

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The Implications of Pickleball Programming for the Hospitality Industry

by

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IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Part One

Introduction

Pickleball is a paddle sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton, and table tennis. It can be played indoors or outdoors. The game is played on a court which is the same size as a doubles badminton court, which is twenty by forty four feet. There is a low net in the middle of the court, similar to those used in tennis. The net height is 36 inches at the sidelines but slopes down to 34 inches in the middle. The same court is used for singles and doubles pickleball. Most people play doubles as it is less taxing on the body and more social. There is no expanded court size for doubles play, as there is with tennis and badminton. The court is “striped similar to a tennis court with right and left service” areas and a seven-foot zone in front of the net where players are banned from volleying the ball. This area is referred to as the “kitchen”. Players hit plastic whiffle balls with larger versions of table tennis paddles over the net in an attempt to score points, hoping their opponent cannot return the ball (United States of America Pickleball Association (USAPA), 2018).

Pickleball has over three million active players and experienced growth of 12% in 2018. This makes it the fastest growing sport in the United State (Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), 2017). Not only is pickleball becoming more common as a competitive sport, it is becoming more popular as a recreational activity in sports facilities across North America, including sports facilities found in hotels, retirement communities, and other hospitality offerings. Much of pickleball’s surging popularity is owed to individuals from the baby boomer generation, many of whom transition from tennis to pickleball in search of a lower impact sport that will not aggravate old injuries or cause joint pain but allow for the same exhilarating dynamic when playing and competing against others. While the majority of

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

pickleball players are over 55, the sport is simple enough that it can be played by young children far more easily than tennis. The fun, loose, open atmosphere of pickleball welcomes everyone.

The hospitality industry has an ongoing challenge of maximizing net operating income (NOI) while simultaneously increasing guest satisfaction, two objectives seemingly at odds with each other. Industry members juggle finding ways to cut back on unnecessary expenses and simultaneously give more benefits and enjoyment to guests. The ultimate, long-term goal for resort owners and developers is to maximize asset value (Hale, 2011). To achieve this, and to overcome challenges while meeting objectives, they need to employ strategies to secure increased guest satisfaction, market share, repeat visitation, gain new visitors, sell group travel, and effectively monetize assets and programs to drive incremental revenue.

The industry embraces many strategies to achieve these objectives, such as training and empowering staff, adding amenities, creating new programming and events, and engaging guests through cultural, music, culinary, sports and other activities. One new programming idea gaining momentum is introducing pickleball programming as an activity for guests. This would function in the same way that tennis does at hotels, providing guests with a new recreation outlet and providing members of the hospitality industry with an opportunity to generate more revenue and maximize NOI.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the implementation of pickleball programming in resorts and retirement communities. For this endeavor, resorts and retirement communities have been combined as they have similar objectives and physical space available at their properties. Given the growing popularity of the sport and the strides that some resorts and retirement communities have already taken in introducing pickleball to their guests, it is timely

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

and relevant to analyze the implementation of pickleball programming with regard to guest satisfaction, resort income and long-term asset value for both.

This objective study will provide a basis for further research into pickleball programming in the hospitality industry beyond just resorts and retirement communities with existing tennis and basketball courts. While focusing on and highlighting the potential of pickleball as a revenue generator for resorts and retirement communities, this paper will hopefully provide insights into introducing new sports programming as a whole. In researching the topic, this exploratory study will use questionnaire-based interviews, research on tennis programming in hospitality, and similar research into traditional sports activities in hotels to investigate the positives and negatives for developers to consider adding pickleball at their properties.

Justification

The main justification for this study is its potential to introduce new revenue streams for various resorts and retirement communities while improving the experience of guests and residents. Profit and good service are the main goals of all hospitality businesses, so the underlying foundation for this study should be evident.

Some resort companies such as Marriott and Margaritaville have noticed the growth trends in pickleball and heard from their guests about desire for courts, and added them (Kensler, 2019). There is an opportunity to research the implications of pickleball on those resorts, both positive and negative, short term and long term, tangible and intangible, documented and theorized to determine if the investment in building courts and adding programming provides beneficial returns for other resorts to consider. Of course, it is difficult to capture data for intangible benefits such as improved guest satisfaction, but there are certain indicators that help isolate abstract variables. For example, guest survey comparing vacation experience for people

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

who played pickleball while on vacation versus those who did not. In the long term research can investigate the growth and financial performance of properties with consistent pickleball programming versus competitive properties without pickleball. This study will analyze as many of these variables as it can, and serve as a jumping off point for future pickleball research.

Seventy-five percent of core pickleball players are 55 or older. These baby boomers spend more on products and services than other generations (Graham & Evon, 2017). This age bracket has high disposable income and a propensity to travel. Like many amateur and professional sports players, pickleball players like to stay active and travel. There are currently more than ten companies that actively market, sell and host pickleball vacations to groups at resorts all over the world. They require thousands of room nights at resorts with either temporary or permanent pickleball courts (USAPA, 2018). Group travel is an incredibly important revenue stream in hospitality, because it can grow profits exponentially. Larger numbers of guests purchasing rooms and attending events leads to increased food and beverage sales and can potentially lead to return group bookings. The opportunities for sports groups bookings are even greater as there is a possibility to profit from court and equipment rentals, and equipment sales (Last, 2017). A great way to market group bookings, especially for something as visually interesting as pickleball, is through social media.

In his best-selling book, *Seven Laws of Spiritual Success*, Deepak Chopra muses about the importance of self-referral and the difference between self-referral and object-referral. “In object-referral, we are always influenced by objects outside the Self, which includes situations, circumstances, people and things. In object-referral, we are constantly seeking approval of others. Our thinking and our behavior is always in anticipation of a response” (2010, p.24). This is especially important and magnified in the era of social media. Social media posts are a method

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

by which many attempt to gain affirmation and validation of oneself from others. Fundamentally, social media is viral. People post thoughts, feelings and activities in hopes of validation through likes, comments, and shares. This is where the work of Chopra intersects with this paper's research and hospitality at large.

Most working people in the United States have only a few weeks of vacation per year. Vacations are often an adventure where people are less inhibited, want to try new things and have fun. They want to share their fun and adventure with friends to validate themselves and their choice of resort or destination. Additionally, people often discover new things from friends, especially when friends share pictures and videos of their recent experiences. In the object-referral culture of the social media environment, people are more likely to try a sport like pickleball and post about it because it is new and different and might generate most responses on social media through likes, comments and shares.

The effect of this confluence is that all stakeholders gain a lift in awareness and affinity. The person for trying or doing something new, unique, and fun in a different environment, and the resort for offering a new and different experience for their guests which is fun and post-worthy, and the sport because people are promoting it to their friends on social media. These three stakeholders all receive mutual lift as the synergy creates a self-perpetuating benefit to each other.

The byproduct is that more people will want to try or play pickleball on vacation, creating more demand for courts at resorts, creating more revenue for resorts, creating more investment for more courts, creating more awareness from competitors who will want to capitalize on the increased popularity of the sport to offer it to their guests, creating more courts, creating more awareness of pickleball, creating more demand for rooms, lessons, and equipment, creating more

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

revenue for resorts. This self-perpetuating cycle is reinforced through social media to the benefit of all stakeholders.

At this early juncture in the adoption of pickleball by some resorts, it is timely to study the impact on and interaction with all stakeholders related to the performance of the property through interviews with resort activities directors, tennis professionals, resort owners, guests, equipment manufacturers, staff, tournament directors and other stakeholders to share their experienced perspectives. According to a recent Tennis Industry Magazine article discussing the financial possibilities of pickleball, “It’s easy to say you’re a purist and are only going to stick with so-called traditional sports, but the participation numbers don’t lie, and neither do the sales. The sports industry is evolving— are you going to serve your public?” (Graham & Evon, 2017, p. 34).

Constraints

The totality of pickleball’s impact on the hospitality industry is not yet known as it is currently being studied and implemented by only a small percentage of resorts and retirement communities in North America – mostly in large resorts and retirement communities, cruises, and country clubs. The limitations on the research are that there are a small number of resorts who have invested in converting tennis and basketball courts into pickleball courts or building their own new courts. No definitive case study has been developed, but this research will provide a foundation from which to start studying pickleball in resort tourism.

Much of the research in this paper will be subjective and anecdotal from personal interviews. The report will address the limitations by evaluating successful programs and other resorts that may have had difficulties implementing or had resistance to the development of pickleball programs on their properties.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Internally, limitations exist in securing proprietary financial data from resorts and retirement communities to adequately analyze financial performance of the program for these properties. These limitations come from the difficulty in isolating pickleball programming without being able to address other variables in financial performance. There may be resistance in getting information as companies want to protect competitive advantages or other proprietary information. Some, including the Discovery Land Company who has courts at almost all of their properties, would not even conduct an interview because they are privately held and very exclusive, catering to the uber-wealthy. Others, like Norwegian Cruise Lines who have pickleball courts on all of their cruise ships, did not or could not provide a spokesperson to articulate their rationale for adding pickleball courts.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Part Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Pickleball is often described as a combination of tennis, badminton and table tennis. This literature review will compare mostly with similar literature on tennis since badminton is so rarely found as a profit generator for resorts and retirement communities that there is limited data available, and table tennis investment costs and profits are not similar to pickleball costs and profits. This is because pickleball requires courts and larger space, whereas table tennis can be implemented by purchasing a table and placing it in any recreational room or open space at these properties. Also, table tennis does not drive revenue in the same way that pickleball or tennis can, as table tennis or “ping pong” equipment is relatively inexpensive and is regarded as a casual game as opposed to a serious sport in the resort and retirement community environments. This means table tennis equipment and training does not provide the same revenue opportunities as pickleball and tennis.

Therefore, the literature review will offer data related to tennis since it requires significant costs to build and maintain courts and develop a program with staff leadership to manage for guests. Tennis is often considered a desired amenity that drives revenue for properties, whereas neither table tennis nor badminton are considered revenue producers for resort properties. The review will keep tennis in mind as a basis for how to discuss pickleball as an impactful amenity in contemporary hospitality, while forming a basis for future pickleball research. The foundations for this pickleball research stem from examinations into tennis as a valued amenity, followed in Part 3 by a series of interviews with prominent hospitality and athletics professionals who have embraced pickleball as a viable business opportunity. These

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

interviews are based on similar research conducted on other common hotel amenities, such as Masterson and Verhoven's 1995 text "Soft Amenity Attribute Preferences of Resort Vacationers". Masterson and Verhoven utilized an open-ended questionnaire format to learn about valued amenities from the perspective of commercial stakeholders. The results of these interviews will be discussed in Part 3. In this section, we must examine applicable current literature on the topic of sports programming amenities in hospitality.

Current Research on Sports Programming in Hospitality

First, a brief overview of the history of pickleball. Pickleball, a racquet and net sport, was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island (near Seattle, Washington) by three fathers whose kids were bored with typical summer sports and games. These men were named Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum. Pickleball "has evolved from handmade equipment and simple rules into a popular sport" in every state in the United States and every province in Canada (USAPA, 2018). The game has grown to include more than 3 million plus players in these countries, while also gaining a foothold in many Asian and European countries. In addition to the numerous USAPA competitions across all fifty states, there are pickleball tournaments in Nepal, Japan, Scotland, England, Spain, Germany, Thailand and Holland.

A game of pickleball ends when one player scores eleven points. Points can only be scored on a player's serve, as in table tennis. This, coupled with the small size of the court and the relative reach of player racquets, means that pickleball is a fast-paced and active game that does not typically last more than fifteen minutes. This allows for fast turnover, which means day tournaments can involve a large number of individual or doubles players. This is an important factor to note when one considers that each player in a tournament typically pays a fee to

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

participate. The larger the pool of competitors, the more revenue a tournament can gain from fees, and indeed from equipment rental.

Much of the current research on the impact of various activities on the customer experience is specific to resort types. For example, much has been written about winter resorts and their relationship to skiing and snowboarding, or oceanside resorts and their efforts to increase revenue through various water-based amenities (Naylor & Kleiser, 2002). This means that much attention has been placed on location-specific amenities with regard to resorts that seek to offer them. However, pickleball is an amenity that could be offered almost anywhere because of the game's meager spatial requirements, across boundaries of resort typology. Also, this study could not utilize a standard performance analysis methodology to analyze the benefits of pickleball programming because there is not a great enough sample size of available raw data regarding pickleball as an amenity (Brey & Hyeong-Gyu, 2010). This is a result of the sport's relative newness and the reticence of stakeholder's to share complete financial facts and figures, presumably for fear their efforts to capitalize on a new revenue stream would be imitated by competitors. Therefore, this study will have to base much of its literature review on research into the amenity that is most similar to pickleball in terms of play, equipment, and spatial requirements: tennis.

Tennis and hotels have been associated with each other for decades, with tennis courts being a feature at most luxury resorts and many mid-range resorts. In fact, the Tennis Industry Association (TIA) stated that "3% of tennis facilities listed in the (TIA) facilities database are tennis facilities at a resort... most resorts, especially higher end resorts, have between 4 to 6 or more tennis courts" (Melton, 2014, p. 11). This shows a persisting desire for developers to offer tennis at their locations, suggesting that pickleball could be a similarly attractive proposition. At

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

the most basic level, this highlights how a sporting activity can be included as part of what a property offers. Offering additional or new amenities can lead to obtaining new guests or retaining returning customers, as well as opening up new revenue opportunities. The 2012 Resort Survey “showed 42% of resorts having tennis facilities and services. Of those, seventy three percent (73%) open their tennis facilities to the public” (Wisnom, 2013, p. 7). Attracting locals to the property can lead to food and beverage sales, equipment sales and other incremental revenue. It is clear that this is an important revenue stream too, given the fact that “39% of resorts with tennis reported having a pro shop” (Wisnom, 2013, p. 7). These pro shops can carry pickleball equipment easily, capitalizing on another synergistic revenue opportunity and creating new “sales opportunities for retailers, facilities and manufacturers” (Oswald, 2018, p. 4).

Yet another revenue stream is available with tennis instruction, which “was offered at 71% of resorts with tennis” (Wisnom, 2013, p. 7). As this essay continues to discuss pickleball programming at resorts and retirement communities, bear in mind that all of these revenue streams are available with pickleball. In fact, resorts and retirement communities with pre-existing tennis amenities can simply add pickleball programming to their tennis programming, using the same courts and stores to facilitate play and generate revenue. This is implemented by “lining your current facilities for pickleball play” so one “can capitalize on that demand and reap the financial rewards. We have seen clubs and parks smartly offering pickleball at times when tennis courts aren’t as busy” (Graham & Evon, 2017, p. 34). It is not an either/or choice or zero sum, but rather an incremental and concurrent opportunity.

While the similarities between tennis and pickleball as sports and as amenities are many, the differences in the sports’ cultures are stark. Tennis is a longstanding country club sport, favored in pop culture by the one-percenters, the elite earners of high society. Meanwhile,

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

pickleball is a pick up and play activity for the whole family, which can be played informally as easily as it can be structured for tournaments. This ease and comfortability may be advantageous to pickleball as a hospitality amenity, as research suggests a shift towards spontaneous recreation over structured recreation in the modern day. This is perhaps because spontaneous recreation fosters a sense of community, an important goal for many resorts, recreation centers, and retirement facilities. Regardless, “Trends suggest that recreation interests are evolving in such a way that favours spontaneous participation over structured as well as individual activities over team sports” (Ellis & Schwartz, 2016, p. 13). While structured recreation will always be a part of tourism given the benefit to resorts of attaining group reservations and the benefit to a group like the USAPA of facilitating tournaments for the more competitive pickleball players, leaning into the changing desires of guests and groups is important to all businesses, none more so than hospitality.

Another important cultural shift is how, through advancements in travel technology, cultural evolution, and globalization, sports participation is diversifying. This diversity is cultural, regional, racial, educational, and social, which means a sport that retains an image of being snooty, exclusive, or stratified such as tennis may not be best suited to attracting newly available participants. A new sport such as pickleball, whose image does not retain any hangups from previous generations, is best suited to capitalize on this changing market. Gender diversity in sports participation is also growing, adding more women to the pool of potential players (Schultz, 2016, p. 34). Pickleball is one of the few sports that does not rely on brute power throughout the course of a game, given the benefit to utilizing a “soft” or “short” game in numerous game scenarios. This provides an egalitarian framework for various genders, ages, and body types that is missing from many other sports, and indeed, amenities.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Inverting the perspective for a moment to look at the importance of pickleball at resorts as a channel to grow the game, people have reduced inhibitions while at resorts and want to maximize their enjoyment by trying new things. Just about everyone who plays pickleball raves about it to their friends and family. The advent and increased use of social media then acts in a dual capacity – simultaneously promoting the resort or retirement community and the sport of pickleball. This provides both the sport and the property with a symbiotic benefit which goes viral through likes, shares and comments. This become self-perpetuating as more people hear about the property and sport until it is in the zeitgeist. Examining pickleball's impact and interactions on social media can help us understand its place in contemporary pop culture.

Online groups and forums based around pickleball fandom and social gatherings are numerous. For example, Facebook's Pickleball forum has 25,000 members with hundreds of daily interactions. A recent informal poll shows that celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Kid Rock, Kim Kardashian, business leaders and philanthropists like Bill and Melinda Gates and Larry Ellison, athletes and former athletes like Andre Agassi, Martina Navratilova, Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson and even Michael Jordan have been known to play.

This study will also draw insights from beyond hotels with tennis and pickleball programming to include other stakeholders – tour leaders, resort property managers, equipment manufacturers, sponsors of tournaments, dedicated pickleball resorts/clubs, and players to include other hospitality properties like Chicken N Pickle.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Part Three

Recommendations

Introduction

This paper has identified the value of research into the growth of pickleball in hospitality, while underlining the value of said research to the tourism industry as a whole. After discussing potential benefits of this analytical endeavor and highlighting potential constraints on the research, this essay concluded that a thorough comparison with tennis in hotels and an investigation of current pickleball programming information was the best method by which to form a foundation for future research. After comparing pickleball as a hospitality amenity and revenue creator with other relevant sports, the topic was discussed with stakeholders in the form of professional interviews. The interviews were analyzed and a few recurring points became clear.

The following findings, results, and recommendations will identify the potential benefits of developing pickleball programming in a host of hospitality environments, ranging from cruise ships to traditional hotels, from resort and retirement communities to restaurants and bars. The conclusion of this paper provides specific justification for instituting or expanding pickleball programming at a variety of properties depending on space, facilities, and demographics of guests. A number of options are also provided regarding how best to capitalize on the growing popularity of pickleball as a social, active, and profitable sports offering.

Findings

This section of the paper will present findings gleaned from interviews conducted with hospitality industry (and pickleball programming) leaders. The interviews for this paper were conceived due to the lack of scholarly work on the intersection of pickleball and

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

resorts/retirement communities. Much has been written about pickleball's health benefits – both physical and psychological, and the history and growth of the sport has been documented, but deep research into the drivers for the growth of the sport and implications for resorts and retirement communities has not been examined by academia.

Therefore, a determination was made that research on this subject area would be valuable and impactful, especially if it contained information gleaned from interviewing industry leaders who can speak on this topic from direct experience with pickleball as a revenue proposition. The first and most natural point of inquiry was the executive leadership within the organizing institution for pickleball in the United States, the USAPA. Fortunately, they were not only available and helpful with their time but also provided numerous resources to gain further information. They provided suggestions for other interviewees, people directly at the intersection of pickleball and resorts and/or retirement communities. USAPA also shared links to their own website which provided detailed information on the growth of pickleball in the United States.

The interview questions were developed from an organic process of needing to determine the existing drivers (if any) for adding pickleball as an amenity for guests and potential future drivers of growth. It quickly became clear that pickleball was added to most resorts due to its low initial startup costs, and its ability to generate revenue and improve the guest experience. In fact, in some cases one of the reasons for adding courts and programming to a resort was guests expressed a desire for same. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked to suggest another peer or peers in their industry that may be able to offer more perspective to the questions they were asked. This led to more interviews with peer-approved thought-leaders. This system of interviews closely resembles contemporary business ethnography research methods, wherein a series of ethnographic interviews with stakeholders (often customers, service providers, retailers,

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

etc.) leads to insights into behavior with regard to a business process, sector, product, or in this case, amenity (Ladner, 2016).

The specific questions were developed and then modified according to new information gathered in each interview. While only 15 interviews were conducted over a two month period, a broad range of perspectives was requested, received, and documented. The resort leaders interviewed ranged from a dedicated pickleball resort with pickleball as the only sporting amenity to properties who converted tennis courts gradually based on demand of guests in places like California, Arizona, Florida, and Mexico. More specifically, the respondents were chief marketing officers, directors and/or programmers of recreation at resort chains, resort owners, professional pickleball athletes, and one owner of a tennis and pickleball equipment retailer. They all have over ten years of experience in their chosen fields. The interviews were based on a set of questions which can be found listed in Appendix A. The questions ranged from basic experiential concerns such as when respondents first encountered pickleball to more complex interrogatives regarding the cost of implementing pickleball programming and the benefits of same. Experiential questions were asked to learn about the spread and growth of pickleball to various stakeholders. Interrogative questions about profit and loss and cost benefit were designed to add to this study's understanding of pickleball as a potential revenue generator. The respondents are as follows:

Justin Maloof, Executive Director, USAPA

Jack Thomas, President, USAPA

Christine Barksdale, Former Managing Director of Competition and Athlete Services for USAPA and current Manager of Marketing Programs for Head Pickleball

Tamara Baldanza-Dekker, Margaritaville Chief Marketing Officer

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Michael McFarlane, Shadow Mountain Resort Co-Owner, Owner Wyn Tennis Academy and Operator of Palm Desert Resort Country Club Tennis and Pickleball

John B. Rohan, Director of Recreation for The Villages Community Development District.

Kevin Conley, Director of Tennis at La Quinta Resort and Spa

Dave Kensler, PBI Pickleball Professional, Marriott - Desert Springs

Andy Gensch, Consultant/Head Pro of Chicken N Pickle

Paul Bland, Co-owner/operator of Tres Palapas

Steve Dawson, Owner/Director Bobby Riggs Racket and Paddle

Brian Thorfinnson, Director of Tennis, Marriott - Desert Ridge

Lon Krantz, Teaching Professional, Coronado Island Marriott

Lorraine Keogh Davis, Director of Local Sales, Operations for Club Med

Fred Hartzman, Club Director, Indian Wells Tennis Center

Ben Keilholtz, VP, Marketing and Sales, Bluestar Resort and Golf/Trilogy Retirement Communities

A broad group of people interviewed were identified as thought-leaders or influencers with knowledge of pickleball and resorts or retirement communities. They were identified based on referrals but also respondents were chosen based on the pickleball offerings at their properties, as discussed on their business websites, as well as their years of experience in hospitality and/or pickleball. A majority of the interviews came from resorts and retirement communities with pickleball as one of several amenities. Some of them have had programs for over five years and a few were relatively new to adding courts. Some resorts have exclusively dedicated their programming to pickleball and others have integrated pickleball into their mix of

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

offerings. This diverse group gave a broad perspective of their opinions about the impact of pickleball at their properties. Several of the interviews came from past and present leadership at USAPA – the governing body for pickleball in the United States. USAPA also holds camps, clinics, and ambassador retreats at resorts, so they have a unique perspective as an entity with specific insights and experience. Admittedly the USAPA could be biased due to their goal of promoting pickleball and pickleball programming, but this bias can be addressed through comparison with objective facts and figures.

These phone interviews asked basic questions including “what is your relationship with pickleball?” “When and how did you decide to be involved with the sport?” “What have you personally observed at the intersection of pickleball and resorts?” “How has pickleball in the resort environment helped or hurt your business?” “What do you see as the future of pickleball and your business?”. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix A at the end of this paper.

Results

The results of this research are based on limited sample size, due to the newness of pickleball programming in resorts. However, given the specificity of the interviews conducted with resort managers and pickleball programmers, this research was able to produce direct results and recommendations focused on the topic of pickleball programs for resorts. These specific points will be detailed below.

First, a sociological statement must be made about the ethos of pickleball. The culture of the sport of pickleball is a unique sociological phenomenon. The subculture of pickleball is almost antithesis of tennis. It has an unpretentious origin as a sport for all people, invented in a backyard and initially embraced mostly by seniors at retirement communities; not just the

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

country club elite. In fact, many more people play on public courts (rec centers, community centers, public tennis courts) than in private clubs. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to play.

Pickleball takes very little investment of time and money to learn. This opens it up for everybody to participate and these places support and promote the recreational and social aspect for all to be able to play. It also leads to many first encounters with pickleball revolving around social happenstance, rather than in school or from a parent or other authority figure such as a trainer or tennis professional. People see (or hear) this new, unfamiliar sport being played and are often intrigued, asking for information and guidance which most players are happy to provide. This openness and inclusivity has permeated the culture of pickleball so players who become more advanced still remember when they learned and try to give back to the sport by encouraging new players to join them and play. This process can be self-propelling and contagious. Pickleball is also mostly a sport uncorrupted by big money and egos, without pretention or arrogance even at the highest levels.

In many major sports, professional athletes are pampered, entitled, and aloof. However, it is not uncommon to see top professional pickleball players mingling with fans and friends between matches at tournaments or even during breaks in games. One top professional player, Michelle Esquivel was recently seen sitting with fans on the court during breaks in play during her recent championship match at a tournament at The Lakes in Palm Desert in California. She also over-ruled her own call in the same match to give the benefit of the doubt to her opponent while congratulating her on a nice shot on several occasions. This is not uncommon. This goes to the integrity of the sport. People call their own penalties for foot faults, kitchen violations and are generally generous with line calls. Of course, there are individual exceptions to the cultural norm, but, for the most part, pickleball is an egalitarian sport that does not discriminate based on

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

age or sex. There could be many reasons for this but one is certainly that the game requires touch (soft game) with dinking but also power (with banging). This equalizes the playing field beyond gender and age barriers, providing strategic opportunities for young and old, male and female, and a wide range of body types. Many tennis players come to this sport without the requisite touch or soft game and can quickly get humbled by a much older and slower player who has a soft touch and great strategy. The success of this social culture is exemplified by the success of a restaurant and bar that uses pickleball as their primary amenity, Chicken N Pickle, and through the success of the USAPA ambassador program.

There are thousands of volunteer evangelists of the sport called ambassadors that host free clinics and promote the sport all over the world without the expectation of any monetary remuneration, just because they love the sport and want to share it with others. “USAPA currently has a network of over 1,800 volunteer ambassadors who have pledged to promote the sport of pickleball ... assist with local clinics/tournaments and look for opportunities to add/grow the game in their community”. Nothing like this exists in tennis or any other hospitality related sport.

Now that the social culture of pickleball players is clear, the business incentives of hospitality developers can be discussed. Each respondent that was interviewed for this study had unique responses and different perspectives on the topic of the implications for pickleball at resorts and retirement communities according to their own objectives. A succinct statement of the methods and goals of one stakeholder serves as a strong example of why entrepreneurs from various sectors are intrigued by the revenue generating capabilities of pickleball programming. Robert Elliot, Executive Director of Engage, a pickleball equipment company, said “we decided to get into providing pickleball camps and clinics at resorts and on cruise lines as a natural

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

extension of our brand marketing of our equipment.” The reasoning behind this strategy was explained thusly: Elliot hoped to “achieve a few objectives: drive revenue through the registration fees by participants, grow the sport, create affinity for our products, sell more equipment, grow market share” all with the ultimate goal of building relationship with resorts and retirement communities, in the hopes that these locations would “implement programs where they can become wholesale buyers and eventually retailers by selling our merchandise at their pro shops” (Elliot, R., personal interview, February 12 2019). This underlines the benefit of pickleball programming for an equipment retailer. For a hospitality leader, the benefits are based more around gaining and retaining guests. It was unanimously felt by respondents that pickleball in resort and retirement communities can be a valuable amenity and drive revenue if introduced properly. For example, Ben Keilholtz, VP of Marketing and Sales for BlueStar Resort & Golf, stated that “From a development standpoint, its smaller footprint and relatively low ongoing costs make it a great use of amenity space. I could not imagine introducing a new community that didn’t have pickleball among its offerings” (Keilholtz, B., personal interview, February 21 2019).

However, each respondent had their own perspective and prognostication according to their objective, job responsibilities, and pickleball experience. Some properties take it slowly and add according to demand, others have gone all-in by exclusively offering pickleball instead of tennis. Pickleball has also established itself as an amenity outside of traditional hotels, functioning as an attraction for a restaurant bar (Chicken n Pickle) and the core foundation for a resort based entirely around pickleball programming (Tres Palapas), which does not even offer accommodations. Chicken N Pickle is a restaurant/bar management company that features pickleball programming as an attraction because of the game’s social nature, addictiveness, and

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

the synergistic demographic benefits of pickleball driving visitation and increased food and beverage sales (Chicken n Pickle, 2019). This pickleball themed restaurant property has proven so successful that according to consultant and head pro Andy Gensch “we are breaking ground now on our third location, San Antonio, and will be announcing our fourth location soon” (Gensch, A., personal interview, January 11 2019). This success and growth could be an inspiration to other business developers, whether they are building new businesses in the food and beverage space, rejuvenating a pre-existing hospitality brand with a new recreational activity, or some combination of the two.

Tres Palapas describes itself as “the most random and newest architectural oasis dedicated to America’s new “it” sport pickleball... The first and only Pickleball-only resort” (Tres Palapas, 2019, para. 4). Owner Paul Bland banked on pickleball as the sole amenity on which to base an entire business, and has thus far proven successful. “The demand for play was so high and the times available were so limited that we began to think of a dedicated resort... We have hundreds of members and host tour groups and tournaments every month” (Bland, P., personal interview, February 15 2019). Bland built his pickleball-only resort based on existing demand in Baja Mexico, combined with the projections he saw for growth in the sport and his passion for the sport. He sees growth locally though his outreach efforts with local communities with relatively poorer citizens who have never played tennis but find this sport a reasonably-priced alternative. This shows that pickleball can not only act as a revenue driving amenity as part of a business, but pickleball can be a revenue generating business itself.

Other properties offering pickleball fall into previously mentioned categories, including retirement communities like Trilogy and The Villages, and cruise ship companies such as Holland America where pickleball “recently was added to the sports offered on all 14 Holland

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

America ships. And the line's newest ship, the Nieuw Statendam, which debuts in December 2018, will feature the game as well" (Holland America, 2018, para. 3). Other cruise lines like Regent Seven Seas and Princess have also added pickleball to many of their ships. Lastly, other venues like tennis club Indian Wells are dedicated to tennis but convert their courts temporarily to host pickleball events such as the Pickleball National Championships.

Each of the respondents has a compelling and interesting story about their development and predictions for the future. When asked "what growth plans do you have for pickleball at your property?" every respondent advocated for adding more pickleball courts and programming. All justify their implementation through a combination of new revenue and guest satisfaction/demand.

Take for example John B. Rohan, Director of Recreation at The Villages retirement community. He believes in the satisfaction pickleball provides for his retirees so much that his resort has "over 150 pickleball courts and have had our pickleball program running since 1989. We offer... everything from lessons, leagues, open play, rated play, to tournaments" (Rohan, J. B., personal interview, February 17 2019). The pickleball programming at The Villages services 125,000 long term residents as part of its total offering for guests. The game adds to the fun atmosphere of the community and helps sell the resort to retirees seeking active retirement. Rohan's advice to resorts and communities that have not yet installed pickleball courts that "They are behind the 8 ball if they aren't putting them in now".

For most resorts with pickleball programming, courts and activities are a relatively new addition to properties. When respondents were asked whether they had built entirely new courts or converted existing space, a variety of answers were received. Some resorts have incrementally added pickleball by replacing tennis courts, including La Quinta Resort and Spa, The Palm

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Desert Resort and Spa, Club Med, and Marriott hotels. This is the method Desert Springs Marriott used to add convertible pickleball courts to its preexisting tennis courts. Dave Kensler, Head Pickleball Pro at Pickleball International (PBI), describes the ease of adding pickleball programming to tennis amenities at the Desert Springs Marriott. He “opted for putting permanent lines on two tennis courts and using the tennis net”. This means the hotel has “a total of two pickleball courts, one pickleball court on each tennis court. They are still tennis courts, but also temporary pickleball courts. You have dual usage, all we have to do is lower the net 34 inches in the middle” (Kensler, D., personal interview, February 06 2019). Transformable tennis/pickleball courts are a lucrative opportunity for resorts who wish to add to their guest offerings with minimal financial investment.

Steve Dawson at Bobby Riggs Racket and Paddle Club sees lots of growth from the conversion of existing tennis players. He is developing PicklePalooza as a new, robust, integrated special event combining sports and entertainment to help spur the sport’s growth and revenue at his club. Dawson is acting fast now in the hopes of cementing Bobby Riggs as a pickleball destination, in the hopes of securing his club as a top destination and secure group bookings for years to come. This would have been unthinkable even ten years ago, before the surge in pickleball availability. This was when Bobby Riggs Racket and Paddle was almost exclusively focused on tennis, as the name of the property would suggest. However, properties must attempt to increase revenue any way that is feasible, or in the words of Dawson himself: “I just let economics dictate the flow” (Dawson, S., personal interview, January 28 2019).

Another incremental approach in adding pickleball to tennis comes from Michael McFarlane, a respondent with a long history in tennis who has embraced pickleball in recent years. He is a 35-year resident of the Coachella Valley. He has been involved in tennis since the

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

age of eight and has been teaching clinics and camps for the past 25 years. Michael was exposed early to the workings of a country club. His grandfather owned one in Palm Springs, and since his grandfather was also the developer, Michael literally saw how a tennis club was created from the ground up. At age 14 he started his serious study of tennis at the Rancho Mirage Reed Anderson Tennis School and credits his style to the teaching he received and provided there for a total of 14 years.

In 1997, the opportunity arose for him to instruct at Shadow Mountain Resort's highly acclaimed Desert Tennis Academy, where he took his love of tennis to the next level. His love for tennis and attachment to the resort culminated in ownership in 2009. Michael is committed to creating a resort that stays serious about tennis and yet has a more social vibe, wanting to give the historical Shadow Mountain Resort & Club a updated look and create a social ambiance that entices people to come play and hang out with friends while improving their tennis game, aspiring for them to come back over and over again. He enthusiastically takes on the challenge of keeping Shadow Mountain Resort a favorite hotspot for years to come. Recently, under the umbrella of Wyn tennis, they added new programming for their members:

We had an opportunity to take over the tennis program at the Palm Desert Resort Country Club and signed a three year lease. They had 15 tennis courts and no pickleball program or courts. We immediately converted three of the tennis courts to 12 Pickleball Courts. We made this decision partly on intuition and from some data gleaned from incoming inquiries about Pickleball at our other resort nearby – Shadow Mountain. We opened membership sales in January, 2019 and launched the program in February just after the BNP/Paribus tennis tournament at Indian Wells. By the end of April, 2019, we'll already have exceeded our limit of 300 members. We have started a waiting list and are planning to add staff and more courts to

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

meet the demand of new players wanting lessons. We are thrilled with the program and look forward to its' continued growth. (Macfarlane, M., personal interview, March 19 2019)

This case proves that adding transformable courts and pickleball programming to a resort's offerings can grow the business's NOI and expand the customer base. At least one new member purchased a home in the resort as a result of the new amenity being provided.

However, permanent pickleball courts are also a revenue generating opportunity, as pointed out by another respondent. Answering the same question about introducing courts, Lorraine Keogh, Director of Local Sales and Operations for Club Med, points out that while "they have created temporary courts by converting tennis and basketball courts at their villages in Cancun, Ixtapa, Punta Cana" they have also "built a few permanent courts at their property ... in Port St. Lucie, Florida, and plan to add a few when their newest property in [sic] Dominican Republic, Michees opens in December, 2019". Beyond pickleball infrastructure creating guest amenities, having the courts also creates opportunities to draw new guests. Club Med has "hosted group travel (15 or more people) for camps, retreats, clinics and tournaments" including hosting the "the USAPA East Coast retreat and University in January 2019 at Sandpiper" (Keogh, L., personal interview, January 10 2019). Keogh goes on to state that volume of interest suggests that Club Med will continue to expand its pickleball offerings, answering the question about Club Med's growth plans for pickleball at their properties.

Someone with a unique perspective from all sides of the issues is Christine Barksdale. In her own words she has a broad background to draw on as "a top-tier competitor, former events director and now current Manager of Marketing Programs for Head Pickleball". Her responses showed a core belief in "grassroots marketing" as a driver of pickleball's growth, going so far as to state that "Manufacturers who effectively leverage grass-roots marketing will gain increased

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

market share. We will be doing this with by sponsoring players and tournaments this year”. In her capacity as Former Managing Director of Competition and Athlete Services for USAPA, Barksdale signed a 5 year deal that brought the National Championships to Indian Wells Tennis Center, because “we knew that our sport was ready for the leap from a much smaller venue in Arizona to the same place that hosts the 5th Tennis major – BNP/Paribus Open” (Barksdale, C., personal interview, March 1 2019). This shows how the growth of pickleball as a sport has led directly to business opportunities for companies like Indian Wells.

Indian Wells is considering increasing the number of courts onsite, including permanent pickleball only courts. As Club Director Fred Hartzman describes “We have seen a few resorts nearby add permanent pickleball courts and are watching their performance to determine if this is something we want to pursue as well” (Hartzman, F., personal interview, March 1 2019). As properties find success with pickleball as a revenue generator, their models and practices may be imitated. Of course, this is also true for any negative consequences of implementing pickleball. If a program or series of events were to fail, developers might think twice about pursuing pickleball as a profit driver. This is especially true if guests express dissatisfaction with any aspect of new pickleball facilities or programming.

A few concerns and potential limitations come from a small but vocal opposition to new programming and the attendant issues of noise, increased congestion, competition for space and reallocation of resources. As with any change, there will be pushback from some people who are resistant to alteration of expectations or routine. The issue of noise is real. There is a distinct, “pop, pop, pop” sound of the ball coming off the paddle and that sound travels and exultations from participants when hitting a great shot or missing an easy one. Mitigation for this sound issue can be performed by installing sound barriers, using softer balls that emit a quieter sound

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

off the paddle, restricting hours, and/or moving courts away from sleeping, eating and intentionally quiet hours at a property. The other potential negative implications can be mitigated through clear communication to all stakeholders, posted hours of usage, time of play per game, rotation of courts, on-site leadership to address questions and complaints and common courtesy. These concerns of space, behavior and sound are already a consideration for tennis and other recreational activities in resorts and retirement communities, so management should be prepared to deal with these potential issues. If addressed properly, adjustments can be made to modify and placate issues. The positive overall benefits outweigh the negatives as demonstrated by responses from property owners in interviews.

Despite a diverse group of respondents with a variety of relationships with pickleball, the results of the interviews provided a relatively uniform set of responses. However, respondents' thoughts on the reasons for pickleball's growth to this point were the most divergent set of answers given.

Staff at USAPA attributed much of the sport's growth to their robust ambassador program of 1,800 plus volunteers across the United States and the structure they provide in supporting the ambassadors, sanctioning and hosting tournaments, aggregating tournament information, providing standards and regulations for equipment, and hosting the popular "Places2Play" section of their website (USAPA, 2019). This section is widely promoted and generates most of the traffic on their website. Their website also hosts all of the resources and support tools USAPA ambassadors need for their volunteer work in growing the sport. The prime growth responsibilities of ambassadors is twofold: introduce the sport to new players and get new places for the new and existing players to play. They also have a section on their website called the "Promoters' Guide" which outlines strategies and tactics to grow the game. Their

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

tagline is literally “Watch Us Grow”. Additionally, their website hosts lots of other information for players of all levels, from beginners to top-level players with videos via a link to the pickleball channel. The website also provides information and resources for properties/clubs/destinations/locations considering the construction of courts. Through their non-profit arm they also provide grants for new locations to secure money to purchase equipment to get started. There is a membership fee to join USAPA and they encourage all players to join, but it is requirement to join if you want to play in a sanctioned tournament or get rated in order to play in one of their sanctioned tournaments. Moving forward, they see growth coming from many different sources, but they are investing in staff and promotional materials to grow the sport by introducing it at as many schools as possible through ambassadors. Lastly, most major equipment manufacturers are sponsors of USAPA which gives USAPA the income needed to continue their mission of growing the game.

Most respondents agree that the USAPA is a leader in growing pickleball but others have had an impact beyond the work of USAPA. Most pickleball equipment manufacturers and retailers have grass-roots marketing initiatives where they donate equipment, sponsor players and tournaments, and generally welcome thoughts on ways to help grow the game. Both interviews with Christine Barksdale of Head and Robert Elliot of Engage reinforced this similarity in the approach of equipment retailers. While Head is not yet involved in hosting camps and clinics at resorts, Engage is active in this revenue-generating tactic to grow the game and their brand.

The respondents from resorts varied somewhat in their responses based on their role. Lorraine from Club Med comes from an operational orientation and did not have a perspective on the reason for growth nor a perspective on future growth. She talked about adding pickleball courts from a simple, supply and demand perspective. Club Med adds courts when guests

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

(mostly group travel guests) require them for their travel needs. That being said, they are seeing the demand and other benefits continue to grow so they are now adding courts to new resorts villages as they are built instead of adding them after they are operational. However, Lorraine pointed out that if demand decreases, they would adapt accordingly.

Group travel is a very important channel to resorts. Given the existing number of businesses that hosts camps, clinics and pickleball-themed vacations, this channel will only drive more revenue for resorts as the sport continues to grow and more events take place across the Americas and beyond. Speaking of travel, pickleball's meager spatial and equipment requirements means that it is the perfect amenity for yet another kind of resort – cruise ships.

Unsuccessful attempts were made at getting interviews with Norwegian Cruise Lines, and in the process evidence was found they have put courts on all of their cruise ships (Norwegian Cruise Lines, 2019). Ultra-luxury developer, Discovery Land Company declined to be interviewed because they are a private entity, but Instagram posts from various guests (including the Kardashian-Jenner family) and their website shows that they have embraced pickleball and have courts in a few of their communities. This shows that pickleball is not an amenity solely for local suburban recreation centers and some resorts, but also serves as a recreational activity for luxury guests on land and at sea.

Recommendations

First, while the sport of pickleball is more than 50 years old, it has experienced very significant growth in the past five years and continues to trend upward. Its pattern of growth is relevant to hospitality in general in the same way that any cultural activity surging in popularity will have a knock-on effect on tourism and/or service industry. The growth of the sport means more events and more players, both of which can be capitalized on by properties with pickleball

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

amenities. This is backed up by statistics from the USAPA, which hosts postings of various pickleball tournaments across the United States on their website, and from respondents such as Lon Krantz of the Coronado Island Marriott and Paul Bland of Tres Palapas who both have repeat bookings of pickleball groups returning to their establishments (and spending money) on a weekly basis (Krantz, L., personal interview, February 19 2019). Krantz described the growth of his teaching camps as exponential. “When I first started, we had less 75 players playing. We currently are averaging 500 to 600 participants every month now, and I anticipated will continue to grow probably another, you know, 10 to 20%. Because now we have additional courts” (Krantz, L., personal interview, February 19 2019). Other respondents are excited about the prospect of attaining repeat group bookings for pickleball and pickleball events now and in the future (Bland, P., personal interview, February 15 2019).

Second, while relatively small in total participation, the sport is growing quickly. And with growth comes demand from consumers. With consumer demand there is opportunity for increased market share and revenue by early-adopting developers who see the potential in pickleball programming based on the numbers and the rabidity of existing pickleball players. Given the ease of onboarding new players, the research indicates that pickleball programming would be a boon to the uninitiated as well as preexisting pickleball fans. Out of a potential audience of more than 300 million residents in the United States, only 3 million currently play. This is still a very small percentage of the total population with tremendous upside potential for continued growth (USAPA, 2018). The potential for global growth is also an exciting possibility, and the world’s first pickleball only resort, Tres Palapas, will function as an important bellwether for the future.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Third, the social nature of the sport creates a dynamic that lends itself to group travel, branding, and generally resorts that want to bring people together to create a fun atmosphere. The conducted interviews indicate that pickleball players and organizations will seek out programming, but the research also suggests that pickleball works as an activity for vacationing families just as well. This seems to fit with the cultural brands of a number of resorts, such as Club Med and Margaritaville. In fact, Chief Marketing Officer for Margaritaville, Tamara Baldanza-Dekker said that the fun activity of pickleball “aligns perfectly with the DNA of our brand” (Baldanza-Dekker, T., personal interview, February 22 2019). Pickleball could make a profitable addition to resorts that wish to offer fun athletic recreation. For Margaritaville, they went a step further than providing a fun activity for their guests, eventually partnering with USAPA and ESPN to sponsor the Pickleball National Finals, which received coverage on ESPN on a large scale. This is another example of cultural brands intersecting and partnering in the hopes of generating revenue and gaining exposure with desired demographics.

Fourth, the demographic of pickleball participants is mostly comprised of people over the age of 55, which is a desirable demographic since they have time and money with a propensity to travel and a desire to stay healthy and active. This is proven through pickleball’s success at senior living communities. Trilogy Resort Communities are designed with active retirees in mind. They have dedicated pickleball courts and programs at all 18 of their communities. They consider pickleball an essential amenity. If one retirement community considers pickleball an essential amenity, it only makes logical sense that other retirement communities would offer it to remain competitive for this desirable target market. There are already studies that show the mental and physical benefits of sports in retirement communities, and studies specifically about pickleball’s positive effect in retirement communities are being published in recent years. It

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

seems sensible that studies looking at pickleball in resorts from a business perspective should follow close behind, in an effort to best serve hospitality's number one goal: satisfying guests (Ryu, Yang, Kim A., Kim K., & Heo, 2018).

Fifth, the courts are small and can easily be converted from existing tennis and basketball courts that may be underutilized. The cost/benefit ratio of retrofitting preexisting courts will be specific to individual resorts, but generally the cost of adding pickleball programming to resorts that already have courts is low. Adding a temporary, mobile net, painting, taping or chalking lines, and purchasing paddles and balls can be done for less than \$500 per court on an existing surface. Building new courts from scratch can be as inexpensive as \$10,000 per court (USAPA, 2018).

Sixth, more people can play on pickleball courts every hour than can fit on the same area if it were used for tennis courts. 4 pickleball courts can fit in 1 tennis court. So, two people playing singles tennis for an hour equals sixteen playing doubles pickleball. This an 8 to 1 return on investment. Given that pickleball games only take 10-20 minutes per game, the math can work out even better for resorts when time is factored in. Steve Dawson of Bobby Riggs Racket and Paddle claims that "I can get two members climbing singles on a tennis court or 25 people playing doubles pick up on the same size" (Dawson, S., personal interview, January 28 2019). This increases the monetization quotient of the space by a significant margin, which is essential for any business, particularly in hospitality. This is a basic economic principle proven by the airline industry – the more people you can fit into an existing space, the more money you can make.

Seventh, the building or conversion of courts can create a point of competitive differentiation and increase market share for resorts. Pickleball courts would add to a brand's

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

feeling of active fun. Several of the Marriott properties have provided this example, according to Brian Thorfinnson, Director of Tennis at Marriott Desert Ridge. One of their properties added pickleball programming and now several have added it. “It all started when we had a group booked with American Express probably six years ago. They had a 7 pm dinner meeting and didn’t leave the courts until 8 pm” (Thorfinnson, B., personal interview, January 30 2019).

Marriott Desert Ridge’s quick shift into pickleball did include some drawbacks. “We did lose a few tennis groups as a result since we now only have five tennis courts and that was not enough to accommodate them” (Thorfinnson, B., personal interview, January 30 2019).

However, Thorfinnson quickly pointed out that their earnings from pickleball, mostly because of the “Level Up” training camps they offer, provide more net revenue than the three tennis courts they lost. When their case studies of success were shared internally, the number of Marriott properties with courts grew, and this success could be replicated by many others outside of the Marriott family. Like any industry, hospitality is a copycat industry. The success of a few resorts with pickleball will be copied by other resorts, both in the same company sharing best practices to drive revenue, and by other competitors who must avoid losing market share by not offering a revenue generating amenity like pickleball (Thorfinnson, B., personal interview, January 30 2019).

Eighth, more group bookings for pickleball events and programming equals more heads in beds and incremental Food and Beverage sales. For Club Med, this was the driving force for their conversion – group travel demand dictated it. Often developers look to group travel as their cash cow or revenue provider for growth opportunities. Group travel is becoming more and more important to resorts. Group travel is a booming business and developers want to do everything they can to be sure they are competitive in offering amenities desired by various groups. Also,

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

group travel is often repeat business, with trips recurring annually. Developers can cater to group travel managers and businesses to enhance their relationship so their property is a preferred destination. Group travel is continuing to be a strong proposition for resorts, and this shows no signs of slowing. Sports like pickleball can be a part of driving this proposition, according to the Sports & Leisure Research Group's 2017 *Trends and Insights in Sports Travel*, which declared "We continue to observe a majority of sports travelers strongly agree that it is important to try new things, which coincides with directional insight that continue to support the trend towards participatory sports and adventure travel" (Last, 2017, p. 2).

Ninth, a new sport with new equipment equals new fees for court usage, lesson revenue, and merchandise sales. Adding new revenue streams is important in the changing world of hospitality. All resorts are looking to enhance their revenue streams. Any resort or retirement community that is not focused on this and maximizing their space usage is doing a disservice to their ownership, stockholders, staff and guests (Dawson, S., personal interview, January 28 2019).

Tenth, with enough courts at a resort, tournaments can be held and the facility can be rented for special events and private parties. This could be yet another revenue stream that would bring people into the resort, perhaps to stay for a few nights, a few meals, and/or a few drinks. Tournaments can be scheduled during off/shoulder seasons to drive demand during off-peak times. Indian Wells adopted this strategy by adding the National Pickleball Championships in early November when occupancy is traditionally very low. In the words of Fred Hartzmann, Club Director: "We chose to host it in early November each year because we see this as an up and coming sport and it is timed to be here during a softer part of our schedule in a shoulder season before our winter season really begins" (Hartzmann, F., personal interview, February 15

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

2019). In addition to the revenue that tournaments drive, there are other ancillary benefits like enhanced reputation and positive public relations for the property. The Lakes is a country club community in Palm Desert that has a tournament in March. They have proven recent sales of some homes are a result of fans coming to the tournament and eventually buying a home on the property. It may be too early to forecast the future of pickleball as a revenue driver in hospitality, but everything in this study and in research from authorities such as the Sports & Leisure Research Group tells us that the market wants something active when they travel, and something new when they vacation. Pickleball fits that description without running up against a cost barrier (Last, 2017, p. 2).

Conclusion

Based on limited available research with verifiable financial statements, the conclusions drawn are based on parallel literature on tennis in hospitality and from interviews conducted with people who have a vested interest in the success of their business. From the documentation it appears there are some relevant and consistently reinforced components that impact the hospitality industry. The most consequential of these conclusions is that pickleball programming in resorts generates net revenue, even given initial startup costs. In terms of universality, this research has focused on pickleball programming in North and South American resorts. This could mean the results are not applicable to all resorts, though the relative omnipresence of table tennis and tennis in hospitality globally may partially refute such a worry. Regardless, the current research suggests that pickleball programming in resorts is a potential way to create multiple new revenue streams. When considering the information available about the success of several developers in several different types of resorts, country clubs, and properties, combined with the ease of conversion of existing space, the dual use of that space, guest demand and increased

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

satisfaction, incremental revenue opportunities, and the fast growth of the sport in the past 5 years; it appears that developers should consider converting or adding pickleball courts to help themselves efficiently reach their fundamental objectives of maximizing asset value.

The developers must be willing to properly invest in court conversion – either temporary or permanent, and support that investment with teaching staff and promotion to alert and encourage guests about the new amenity. Smart developers take an incremental approach to the conversion and allow demand to dictate space usage and added courts. Aggressive developers like Tres Palapas and Chicken N Pickle go all-in with only pickleball courts. Both approaches have been successful.

From an employee perspective, pickleball programming could enhance morale, health, and welfare when they participate in programs. There is also the intangible fun that sporting games can add to the guest experience. Guest satisfaction can improve employee satisfaction, which can aid in employee recruitment and retention of both guests and workers.

Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that, at the very least, resorts with existing basketball and tennis courts should introduce pickleball for the reasons stated above. These courts can easily be converted for temporary use by adding portable nets and lines. This retains the original usage and allows for another activity that may appeal to both existing and new guests. Converting courts in this way allows for better space usage, more amenities, greater guest satisfaction and increased revenue opportunities. Care should be taken to properly introduce the pickleball program so guests are instructed on equipment use, rules, strategy, etiquette, and more. This can be done by contacting a teaching professional or ambassador of a manufacturer of equipment to train existing sports/events staff so the program can be properly implemented and

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

grow. Equipment can be purchased through a retailer or direct from a manufacturer. Some manufacturers are willing to partner with resorts by sponsoring the implementation of pickleball programming. This could include reduced pricing for equipment, dedicated signage, co-branding of paddles and merchandise, rights to host clinics, sales at pro shops and other shared revenue opportunities. Manufacturers, as with tennis, may even send a brand ambassador to implement the program to set the property up for success. As pickleball programming grows, further research should be undertaken to measure the outcome of implementation.

Usage and demand for court space and time should be closely monitored, researched, and analyzed to best serve hospitality professionals and guests and ensure maximum efficiency of use. Depending on demand, courts can be converted for permanent pickleball use. Care should be taken to contract with builders who know how to properly convert courts by using resources available through reputable sources like the USAPA to find the recommended materials and specifications.

Once a conversion plan is in place, marketing of the new amenities should be comprehensive and fully integrated. Just as the restaurants and spa at resorts offer introductory specials through advance communication and in-room promotion, the same should be done for the introduction of pickleball. The messaging should be that it is easy to learn, fun to play, and open to everyone. Literature based on the marketing of pickleball as an amenity does not yet exist but would prove hugely beneficial to the hospitality community at large.

To enhance community engagement and possibly generate more revenue, pickleball courts can be opened up for locals to play during slower periods, local tournaments can be created, and players can be sponsored. This creates news and enhances the reputation of the property as well as the fitness and engagement of staff who live in local communities. Because

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

of the social nature of the sport, round robins and evening play can coincide with evening socials to enhance the friendly atmosphere, such as at Tres Palapas. Finally, effective ongoing communication is critical to advise all stakeholders about the availability, hours, benefits, and potential conflicts with other sports impacted by the change in use of courts to ensure a successful program is developed and maintained. Care must be taken to proactively address potentially negative implications from increased sound and scheduling changes.

Hospitality is an everchanging field. As new amenities and activities become popular, perhaps even expected, new research must be undertaken to advance both the academics of hospitality and the business of hospitality. The intersection of sports and hospitality has always been an intriguing one, and with a growing sport like pickleball generating revenue for numerous businesses already, further research cannot come soon enough. Research areas could expand to include pickleball in general studies of sports as leisure amenities, or as in this paper, could attempt to investigate and analyze the upside of pickleball for various business sectors and stakeholders.

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Hospitality and Sports Professionals regarding Pickleball

Programming

What was the biggest influence in deciding to develop a pickleball program?

How many courts do you have?

Did you build new ones or convert existing space?

How long have you had them?

Tell me about the approval process for building them:

Internally with budgeting?

Externally with other guests?

How has it improved:

Profitability?

Guest satisfaction?

Group sales?

Return Visitation?

Other? Staff involvement/community engagement/competitor differentiation?

What are the negative impacts of Pickleball at your property (complaints)?

What would you do over or better?

What growth plans do you have for Pickleball at your property?

What have you seen from competitors with this program? How has that impacted you?

What do you see for the future of Pickleball at resorts?

Other anecdote/feedback/suggestions?

IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

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IMPLICATIONS OF PICKLEBALL FOR RESORTS

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