

'Could be the next big thing': how pickleball is courting a new generation of players

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Test your knowledge. Select all the statements about pickleball that are true.

1. A pickleball is similar to a Wiffle ball. It has 26–40 holes in it.
2. In pickleball, if you've lost, you've "pickled".
3. Paddles are similar to ping-pong paddles and can be made from wood, plastic or carbon fibre.
4. "The kitchen" is an area behind the net on both sides of the court.
5. Pickleball can be played by wheelchair users.
6. The net is lower than the net in tennis.
7. In pickleball, the ball must bounce once on each side of the net after being served.

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

affiliate	afoot	ceded	dampen	diplomacy
hip	hodgepodge	incessant	nimby	riff
skew	temper	turf	unveil	uptake

1. A _____ is something a little different from the usual form.
2. A _____ is a mixture of different things.
3. To _____ means *to cause results or numbers to be changed*.
4. To _____ means *to make something less extreme or strong*.
5. To _____ means *to show something new for the first time*.
6. _____ means *the ability to deal with people without upsetting them*.
7. A _____ is someone who doesn't want something undesirable to be located in their neighbourhood.
8. If something is _____, it is happening or being planned.
9. To _____ means *to allow someone else to have something, especially when you are forced to do so*.

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10. If something is _____, it never stops, especially in an annoying way.
11. To _____ means *to make something less strong*.
12. _____ means *land or the area that a group considers their own*.
13. An _____ is an organisation that is connected with another organisation.
14. If something is _____, it is fashionable.
15. _____ is the rate at which something is accepted.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. Writing survey questions is an art because poorly phrased or biased questions can _____ participants' responses.
2. I don't speak French, but when I go to France, I try to use a _____ of Italian and Spanish words I know.
3. There is a psychological advantage to the final match being on their home _____.
4. *Sleeping Cutie* is a comical _____ on the original fairy tale that the whole family can enjoy.
5. The _____ noise of the party next door kept me up all night.
6. I'm afraid I need to ask you to _____ your language; this is no place for foul speech.
7. I discovered a really _____ jazz joint last Saturday that I think you might enjoy.
8. There was a lot of media presence when the mayor cut the ribbon and _____ the new hospital.
9. The government is offering free yoga and other exercise classes, but _____ has been disappointing.
10. Sometimes quiet _____ can get you further than loud threats.

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11. Many leaders find it very difficult to _____ control to others and don't delegate responsibilities.
12. The Poodle Noodle is an _____ of the national pet shop chain Pow Wow.
13. This obstacle will not _____ our efforts. We will push forward.
14. Something profound is _____; I will get to the bottom of it.
15. The development can't go ahead because of opposition from _____.

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The cross between tennis, ping-pong and badminton is growing in popularity but faces a shortage of courts and a problem with nimbys

Jordyn Beazley

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- 1 “Don’t be put off by the silly name,” says Pam Fleming to a loud chorus of pop-pop-pop as ping-pong-like paddles strike a plastic ball back and forth on what used to be a tennis court in Sydney’s north. “This game could really be the next big thing here.”
- 2 That name, and game, is pickleball. It was created in the US in 1965 and its name was a riff on the “pickleboat” – where leftover rowers who did not make the cut for official teams would row together – to represent the game’s hodgepodge of ping pong, tennis, and badminton.
- 3 In the past eight years or so, it has been edging its way on to tennis courts across Australia, with anecdotal claims it is now the fastest-growing sport in the country.
- 4 There are an estimated 20,000 pickleball players in Australia, with players, or “picklers”, skewing older at an average age of about 58. But Ron Shell, the chief executive of Australia’s National Pickleball League, believes in three years that will grow to at least 1 million and in 10 years it will be an Olympic sport.
- 5 Yet that growth is tempered by a hurdle: the need for dedicated pickleball courts, which are about a third the size of a tennis court, with a lower net.
- 6 Fleming, who is 52 and based in Sydney, came to pickleball in 2019 after her tennis partner said: “I’ve found a new sport for us.” She says the usual solution is to tape down lines and string nets across existing tennis, netball, or basketball courts. However, the sharing means limiting how often players can revel in a hit.
- 7 “You’ve got to pick your time and make sure it’s OK,” she says.
- 8 That is starting to change. Fleming speaks to *Guardian Australia* while at the National Pickleball League’s first championships.
- 9 In September 2023, the club unveiled the first ever dedicated pickleball courts in Sydney on what used to be a multi-purpose tennis, basketball, and netball court.
- 10 Seeing pickleball become a sport deserving of its own courts requires a level of diplomacy so as not to step on other sports’ toes.
- 11 It is a lesson that has been learned from the US, where players are forecast to reach 22 million this year, and a feud of epic nimbys proportions is afoot.
- 12 Pickleball in the US is opposed on two fronts: tennis players unwilling to cede their courts and residents who have described the incessant pop-pop-pop ringing as being like “having a pistol range in your backyard”. So, are the nimbys of Australia about to find themselves a new foe? Shell says they are doing their best to avoid it. Shell thinks the noise is unlikely to be an issue because Australia’s sport centres are not closely nestled in residential areas like in the US. Also, new types of rackets to dampen the noise are starting to hit the market.
- 13 As to the turf war, Shell says they are in discussion with Tennis Australia with a pitch to “work together”.
- 14 “Otherwise, what’s going to happen here is what’s happened in the US, where 40% of tennis courts have been converted to pickleball courts over the past four years because it just makes more commercial sense and more people actually play pickleball day to day,” he says. “So, to me, that’s the biggest ‘controversy’ that might be coming soon to Australia.”
- 15 A spokesperson for Tennis Australia says it supports the integration of pickleball at existing tennis facilities but only where those courts are being under-utilised.
- 16 Shell says a number of tennis clubs – where there is an issue of courts sitting unused – have already signed up as affiliates.

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- 17 “They realised that a lot of their tennis courts are sitting unused, and they can change one tennis court into three pickleball courts as a general rule,” Shell says. “And they can make so much more money.”
- 18 Investors realised this, too. In November, an indoor pickleball centre will open in South Melbourne. Sydney may have a centre next year and, soon after, Brisbane and Perth.
- 19 This will, Shell hopes, aid his other grand scheme: to make pickleball hip among the young and realise its potential as a cross-generational sport.
- 20 Pickleball has long been cast as a “retirement village” sport, Shell says. Its initial uptake among older generations is due to its social aspect and accessibility: it’s a workout yet it’s easier on the body compared to tennis, which has a larger court.
- 21 The young are starting to see its appeal, says Sydneysider Mitch Hargreaves, 25, who won this year’s men’s singles at the World Pickleball Championships in Bali.
- 22 “When I first started, I was just playing with my parents,” says Hargreaves. “It’s very social, so you can just hang out with family members, with friends. It’s really starting to grab the attention of a lot of younger people now, and it’s only going to grow.”

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3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and answer the questions.

1. What is pickleball? What about pickleboat?
2. What is the biggest obstacle pickleball faces in Australia?
3. How are courts usually converted?
4. What are the two most significant US pickleball issues?
5. What has Tennis Australia agreed to?
6. Why have so many courts in the US been converted to pickleball courts?
7. What does Shell hope will help change pickleball's image?
8. Why is pickleball so popular among the older demographic?
9. Who did Hargreaves start playing pickleball with?

4 Key language

a. Find phrases in the article that match the definitions provided. Paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a future trend (*title*): _____
2. be repelled by something (*paragraph 1*): _____
3. be one of the players allowed to continue playing (*paragraph 2*): _____
4. work its way in (*paragraph 3*): _____
5. do something that upsets someone (*paragraph 10*): _____
6. referring to size or number (*paragraph 11*): _____
7. made available for purchase (*paragraph 12*): _____
8. assign someone a role or part (*paragraph 20*): _____

b. Choose five phrases to write questions with. Ask and answer your questions.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Pickleball is probably a short-lived fad.”
- “There’s a great potential for pickleball in my neighbourhood.”
- “Sports benefit society by increasing physical and emotional well-being, promoting personal development and making and maintaining social connections.”
- “Sport isn’t for everyone. You don’t need to be sport-inclined to live a fulfilled life.”

6 In your own words

a. Prepare a short speech to persuade your local government to invest in sports facilities.

1. What kind of sports facilities do you want to be built, expanded, or remodelled? Where? Why?
2. What are the physical, emotional, and social benefits of your chosen sport?
3. Which demographics would benefit most?
4. What other uses could the facilities have? E.g., for summer camps, festivals, arts and crafts, etc.