

- » Finding out what pickleball is
- » Brushing up on the history of the game
- » Discovering the benefits of playing pickleball

Chapter **1**

Welcome to Your New Favorite Sport

Before coauthor Reine discovered pickleball, she was your typical work-from-home programmer leading a boring, sedentary lifestyle. Some weeks, she wouldn't leave the house for several days in a row. She felt isolated, depressed, and out of shape. Clearly, she needed a hobby! After failing to find much interest in knitting, hot yoga, soap making, or matchstick model building, something new in the adult learning class catalog caught her eye: pickleball! This sounded right up her alley. From day one of starting to play, she was hooked. She not only enjoyed the game but was also meeting a lot of interesting, fun-loving people and laughing more than she had in years. In a very short time, pickleball brought joy back into her life, transformed her health and self-confidence, and led to many close friendships.

This story is not unique to Reine. We've heard variations countless times, told by people from all walks of life. Former athletes are discovering pickleball and competing again for the first time in decades, igniting a spark they once thought was lost. Lonely folks are finding themselves immediately welcomed into a community of people who share a passion for this quirky, addictive game. Those struggling with various health issues are finding pickleball to be a safe, accessible option for getting more fresh air and exercise (definitely way more fun than using an elliptical.) The list goes on and on. Can pickleball save the world? Probably not, but there's no doubt it's saving lives.

Who's Playing Pickleball? Everyone!

Why, you may ask, would you want to get off of your comfy, custom-indented spot on the couch and go running around a tiny court chasing a plastic ball? Here's why: It's *fun!* Pickleball is pure joy. Despite its silly name, it's an amazing game. It has action, patience, surprises, athleticism, power, finesse, strategy, trash talk (all in good fun), and so much more.

The rules of the game have made it perfect for players of all ages. Does your shoulder no longer allow you to hit an overhead serve? No problem — the serve is underhand! Do you suffer from some abdominal swelling (a.k.a. overeating), or dislike running long distances? This sport is typically played as doubles on a small court, so you don't need to train for a marathon. It's not uncommon to see players of three different generations on the same court enjoying the game together, as you can see in Figure 1-1.



FIGURE 1-1:
Pickleball is fun
for everyone,
young and old!

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The learning curve is short in pickleball, but you can spend a lifetime trying to master it. You can pick it up in less than an hour and enjoy the challenge indefinitely because there is always more to learn. Therein lies the joy for many of us. People play the game at swanky country clubs as well as small city parks, schools, and prisons. It's the same game, no matter where you play it.

Now, don't get us wrong; this sport can definitely be physically challenging, and is played by elite athletes at the highest levels. Multiple professional pickleball tours take place with amazing players who constantly push the limits of the sport. This game will continue to grow and change. One thing we can say with certainty is that pickleball is here to stay. Welcome to your new healthful addiction! (It's like having broccoli as your passion. "Pickleball" has a better ring to it than "broccoliball," though.)

In this book, we cover why people love to play pickleball, how and where to play, and the proper body mechanics for safe and effective play. We take you through all the different shots, the fine art of "dinking," and how to strengthen the mental part of the game. If you choose to advance into intermediate levels, we take you on a deep dive through improving, training, and even playing in tournaments. Pickleball is quite social, offering many different opportunities to meet new friends. This comprehensive book on the game of pickleball can serve as a handy reference tool for anything you want to know about the sport as you begin to play, play more often, possibly get addicted as so many others have, and more.

In this chapter and the rest of Part 1, you dip just briefly into the origins of this wonderful sport and then get to know the basic rules and scoring. We also cover the burgeoning world of pickleball equipment, gear, and fashion. We give you the low-down on the different kinds of courts, where to find them, and how to find people to play with. Are you a former soccer star or tennis ace? If so, you'll want to read Chapter 5 for some help with transitioning from other sports. Part 1 gives you all the information to get started in your new pickleball life.

Pickleball in a Nutshell

Created in 1965, pickleball is a hybrid of tennis, table tennis, and badminton. You play the game on a court with a three-foot high net, and the aim is to hit a perforated plastic ball over the net with a paddle (about twice the size of a table tennis paddle) in a way that prevents your opponents from returning it. At first glance, it looks a lot like tennis on a miniature court. It involves less running than tennis, which is great if your knees don't like that sort of thing. Pickleball has unique rules that place a high emphasis on precision and strategy. The sport, which has a multigenerational following, can be fast-paced and competitive. Pickleball is a fast-growing sport all over the world, with more than 5 million players and counting.

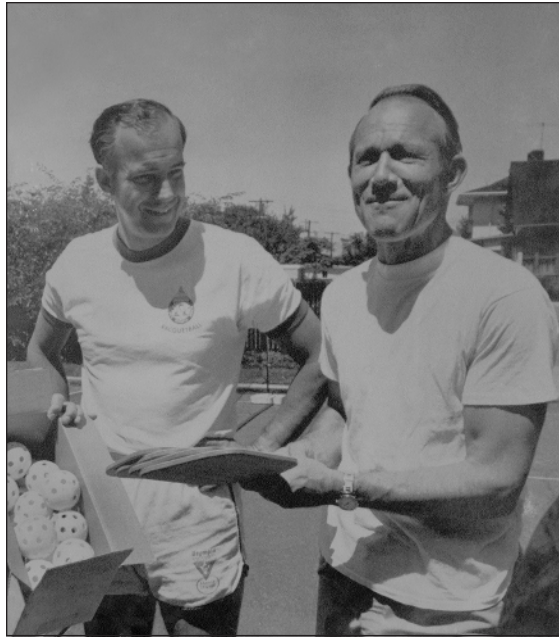
Fun and accessibility were at the heart of pickleball from the very start. It was designed to be a game that everyone could play. After players are introduced to the sport, they often find that they can't stop smiling. It's so easy to become addicted! You may find yourself waking up in the morning, looking forward to playing pickleball, possibly after dreaming about it all night. You will start looking for pick-up games anywhere you can find them — a gym, local park, tennis club — you name it. You'll start recruiting all your friends to play so that you can keep talking about pickleball nonstop without seeing them roll their eyes so much. Then you'll probably want to learn more and improve. *Pickleball For Dummies* is for anyone with the enthusiasm to step on the court, understand the rules and fundamentals, perhaps move on to more advanced strategies, and, of course, have a blast playing.

Getting Everyone in on the Act

Joel Pritchard (shown in Figure 1-2) was a congressperson from Seattle who spent summers with his family and friends on Bainbridge Island, Washington. One summer in 1965, the kids were complaining of boredom. Joel and his friend, Bill Bell, felt there must be a way to get kids and parents to play together, so Joel set out to create a new game. Failing to find enough tennis rackets, he tried four table tennis paddles and a wiffle ball. The table tennis paddles didn't work so well, so the dads crafted some larger wooden paddles to use. They started to play on the old badminton court in the yard, and the kids lowered the net to waist height. Soon there was laughter, some shrieking, and a lot of rallying back and forth. They introduced the game to another friend, Barney McCallum, and made up some rules and a scoring system (with some inspiration from badminton). From there, the game has continued to evolve to this day.

We've encountered more than one version of how the sport's unique name came about. One story from Barney McCallum claims that the game was named after Pritchard's dog, Pickles. Peggy Pritchard, Joel's daughter, points out that the dog came later, however. She says that her mother, Joan Pritchard (a competitive rower in college), came up with the name, loosely derived from the term *pickle boats* that college rowing teams use for the "odds and ends" members of their team. The "odds and ends" were much like the random pieces of equipment Pritchard had grabbed to play the new game. Whichever story rings true, the quirky name is as fun as the sport itself.

FIGURE 1-2:
Pickleball
pioneer and U.S.
Congressperson
Joel Pritchard
(left) with Dan
Evans, Governor
of Washington
(right).



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Here's a quick timeline of pickleball's evolution:

- » **1965:** Pickleball is created by Congressperson Joel Pritchard and his friends.
- » **1967:** The first "official" pickleball court is built on Bainbridge Island, Washington.
- » **1972:** A corporation is formed for the new sport.
- » **1975:** Articles begin being published about "America's newest racquet sport."
- » **1976:** The first known pickleball tournament in the world is held at South Center Athletic Club in Tukwila, Washington.
- » **1982:** The United States Amateur Pickleball Association (USAPA) is organized to encourage the growth and advancement of pickleball on a national level, and the first official rule book is published two years later.
- » **1990:** Growing exponentially each year, pickleball is now played in all 50 states.
- » **1999:** The first pickleball website is launched.
- » **2001:** Pickleball is introduced for the first time at the Arizona Senior Olympics.
- » **2008:** The first mass-media exposure of the sport appears on ABC's *Good Morning America*, which airs a live, in-studio segment on pickleball that includes a brief demonstration.

- » **2009:** The first USAPA National Tournament for players of all ages is held in Buckeye, Arizona.
- » **2014:** The Pickleball Channel is launched.
- » **2016:** USAPA reports 17,000 members and over 4,600 places to play.
- » **2019** The Sports Fitness Industry Association 2019 report indicates that pickleball continues to be one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S. as participants reached 3.3 million.
- » **2021:** Pickleball is featured on NBC's *The Today Show*, CNBC, BBC News, and *Live with Kelly and Ryan*. Stories are published in top-rated publications including the *New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Forbes*, *Allure*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Economist*, *USA Today*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Parade*, and *Axios*.
- » **2022:** More than 5 million people are playing pickleball all over the world. Washington State's Governor Jay Inslee signs a bill into law that makes pickleball the official state sport of Washington.

As the preceding timeline shows, the sport of pickleball has grown gradually and steadily over the decades. As baby boomers started to retire, it grew faster, and then the pandemic hit in 2020 — and *boom!* The sport exploded. *U.S. News and World Report* said that pickleball “encouraged recreational opportunities closer to home, with participation surging by nearly 40% between 2019 and 2021.” Each year, more and more people are playing pickleball all over the world.

Discovering the Benefits of Pickleball

One of the reasons we wrote this book is to set the record straight. For example, many people assume that pickleball is played only by retirees and older people. Not true! People aged four to 100 are playing pickleball. About a third of players are under the age of 25, and this number is growing steadily. Pickleball is being integrated into many schools' Physical Education programs, and a whole new generation of kids is growing up loving the game.

The many good reasons to play pickleball start with its impact on body and mind. The health benefits of regular exercise are obvious, and pickleball is a relatively low-impact sport yet provides a great workout. Your body releases endorphins while you play, improving your mood. Keeping score and devising strategies to win are enough to keep your brain engaged for hours. The significant social aspect of the sport means that it's easy to meet lots of new people — and the truth is, making new friends as an adult can be hard! Your mental, physical, and emotional well-being are all connected, and pickleball checks every box.

Here are some of the top benefits to playing pickleball:

- » **It's easier to start playing than most sports.** Sure, the scoring seems kind of quirky at first, but the barrier to begin playing is very low. Chapter 2 tells you everything you need to know to start playing real games your first time on a court.
- » **It's available year-round.** You can play the sport indoors or outdoors, in any season.
- » **You can find many places to play.** As Chapter 4 describes, you can already find courts in many parks, gyms, athletic clubs, and community centers, and many cities are busy converting basketball and tennis courts to pickleball this very minute. Resorts and residential communities are also actively adding more pickleball courts for their residents.
- » **You can easily find other players.** User-friendly online resources and handy apps help you find people to play with wherever you are, as you find out in Chapter 4.
- » **The sport is affordable.** No fancy gear is required — you just need a paddle, a ball, and a positive attitude. Playing is often free in places like public parks.
- » **You can improve your fitness.** The multidirectional movement in pickleball improves strength, balance, and agility. Quick bursts of play action provide interval-like training to boost your cardio fitness.
- » **The matches are often played quickly.** Pickleball is great for short attention spans, young and old. With quick games and rotating players, it's constant fun.
- » **It's a multigenerational sport.** Family and friends of all ages can play together. Hello, bonding!
- » **It improves social skills and boosts confidence.** Newbies are warmly welcomed onto the court to play. “We all started just like you!” can be heard on pickleball courts everywhere.
- » **You get to use your brain.** Strategy and placement rule over raw athletic speed and strength, so you can work on your pickleball game even while waiting in line at the grocery store or commuting to work.
- » **You get to channel your inner-kid.** Playing pickleball is so much *fun!* Everyone needs more fun in their lives.

This chapter gives you many great reasons to start playing pickleball right now, so read on to find out how to play. A good place to start is Chapter 2, “Playing by the Rules,” which, in addition to the rules, tells you about the layout of the court, how to serve, and a few basics to get you going.

