



## 2021 Pickleball Fact and Media Sheet

Pickleball is a court sport played on a badminton-sized court with the net set to a height of 34 inches at the center. It is played with a perforated plastic ball and composite or wooden paddles about twice the size of ping-pong paddles. It can be played indoors or outdoors and is easy for beginners to learn, but can develop into a fast-paced, competitive game for experienced players. In addition, the game has developed a passionate following due to its friendly, social nature, and its multi-generational appeal.

Pickleball can be played as singles or doubles. New players can learn the basic rules quickly in a single session. No special apparel is needed – just something comfortable and appropriate for a court sport. Equipment is inexpensive and easily portable. The game can be played by all ages and is particularly popular in school P.E. programs and in adult living communities.

The sport is governed by the USA Pickleball Association ([USAPickleball.org](http://USAPickleball.org)), which maintains the rules, promotes the sport, sanctions tournaments, and provides player rankings. For more information, please visit: [usapickleball.org](http://usapickleball.org).

### History

2021 marks the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of pickleball, as it was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, a short ferry ride from Seattle, by three enterprising dads – Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum. Their children were bored with their usual summertime activities. It evolved from the original handmade equipment and simple rules into a popular sport throughout North America and is now taking off in other parts of the world.

The origin of the game's name is very interesting, especially since no pickles are used. Accounts of how the name originated differ. According to Joel Pritchard's wife (Joan), she started calling the game pickleball because "The combination of different sports reminded me of the pickle boat in crew where oarsmen were chosen from the leftovers of other boats." However, according to Barney McCallum, the game was officially named after the Pritchards' dog Pickles who would chase the ball and run off with it. According to McCallum, "The Pritchards had a dog named Pickles, and you're having fun at a party, right? So anyways, what the hell, let's just call it pickleball."

Others claim both accounts may be true. In the early years, no official name was assigned to the game. However, a year or two after the game was invented, the Pritchards' purchased a cocker spaniel and named it Pickles. As the game progressed, an official name was needed and "pickleball" was it.

## The Court

A pickleball court is 20' x 44' for both singles and doubles. The net is hung at 36" at the ends and hangs 34" in the middle. A non-volley zone extends 7' back from the net on each side, commonly called "the kitchen." In 2017, USA Pickleball and the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) co-produced and released an official pickleball courts construction and maintenance manual for the industry. In 2020, USA Pickleball and ASBA produced an updated version of the court construction manual. Copies of this manual can be purchased at:

<https://www.sportsbuilders.org/publications/>

## The Equipment

Competitive paddles used in pickleball are constructed from a high-tech composite. An official pickleball is made of plastic and is between .78 to .935 ounces and 2.874 to 2.972 inches in diameter. There are no color restrictions other than the ball must be a single, consistent color. USA Pickleball has tested and approved several outdoor and indoor balls for official tournament play. [Click here](#) to review the complete list of all tested/approved paddles and balls approved for sanctioned tournament play.

## Places to Play

Every US state and all Canadian provinces now have pickleball venues. Senior residence communities, YMCAs, local community recreation centers, schools and parks are just some of the places likely to have pickleball courts. USA Pickleball compiles the most up-to-date and comprehensive listing of places to play on a new dedicated website: [places2play.org](https://places2play.org). The known places to play totaled of 8,735 at the end of 2020 which represents an increase of 807 locations or approximately 67 new locations per month.

## Tournaments

USA Pickleball supports and sanctions tournaments throughout the United States. See [Upcoming Events List](#) for a current list of upcoming USA Pickleball sanctioned tournaments. In 2009, USA Pickleball held the first Nationals Pickleball Tournament in Buckeye, Arizona. Over 400 players participated in divisions for all ages. In 2019, the Margaritaville USA Pickleball National Championships were held at the world-renowned Indian Wells Tennis Garden, just outside of Palm Springs, CA. The event drew more than **2,000** registered players who competed for \$80,000 in prize money, the largest cash purse in the history of the sport at that time. [Click here](#) for detailed information regarding this event. The 2019 event also included over 200 hours of livestreamed matches. Like most sporting events in 2020, the Margaritaville USA Pickleball National Championships was cancelled due to COVID-19. However the event is scheduled to take place again this fall at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden, November 6-13, 2021.

## Estimated Pickleball Players Within the United States

Pickleball grew in 2020 to **4.2 million players in the US, an incredible growth rate of 21.3% from 2019** per the Sports & Fitness Industry Association's (SFIA) 2021 Topline Participation Report, released in Feb. 2021. SFIA formed in 1906 and is the premier trade association for top brands, manufacturers, retailers and marketers in the American sporting goods and fitness industry.

In their 2020 Pickleball Participant Report (which includes data through 2019), the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) reported pickleball currently had **3.46 million** players in the US. Below are a few details from the 2020 SFIA Pickleball Participation Report – the anticipated

2021 Pickleball Participation Report should be released later this year:

- Of the 3.46 million players, 2.2 million were “Casual” players who play 1-7 times a year
- 1.3 million were “Core” players who play 8 or more times a year
- The Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR) for all players from 2016 to 2019 was 7.2%, for a total growth rate of 23% over three years
- 62% of participants are men and 38% are women
- The average age for all players is 43.5 years old
- The average age for Core players is 51.5 and Casual players 35.5 years old
- 60% of Core players are 55 or older
- 79% of Casual players are 54 or younger
- From 2015-2019:
  - the percentage of Core players ages 54 and younger grew from 25% to 40%
  - the percentage of Casual players ages 54 and younger grew from 78% to 79%
  - these increases in the percentages of both Core and Casual players less than 55 years of age reflect faster growth among younger players
- The percentages by age of Total, Core, and Casual participants are:

<b>AGES</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>CORE</b>	<b>CASUAL</b>
<b>6-17</b>	16.2%	10.9%	19.1%
<b>8-34</b>	27.9%	14.4%	35.5%
<b>35-54</b>	20.9%	14.8%	24.3%
<b>55-64</b>	14.0%	21.3%	9.9%
<b>65+</b>	21.1%	38.7%	7.7%

- The 3.46 million participants represent 1.14% of the US population of 303M people ages 6+; the 1.3M Core players represent 0.41% of that population: demonstrating the tremendous potential for further growth of the sport.
- The SFIA US regions with the largest number of Core participants were:
  - South Atlantic (FL, GA, SC, NC, VA, WV, DC) = 264,000
  - East North Central (WI, MI, IL, OH, IN) = 242,000
  - Pacific (CA, OR, WA) = 242,000
  - Mountain (AZ, NV, NM, UT, CO, ID, WY, MT) = 165,000
  - These four regions account for 73% of Core players
- 56% of Core players live east of the Mississippi River

*Any citation of this data should reference the SFIA report as its source.*

## **USA Pickleball Association** [usapickleball.org](http://usapickleball.org)

USA Pickleball was formed in 2005 to promote the sport. It maintains the official rules, sanctions tournaments, provides player rankings and produces the annual USA Pickleball National Championships Tournament. It is run by a Chief Executive Officer, staff and a volunteer board of directors supported by an all-volunteer Ambassador corp. and thousands of dues-paying members.

## **USA Pickleball Ambassador Program**

USA Pickleball currently has a network of over 1,900 volunteer ambassadors who have pledged to promote both the sport of pickleball and USA Pickleball in their local area. They serve as local representatives for USA Pickleball for all activities related to pickleball within the area they represent. Ambassadors support and abide by all official rules, assist with local clinics/tournaments and look for opportunities to add/grow the game in their community. The USA Pickleball Ambassador Search feature can be found on the USA Pickleball website. [Click here.](#)

## **Community Grant Program**

A USA Pickleball Community Grant will provide current USA Pickleball members a maximum of \$250 reimbursement for the purchase of qualified pickleball equipment dedicated to a specific location. Special considerations will be given to locations with written “new player” training programs, areas with few pickleball locations in the vicinity, and individuals and groups that USA Pickleball deems most in need of financial assistance. For more information, please [Click here.](#)

## **High School Grant Program**

The High School Grant Program will award a maximum of \$350 in reimbursement to USA Pickleball members for the purchase of start-up pickleball equipment for regular high school physical education classes and after-school programs. The grants funding will be equally targeted to every defined USA Pickleball region and, when feasible, awarded to different communities within the region. Considerations will be given to schools and districts where pickleball is being introduced into the high school physical education curriculum and to schools that USA Pickleball deems most in need of financial assistance. For more information, please click on the following link: [Click here.](#)

## **USA Pickleball Social Media**

USA Pickleball social media followers support the sports steady growth. In December 2020, followers on Facebook numbered 26,527, almost double from two years ago. Instagram was added as a new channel in 2019 and ended the year with 12,383 followers. In November of 2020, USA Pickleball added an official Twitter account. USA Pickleball Social Channels saw 42% year over year growth from 2019 to 2020.

### **Facebook**

- [USA Pickleball](#)@usapickleballassociation
- [USA Pickleball Juniors](#)@usapickleballjuniors

### **Instagram**

- [USA Pickleball](#)@usapickleball
- [USA Pickleball Juniors](#)@usapickleballjuniors

## YouTube

- [USA Pickleball](#)@usapickleball

## LinkedIn

- [USA Pickleball](#)@usapickleball

## Twitter

- [USA Pickleball](#)@usapickleball

## 2020 USA Pickleball Facts and Highlights (as of 12.31.20)

- **Places to Play:** USA Pickleball Places to Play Database: **8,735**. Over 800 new locations were added to the database (67 new locations per month).
- **Membership: 37,000** (decrease of approximately 4% due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of most sanctioned tournaments including both the Indoor and Outdoor National Championships and 8 of 11 Regional Championships. As of April 1, 2021, USAP membership has nearly recovered the 4% membership drop and is currently over 40,000 members. Since 2017, USA Pickleball membership has doubled in size.
- **Total Courts: 34,094**
- **USA Pickleball Ambassadors: 1,976**
- **Sanctioning:** USA Pickleball was only able to sanction 59 tournaments due to COVID 19. Already in 2021, the number of USAP sanctioned tournaments is on pace for 200.
- **Grants:** USA Pickleball awarded 119 Community Grants and 27 High School Grants, with a total allocation of \$42,000. Pickle-Ball, Inc. joined USA Pickleball and donated 828 wooden paddles to various programs.
- **2020 National Championships:** The 2020 Margaritaville USA Pickleball National Championships was cancelled due to COVID-19. The event is scheduled to be played November 6-13, 2021 at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden with a record number of players already qualified.
- **Certified Referees:** Due to COVID-19, USA Pickleball was only able to certify a few new referees in 2020. By year's end, USA Pickleball had 211 Certified Referees.
- **Referee Evaluations:** USA Pickleball referee evaluators conducted a total of 25 referee evaluations.
- **Level I & II Referees:** USA Pickleball launched a new referee training program in April. In 2020, only 45 people were trained as either a Level I or Level II referee due to COVID-19 limitations.
- **Medal Matches:** All medal matches in the 2021 Margaritaville USA Pickleball National Championships will again be called by USA Pickleball Certified Referees.
- **Professional Pickleball Registry:** USA Pickleball's teaching and training partner,

Professional Pickleball Registry (PPR), a subsidiary of the Professional Tennis Registry (PTR) ended their year with 1,665 PPR members. See <https://usapickleball.org/usapa/ppr-agreement/>

- **Pickleball Magazine:** USA Pickleball's publishing partner, Dollard Publishing, produced another 6 issues of Pickleball Magazine. <https://usapickleball.org/pickleballmagazine/>
- **Referee Training Page:** To help educate and inform referees and the public on referee matters, USA Pickleball updated the following comprehensive webpage: <https://usapickleball.org/referee-training-tools/>
- **USA Pickleball /IFP Rulebook:** The USA Pickleball rules committee and board updated and approved the 2021 Official Rulebook.
- **Referee Handbook:** The USA Pickleball Referee Handbook was updated in 2020 by the Certified Referee Handbook Committee.
- **Ambassador Handbook:** The 2020 USA Pickleball Ambassador Handbook was updated by a special committee of Ambassadors. The book was distributed to all Ambassadors and is updated periodically with new sections.
- **Paddles & Balls:** USA Pickleball tested and approved 118 paddles and 17 balls in 2020.
- **Brand Change:** In July 2020, USA Pickleball launched a new brand strategy that included relaunching the brand to be USA Pickleball, a modernized, clean logo, an all new website with user-led navigation and a move to a new URL: [usapickleball.org](https://usapickleball.org). Note – July was also the month of pickleball's founding, 55 years prior.
- **Branding Highlight:** The popularity of pickleball continues to rise and USA Pickleball, along with Thor Sports Racing (part of the Thor Industries / SportsMaster, official pickleball court surface of USA Pickleball), did a sport cross-over event. The #99 truck, driven by Ben Rhodes, raced in the NASCAR Gander Outdoor Truck Series at the Michigan International Speedway in a USA Pickleball-branded truck. The race was broadcast on FOX Sports, and garnered focused attention from the broadcast team as several members, including renowned broadcaster, Chris Myers who was calling the race and an avid pickleball player.

#### **For photo requests and media inquiries:**

Email: [Media Relations](#)  
USA Pickleball Association  
P.O. Box 7354  
Surprise, AZ 85374