



RACQUET SPORTS

Saving Our Courts

Pickleball seems to do a much better job advocating for what it needs. Can tennis state the case for itself?

By DENNY SCHACKTER

With the pandemic, sports that have a built-in degree of physical distancing, like tennis and pickleball, have been fairly popular. But as pickleball continues to grow, I've noticed some tension between these two sports, which makes me concerned for tennis.

My wife plays pickleball. She enjoys it because her physical abilities match up well with the sport. For many people, pickleball is a great way to expand motor and mental skills without putting one's body in a precarious position.

Recently, my wife introduced me to a fellow pickleball player who coordinates much of the pickleball activities at our club. He told me that many of the tennis pros at the club resent pickleball. He said he's had to work hard to get space so that

he can conduct pickleball activities.

This got me thinking. In a typical city, the park and rec department oversees athletic facilities—monitoring and repairing the venues, building new facilities, running programs at them for all age groups. Pickleball players seem to be doing a much better job “politicking” park and rec agencies and boards so that resources come their way. Tennis players, on the other hand, seem to stay on the sidelines, not engaging or creating support for their tennis courts, then watching as they slowly but surely disappear.

This is a problem that affects more than recreational tennis players, who will have a harder and harder time finding a place to play. Also suffering will be high school and college teams that use public courts to practice and compete.

Pickleball players always seem ready

and able to help aspiring players learn the basic skills of their sport and find places to play, and they're always very welcoming when it comes to introducing new players to existing players. In the tennis world, this often is not the case.

Tennis also needs to be concerned that park and rec departments hire qualified teachers, otherwise aspiring tennis players will receive less than adequate instruction, resulting in a less



Tennis players can't just stand by and watch others win the budgetary and resource battles in our communities.

than satisfactory tennis experience. The USPTA and PTR have long advocated that education and certification need to be keys for teaching tennis. If we, as tennis players, do not insist on that happening, we will lose more tennis candidates.

What can recreational tennis players and providers do? CTAs, high school coaches, parents, district USTA officials and many others should start meeting with the local decision-makers regarding facility construction, maintenance and usage. Also, run for election on local park and rec boards, which can ensure tennis won't be an afterthought in your community. And push for accurate data regarding the number of tennis players in your community, so that park boards realize a good percentage of its residents play tennis.

Obviously, tennis and pickleball can, and should, get along. They both can provide important segments of society with much-needed fitness and activity. But tennis players can't just stand by and watch others win the budgetary and resource battles in our communities. Tennis players need to start lobbying for and advocating for what the sport needs.

Denny Schackter is owner of Tennis Priorities, specializing in recruiting and placing teaching professionals. He is a USTA volunteer and member of the USPTA and PTR.

We welcome your opinions and comments. Email info@tennisindustrymag.com.