

The Commotion on the Court

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There is an uproar coming from the tennis courts across the nation.

ANGOLA, IN- Pickleball and tennis stand on opposite sides of the net when it comes to needing space to play their sport. Tennis players are not entirely thrilled by the popularity of pickleball, as many of their courts are being redesigned to adhere to the massive overflow of pickleball players.

As the President of the Pickleball Club at Trine University, I can understand how frustrating it is to compete for space with other athletics. Every school year I have reserved gym time for the pickleball club, and often the space is stolen by another sport, or the taped lines are ripped off the floor by the next day. However, two sports should not need to battle over areas to participate in physical activity. Change needs to be made to avoid conflict between two activities that both have a positive effect on our mental and physical health.

The idea of pickleball came about in 1965 when three men invented the game. When creating the outline of the game, they attempted to shadow the rules of badminton. Their main goal was to invent a sport that everyone in the family could participate in. Many people describe pickleball as the perfect combination between badminton and tennis. It is played with hard paddles, a plastic ball (like a wiffle ball), a net, and on a smaller court than tennis.

Tennis is a traditional country club sport that this country has valued since 1874. It is played all over the world on both an amateur and professional level with four grand slam tournaments that earn millions of viewers every year. Tennis has been a beloved sport by most Americans, and that won't be changing despite the invasion of pickleball.

The conflict emerged when the pickleball population boomed so rapidly to the point that empty courts were nowhere to be found. Instead of constructing new courts designated for pickleball, tennis courts were taken over and decorated with pickleball lines. Tennis players around the country blamed the pickleball community, who did not have any other place to play.

Pickleball is a much slower paced game than tennis. The shrunk court does not force much running, the wiffle ball can only travel so fast and far, and the paddles are light, making them easy to swing.



Pickleball Lines Drawn Within Tennis Courts

Pickleball's characteristics have made it known as a sport for the elderly. Pickleball locations are consistently popping up in areas that are heavily populated with people over the age of 65. The game has morphed into the perfect way for retirees to get some exercise and get to know others. Additionally, pickleball is slowly storming through each generation of people. Now, Generation X and even Millennials have hopped on the pickleball train. If the sport continues to move from age to age, the space drought will only get worse.

In Lansing, Michigan a local park used to have several available tennis courts open to the public, but it was recently transformed to offer pickleball. Barabara Groom attends the courts weekly to participate in open pickleball play with others. She

remembers visiting the park when the tennis courts were still there and recalls never seeing anyone using them. Groom said, “I can understand why tennis players who are constantly playing are frustrated with pickleball taking up their space. But if towns are seeing vacant tennis courts, their decision to replace them with a sport that is always being played is reasonable.” Cities always want people to visit, but they have ultimately taken away a portion of visitors who are looking for somewhere to play tennis, by overrunning them with pickleball courts.

Another influence in this situation is that many tennis players are dropping out of the sport to partake in pickleball. According to an article by Apple Newsroom called “New Apple Research Highlights the Health Benefits of Pickleball,” In July of 2023, for the first time ever, the number of people playing pickleball in one month was more than the number of tennis participants. Tennis can be hard on the body and pickleball is a healthy alternative. Mostly everyone can participate in pickleball, but those who have played or still play tennis are at a slight advantage. They are already used to the motion and the hand eye coordination it requires. If a tennis player has a successful first attempt at pickleball, don’t assume it’s beginner’s luck.

To give an example on a larger stage, Jack Sock is a former professional tennis player who won the U.S Open in 2018 for men’s doubles. At only 30 years old, he made the decision to retire from the sport and join the Professional Pickleball Association Tour (PPA). Another tennis star and eight-time major champion, Andre Agassi commented on Sock’s retirement and said, “Pickleball is where tennis players go to die.” Professional tennis players who are making a great sum of money have even decided to forgo their tennis careers and begin pickleball. However, their reasoning for it does not usually have anything to do with losing passion for tennis. But more so, their aging bodies have made tennis difficult, and it is time for them to find a less taxing way to get their exercise. If professional tennis players have started to dip their toes in pickleball, others are likely to follow in their footsteps.



Jack Sock Playing Professional Pickleball

On October 7, 2023, Trine University hosted its annual tennis tournament during Homecoming. In addition to tennis, there was also a pickleball tournament organized by the club. Students, faculty, and members of the community were encouraged to participate in a friendly tournament. Drew Vasko, a member of both the Trine Men’s Tennis team and the Pickleball Club, decided to only play in the tennis tournament. When asked why did not want to take part in both sports, Vasko said, “I’ve heard that tennis and pickleball are in a bit of a rivalry right now, so I better stick with the sport I always have.” Sports should not need to compete against each other in any situation. Both sports could take a turn for the worse if athletes decide to stop playing because of an argument.

Not only has this controversy been fought with words, but also with actions. According to an article by The Guardian titled, “Blame, Threat, and Clash: The war between pickleball and tennis players is escalating-on and off the court,” in 2021, a few tennis players dumped around six quarts of oil on a pickleball court in California. Mixed in with the oil was a harsh note directed at pickleball players to stay off their tennis courts. But tennis players are not all to blame as many pickleballers have retaliated. The article said, “A man, from Denver, Colorado, was arrested on a felony charge of criminal mischief after he used a permanent marker to delineate pickleball boundaries on a basketball court.” Although pickleball players have limited areas to play, that gives them no right to vandalize other sports surfaces. These



Pickleball Courts in an Empty Shopping Mall

careless acts of violence and harsh words against other athletics is completely unnecessary and something needs to be done to end it.

Instead of continuing to point fingers at each other, tennis and pickleball players need to open their eyes to the main culprit. It is not the fault of tennis athletes who would prefer their space to be left alone, and it is not pickleball's fault that the sport has become so popular. The United States needs to be better at prioritizing the sports and fitness industry. Physical activity keeps people healthy, and they should be able to do that no matter what the activity is. There has never been a sport that has grown as rapidly as pickleball has, and because of that, they deserve their own space. Many plans have

gone into effect to help solve the space problem. For instance, several run down and vacant shopping malls are being redesigned to become "Picklemalls." Malls are the perfect arena to play pickleball due to the high ceilings and spacious indoor areas.

The dynamic of pickleball and tennis are very similar, however, they are two very different sports. Tennis is the traditional high class racquet sport while pickleball is a young and growing game for the family. A sport as popular as pickleball deserves its own space without stepping on the toes of another beloved game. Both tennis and pickleball benefit the mental and physical wellbeing of people, so let's make space for both to be played without conflict. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the United States, that alone explains why building more designated pickleball courts is in fact, a big dill.