

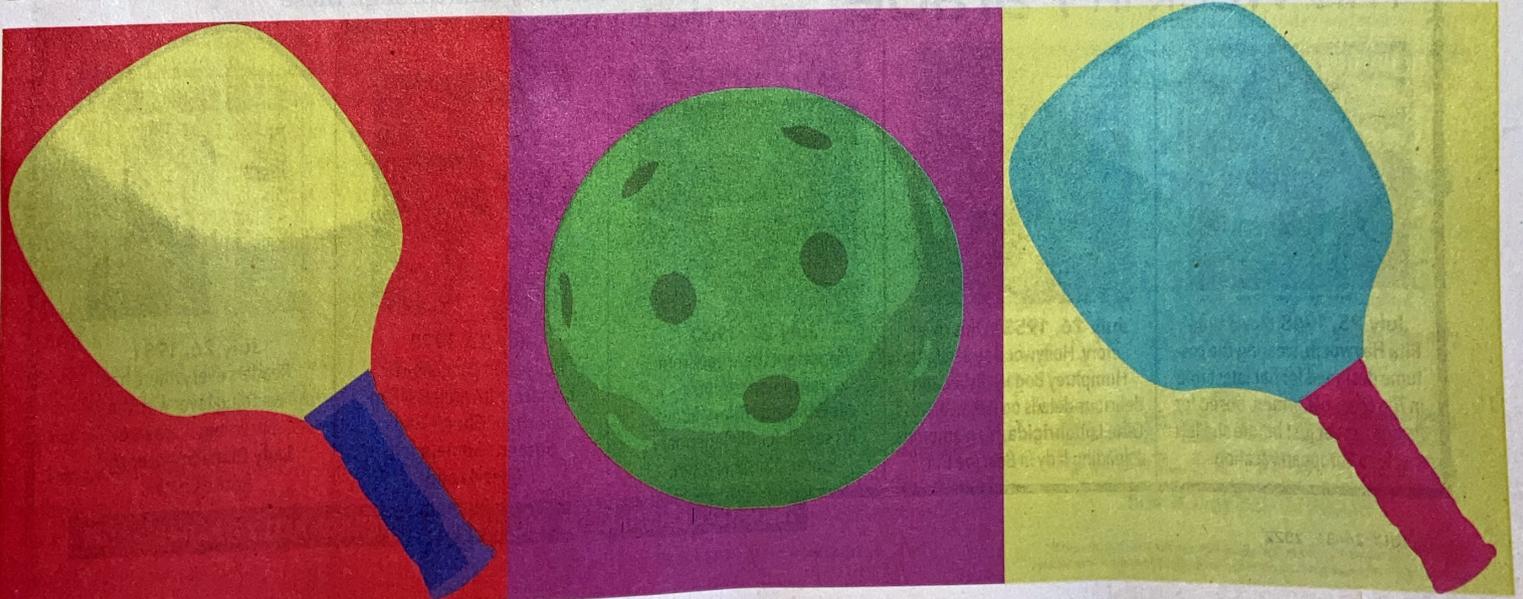
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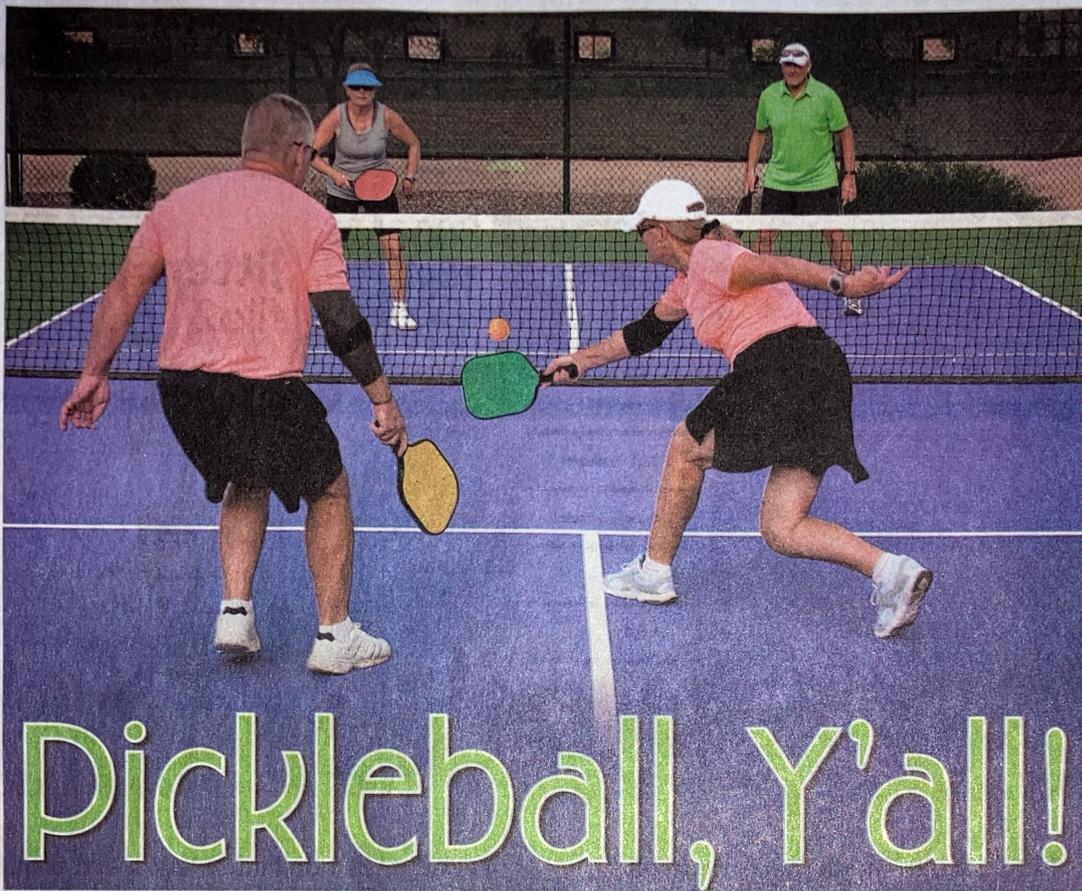
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Check out the
game that's all the rage
across America!



PICKLEBALL





Pickleball, Y'all!

A small-court sensation is sweeping the nation. What's all the racket about?

By Peter Moore

Pickleball. Have you heard of it? It's that incredibly popular tennis-and-Ping-Pong hybrid that everyone's playing, from Ellen DeGeneres ("I'm obsessed with it") to most of the residents of Naples, Fla., it seems (where one center with 60 courts calls itself "the Pickleball Capital of the World").

As if pickleball weren't hot enough already, here's something else to add to the buzz. America's bounciest, most-talked-about game is also really good for *rhyming*.

So says Penn Holderness, co-creator with his wife, Kim, of a viral rap video called "The Pickleball Song." The Holdernesses recently achieved fame as the winners of *The Amazing*

Race on CBS. But before that, they were simply a hilarious pair of YouTubers who mined their marriage and family life for comedy gold and a billion views.

In the pickleball video, Penn leans into the camera to rap-shout, "My wife, yeah, she used to be chill / But to her pickleball's now a really big dill!"

Kim's right about it being a really big, uh, deal. According to USA Pickleball, the sport has been sprouting like a cucumber vine, growing an average of 11.5 percent a year since 2017 to reach 4.8 million picklers in the United States alone. As Penn Holderness might rap, "This gherkin is workin'."

If you haven't yet experienced the sport,

HOW PICKLEBALL WAS BORN

Three dads living on Bainbridge Island, Wash., in 1965, were sick of hearing their kids complain of boredom. So they created a mashup of Ping-Pong, tennis and badminton to squelch the bellyaching. It worked. But what's with the name?

- **Theory 1:** Because it's a mixture of other racket sports, the wife of one of the creators coined the term as a reference to the second-string leftovers manning the "pickle boat" in rowing.
- **Theory 2:** "Pickles" was a ball-chasing dog belonging to one of the creators, and it was named in her honor.

Even pickleball's originators (pictured below with their families) couldn't agree on where the name came from, and now they've moved on to that big court in the sky. So feel free to spread your own theory.



COVER—ISTOCK; FEATURE FROM TOP—ISTOCK; COURTESY USA PICKLEBALL

walk by any of 9,524 pickleball-enabled parks, community centers and sports complexes across the U.S. and listen for the *plink, plonk, plink, plonk* sound of oversize whiffle balls bouncing off of composite paddles.

What Jerry Seinfeld once joked about tennis is even truer about pickleball: It's "basically Ping-Pong, and the players are standing on the table." But four 20-by-44-foot pickleball courts can fit into the space required for the Sport of Kings. Plus, it's easy to pick up, requires minimal athleticism and has a fun vocabulary all its own. So maybe there's new royalty on the court.

We can't all smash like Roger or slash like Serena, but virtually anybody can play pickleball. "A man I was playing against recently was limping," says Ann Farrell Pulliam, 55, a recent convert to pickleball in Vienna, Va. "So I asked him, 'Have you hurt your leg?' He tells me, 'No, I have Parkinson's.' I felt terrible. Then his team totally killed us."

Pulliam is a great case study in pickleball's popularity. She lost her husband to cancer in June of 2021, just shy of their 30th wedding anniversary. She barely left the house for months, except to attend her grief group. "A friend called to check on me," she recalls. "He told me, 'Get out of bed. Take a shower. Put on some clothes. Go play pickleball.' So I went on Facebook and asked if anybody had ever heard of the game. Now I play five times a week and my phone contacts have doubled. It saved my life."

One reason for Pulliam's change in outlook: The *other* incessant noise you hear on a pickleball court is laughter. "The first time I laughed since my husband died, I was on a pickleball court," says Pulliam. "You

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PICKLEBALL OF THE STARS

Who's playing? Absolutely everyone—including these celebrities.

"My husband, Bill, and I were introduced to pickleball several years ago and have been playing it regularly ever since. We've competed in tournaments, even winning several of them, and are totally hooked!" says *E!* News reporter **Giuliana Rancic**, 47, who co-starred with **Bill Rancic**, 51, on *Giuliana and Bill*. "One of the reasons it's the fastest-growing sport is because it's easy to pick up at any age and you can start playing competitively in a rather short period of time. And since it's great for all ages, it makes for a really fun family activity as well." Rancic has a pickleball collection coming out soon as part of her clothing line G by Giuliana on HSN.



"I absolutely love the sport," says *Friends* alum **Matthew Perry**, 52. "But I wish it was called anything other than pickleball," he adds with a laugh. He may joke, but Perry plays almost every day, says pickleball pro Matt Manasse, who coaches Perry and other celebs, including Larry David. "Matthew is competitive and he's getting very good. He's using it to lose weight. He's an awesome guy and will play with anyone at the club here. He has a full tennis background, so it was a semi-easy transition for him."



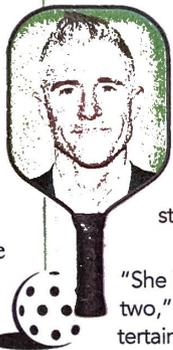
"The [pickleball] court might be the only place in the world where I'm fully in the now," says author and speaker **Brené Brown**, 56, who is part of the ATX Pickleballers owners' group, which promotes major league pickleball. "Not thinking ahead, worrying, wondering—just keeping my eye on the ball and my head in the game. When I don't do both, there's immediate feedback. Like a ball to the face."



"It's something I can play with my dad," says **Cameron Mathison**, 52, who is Drew Cain on *General Hospital* and will star in GAC's *The Christmas Farm* later this year. "And it's been a great way to get to know the GH cast off set!"



"I started playing pickleball shortly after retiring," former Major League Baseball player **Chase Utley**, 43, told *Parade*. "I now play at least once a week. The sport checks off all the boxes for me: hand-eye coordination, strategy and competition. Pickleball doesn't discriminate; anyone can play regardless of age or skill set. I play with my kids, who are obsessed, my wife, who is a killer, and my buddies, who are keeping their pro dreams alive. Pickleball is here to stay and I highly suggest giving it a try."



"She kills me—if we play six games, I'll win maybe two," says **George Clooney**, 61, who told Yahoo! Entertainment that he plays pickleball with wife **Amal**, 44, on their court at their L.A. home. "Amal just beats the hell out of me."

—Nicole Pajner



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**Avid player
Ann Farrell
Pulliam says
pickleball
saved her life.**



have to remember the funny rules, when to rotate on the court and it takes all four of us to remember the score." It's mostly a doubles game, which quadruples the hilarity.

And, as Pulliam says, virtually everybody is a beginner, which lessens the pressure. That's even true for Ben Johns, whose biggest claim to fame used to be his status as hitting partner for his brother on the pro tennis tour. "I was playing tennis one day in 2016," he says, "and I heard this fun popping sound coming from the pickleball court next door. I tried it and thought, *This game is awesome*, mostly because I was beating up on my dad all the time." Now, as the world's No. 1-ranked pro pickleball player in singles, doubles and mixed doubles, the 23-year-old Johns is beating up on a lot of other people too.

Johns, who now has the ultimate sports status symbol—his own signature paddle from Joola—loves that the sport is still young. "Golf has been around for four hundred years, tennis longer than that. There's a right way and a wrong way to play them. But pickleball is still in a time of experimentation. When you figure something out, you expand the sport yourself. You can help it grow."

So why are you sitting there

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COURTESY ANN FARRELL PULLIAM

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reading? Grab a paddle, a ball and three strangers (who will soon become friends), and make pickleball your own. But don't take it too seriously, or you might get kicked off the court. It's just pickleball, y'all.



"I always love a sport where they say, 'Ah, you know what? You're a nice little old person. You can play this. You'll barely know that you're moving.'" says Today's **Al Roker, 67.**



Today hosts (from left) Sheinelle Jones, Carson Daly, Hoda Kotb, Jenna Bush Hager, Savannah Guthrie and Al Roker hit the court in 2021 for their own pickleball tournament.

HOW TO TALK LIKE A PICKLER

FLAPJACK For each serve and return of serve, players must allow the ball to bounce before they hit it. Those bouncing starters are called flapjacks, for some unknowable reason.

DILLBALL An incoming ball that has bounced once and is thus available for you to thwack.

THE KITCHEN A 7-foot zone on either side of the net, where you're forbidden to hit the ball unless it has bounced first. This rule prevents smashes from the kitchen, which are unfun and dangerous at close quarters.

DINK SHOT An annoying shot in which the ball is plinked from your kitchen into your opponents', with little hope of return.

OPA! After two bounce-hit sequences, players may shout "Opa!" to signify that from now on it's OK to hit a ball out of the air (unless you're standing in the kitchen, in which case you need to review the pickleball rules).

PICKLED If you fail to score any points in a game, you've been pickled. But that will remind you: It's time for cocktail hour with your new pickleball besties. Order a dirty martini, with pickle juice.



Parade Picks

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Pickleball Must-Haves

With pickleball all the rage (see page 6), we'd be remiss if we didn't serve up some fun products to help you look and play your best. —Megan O'Neill Melle



How is a pickleball paddle different from a Ping-Pong paddle? It's larger, slightly square and made of high-tech materials. Since the game is so much fun, your paddle should be too, say the founders of Recess. They offer colorful **Pickleball Paddles**, as well as how-to guides for players new to the sport. **\$86 each**, recesspickleball.com



Keep your essentials stowed away—fashionably—with this retro-style **Paddle Racket Bag**. **\$195**, tangerinepaddle.com



For the novice eager to get into the game, the **Nettie Set Double Pack** comes with two paddles, two balls and two sweatbands so you and a partner can be volleying in no time. **\$150**, playnettie.com



For fashion-minded picklers, try a fun-in-the-sun pattern, like the **Palms 1 Drop Pleat Skort**. **\$70**, pickleballbella.com

Knock opponents' socks off when you sport **Pickleball Colorful Balls Pattern Sneakers** or **Pickleball Green White Love Sneakers**, which give a nod to ball-playing grandpas. **\$58**, 84hoods.com



What's larger than a tennis ball and heavier than a whiffle ball? That's a pickleball, which is made of a thick polymer and has anywhere from 26 to 40 holes. There are slight variations in outdoor and indoor versions. **Franklin Sports X-40 Outdoor and X-26 Indoor Pickleballs**, **\$18 per six-pack**, walmart.com



Dress like the pros with the moisture-wicking **Kyle Yates Elite Pro Hat**, named after one of the top players in the world. **\$30**, pb1965.com

We love the **Pickleback Performance T-Shirt** made by a company that creates collegiate-inspired athletic wear for every level. **\$30**, varsitypickle.com



Forget fumbling with your pockets. The **I've Got Balls! Belt** keeps those spare pickleballs handy. **\$15**, pickleballcentral.com

COMING AUG. 7
Oscar-winning actress **Diane Keaton** on life, love affairs, leading men and her new comedy.



There will be no July 31 issue of Parade

Head to places2play.org to find a pickleball court near you.