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The Game of ‘Dinks’ and ‘Overhead Smashing’: Pickleball

Leila Bunker, News Editor

Pickleball was dubbed the fastest growing sport in the U.S. in 2021 and 2022, according to a report from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association. Almost five million people play the game throughout the nation, whether it be for leisure or competition. The sport has even coined its own slang. For example a “pickler” is used to describe someone who’s addicted to pickleball, and so on. The game is easy for players to quickly pick up, doesn’t require a lot of equipment and appeals to all ages without requiring a lot of athleticism.



Peiran Liu

The racquet sport was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, Wash. by three dads for their bored kids. Since then, it has been made Washington’s official state sport as of March 2022. Pickleball is a hybrid of tennis, ping pong and badminton. Typically, games are played with two to four players on a modified tennis court. The necessary equipment includes solid faced paddles, a 36 inch high net and a hollow polymer ball with holes that produces less bounce than a tennis ball. The height of the net allows for a low-barrier entry and doesn’t require a whole lot of movement. Three of the basic strokes include ground strokes, volleys and dinks.

Erik Hanhan, a first-year photography major, pointed out that pickleball can be more competitive than it might appear at first glance.

“I’ve only played once, but it was a lot of fun. It’s like big ping pong. I always see a lot of senior citizens playing it because you don’t need to move a lot, but it can be hard if you want it to be. The people I played with were really good and made it super athletic,” Hanhan said.

Throughout Seattle and King County, there are 78 outdoor courts as well as many community centers which offer indoor courts. The rising interest in the sport is being accompanied by increasing demand for more dedicated pickleball facilities. In response, the Seattle Parks Department is planning to expand access to outdoor pickleball for the community.

Oliver Bazinet, senior planner for Seattle Parks and Recreation, has been leading a pickleball study to determine the best approach to satisfy residents. Most players are satisfied with the courts, however maintenance such as stripping and improving the surfaces may be needed. In addition, the access to nets has continually been a challenge especially when it comes to splitting the courts with tennis players.

The parks project will address immediate, mid-term and long-term goals. The hope is to paint pickleball lines on the surface of existing tennis courts while others may be converted. Additional pickleball facilities will be constructed in the future by the department.

Before that point, one can find four of the outdoor courts at Miller Playfield in Capitol Hill and drop-in games are available there on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for two hours at no charge. It's possible for so many eager people to show up that some may have to wait before jumping on to a court.

Seattle University has picked pickleball to be an intramural sport this year. The University Recreation Center acquired the necessary equipment over the summer after the Seattle U faculty expressed interest in playing. A single, one day tournament is being held this quarter Saturday, Oct. 29 for students interested in either participating in or spectating the event.

Trace Seaton, the Assistant Director of UREC at Seattle U, oversees the competitive sports division and hopes to see students engage in opportunities to play the game.

"If pickleball takes off as an intramural, I think it would be really cool to see it evolve into a club sport. We could turn it into a three or four week league like volleyball or soccer. Even if you've never played any racquet sport before, it's still a lot of fun to go out and play," Seaton said.

After developing a reputation as a sport mainly dominated by seniors, pickleball is expanding its horizons. Younger players are becoming more engaged with the game and Seattle U is capitalizing on the opportunity to get students involved with a sport that is significantly easier than most of the other competitive sports.

"Old, young, everything in between, sporty and not so sporty-everyone is playing the sport," Eva Pilgrim said on Good Morning America.

If enough students show up for the tournament, the sport could potentially take off in the Redhawk community. Given that Pickleball calls Washington state home, Redhawks could substantially contribute to the sports culture.