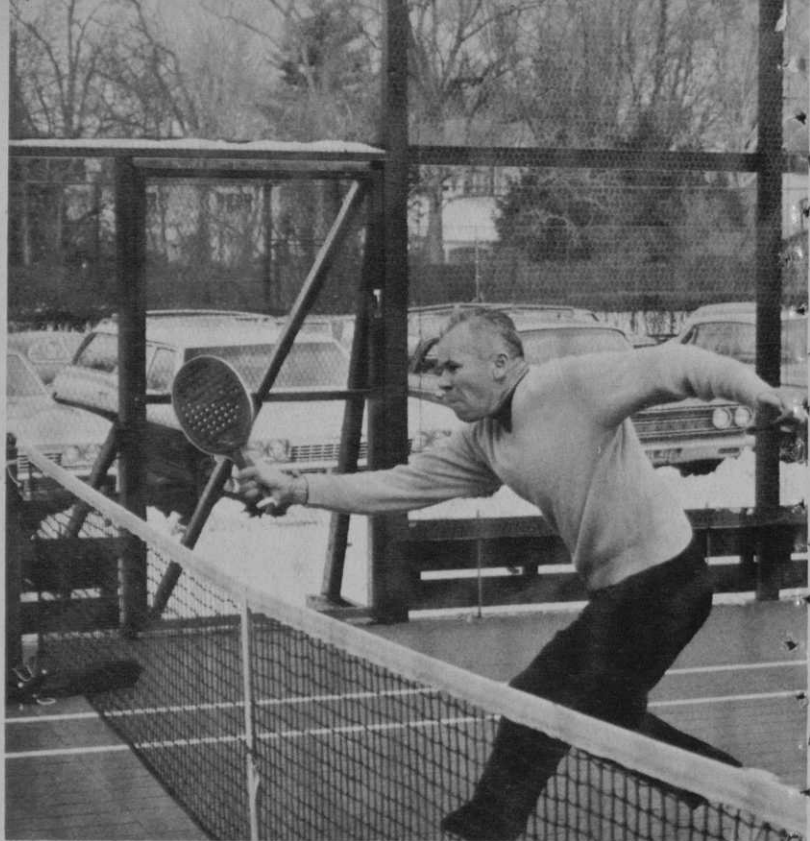


Heating Up the Winter Season

By RICHARD C. SQUIRES



Platform tennis can take the off-season drab out of a club's profit picture

This winter and for a lot of future winters it makes sense to your club to keep the foursome together—those same four guys who play a round of golf two or three days a week all through the late spring, summer and early fall, then become unknown after October. They play golf, spend money and generally are the great supporters of any club “in season.” But does the season have to end?

The average golfer wouldn't be found dead on a tennis court in the middle of summer. Suggest a racquet game during the height of his season and you'd probably get hit with a five-iron. Golfers are golfers, but they can't play golf in six inches of snow. When the golfers don't golf, the club's income drops.

The same not-to-be-found golfer on a tennis court in summer is able and more than willing to take up the game of platform tennis (or, as commonly referred to by the players, paddle tennis) in winter. This game, which is claimed to be the fastest growing racquet sport in the world, has great appeal to the golfing fraternity and

a more subtle appeal to the management of golf and country clubs.

To the golfer it affords the opportunity of outdoor exercise all winter long. It is a non-frustrating game to learn and it's fun. And since it's a game of doubles—two against two—it keeps the foursome together year-round. It combines a bit of tennis, squash, some old-fashioned three wall handball, and a little bit of jai alai.

The game is 40 years old and was originally put together by two gentlemen from Scarsdale, N.Y. Today, it's played as far west as Seattle and Washington and as far south as North Carolina. Another interesting sidelight is that women like and can become as proficient as men at the game. Unlike court tennis, pure strength is not necessary to play the game well because of the wire enclosure or screening and the size of the platform, which runs, overall, 30 feet by 60 feet. The game, played on a 12-foot high wooden deck, is scored the same as tennis with one important exception: Only one serve is allowed.

To a country or golf club, plat-

form tennis means year-round income. Most clubs either shut down or gear down in the winter season; platform tennis will enable the club to keep the grill or dining room open, which means bar chits and all the other entertainment possibilities.

Although in its infancy, the game has some interesting economic statistics for golf clubs. A survey was conducted among major golf clubs in the Northeast. In total, 50 golf clubs were asked the following questions: Do you have platform tennis courts? How many? Average age of courts? Number of players? Does platform tennis help keep the club open? Is there substantial club income from platform tennis?

In answer to the survey, it was established that there were 126 courts, none more than three years old. Also, and it must be emphasized that these are golf clubs, there were 6,000 active players at the 50 clubs or an average of 102 golfers per club playing platform tennis.

All the respondents to the survey agreed that platform tennis



Charles Baird, former under-secretary of the Navy, hits a forehand volley. He and partner Roger Lankenau have won several titles.



helped keep the club open, but the exploitation of active members in a non-active season was mixed. "Yes I know they are there and they should be eating and drinking, but we haven't figured out how to do it" would be an accurate generalization of club managements' remarks. Another generalization: "Yes, it's a great winter game, it does help the club year-round and it does provide action and income for the club."

Aside from all the personal inherent benefits of the game, the sport lends itself to club sponsorship. The construction of a court runs about \$7,000 (a regular tennis court costs about \$12,000) and

once a platform tennis court is built, maintenance is minimal. Generally, the deck will require annual repainting. The screening will require tightening at least annually. Supervision by a professional is unnecessary.

Equipment for platform tennis is minimal. A paddle costs about \$15 and should last about 10 years. The ball costs about \$.45 depending on where it is bought. Sneakers should be worn. The outerwear is up to the player—no regulation whites are required—but clothes should be warm and comfortable. This game is played outdoors during winter. However, in time players will

perspire, which eliminates any clothing that clings or droops when it becomes wet.

The clubs that have installed courts find them beneficial to the club income. The members find that platform tennis gives them a year-round club. And from member and club management viewpoints, it makes good sense to have the game. □



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