

Pickle Ball featured on Morning show

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By JOAN PRITCHARD, Local Columnist

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During the summer of 1966 my husband, Joel, and his best friend, Bill Bell, were too long on the golf course, having promised both our children and Bill's they would return early to our summer home on Bainbridge Island and find some things to do that would be interesting to them. When they arrived and found the children upset with them, Joel stated when he was young, kids made up their own games. As a result he promised he could make something that was not yet made that they would enjoy.

There was a badminton court on the property at the time, and Joel and Bill went there, where Joel lowered the badminton net to his hip height (26 inches, I believe). Next they headed for a nearby shed, retrieved some plywood, and Joel drew the pictures of two paddles. They then cut out the paddles and headed for a store to buy the perfect ball for the game. They tried everything, not finding an answer. Along came a young neighbor, Dick Greene, who was carrying a plastic bat and a whiffle ball. The inventors asked to borrow the whiffle ball and found it was perfect for a knock over the net. I doubt Dick ever got his ball back. The name of the game became Pickle Ball, after I said it reminded me of the Pickle Boat in crew where oarsmen were chosen from the leftovers of other boats. Somehow the idea the name came from our dog Pickles was attached to the naming of the game, but Pickles wasn't on the scene for two more years. The dog was named for the game, but stories about the name's origin were funnier thinking the game was named for the dog.

Changes have been made in the rules over the years, with guys like Dick Brown and Barney McCallum suggesting new ideas. For instance the original game score was 21 points, but this was changed to 21 for doubles and 15 for singles. Serving is made with a side swipe, not an overhead batting, and when a serve is being made, no one can be closer to the net than the long yellow line that cuts the court in half.

It has been amazing to find Pickle Ball is being taught in schools on the West Coast and is a large hit among retirees in Arizona where as many as 12 courts in a row can be found. It is now played all over the world, even in foreign countries, and can be enjoyed by people of all ages because play is made only according to one's capabilities. You definitely improve with the amount of time you play.

Strangely, the game became of great interest to all adults who watched and played. It expanded and neighbors on the island began to build their own courts. Eventually it has become a fun favorite around America.

The paddles are now bearing rounded handles, and the equipment is much more sophisticated. I have two of the original paddles, and honestly, I like them best.

The game introduced last week on "Good Morning America." There was a picture of Joel and Pickles.

Joel, served in Congress for 12 years and as lieutenant governor of the state of Washington for eight years, when he became ill with cancer. He attended Marietta College during 1947/48.

Joan Pritchard is a longtime columnist for The Parkersburg News and Sentinel.