

PRESENTING PICKLEBALL TO PUBLIC PARKS AND RECREATION (And other entities)

And How to Overcome Objections



By Steve Manolis, USAPA Education Ambassador SW Region
Updated: 07-10-2019

INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS:

Introduction

Facing Objections

Developing Advocates

Opening Discussions

Develop Influencers

Addressing the obstacles:

- Park officials/government entities not familiar with pickleball
- Public tennis courts that do not allow play other than tennis
- The public not familiar with pickleball
- Concerns about noise issues
- Give back to the community
- Cost Restrictions
- Confusion of added lines
- How to deal with those that don't want to listen to you
- Cost to Build Courts
- Success Stories

Since 2016 I have presented ideas on growing pickleball to a variety of city parks, HOA's, community centers and private indoor facilities.

During that time, I have kept records of discussions points and come across many objections and have worked to overcome those objections.

I have been involved in presenting to 7 cities, several community HOAs, Public and Private community centers and several schools that have all build courts. The results have led to over 80 outdoor public courts, over one dozen HOA private outdoor courts and over 3 dozen indoor public and private courts.

By trade I am a marketing manager and have learned one thing from a sales perspective: assume objections, as there will be many, and be prepared to understand those objections and have answers.

In the process of 'selling' the idea of new courts or conversion courts you should know that the people you are presenting to probably have someone they report to. Your presentation is also about helping them overcome the objections they too will be faced with.

For instance, you may be presenting to a recreational board staff or park manager, they are faced with having to present your idea to their supervisors (executive directors, city council, or mayor may be a few).

No doubt it is an uphill battle, so preparation is critical and knowing what you might face in objections will allow you to create and better presentation.

By now most people know what pickleball is so I try to avoid clichés such as "it's the fastest growing sport" (it isn't Lacrosse is growing faster, and so is soccer) or saying, 'it's a serious game with a funny name'. Facts are better than sayings or clichés and you will always want to source your facts.

Make sure you have an idea for an agenda for discussion. If it's your first meeting obvious things like introduction and some short points on why you wanted the meeting.

Prior to the meeting will help you prepare better, try to get some history of why pickleball courts were not built, what objections you

might face, how many courts there are in city parks and how often they are used would help a great deal.

Also check out which parks might be ideal for courts, are the parks near homes, is there adequate parking, washrooms, and other family amenities is very helpful.

Other things, how often the courts are used, how many pickleball players are there in the area, are schools nearby... basically know the demographics and geographics of the area are essential.

Most importantly create an atmosphere of dialogue, remember you are fact finding on your first meeting, listen to what is said and what is not said.

Listen to what objections are being discussed, do not disagree, rather understand the concerns.

For instance, if your audience says things like, it's a fad, or the noise is problematic, or the courts are primarily for tennis and pickleball is not interesting to the community take note of those, acknowledge the issue of noise.

You should anticipate some negatives of why courts aren't being built. There is no need to be defensive, it is important to know exactly what you are up against.

This document will discuss the objections you may face and how to address them.

In your preparation one of the best things you can do is monitor activities if you are looking to convert tennis courts to shared courts or strictly pickleball.

We have had great success monitoring and recording court activity, we keep records of how many tennis courts are used, peak times of use, take photos and do follow-up reports.

It's as simple as creating a spreadsheet, or diary on a periodic basis. You can involve other players to help record usages.

Taking photos support your findings.

FACING OBJECTIONS

The following should serve as a guideline for working with city parks and recreation in introducing pickleball within your community.

The process can be slow and tedious as there are many obstacles you will naturally be faced with, below are some: all of which, have a solution.

- Park officials/government entities not familiar with pickleball
- HOA's considering conversions or adding courts for pickleball vs homeowner objections
- Public tennis courts that do not allow play other than tennis
- The public not familiar with pickleball
- Concerns about noise issues
- Cost concerns (developing pickleball courts or lines)
- Confusion of added lines on existing courts

I will attempt to answer each of these, although there is a natural start prior to addressing the issues. And with most cases you will need to understand what, if any concerns there currently are.

DEVELOP ADVOCATES

Make them part of your team

First, you need to find advocates to help you. Advocates can be fellow players, city officials, heads of HOA's, park employees, tennis players, park coordinators...really anyone that you can count on to push forward.

Second, if you can, find those who might strongly oppose pickleball, for whatever reason. Find out what their concerns are, it may be simply they are not educated in the game (they don't know how to play or what pickleball is). Mostly, they will be unaccepting to change, which is common as we all love our comfort zone.

What can you do with folks that oppose pickleball, find out why, invite them to play, show them videos.

The process of conversion...the above is relatively easy, although it does require working with people; it really should be a focus on listening to the concerns and understanding their point of view.

You should not attempt to address their concerns or become defensive, rather use your ears. You will hear, most likely, 'pickleball is loud and distracting, people can't cope with the constant noise', I would say in response that I understand this is a concern as pickleball can be very enthusiastic and move on. Later you will address the technology that has helped pickleball equipment to be less 'noisy'.

OPENING DISCUSSIONS WITH PARKS AND RECREATION AND OTHER CITY OFFICIALS

There are probably very few city and city personnel that do not know what pickleball is. Keep the description simple.

The largest obstacle you may be faced with is budget allocation. This is something that is not readily an obstacle that can be overcome, certainly not soon.

Acknowledge those obstacles and offer other economical solutions by doing your own homework and research.

Make a list of all viable parks in the city, note those that have tennis courts, and narrow down to those that are little used or in need of repair. Chances are a city is more willing to repair and repurpose existing courts for conversion than building new ones from the ground up.

Further note if the parks have ample parking, washrooms, lighting, good fencing and are a good distance away from housing and other businesses that may not welcome the noise.

Neighborhood parks are generally too close to houses and noise/lighting may be an issue.

Instead of a total conversion of existing courts, simple and economical solutions may be dual purpose usage, with lines

and heavy-duty portable needs. Light nets will be easily bent or broken.

Look at public schools in the area; discover which ones have tennis courts. It is very likely the schools may not teach tennis, offering to teach pickleball may be a way to get courts. Public schools are also 'public' and the courts can be used when school is not in session.

Every city I have introduced pickleball to love the idea of ambassadors offering free classes to students, they also love that word 'family' ...cities are all about family fun and involvement, and what better game than pickleball.

Use Google Maps to get a birds-eye view of your area/city, know your demographics.

You may have to work with tennis groups to share court space, offer friendly challenges, try to remove potential obstacles.

GET OTHER INFLUENCERS INVOLVED IN THE GAME

One sure fire way to get influencers involved and help advocate for the game is to have them play. Introduce them to pickleball; get them to play with you as you can team up with them.

Influencers can include PE teachers, city services groups such as the fire and police department, first responders, your council members, local community leaders, local business owners, etc.

Set up mini tournaments even on makeshift courts and have some competitive fun play such as Police vs Fire, two rival high schools, one restaurant vs another.

Understand that people generally don't like things because they never tried it.

Focus on pickleball as an amenity that can be enjoyed by all ages, genders, and the entire family.

Offer to teach introductory and beginner classes for free to any church, boys/girls club, youth group, school and other entities.

See if you can get advocates to support you from the above groups as those leaders can represent positive influences for the city and elected officials.

ADDRESSING THE OBSTACLES:

- **PARK OFFICIALS/GOVERNMENT ENTITIES NOT FAMILIAR WITH PICKLEBALL**

Here, as in many of the people obstacles, you will find and look for the following types of people: **the influencers, the decision makers and the ones that are 'blocks in the road'**.

You want to find and advocate with the influencers, those are the ones that can help you move forward. They will help introduce you to other influencers and advocates. They will also be essential in getting you to the decision makers.

With your advocates, and this certainly doesn't come overnight, you will want to understand their concerns in pickleball, even letting them know, there are concerns and talk about them.

Eventually you will want to work with your influencers in getting public opinion of pickleball from the general public, establish a focus group and send out surveys.

You will want to find and identify potential places to play, or places that you may convert to dual sport (indoors or outdoors). Be cognitive have being too close to houses or neighborhoods, parking availability, road access, lighting (for night play) and physical condition of the courts. Some of this will alleviate the 'noise' factor.

Ultimately you will want to create a plan of action with your influencers to bring to the decision makers

- **PUBLIC TENNIS COURTS THAT DO NOT ALLOW PLAY OTHER THAN TENNIS**

The plan of action above should include how to overcome any ordinances that might be preventing pickleball play. Part of the plan is to get a public consensus regarding any ordinance, should they exist.

We cannot forget we are talking about public places to play. The public's wishes need to be addressed by park and planning officials. In phoenix, we have such an ordinance, but we overcame it recently because pickleball players asked, local ambassadors worked with influencers at parks and rec and a survey went out. Over 85% of the respondents said they had no problem sharing court time.

Public opinion, through social media, direct surveys and focus groups are highly influential, and generally listened to.

The same process can be used in adapting modifications such as going from temporary lines to permanent lines, scheduling or adding courts to existing programs.

- **THE PUBLIC NOT FAMILIAR WITH PICKLEBALL**

Getting the public involved can follow a variety of paths. The easiest is to introduce pickleball to tennis and racquetball players. The similarities of the game are, in concept, obvious.

My wife, who is a 40 year vet of tennis and a 4.5 caliber player was introduced to pickleball by some tennis friends who also played pickleball. She, in turn, has taught pickleball to other tennis friends. It's as simple as 'try it you might like it'. Another saying I hear a lot is that tennis players are one injury away from being pickleball players. I have met many male friends that are former racquet and handball players. It seems the transition to pickleball is that it can be a slower game and easier on the body.

The other avenue for non-racquet/paddle type players is a bit harder in general as any game involving a ball or 'hitting device' requires good hand-eye coordination.

Regardless, it's just a matter of going out and asking people to play, as you most likely know, when there is any kind of sport activity going on people are watching, for pickleball it's a matter of stopping playing and asking them to come 'hit a few'

For communities, parks and HOA type areas, you can have a more selective approach by offering to do a few beginner lessons to sort of ease the tension of this *strange game*.

- **CONCERNS ABOUT NOISE ISSUES**

It is my belief that this concern is one that should never be defended, and simply be acknowledged. Right or wrong, good or bad, this is big one. It faces the perceptions, myths and realities that the game brings a terrible annoying noise. So what can you do about noise? DO NOT DENY IT EXISTS.

When we in Phoenix were negotiating which of the 32 city parks (that had tennis courts) would be considered for pickleball (dual play) we had a list of criteria in mind: available parking, condition of the courts, lighting, number of courts, and proximity to residential areas. We immediately removed the objection of noise being an issue. We acknowledge it amongst ourselves and let the city know we too were concerned about it...I can tell you that went a long way in acceptance of our final list.

And obviously, USAPA has acknowledged it and equipment manufacturers are developing softer sounding paddles and balls. Plus, there a sound dampening screens that can be utilized where you have existing courts and do not have choices as to where those courts go.

- **GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY**

One of the biggest successes I have had involved what pickleball players can do for the city and the community. We include what we can do for the youth and family. We promise to give free lessons, for families that want to learn.

Our biggest success come from involving the schools and school districts, church groups, youth clubs, etc. Developing after school programs, family days, kids' events, pickleball parties and more.

Often the city wants to be involved in those events and help donate prizes and activities. The city does not charge for court usage, they recognize the importance of the amenity and it's a feel-good story for council and mayor.

From the adult perspective the city sees that when more mature adults are playing it creates a safer environment, especially at night.

Cities and parks districts want to see positive activities in the parks. It's good for the entire park and more people use the park and its amenities.

Pickleball is a life-long activity and the positive aspects of giving youth and teens a place to play, without spending a lot of money, keeps them physically active.

Also, the city doesn't need to add staff, they have the ambassadors, instructors and leaders of the pickleball community involved as a volunteer staff.

- **COST CONCERNS (DEVELOPING PICKLEBALL COURTS OR LINES)**

In dealing with governmental agencies you will find quickly that funds do not exist for development of park infrastructure, "it's not in our budget". Those same agencies certainly do not shy away from free, and the one area you can have the most impact in is through community (pickleball community) support and fund raisers. Many communities are funding and raising money for court development, painting lines and court improvement.

The community of Eau Claire Wisconsin negotiated with the city and raised 30,000 to build several courts recently. The same thing happened in Wickenburg Arizona where they have 6 courts with 6 more due to follow.

- **CONFUSION OF ADDED LINES ON EXISTING COURTS**

This too is a myth, that people get confused by having too many lines, especially on an indoor gymnasium and sometimes outdoor where tennis is being played.

For outdoor, technology has helped in the concept of “shadow lines” which are lines that are faintly painted to downplay any confusion from tennis players.

For indoor, gymnasiums often field a multiple of sports, there are lines everywhere. Pickleball players deal with it and figure it out on the indoor side, for outdoor courts, we did a survey and found the majority of tennis players would not be bothered by it.

As a result, I believe from experience, that this is a concern of public officials, albeit a small one that can be overcome from the statements above.

- **HOW TO DEAL WITH THOSE THAT DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO YOU**

One thing is certain, if someone doesn't want to be troubled to hear you go on and on about how great the sport is, how it got its name, and how it is one of the fastest growing sports, or that 3 million people play...they simply don't care...they will become a deficit to your cause faster than an asset. Cut bait and find someone that will advocate for you....and as the saying goes...keep your friends (advocates close) and keep the naysayers closer.

For the one that isn't a fan:

- Try to find his colleagues that are...sometimes peer pressure helps, and sometimes he just can't be convinced.
- Find those above him that are.
- Find PE teachers in your city that are fans, chances are he knows them.

- Set up a demo day to teach all the parks staff pickleball.
- Set up a demo day to teach some schools kids.
- Teach pickleball at the senior center, offer free classes.
- Offer camps or free lessons.
- Talk to some of the tennis pros that are PTR certified and ask if any are getting PPR certified.
- Find out who among the tennis players play pickleball; or want to learn...4 out of 5 will generally try it.
- Build your core group of advocates...invite them to play with you and your friends.
- See if anyone in city council plays pickleball...there are usually one or two.
- Finally start an email campaign to city officials from other pickleball players.

- **COST TO BUILD COURTS**

Cost estimates can vary widely, and several things must be considered:

New Builds: (Anywhere from 20K to 80K)

Conversions of an existing pad (tennis courts) 5-10K

Examples: (all in the Phoenix, Arizona area)

- A new build just got approved with a 450K budget for 8 courts (60k per court)
- Another was finished with a 420K for 6 courts 70K per court
- City of Phoenix did 16 courts for 1.2 million, plus refurbished 8 courts on an existing tennis court for 40K
- Tempe is doing 8 courts (bleachers, washrooms, ADA needs, Water and irrigation, lighting for about 680K

- Another tennis rebuild conversion for 6 courts was 60K
- Court lines, for dual/shared play to have 4 courts was 500 dollars for paint and over 600 for nets
- New Court construction in Show Low AZ, included 4 courts, no lights, post tensioning, 10-foot fence with fence capping, seating area and drainage of existing grounds...cost was \$230,000 or about \$60,000 per court.

What factors do need to be consider: These will affect the cost and show why there is a large range in cost per court.

For sake of argument, I am assuming the land is already paid for, as that can DRAMATICALLY change the costs.

- Number of courts (more courts will reduce the cost per court Slightly)
- Is the pad poured concrete or post-tensioned
- how thick is the pad...typically 5-6 inches...(depends on the ground and how much pre work is needed)
- Do you need to move/add irrigation, electrical lines, drainage.
- Does the land need to be leveled.
- Do you need to adhere to ADA standards
- Will you be building Adaptive Courts for wheelchair play
- Will you be adding water fountains, bathroom, bleachers
- Will you do individual fencing around each court
- How high will you need to have the fencing around the perimeter
- Colors, how many (one two or three) plus lines
- Wind Screens
- Paddle Holders
- Maintenance costs
- Lighting (LED or Halogen)
 - Pros and Cons of new builds
 - New builds usually are built with post tension concrete, which is more expensive but in the long run last longer by many years
 - Repairing cracks on existing builds is not a good idea as those cracks will certainly reappear

- It is more efficient to start over than do patch work repairs.

I am sure there are more factors, but one great resource for court design is <https://www.sportsbuilders.org/publications/>

The book is 29.95. I highly recommend it.

- **SUCCESS STORIES**

This document has been used by many individuals and has been attributed for many successful campaigns, among those are:

- 33 new outdoor pickleball only courts in Phoenix, Arizona (all free and open to the public) 24 at Pecos Park (opening in April 2018), 6 at Paseo Park (opening in Fall of 2018) and 3 at Rose Mofford Sports Complex (open now)
- 6 free public pickleball only courts (converted from tennis) in Chandler, Arizona at Arrowhead Meadows Park (opened Feb. 2018)
- 8 public outdoor pickleball courts (new build and free) in Tempe, Arizona at Tempe Sports Complex...2 of which are adaptive courts. Scheduled to open in early fall 2018.
- A 4-court conversion...dual purpose shared with tennis, from two unused tennis courts, at Harelson Park in Tempe, Arizona. Courts are public and free and have heavy duty portable nets. Scheduled to open in April 2018
- 8 courts added at Highland High School in Gilbert, Arizona, shared with tennis courts, with portable nets. Courts are free and open to the public during non-school hours.
- Up to 24 public free outdoor courts in Gilbert, Arizona, part of a new public park project build over the next 3 years, anticipated opening date, 2020
- 4-6 court conversion in Chandler, Arizona at a HOA retirement community, from tennis courts.
- 4-6 court conversion at an HOA community in Phoenix Arizona
- 6 courts complex in Maricopa, AZ

- Opening conversations for new outdoor pickleball courts in Glendale, Arizona
- Discussions to start In 2020 on another new project in Gilbert, Arizona
- Discussions to start in Fall of 2019 for additional courts in Chandler, Arizona
- Discussion to add another 16 outdoor courts in Phoenix starting in Fall 2019

For more information or assistance, contact Steve Manolis, Regional Ambassador for Education SW Region

Email: esstathios@gmail.com