shoulder injuries are a lesser concern than falls on an out-stretched hand or arm. “That doesn’t mean pickleball is safer than tennis or without injuries,” he cautioned.

“I also would expect to see ankle sprains, calf strains or Achilles tendon ruptures, wrist and finger fractures, and acute knee injuries involving the meniscus and ligaments,” Dr. Chudik explained. “Treatment of these injuries can range from rest, icing, compression and elevation (RICE) to non-weight bearing, bracing, physical therapy or possibly surgery depending upon the severity,” he added.

According to Dr. Chudik, other potential injuries worth noting include hamstring, quadriceps, hip flexor adductor and calf muscle strains.

Based on his more than 20 years treating athletes of all abilities and ages, Dr. Chudik recommends pickleball players make sure to warm up thoroughly before playing. This includes upper body, lower body and full body exercises.

Dr. Chudik’s foundation, the Orthopaedic Surgery and Sports Medicine Teaching and Research Foundation (OTRF), has warm up , stretching and in-season performance and conditioning programs available as PDFs that can be downloaded from the foundation website at <https://www.otrfund.org/sports-performance-programs/>. Topics include a host of sports and activities that would benefit pickleball athletes such as ACL injury prevention, overhead racket sports, volleyball, sprint interval training, and more.

Oh, and what about Colbert, Brady, Brees and James? Brady, Brees and James have ownership stakes in professional pickleball teams to reportedly increase awareness of the sport. Colbert and his production company collaborated with Comic Relief US to create the pickleball tournament PICKLED, broadcast on the CBS Television Network to raise money for millions of children and families experiencing homelessness.

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Research Roundup

How often should you clean personal workout equipment?

Home workout areas became popular during the pandemic and many found them to be more convenient than a fitness center. However, the fitness center has towels and disinfectant to wipe down the machines you used. But what about your home equipment?



Because sweat can harbor bacteria and fungus, wiping down your home equipment after each use is recommended, especially if you share them with others. However, beyond just a wipe-down, you need to “deep” clean your equipment at least once a month. The following recommendations are what the cleaning experts recommend.

•Barbells and dumbbells

If you wipe down after each use with a disinfecting solution of soap and water, deep cleaning is recommended twice a month. Brush the bar to remove dirt and grit. Put some three-in-one oil on a rag and wipe the bar and the weights. Leave overnight. Wipe down the next morning. This is important to keep the metal from rusting.

•Treadmills

Wipe the exterior after each use. Once a month you need to clean the motor area. Check your owner’s manual for specific instructions. No manual? Before starting, unplug the machine, release the hook on the treadmill motor and vacuum around it thoroughly. A dry cloth also can be used.

•Kettlebells

Wipe your kettlebells after each use with a microfiber cloth and clean twice a week with warm soapy water and dry. Deep clean with disinfectant spray once a week, particularly the handles.

•Stationary bike

Wipe sweat and oil off your bike after every use with a cloth. Once a week disinfect the machine with a soap and water mixture of one part soap to nine parts warm water in a spray bottle. Spray and wipe dry any parts of the bike you touch.

•Yoga and gym mats

After each use, wipe with soap and water or a mat cleaner. Once a month, deep clean. Check the manufacturer’s instructions. Often these can be cleaned in your washing machine.

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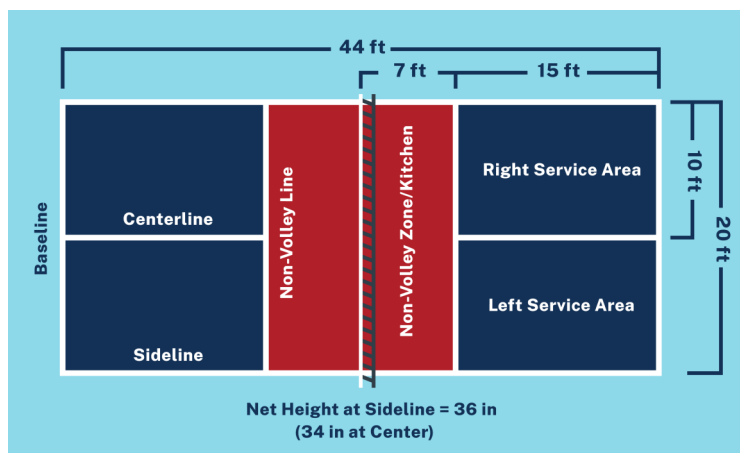
Looking for a fun sport? Become a “Pickler”

The origination of Pickleball was developed in 1965 by Joel Pritchard, a former Washington state congressman and his friends who set out to play badminton but unable to find all the necessary pieces so they improvised. Instead of strung rackets they used wooden ping-pong paddles and a plastic perforated ball to limit flight, and the badminton net adjusted to roughly the height of a tennis court net. After some experimentation, the group developed a sport the entire could enjoy together. Two years later the first permanent court was built next door to Prichard’s home and a couple of years later a corporation was created to protect the sport.

However, the greatest debate since the sport was created is the origin of the name—Pickleball. One story attributes it to Pritchard’s wife who thought various elements of the game reminded her of pickle boat crews where oarsmen were chosen from leftover crews on other boats. Another account is that it came from Pritchard’s dog named Pickles who would retrieve wayward balls upon the command, “ball.”

The game rules and standards also evolved. The court is smaller than a tennis court and includes a seven foot “no-volley zone” next to the net on both sides. The racket is constructed of wood or composite material that is larger than a ping-pong paddle and smaller than a tennis racket. The game can be played by teams comprised of singles or doubles who start by serving a perforated hard plastic ball underhand. The opponent has to return the ball within court bounds and outside the no volley zone. When the ball bounces once on each side, volley play ensues. Only the serving team can score. The game typically plays to 11, 15 or 21 points with the winning side required to win by two points or more.

Like many other sports, pickleball can be played in driveways, as well as a sanctioned scholastic sport and in amateur and professional tournaments across the country. The 2022 professional pickleball league winner took home an event purse of \$319,000.



Here’s all you need to DIY your own court in your yard or drive. What are you waiting for? Get some exercise and fresh air. Get Pickling!