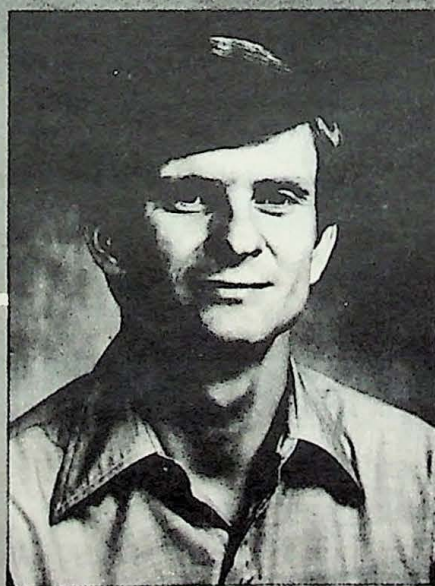


The History of Racquetball



Racquetball was formally organized by Bob Kendler only seven years ago, in 1968, but it is a game that has captured the enthusiasm of physical-fitness minded men and women throughout North America. Foundations of our present-day paddleball and racquetball games may be found more than seven centuries ago.

In an idle moment 700 years ago, two French monks began batting a ball around a monastery courtyard with crude wooden paddles. As a result, this impromptu game, which came to be known as court tennis, gained popularity with royalty and Louis X was so over-extended chasing balls that he became ill and died shortly after a match. Also, the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon were both reported to have played the game.

Today, the game of court tennis, which was the forerunner of lawn tennis, table tennis, squash, badminton and racquetball is extremely complicated. The court itself is a stylized version of the old monastery courtyard, and costs up to \$250,000 to construct. There are only 27 courts in use today (seven in the United States).

While the game of racquetball has its origins in court tennis, it evolved directly from the game of paddleball. Earl Risky of the University of Michigan is credited with being the individual who originated the concept of paddleball in the 1920s. While watching tennis players practice their strokes in a handball court, Risky decided that one could play

a game similar to handball, that would also include the skills of tennis. Paddleball was the result of this idea.

While paddleball is played with a wooden paddle, racquetball is played with a strung racquet the frames of which are made of wood, aluminum alloy, fiberglass or a similar combination of materials. Since its origin, probably in the 1940s through the efforts of Joe Sobek, the popularity of the game of racquetball has spread and surpassed paddleball; players of all ages and both sexes can now be found playing racquetball. The increase in interest, facilities, and the addition of racquetball to the physical education curriculum has done much for the promotion of the sport.

Racquetball is a fast game requiring endurance, skill and body control. It requires the use of nearly all parts of the body. Because of its demands on the cardio-respiratory system it ranks as an excellent conditioning activity. Research indicates that racquetball is an excellent means of providing the stimulus to bring about endurance gains. Racquetball can be a means to help control body weight because of the high caloric expenditure required in the playing of the game. In our sedentary society there is a need for physical activity to relieve the stress and tension of modern life. The fact that

racquetball is a means to relieve this stress makes it an important aspect in the development of good mental health.

What *is* the appeal of racquetball? The answer is that racquetball makes it possible for a person to enjoy a physical and mental workout without requiring a high degree of skill ability. The game eliminates the pitfalls of a tennis net, yet requires similar stamina necessary for handball. Also, because of the short length of the racquet used in racquetball, the game may be played at an even faster pace than squash. A major advantage of racquetball is that it can be played by men and women, boys and girls—anyone who has a general degree of motor ability.

When it first gained popularity, the game of racquetball was criticized by handball players who resented the game because it occupied time in their handball courts, which were already in great demand. Because of this feeling, racquetball was banned or had restrictive time limits in many private clubs, community centers, and YMCAs, where most handball courts are located. However, the strong appeal of racquetball helped it to endure. By the mid-1960s, the strength of numbers of racquetball supporters and players caused the opposition to accept the game and allowed it to be played more widely.

In recent years the game has made rapid gains in numbers of participants, refinement of rules and equipment, and the establishment of a national organization in spite of a relatively brief history.

Paddleball, Forerunner To Racquetball

The origin of the game of paddleball, the forerunner to racquetball in the United States, is credited to Risky, the first president of the National Paddleball Association. Risky is recognized as founder of the game. As a city recreation director in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he had paddle tennis courts installed and promoted this game for the National Paddle Tennis Association in the 1920s, prior to the beginning of paddleball. Paddle tennis was the modern version of the early game of court tennis and had some of the elements of tennis, only it was played on a smaller, unwallled court and utilized paddles instead of tennis rackets. Early competition was limited to inter-park contests. Following Risky's affiliation with the Department of Physical Education and Athletics at the University of Michigan, the university recreation department installed several paddle tennis courts at the newly completed Sports Building and the activity

became immediately popular with both students and faculty.

Tennis players discovered that they could gain more skill proficiency for their game by using the handball courts, stroking the ball against the wall. Risky found that hitting the paddle tennis ball against the handball walls helped to improve ability in paddle tennis. Members of the physical education staff joined in using the paddle tennis equipment in the handball courts rather than on the unwallled courts normally used for the game. Most already played handball so rules from that game were used; consequently, an intriguing game was developed.

Physical education students at Michigan, many of whom were already varsity athletes, were introduced to the game and often matches between the faculty and students ensued. For a brief time this newly created game was known as "paddle tennis in the court." Printed rules were drawn up at Michigan and the game came to be known as paddleball. Since the University of Michigan also had two one-wall courts in their gymnasium, it was necessary to establish rules for that game as well as for the four-wall game.

Paddle tennis, the forerunner to paddleball, eventually passed out of the athletic picture at the institution, primarily because the gymnasium could be put to better use with other activities. Risky then organized competition for paddleball and the winner was

crowned the All Campus Champion. The first paddleball (wooden paddle) champion was Harvey Bauss, a varsity wrestler and a skilled boxer, who won the title in 1930. A printed chart still hangs by the courts showing the champions since that date.

The game of paddleball was given great impetus during World War II when it was selected as one of the activities in the United States Armed Forces Conditioning Program held at the University of Michigan. Thousands of young men from the different branches of the military service were first introduced to the game and it gained great support. They carried the game back to other military and non-military training sites where others learned to play. At the conclusion of World War II, the returning servicemen took the game to their local areas throughout the United States and Canada.

The first national paddleball tournament was held in Madison, Wisconsin in December, 1961, with Paul Nelson of Madison winning the singles title. These national tournaments have continued annually since that first tournament. A permanent organization was established in 1962 with a board of directors, officers, and committees. Risky was honored by being elected President.

The U.S.H.A. Era

Apparently, the first mention of paddleball (wooden paddle) in *ACE*, the Official Voice of Handball (now *Handball* magazine), was in the December, 1966 issue which was probably the first official recognition of the paddle sport by the United States Handball Association. Mention was made of the need for organization and management of paddleball. Just two years later, paddle rackets (strung racquet) as it was then known, began to appear regularly in bi-monthly issues of *ACE*.

Robert W. Kendler, President of the United States Handball Association, travelled around the country for the promotion of handball and found that paddleball was frequently played in the handball courts. Athletic directors of the various clubs often apologized for this and explained that the game was limited to certain hours. Many of them felt that paddleball would eventually lead to the demise of handball. Kendler felt that this was not true and, in his opinion, both paddleball and handball were growing and prospering. Kendler decided that simply because paddleball was played on handball courts, did not make it detrimental to the future of handball. Actually, it was beneficial for players since paddleball was being played by older players who could either give up the game of handball or add ten years to their participation in sports by continuing with paddleball.

Kendler realized the need for new rules and equipment. Moderation in both sports was needed to lessen bodily damage such as sore arms in handball and head injuries caused by blows with the paddle which were common at that time. New rules would help to curb the damage to arms and heads while new racquets would stop the damage to the walls as well.

Kendler felt that paddleball (paddle rackets) needed organization and management by the players, and with sound direction it could become a welcome partner in the overall handball program. Handball had once been the "orphan" when Kendler had severed relations with the Amateur Athletic Union to form the United States Handball Association. Paddleball was now the orphan as handball had been. Kendler requested the handball membership to inform the headquarters as to their feelings concerning this idea.

Should there be an organization and promotion for paddleball along with national tournaments and inclusion of its news in *ACE* on a monthly basis? Letters poured into the USHA office from all across the nation and many were printed in *ACE* in the February and April, 1967 issues. Replies were almost entirely favorable in support of incorporating a paddleball section

in *ACE*, a magazine previously devoted wholly to handball. It was Kendler's judgment that the time was right to incorporate paddleball in the organization of the USHA; this was also advised by some of the best handball players in the East, who played both handball and paddleball.

Letters supporting the game of paddleball published in *ACE* came from professional YMCA physical directors, Jewish Community Center directors, physical educators, as well as interested proponents of the game. Paddleball was noted as a fine sport for all-around physical fitness; it also gave the handball player an opportunity of playing a sport employing very much the same rules. Supporters of the game believed that the sport of paddleball was well established and it should be given its proper place. A handball advocate suggested that the USHA could be a contributor to the sports scene by taking a leadership role for paddleball. Still others felt that it was the responsibility of *ACE* to help promote the sports of paddleball and paddle rackets until they both became self-sustaining; a national tournament for both sports was suggested. The following reasons, based on YMCA experience, were given for the need for paddleball:

1. Men who have never played handball or a comparable four-wall game would find the game enjoyable.
2. Business and professional men

who needed to protect their hands could do so playing paddleball as opposed to playing handball.

3. Youngsters starting four-wall activity could be given an early start on a lifetime sports skill.

Physical educators indicated that paddleball was an excellent sport from their point of view and fulfilled the physical needs of many individuals who might not otherwise be able to get vigorous exercise. The writers contended that coaches, physical educators, and handball enthusiasts should be cognizant of the good and bad aspects concerning paddleball and apply them so that both sports could benefit. It was further stressed that there was a choice of two directions to follow. First, the USHA members could degrade the sport of paddleball to their own detriment, or, second, they could support the game and in the long run be helpful to the entire physical fitness picture.

Not all of the members who wrote replies to *ACE* were in favor of paddleball. Some voted against the admission of paddleball and its players into the USHA and felt that if this was done it would be a serious mistake. Their argument simply stated that it was not fair for paddleball players to use handball facilities just as it would be wrong for handball players to use squash courts or visa-versa. Other writers expressed their opinion that the association would have all it could

do to supervise handball, without having to expand or develop new sports within its organization. The following additional problems were noted:

1. Not enough courts.
2. Courts were not constructed properly to withstand contact of the paddle on the court.
3. Lack of national, local and regional recognition.

Mort Leve, editor of *ACE*, reported in the February, 1967 edition that it appeared from the overwhelming positive attitude of the USHA membership toward paddleball that action should be taken. The intention of the national headquarters was to study the situation and compile a complete report for the members at the national convention, April 4, 1967, during the National Handball Championships at the Olympic Club in San Francisco.

The stand of the USHA was that support should be given to the paddle racket game rather than paddleball, since this version had gained more popularity and was played almost exclusively in the four-wall courts. In the New York

City area, through the efforts of the United States Paddleball Association (limited to New York City) paddleball had gained great popularity, and the Association had been headquartered there since 1961. The appeal of the game in New York stemmed from the accessibility of the courts in public parks and beach clubs, the minimal cost of equipment, and the natural fascination of a sport requiring agility, speed, and coordination. Yet the game did not require a great deal of strength or endurance, which was largely responsible for its appeal to the very young and to women and older men.

Next issue: the origins of racquetball and the first national tournament.

Origins Of Racquetball

Racquetball probably got its earliest start in the year 1949. Joe Sobek was credited with inventing the game at that time. The original name of the game was "Paddle-Rackets." Prior to that time, Sobek had left his profession as a tennis and squash professional and was employed in an executive position in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Sobek had watched paddleball, using the wooden paddle, being played by numerous members of the Greenwich, Connecticut YMCA. Looking for a means to exercise, Sobek thought that paddleball would be a more interesting and entertaining game if a strung racket were used rather than a solid-faced wooden version. Sobek designed the kind of racket thought to be appropriate and took it to a New England manufacturer of tennis rackets, squash rackets, and badminton frames. With the new racket, Sobek started a group of men playing at the Greenwich Y.

In the early stages of the game, the only suitable ball available was a Spalding ball for children made of red, white and blue rubber; however, it worked remarkably well. As the supply was depleted, Sobek then put out a request to friends traveling throughout the country to purchase this ball wherever it could be found in toy stores. Eventually, the supply became exhausted and Sobek and his friends could locate

no more balls. After consulting Spalding, Sobek discovered that the firm did not plan to continue manufacturing the ball. Spalding did, however, have a pink rubber ball that was similar to the inside core of a tennis ball. This ball was used for many years, as well as a softer ball, which was blue in color and developed especially for Sobek, whose autograph was stenciled on the outside. The early rules for the game of racquetball were derived primarily from established squash rules. Over the years Sobek was reluctant to make changes, but most of those that were made were concerned with revisions in the serve.

The sport spread rapidly from the Greenwich Y as players moved to other towns and introduced the sport nationwide. During those formative years, "National Championships" were held at the Greenwich Y in Connecticut and identified as Paddle-Rackets Championships.

In those early years, Sobek on his own initiative periodically sent a YMCA four rackets and several balls and asked such organizations to experiment with the sport and give it a try. This often was done in the years from 1949 through 1959 and, as a result, the sport spread rapidly throughout the nation's YMCAs in

this ten year period. Sobek reported that the early participants in the game consisted of approximately 50% handball players and the remaining players came from some other racket sport.

After having played many racket sports, Sobek felt that paddle-rackets had more to offer than any of the others. It proved to be a stimulating winter activity. Additionally, it was fun, gave tremendous exercise, and was easy to learn. Another advantage was that anyone, young or old, could step into the court and play the game at his own pace. As the game prospered in the 1960s and spread throughout many geographic areas, as well as private clubs, many different types of balls were tried in an experimental effort to discover which was the most satisfactory. Also, during the same time period the game was played under a variety of different names, such as "paddle-rackets," "paddle-tennis," and "paddleball."

Racquetball 1968-70

Due to the increasing popularity of racquetball throughout the country in the 1960s, competition on a nationwide basis emerged. After an introductory national tournament in Milwaukee, the first "International Championships" was conducted in St. Louis, Missouri, at which time the International Racquetball Association was established through the resources and leadership of Robert W. Kendler and the offices of the United States Handball Association. That newly formed racquetball association

combined the splintered groups of racquet and paddleball players across the nation. It also attracted many former handball players as a result of the similarity of the two games.

Although the first official International Racquetball Association Championships were held in 1969, the sport had really begun to emerge on the national sports scene one year earlier. The National Paddle Rackets Tournament held in 1968 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 23-36, served as the springboard from which racquetball was brought into prominence. Before, paddle rackets players had been primarily playing for enjoyment and had held a few tournaments in the New England states. However, in the 1960s, as the sport began to spread rapidly, it infiltrated the paddleball and handball player ranks.

Several of the top racquetball players of today were nationally ranked performers in paddleball, including Bill Schmidtke, Bud Muehleisen, Charlie Brumfield, Bill Schultz, Paul Nelson, Steve Keeley, Craig Finger, and Paul Lawrence. By 1967, the game of paddle rackets began to challenge paddleball as the most popular game in many clubs and communities. A widespread interest was noticeable among the top-flight paddle rackets players, not only in New England, but also in areas such as Louisville, San Diego, Minneapolis and other major metropolitan areas. To

highlight this great enthusiasm Larry Lederman, Athletic Director of the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Milwaukee, decided it was time to hold "a big tournament." By then it was debatable which was the better game, paddles, or racquets. Lederman's idea was to get all of the top stars together, organize one game, and decide whether to play with the solid paddle or the newer strung rackets. Lederman recalled that people came to the Milwaukee Jewish Community Center with wooden paddles and played the game in the handball courts, although many handball players had the attitude that the paddles would damage the court walls. But play was allowed and Lederman became curious as to what extent a sport like paddleball played with the strung racket could ever progress.

He had tried the game of paddleball himself and played with all kinds of different balls then in use. The game was also promoted at the JCC but it just did not flourish; there was a lack of appeal. This might have been due to the game not being fast enough, plus the added factor of the heavy racket being a lethal weapon. The game continued to be played at the JCC, however, especially by Tom Sanicola, who played in all kinds of contests with the better handball players, hands against the paddle, using a handball. Sanicola played against Paul Haber, five-time national handball champion, and Simie Fein, two-time national handball doubles champion, to see who could win.

It was not until a gut racket invented by Sobek was introduced in the Milwaukee area in 1966 that the game really began to create enthusiasm. Lederman purchased several of the rackets immediately, allowed people to borrow them, and encouraged play. Before long there was a large following, especially the participants who had difficulty learning handball or squash because those two sports appeared to be more difficult. In contrast, there was instant success with the gut racket game.

The ratio of paddle rackets to handball players at the Milwaukee JCC soon grew to five to one and this was years prior to the first national tournament. In 1967, a small committee for paddle rackets was organized which was interested in being incorporated with the National Paddleball Association. Papers were drawn up by the committee of Sanicola, Lawrence Gardner, Benjamin Labowski, Phillip Cottle, and Maurice Laskin, with the intent of making the new sport into a national organization. It, too, was called the National Paddleball Association.

When the first tournament was held in Milwaukee May 23-26, 1968, the committee called it the National Paddleball Tournament, not distinguishing between paddleball and paddle rackets. There were 72 entrants in that first tournament

from all over the United States—New York, Pennsylvania, as far west as Denver and Phoenix, and as far south as New Orleans; players from Canada also participated.

Entries came in from every state in the Midwest, as well as inquiries about the rules, rackets, and type of ball, indicating the wide differences of play in the various areas.

Paddleball was described as being played in the same courts as handball, following the same rules, but differing in the ball and racket. There had been other national paddleball tournaments, but the wooden racket was used with a slower type of ball, according to Lederman. In order to standardize the game as to racket and ball, a Paddleball Committee was incorporated into the USGPA (United States Gut Paddleball Association) to organize the tournament and make headway towards a uniform sport code.

Libowsky was the president of the group with a committee composed of Gardner, Lederman, Sanicola, Mort Luck, "Buckets" Goldenberg, Irving Peckarsky, and Sydney Plotkin. A news release written for publicity of the tournament predicted that the number of gut racket players would eventually outdistance handball players which claimed 2,500,000 players in the nation. Apparently the game had become popular because one did not need to be an athlete to play. There was almost instant success the moment a player stepped into

the court. The resiliency of the racket, the fast moving ball, and the size and shape of the racket did not offer any obstacles to a person trying to hit the ball. It was easy to keep the ball in play. As Libowsky noted, "*Once we get a few national tourneys going and players begin to accept the new game, it is bound to become one of the most popular games in the nation for an indoor sport.*"

In 1968 it was hard to determine how many gut paddle players there were in the country because nobody had taken the time to find out and organize the players into an association. It was possible that the Milwaukee committee might turn the game over to the United States Handball Association with headquarters in Chicago and a national magazine at their disposal. Thus, players could be registered and the game more easily promoted. It was prophetically stated that if this was the committee's choice, Milwaukee would have had a hand in shaping the destiny of a coming indoor activity that had a lasting value for men and women because this game could be played from age six to 76.

Lederman and his directors, along with the athletic community of the JCC, combined to handle the problem of organizing paddle rackets players into a cohesive group. They formed a tournament committee of members of their club and athletes in the various court sports—persons who, over the years, had organized major

tournaments and even some national sport events. Lederman convinced most of the top players of paddleball to give up the older game in favor of the newer game of paddle rackets for the tournament and then collaborate and form a national committee for the sport of paddle rackets.

A contemporary list of names of top paddleball players in the country was developed and most of them agreed to set aside their paddles to take up rackets at least for this tournament. Lederman also sent invitations to every YMCA athletic club, JCC, college or university known to have courts, urging them to send their top players to compete in the tournament. Players from all over the country made it truly a national championship. The spirit of the tournament was set in a letter from the tournament committee to all participants:

Our Committee has worked long and hard to make this tournament a truly memorable experience for you, and if there is anything we can do to help make your stay more pleasant, we are eager to do so. The Jewish Community Center is dedicated to enhancing the physical and spiritual health of all people, and we are happy to be part of the effort to strengthen the physical fitness of people through paddleball.

Bill Schultz and Bill Schmidtke, players from Madison, Wisconsin, met in the finals of the singles championships and other players from Milwaukee battled in the doubles finals, as these two cities dominated the National Paddle Ball

Gut Racket Championship in the first tournament. Schultz won the singles crown in three games by defeating his doubles partner, Schmidtke. Fein and Jim White captured the doubles title with a triumph over the other Milwaukee team, David Glinberg and Dan Trost.

In winning the singles titles, Schultz established himself as one of the country's foremost players in the game, having won the national wooden paddleball title in 1962 and a runner-up in every tournament since. Schultz, who was a YMCA Executive Director in Madison, Wisconsin, had been instrumental in popularizing the wooden paddle game, having initiated two national tournaments in Madison. However, his introduction to the game with the gut racket began on a "home and home" sociable arrangement between the Madison YMCA and the Jewish Community Center in Milwaukee. Schultz had seriously begun working out with the gut racket only three weeks before the tournament with a purchase of four rackets and a half dozen Pennsylvania Pinkies (a pink rubber ball used in the national tournament) from Lederman. Daily sessions on his own home courts with partner Schmidtke revealed the remarkable transformation that could be made in adjusting to a new game and ball.

The first national tournament determined that handball players could make the changeover to

paddleball. Half of the players in the tournament played both sports and enjoyed playing the two games; it gave them a chance to choose.

Organizational meetings were held throughout the tournament and after its completion. Every player, along with athletic directors and prominent sports-minded businessmen, took part in discussing the future of the sport. The conclusion was that this was the beginning of a great new sport called paddle rackets and it needed an organizational structure.

In essence, the good of the first national tournament was to form a permanent and enduring framework for the new sport as an end result to the athletic competition it provided. Large paddleball tournaments had previously generated a spirit of friendship and harmony necessary to accomplish the desired goal of organization. Lederman and the tournament committee hoped to capitalize on that harmony to guarantee that the future of the game of paddle rackets would be secure. Many popular sports had risen to popularity only to falter due to poor organizational structure, excessive commercialism, lack of publicity, or for other reasons. It was hoped that this failure could be avoided with the game of paddle rackets.

Name Change

A change in the name of the organization was the product of meetings held in conjunction with the first International Championships in St. Louis. It was the wish of the U.S. Handball Association to tie together the various games played in the 20x40 handball courts. Several players from Madison, Wisconsin, and San Diego, California, played with both the wooden paddle and the "gut" racket and had demonstrated a desire to unify. If this desire held true for other players across the country, the USHA felt that it might be more inclusive to change the name to the International Racquetball Association. This would include everyone under one organization for the benefit of all. This was to be a topic brought up for discussion at the first "International Paddle Rackets Association" championships convention which brought to an end the first season of paddle rackets. The membership was urged to voice their opinions in response.

At the organizational meeting in St. Louis on April 26, 1969, players and officials who attended voted for selection of a name that gave a better description of the game. The International Racquetball Association became the new official name for the four-wall racket game since the word "paddle" appeared to denote the use of a wooden paddle. It was reported that since there was a great deal of confusion of nomenclatures in the game of

paddleball the initial naming of the "International Paddle Rackets Association" might be repetitive in using both "paddle" and "rackets" together and perhaps not all-inclusive.

After official adoption of the word "racquetball" as the name for the game, people were still referring to the "gut" four-wall court game as paddleball. The IRA headquarters tried to explain that paddleball referred to the wood paddle game and that had been the main reason for the changeover at the first international meeting in St. Louis in April of that year. It was also stressed that the "racquet" spelling be used both for the game, racquetball, and the implement used, racquet, rather than racketball and racket.

The results of the first International Racquetball Association Championships held in St. Louis, April 24-27, 1969, were termed a total success. The large cross-section of the players in the country who attended provided outstanding competition in the four brackets of action—open singles and doubles, and Masters singles and doubles (players over forty years of age).

Continued Success

With the advent of the 1970 championships, racquetball was well on its way to success. The tournament exceeded any previous national racquetball entry with sixty players in singles and an overall count of 159 entries from fifteen

states. National Commissioner Lederman presided at the International convention meeting and stated that this was an "historic first," not just the meeting but the four-day competition held at the St. Louis JCC. *"By banding together we can follow only one road, that of success,"* Lederman added.

Committees were formed covering adoption of an official ball, rules, nominating, and tournament procedures. Many players requested that the association provide a ball that would be uniform in performance and give a true bounce.

Kendler, President of the IRA, recommended that an "Air Force Orange" ball be experimented with, for better view by players and for picture values on film and television. Kendler felt that TV was the key to promotion of the game and orange was a color the public could follow. It was also suggested that the St. Louis JCC be given an option to again host the International Championships for the next year because of its fine facilities, central location, and also because racquetball was primarily played east of the Mississippi river.

A highlight of the tournament was the first women's competition. A local heroine, Frances Cohen,

proved the class of the field in defeating Kimberly Hill, a University of Southern California freshman. Women had claimed their rightful place in the sport's national tournament.

National championship tournaments became the culmination of each year's play as well as being the key to rule changes and organizational meetings, and they provided a general reinforcement of the best interests of the sport.

Organization and Leadership

Prior to the 1969 national tournament, Larry Lederman, Physical Director of the Milwaukee JCC, had hoped racquetball would move forward more rapidly than handball. Lederman realized that almost instant success was possible with racquetball and the only means to accomplish this goal was to turn the control of racquetball over to the United States Handball Association. Their magazine could improve and promote racquetball as it should be; however, Lederman's committee which organized the first national tournament the U.S. Gut Paddle Association (USGPA) had been opposed to this loss of control.

Even though the USGPA committee was against the proposal they were not in a position to subsidize a magazine; it took a great deal of money and they simply did not have the revenue. It was through Lederman's contact with Kendler, President of the USHA, and a personal friend, that he was asked to attend the players' meeting at the 1968 national tournament. Lederman explained to Kendler his intention to turn the racquetball organization over to the USHA in order that it might reach its full potential. The arguments for this were accepted by Kendler and the visit was agreed to.

A meeting for all interested players was conducted at the JCC Health Club after the 1968 championship match and Lederman presented his plan to the players. It met with some resistance, but with some assurances and Kendler's persuasive nature, the players were convinced of the value of the plan. Kendler immediately proposed a plan of action to get royalties from the sale of an official ball and outlined the business needs of the game. At that point Lederman knew the game was on its way to success.

An official meeting to begin proceedings for the formation of the International Paddle Rackets Association was held on August 1, 1969, at the USHA offices in Skokie, Illinois. In attendance were Lederman; Gerard Lapierre; J. Lawrence Meyer, Physical Director of the Evanston, Illinois YMCA; USHA President, Kendler; Mort Leve, USHA Executive Secretary; and Samuel Carl, one of the leading players at the Evanston YMCA. Topics of discussion included plans for a uniform ball, initial administrative structure of the IPRA, first year tournaments, and a unified set of rules for four-wall and one-wall paddle rackets. Particulars on membership subscription and official operation of the Association were to be carried in the October edition of USHA's *ACE* Magazine. A dual membership was to be offered to any players who participated in both paddle rackets and handball.

Kendler assumed the role of President of the IPRA, the same capacity he had held with the USHA, guiding the promotion and growth of the paddle game, and working to unite the paddle rackets enthusiasts into one viable democratic organization with uniform operation and equipment. Lederman, who had conducted a very successful national tournament that previous May in 1968, was elected to serve as the Association's National Commissioner. Meyer, who was a well-known promoter of squash and paddleball in Chicago, was announced as the Midwest Area Commissioner, and Lapierre was designated as Eastern Area Commissioner. Other area commissioners were to be named. A plan which originated at this meeting was to hold four area (or divisional) tournaments in 1969 with provisions for the singles and doubles winners to be awarded a special air coach trip to the national tournament.

Divisional tournament boundaries became flexible after their inception in 1969. The idea had always been to give good competition over an area of several states and was patterned after the same regional tournaments as the USHA sponsored handball competition had. In selecting divisional tournament sites the IPRA tried to take into account locale, density of players, facilities and other pertinent factors. The ideal host would be the club that already had several good players to provide

the foundation of the tournament.

The IPRA's Canadian members, who had in previous years found that high expenses took a heavy toll in entries, were also considered in divisional organization. Many times these players would forego regional competition for the more important trip to the international tournament. In 1970 the national finals were in St. Louis, Missouri, and that was even more inducement to bypass the regionals because of the distance to be travelled from many areas in Canada and expenses involved. The divisional structure was made even more entertaining and attractive with the advent of women's competition. Not since the women's one-wall handball competition in New York in the mid-1960s had so much interest been evident among women in the handball-type games.

As in the past, the IPRA continued to have three other areas of competition, Masters doubles, open singles, and open doubles. Masters singles for players over forty years of age was optional for the host club and was dependent on availability of courts. Players were limited to entering one event only. The IPRA continued to pay for sending the open singles and open doubles champions from each divisional tournament as it had done in the past.

Opposition by Handball Players

In response to the outcry by handball players who were opposed to the promotion of paddle rackets (as it was called in 1968) by the

USHA, the aim of the USHA was explained as peaceful co-existence with the racquet sport:

Let's get one fact straight—and above board. The U.S. Handball Association is NOT trying to sell the paddleball game. However, we do feel that the handball and paddle racket sports can definitely co-exist, and that we must respect the wishes of athletic directors who seek maximum participation in the court activity.

In the early beginnings of organized racquetball, handball and racquetball players were quite different. According to Kendler, the racquetball players were considerably more courteous on the court than handball players; there was less contact and more good sportsmanship displayed in racquetball games than there was in handball. This could have evolved from tennis where at least in amateur tennis there was a great deal of courtesy and consideration. The violent competition of handball carried over into racquetball and the sportsmanship of that game emerged in handball.

There was also a severe backlash from some of the oldtime handball players. There was, of course, a tremendous lack of handball courts and the complaint was that introducing racquetball players and particularly women players into the area where there was already a shortage would simply compound the problem.

Kendler received some very derogatory letters and had many arguments and many discussions at the USHA conventions, but his theory was that there should not be fewer players on the handball courts as a result of the increased popularity of racquetball. The point was that everyone needed more courts. The solution was not keeping the racquetball players out but developing more facilities. Kendler felt that the two games were companion sports and that one would complement the other, and it was discovered that although this was not the case in the beginning, there was a great interest by racquetball players to try handball and by handball players to try racquetball. Suddenly some very good nationally recognized handball players became exceptionally good racquetball players.

The introduction of racquetball into the handball arena had made it possible for owners of handball courts to begin making money on handball. Handball players were using the handball courts for perhaps six hours a day; when racquetball became popular the courts were occupied for sixteen hours a day. Women and children were playing in the morning and in the afternoon when the businessmen were not there, and before long an industry that had

been a "loser" for years was suddenly a winner.

Charles Leve, Executive Secretary of the IRA, discovered a great deal of resentment to racquetball in the courts throughout the country and actually received about two dozen letters a week from racquetball players complaining that they were not allowed to play on their local courts. Leve replied to these letters and wrote to the proprietors of the facility where the complaint originated and explained three points:

1. The transition from wooden-framed racquets to metal and fiberglass will eliminate court damage;
2. The black marks on the walls result from years of handball play, racquetballs do not leave a mark;
3. Most important is that racquetball will bring new members to the clubs along with women and children as racquetball is a more family-oriented game.

The opposition in the beginning was somewhat understandable. The handball participants who had supported their game for 50 years suddenly found it was difficult to reserve courts, even though the courts were built originally for handball. The fact remained that if people who had never played either game wanted to play, they chose

racquetball since it was basically much easier to learn.

Game Changes

Equipment

Early in 1968 in a letter to Marlowe Phillips, Mort Leve described the early problems with development of an official ball. Leve felt that getting a good cross-section of sample balls and testing them was the most democratic way to proceed. Several balls were available from various sporting goods companies and included the Seamless 556, the Sobek blue that Seamless also made, the Spalding hi-bouncer, the Pennsylvania Pinky, and the Pennsylvania official paddleball, a ball with a pin-point hole in it.

Lederman had noted that the Sobek ball was not ideal as it flattened out too much off the front wall and lacked firmness. The Seamless 556 was found to have an acceptable bounce but the rubber was so heavy that it had too much reaction off the racquet. Leve concluded that a ball incorporating the best of the two Seamless balls might be the best solution. Later, in November of 1968, Mort Leve wrote Lederman that no other company was willing to change from the ball they were then making, including Spalding, so the organization was going to work with Seamless.

Mort Leve reported in February, 1969, that the first set of test balls to arrive did not reach desired performance standards in the effort to produce an official IPRA ball.

These sample balls were mailed to test sites at the Evanston, Illinois, and Madison, Wisconsin YMCAs and the Milwaukee and St. Louis JCCs. After those tests, modifications were made and another set was being readied before the division IPRA tournaments were held.

Leve believed that the second sample ball would meet with a variety of reactions but that a start had to be made somewhere. The consensus of the membership was to develop a relatively lively ball that would enable the players to use the four-wall courts and ceiling to their full advantage. A dead ball was seen to be a hindrance to the progress of the game because it was assumed that the success of modern handball was based on a lively ball. Racquetball was placed in the same category. There was concern about a squishy ball that would not carry to the back wall of the court. Only through trial and error could any decisions be made.

In a letter from the Seamless Rubber Company to the International Paddle Rackets Association dated April 10, 1969, William O'Brien, the Chemical Engineering Manager, apologized that the official IPRA ball was not found to be lively enough for tournament play. O'Brien explained to Leve:

In our telephone conversation on February 27, we agreed to make 200 dozen balls simply coloring the Sobek Ball black because of the urgency of the situation; and this is

what we did. In all probability, the black pigment gives the ball a different characteristic than the blue pigment which is in the Sobek Ball. We noticed that the balls were somewhat softer than the regular Sobek Ball, but we did not know if this would influence their playability.

O'Brien went on to explain that since the IPRA had requested a ball about 15% livelier than the Sobek ball, it would be necessary to run some experimental batches to determine the degree of liveliness. The few balls tested in the laboratory were found not to have the same playing characteristics as those made in production; therefore, it was necessary to run small production lots before finding a suitable ball.

In 1970 only one official ball was approved by the IRA and that was the black Seamless 558 which was advertised as tournament tested for two years by top racquetball players across the country. Indeed, it had undergone thorough examination, and had been distributed to stores, clubs, and YMCAs throughout the country. The ball was produced and distributed by Seamless.

In a letter written to Lederman, Donald Strong, then Executive Vice-President of Seamco, formerly Seamless, reflected the early manufacturers' problems:

Just for the record, I want you to realize what Seamco Sporting Goods has gone through the past 3-

4 years on this great game of racquetball. At the beginning, we were contracted to make "a ball" that bounced this high and weighed almost so many ounces. . . . people wanted immediate delivery. In addition, the standards were changed several times, which means that ingredients are changed also.

Strong stated that although the company's costs were extremely high and a high royalty rate was still paid for every dozen racquetballs they produced. Seamco lost money, but helped promote the sport.

In addition to the development of a lively ball, color for uniforms was a topic in early 1969. Leve suggested that racquetball should be a more colorful game and make use of coloring—why should racquetball uniforms remain white just because the established rules for other court games of yesterday had failed to be changed? The pastel shades were not bright enough to cause a player to be hindered in following a black ball, and, in fact, the referee would have an easier time of following the play in both singles and doubles if players had contrasting colors. Thus, official IRA uniforms consisted of all-cotton shirts and trunks bearing the official IRA seal, and a choice of blue or yellow was available, as well as white.




In October, 1969, it was announced that General Sportcraft would become the manufacturer of official racquets and would use the IRA seal. Kenneth Edelson of Sportcraft guaranteed that an extensive line of racquets would be offered. At that time, both steel and aluminum racquets had been tested. The steel racquet had proved to be the more desirable and the IRA decided that it would be included as one of the association's officially sanctioned racquets.

In December of 1969 Sportcraft decided to include both steel and aluminum racquets as part of the line of official IRA equipment for 1970. Both sample racquets had been tested by leading players and had been given a vote of confidence. The aluminum racquets became more popular and were within the rules, and they were light, allowing for excellent whip action on the stroke. One official racquet as advertised by ACE was the Sportcraft model with the "flaw-free extruded aluminum frame for rugged championship tourney play." It was made with nylon stringing, had a leather grip and end-attached wrist strap.

A wooden racquet was also designed to have a high quality craftsmanship fashioned in a seven-ply laminated racquet with two fiber inserts for maximum strength and warp resistance. Breakage of previous wooden racquets was

common. A sturdier frame was needed. Also, warping was common with wooden racquets. The new racquet was strung with twisted nylon, had a perforated brown leather grip and a braided wrist strap. These IRA racquets were all manufactured by General Sportcraft Company. The head of Saranac Glove Company, John Fabry, also began to produce an official IRA glove providing a firm fit and a better grip for the racquet hand.

As had always been the case in handball, the support of the IRA membership of official products was required in the promotion of the game itself. This support also helped to provide better tournaments, produce films, give clinics and exhibitions, and to put back into the game funds that were accrued through royalties.



Rules

The first draft of rules for the International Paddle Racket Association were presented in *ACE* for the purpose of acquiring constructive criticism from the IPRA membership. This criticism made a refined record draft possible and an official set of rules published in 1969. The first draft emphasized the safety factor. The first national convention which convened during the April, 1969, National Championships was to vote on the adoption of the revised official rules. Members were asked to send in any comments on rules.

The first set of rules to be used during the International Championships of 1969 were those presented in final draft form in the December, 1968 issue of *ACE*. To prepare this outline for the conduct of the game, the headquarters had sifted through a large nationwide response of suggestions and constructive criticism of the first draft of the rules published in the October, 1968 issue of *ACE*. Telephone conversations and personal meetings were also held and the result was adopted before the tournament with recommendations open for discussion at the organizational

meeting in St. Louis. A national rules committee headed by Charles Hazama of Rochester, Minnesota, was to report at the convention meeting also.

Several IRA members in attendance at the convention during rules hearings were in favor of scoring on both offense and defense due to time period limitations at many clubs. However, the majority voted that the IRA would retain the same scoring system as stated in the rules, points could only be scored by the player or team in service and twenty-one points constituted a game. Also, the proposal of

adopting alternate serving was not approved.

Only a few major changes in the rules were recommended by the Rules Committee in St. Louis and were related to the designation of the racquet dimensions:

Racquet.

The official racquet will have a maximum length head of 11 inches and width of 9 inches. The handle will not exceed 7 inches. The total length and width may not exceed a total of 27 inches.

Other changes were made in the Masters' age limit. Forty was designated as the minimum age for all competition in singles. In doubles, one participant had to be a minimum of forty-five years of age, the other could be a minimum of forty. Injury allowances were made also. An injured player could be awarded 15 minutes for an injury during play. An additional five minutes for a second related injury would be awarded to the player. Injury times were not to exceed a total of twenty minutes. These times were not to be charged to a player's timeouts during the game. On any further injury to that player, the commissioner or committee, after considering available medical opinion, was to determine whether the injured player should be allowed to continue.

Discussion of rules took up a great deal of the convention time at the

national tournament in 1970. Hazama, IRA National Rules Chairman, had canvassed his committee during the year and had gathered useful, constructive ideas. Dr. Bud Muehleisen was especially cooperative and proposed many suggestions. Overall, the thinking of the racquetball officials was to keep the rules very closely related to those of handball in order to avoid confusion and to make it simple for players to play both games. One player pointed out that possibly some of the handball rules needed revision. As usual, the "avoidable hinder" crept into the discussion, and as always, the simple standard for the referee was noted—a player was entitled to a fair and unobstructed chance at the ball. If, in the judgment of the referee, the opponent could have given this clear shot and does not, the avoidable hinder should be ruled. In racquetball, more so than in handball, the doubles play can be very close-quartered. This is especially true in front court where all four men are positioning themselves up front for a volley ending shot. To prevent accidents, it was stressed that referees be alert and quick with hinder calls.

Women In Racquetball

The interest and participation of women in the game of racquetball helped the sport to succeed according to Association president Robert W. Kendler, who was happy and enthusiastic about women's involvement. It was

Kendler's opinion that any one of the major sports could not have succeeded without women in the audience or gallery or women actually participating; women had just as much right to be in any sport as any man. Kendler felt women should be allowed to participate in any form they chose.

Marlowe Phillips, a former handball player, had been a strong supporter behind the promotion of the paddle rackets game at the St. Louis JCC. Phillips was an excellent player who had done a remarkable job of introducing the game to men, women, and young people. In conjunction with the JCC meeting to approve the 1969 National Tournament, Phillips was engaged in a mixed doubles playoff match on the glass court there, which turned out to have real spectator appeal. A good crowd materialized, mainly to watch the ladies exhibit their skills on the court. Women insisted on colorful uniforms, which was a new innovation in handball and paddle rackets. Women's and junior divisions were expected to be developed even at this early stage of the game.

Kendler invented the glass-walled court as a result of seeking a comfortable way for his wife to view handball at his Town Club in Chicago. The courts were remodeled, glass was installed along with air-conditioning for comfort and an elevator lobby so that other wives could be spectators. The previously

unsportsmanlike game of handball became more sportsmanlike when the players' wives and children sat in the gallery and watched the men play.

Phillips, the IRA Masters singles and doubles champion in 1969, was probably the first person to support a women's bracket for the 1970 National Tournament. Phillips was a key promoter in the St. Louis area where women had played the game for years at the JCC and believed that the female players should not be denied their fair share of tournament honors. With the lightness of the racquet they could easily adapt to the game, as well as make the game more attractive for spectators. Some JCC mixed doubles tournaments were tried and met with success.

A small group of young athletically inclined women, who were not satisfied with jogging and exercising, were inspired by a few leaders like Frances Cohen, Goldie Hogan, and Joan Zuckerman and began to develop interest in the game. Phillip Smith, St. Louis JCC Health Club Director, was convinced that women had discovered a sport made to order for them and that it provided a physically challenging and emotionally relieving activity needed by women as much as men.

In 1970 a survey of several women players provided some insight into the appeal of the game for them. Women seemed to be delighted

with playing racquetball because it made them a part of their family scene and had given them a sport they could play with their sons, and their daughters too, although they were just beginners. They found that playing racquetball was a good exercise and they preferred the game to other forms of activity. One thought echoed by most players was that when they were on the court, everything else was forgotten; it was a tension reliever.

Women players represented varying ages and backgrounds. Some played the game only occasionally, others daily. Some were working, career girls who played whenever they could find time; others were housewives, who often began each day playing racquetball. They generally agreed that the activity on the court helped them to get through the day with more vitality than they had without it.

In this same report, men were polled as to their feelings on women playing the game. Some of them replied that when they could not get a court reservation because of women playing they became aggravated for the moment; however, they felt that the women had as much right to the courts as they did. Other male players felt that they did not find any difference between men and women playing racquetball and by participating, the women were then more able to see how a man felt about a sport

when they were involved in the same activity.

An opposite view was stated emphatically by one man who felt that the courts should be free during prime hours for the working man. The writer thought that women should confine their play to certain hours during the day and that the majority should rule with respect to court time. One last opinion was that a housewife should get an hour's worth of exercise if it was desired. Women paid their dues and had every right to use the courts.

In the 1970 era, though opinions were being strongly aired on both sides, the controversy had by no means been settled. The future status of women in racquetball was viewed as possibly a very volatile issue. However, a very important decision was that the ladies were to have their own division in the IRA International Tournament in April, 1970.

Growth of The Business Aspects of Racquetball

Once sports attain organized status, the problem of finances often becomes important; the early financing of racquetball, however, was minimal. The main concern of the USHA in 1969 was still the well-being of handball, but racquetball was allowed a small budget. It appeared that Kendler wanted to make racquetball as self-supporting as possible with the main source of operational revenues for

administration of the IRA to come from royalties on endorsed products such as balls and racquets. This apparently proved to be the right approach, since funds became more plentiful as a result. With information and news concerning the IRA printed in a section enclosed in *ACE*, financing a separate publication for racquetball was avoided. Expenses were largely confined to operational requirements.

The first budget sheet for the International Racquetball Association covered the period November 15, 1968, to December 31, 1969. In the infant stages of the organization a loan even had to be taken out from the United States Handball Association in the amount of \$500 to help with finances. Separate books were kept between the IRA and the USHA, although the administrative offices were set up with the handball office. Total cash assets amounted to a mere \$458.14 after total disbursements of \$1,682.86 were paid. However, Kendler's opinion that no organization could proceed without profit and income was to be evidenced in future years.

As the game of racquetball developed, it was evident that a business manager and a public relations staff member were needed. Charles Leve, who was a recent graduate of the University of Miami with a B.A. degree in journalism, was added to the USHA-IRA headquarters office in June of

1970. Leve, the son of Mort Leve, was hired to concentrate his efforts mainly on the promotion of the game of racquetball and paddleball, giving those games the full necessary attention for continued growth and development.

Association President Kendler felt that the expanding racquet game, along with paddleball, could be given full-time attention; a concentrated attempt at a membership drive was also forecast. Kendler thought that *ACE* had provided an ideal communication link for handball and only with a corresponding response in racquetball and paddleball memberships could the newer game move forward.

The appointment of an executive secretary for the IRA resulted in a staff member of the IRA who could be a direct contact between the association and its members throughout the country. Suggestions, complaints, and information could be passed freely, which helped to stabilize relations between the association and its membership. Anything less than a full-time coordinator in this position would have been inadequate for the rapid growth and accompanying problems associated with the new sport.



Organization and Leadership

In the early organization of the IRA, authority was primarily vested in the USHA president and executive secretary and the IRA national commissioner. As the organization grew larger, a need for a board of directors, a national executive coordinator, as well as other offices, became apparent. Racquetball and the IRA had adapted to the early problems of organization and leadership in the sport, largely through the effort of the USHA, which provided a functional system for promotion of

the game and a magazine for dissemination of news.

Organizing racquetball was similar in many ways to structuring handball. Tournaments, age group divisions, and regional tournaments were patterned after successful handball programs. The USHA had been dealing with related problems since breaking away from the Amateur Athletic Union about 1950, and this experience surely added stability to the racquetball enterprise. Also, since the courts and facilities used for the game were identical, promotion of racquetball was made in conjunction with handball.

The USHA, however, was previously dedicated to handball, and its true allegiance was to that game. During each of the annual IRA National Championships, a board of directors meeting continued to be held to bring up new ideas and suggestions for improvement of the game and the organizational structure.

The Third Annual International Tournament was conducted in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Deseret Gymnasium in 1971. In his president's address at the tournament banquet, Kendler emphasized the future of racquetball, indicating that

participation by the whole family, including women, should lead to more players and greatly increase IRA membership. Kendler reiterated the progress that had been made in promoting handball as an Olympic sport and that the current success caused him to be enthusiastic for the same outcome for racquetball. The IRA President described how television should provide excellent exposure for the game and play in the glass court allowed viewers to be better able to follow the ball.

Gathering from all across America, the directors of the IRA finally came together for their first official meeting since the previous year to sit down and put their organization in order and exchange ideas. This important meeting took place at the Court House Handball-Racquetball Club in Minneapolis, Minnesota, after the National Invitational Singles in January of 1973.

Board of Directors—April, 1973

At the April, 1973 International Tournament in St. Louis, Kendler resigned as President of the International Racquetball Association.

The Board paid tribute to past president Kendler by expressing dismay for the loss of Kendler's leadership and unequalled experience for the future of racquetball. In the past Kendler's name had been synonymous with the sports of racquetball and handball. The Board expressed a debt of gratitude to the man who

had almost singlehandedly surfaced two formerly obscure sports into national recognition. Kendler's devotion, contribution and unselfish service was recognized.

Kendler was a diversified man and an extremely successful businessman who had broken ties with the Amateur Athletic Union nearly a quarter of a century before to form the United States Handball Association, and most of the top players of the game had followed him; the USHA was unrivaled as the major handball organization following the split with the AAU. Many factors were probably involved with Kendler's resignation from the IRA. Kendler had preferred to oversee the organization in his own manner and this created friction between himself and the board of directors. Probably his lifetime love for handball caused some members to question whether or not racquetball was being given equal attention. Regardless of the reasons involved, under Kendler's tenure the IRA had been immensely successful. Also, Kendler initially had been asked in 1968 to promote the new game and had agreed to do so in the face of some opposition from handball players. His actions had taken foresight and the courage of conviction.

Game Changes

Equipment

Innovations in equipment were popular in the early 1970s. Equipment manufacturers realized

a new market with the upsurge in racquetball play and made vast production investments. In racquet development there had been a large field of improvement. Originally, players used wooden framed racquets which were bulky, heavy, and could lead to sore arms and more severe injuries than the newer conventional racquets. The old racquets with their heaviness and rigid frame allowed no real "sweet spot" on the racquet. This meant that if one did not strike the ball on the center of the strung area and happened to hit the edge of the frame the ball caromed off to the side. The frame of the newer models was practically flush with the strings and prevented this occurrence.

With the introduction of aluminum racquets, first Sportcraft, then Ektelon, and the beginning of fiberglass or plastic mixed with fiberglass, mainly with Leach Industries, the racquets began to be customized to the sport. Before, the wooden racquets were more of a cut-down version of a tennis racket which was the idea that most manufacturers went by in production. The wooden racquet was more cumbersome and was made with varying degrees of quality. With the advent of racquet improvement, the frames became lighter and were easier to swing, the strings used for racquets were of a better quality, and were strung looser than before. This afforded more control for the livelier ball

which did not require as much power to stroke firmly. Through this type of development, both Leach and Ektelon were instrumental in upgrading the sport as far as racquet development.

In 1971, the first model in the line of Ektelon racquets was introduced, with the Bud Muehleisen Autograph model as the prototype. It consisted of a "durable aluminum alloy frame and rubberized grip combined with light weight and ideal balance for complete hitting response." A tough bumper inserted around the racquet head provided cushioned protection for walls and floor. The racquet was tested by various caliber players for a year and a half and became available for immediate delivery.

One racquet equipment company added new dimension to its advertising and a wider variety to its racquet inventory in 1972 with Leach Industries, Leach Racquet Division, advertising in the August edition of *Handball* magazine. Leach used top racquetball players to subsidize their equipment advertisements. Leach racquets were structured out of fiberglass or carbon and came in a wide variety of weights, grips, styles, and stressed that their racquets provided more flexibility and "feel" to put more energy on the ball for stronger shots.

In response to the question of how equipment had influenced racquetball, Kendler stated that the

equipment had actually made the game, specifically the ball. Racquetball, like handball, succeeded because in the development of the racquetball the players demanded that the ball be speeded up. A lively ball allowed maximum use of all four walls as well as enabling players to execute the ceiling shot in which the ball must be pressurized enough to carry deep into the back court after being struck. This caused the opponent to relinquish commanding center court position by racing to the back wall to retrieve this high shot rebounding from the ceiling. However, the lively ball created difficulties because the more the ball was pressurized, the more fragile it became. Seamco makes the official racquetball and it is probably the finest on the market presently. A green ball is also marketed by Seamco. This was done to alleviate the visual problems caused by playing in glass courts where the black ball sometimes became difficult to see. Also, a black ball is not as readily visible on television as the colored ball. Breakage problems are now behind them.

In summary, the speed of the ball has changed the type of play completely. The type of court with the glass walls changed the type of play also. The color of the ball made its marketability greater. Changes in the equipment have had a profound effect on the game.

Opposition to Racquetball by Handball Players

The hostility between handball and racquetball players continued to be a problem in some areas, especially in California. The dispute was described as a "range war" with the handball players still defending their courts from the invasion of a new breed, the racquetball players. However, in some areas the handball advocates did cooperate, for instance, at the Hollywood, California, YMCA where racquetball had been played since 1949. Momentum for the game really began in 1968 with the formation of the IRA and the use of newer and better equipment. Since that time racquetball players have literally filled the courts around the country, and several conflicts between handball and racquetball players emerged.

Court Space Problems

In 1968 in San Diego County few people were playing racquetball; court owners in recent years have estimated that 10,000 players were in a rivalry for space and there were only about 100 courts available. The Midwest, which was always an area which supported handball, became a predominately racquetball "hotbed" and accounted for a great majority of play in courts where both sports could be played.

Thomas Stattler, a professor of physical education at the University

of Illinois, studied the popularity of racquetball in various sections of the country. Stattler stated that racquetball was much more popular than handball in most areas. Equipment companies probably agreed. Leach Industries of San Diego in 1972 produced 15,000 racquetball racquets and they began to produce that many each month in the following months. Seamco produced 84,000 balls in 1969 and they soon began to produce around two million a year.

Rivalry Continued

As the rise of racquetball continued, animosity between its supporters and handball players grew prior to the formation of the IRA, when players convinced Kendler to head their association in 1968. Then the opposition to racquetball lessened somewhat, though Kendler's position to allow the racquetball players to have equal status with handball players created a wave of protests for a while. Racquetballers at exhibitions at court clubs often received jeers, and at times employees who were concerned about the wishes of handball playing members were forced to ask racquetball players to leave.

The force created by the continued popularity of racquetball broke down many of the early obstacles presented by handball, although some clubs continued to disallow the sport or restrict its play to certain hours. The Hollywood

YMCA was presented a petition signed by 400 handball players who stated that they would stop their membership if they were forced to share courts with racquetballers. Many clubs like the Encino Health Club actually lost members as a result of such opposition.

Kendler was of the opinion in 1974 that the opposition to racquetball from handball players had subsided 100% from the late 1960s. In past years there was an enormous boom in court clubs all over the United States that was beyond anything imagined in the early years of the game. Kendler related that any new innovation in the USHA required a convincing argument to persuade the membership. A trial run was suggested to indicate proof of the benefits of racquetball over a period of time. This was precisely what had resulted with racquetball.

Mort Leve, USHA executive secretary, was in general agreement with Kendler and indicated that the handball opposition had eased over the past years. Many handball players discovered that they could enjoy both games, and if no handball partner was available they could usually find someone with whom to play racquetball. Involvement of wives and girlfriends in the game created a co-existence with women also. There were, however, a few handball players who still treated racquetball as a stepchild and would not change their staunch opposition to the new game.

Epilogue

The sport of racquetball was developed through the diligent efforts of several individuals, but it was the combined energy of the enthusiastic and interested participants—men, women and even children—that made it the successful game that it is today. It is apparently the ease with which the elementary phases of the game are learned that ensures further participation for the beginning player. Many games attract eager-minded followers, but interest subsides when it is discovered that a game is not always as easy as it appears. However, with racquetball, players usually find some degree of success on their first try and further progress is limited only by the time available to play the game, along with inherent physical skill and ability. A player may progress up to the highest level of competition on the national level or may choose to just have enjoyable physical activity with a partner, as is generally the case. Racquetball is a lifetime sport that provides stimulating physical exertion in a brief period of time, but the most important point to emphasize is that it is *fun*.

As a product of hundreds of years of evolution of other racquet sports, racquetball has progressed so rapidly that it is now a game of sophisticated modern equipment. In the last few years, the ball used for the game has changed from a rubber child's ball into a highly compressed version which is the result of constant industrial

research and development seeking to perfect its playability. Racquets have evolved from bulky wooden frames to light weight plastics derived from research in the space program, along with other combinations of metals, ensuring reliable playing dependability. Racquetball courts, being identical to handball courts, became the recipient of many years of court improvement pioneered by handball, such as glass sidewalls or backwalls for better viewing, superior floor and wall textures and improved court lighting. This synthesis of the various aspects of the game, along with the design and construction of court clubs across the country to showcase facilities and top players, has aided in making racquetball an almost instant success story.

Racquetball was established as a separate entity when the IRA began publication of its own magazine apart from the game of handball. This was the turning point that proved that the game could stand on its own merits with its own membership to support it. Along with its own magazine and the royalties accrued from the sale of official IRA products, the financial base for the continuing success of racquetball was secured.

Kendler severed relations with the IRA in 1973 and formed a rival organization, the National Racquetball Club (NRC) which sponsors a professional tour for

top-ranked racquetball players. Included in the professional tour is an amateur open tournament at each stop. In conjunction with this idea, the NRC formed the United States Racquetball Association (USRA) as the amateur organization of the NRC.

The participation of women has had a marked effect on racquetball. The latest milestone was the appointment of Kathy Williams as the first female teaching pro and manager of a new racquetball center in the Detroit, Michigan area. As a fulltime salaried employee, Ms. Williams became the first woman to gain professional status in racquetball. To accept her new position she gave up a faculty position in the physical education department at Oakland University.

Racquetball has made remarkable achievements for a new sport. It will be interesting to see just what progress the sport will make; it is hoped that the worthy examples and achievements made by the founders and leaders of the game of racquetball will be followed in future years. The ingenuity and determination of these men is worthy of admiration.

As the sport of racquetball progresses, the need for future study is recommended in several

areas. The contribution that women continue to make to the sport is a topic which should be explored; the influence of women is becoming more and more apparent. Another matter which will need to be researched is the various personality types among players of the game; what are the reasons that some young men have sacrificed lucrative careers to pursue relatively meager monetary winnings on the professional racquetball tour? The continued evolution of equipment is a topic which will also need to be investigated. In the relatively short time span that the game has existed, equipment changes have been of major importance; later evaluations will be required. To increase and further the little existing knowledge of the sport of racquetball, these areas are recommended for future analysis and consideration.