

## The History of Pickleball in Southern Colorado

October 1, 2022

It all started in 1965 in Bainbridge, Washington, a game that would become a game for all ages. Several families that vacationed together in Bainbridge started a game that would keep their kids busy outside. The adults found it to be so much fun they started playing as well. The rules evolved so that it is fair for all ages and sizes to play. The NVZ (non volley zone) "kitchen" was designated because of the height of one of the adult founders; he was 6'4" tall. These pioneers cut paddles from wood, could they imagine how big the sport would be and technical advanced equipment evolve? Or how many players would become "hooked" on this great game?

Pickleball progressed slowly at first it took decades for the game to spread in the USA, but when it did, it became more refined with more sophisticated paddles and new adjusting for so many levels of play with new rules. The courts were usually shared with tennis and now we have designated pickleball courts all over the world.

In Pueblo, it started 47 years after origination in Washington. Bob and Judy McLin brought pickleball from their second home in Texas to the Pueblo YMCA. The game was exploding in popularity in warm southern states among the retirees. There is a newspaper clip that shows the first game played in Pueblo at YMCA in January of 2012. They started with a handful of people Dave and Donna Raymond, Roger Ganger, Jim Holbrook and the McLin's.

In 2016 the YMCA players were growing rapidly. One day Clinton and Kay Tamada, John Crump, Sammy Peterson, Greg Sowell and 6 other newbies started. There were only 3 courts. The sport had outgrown the YMCA. The growth of players at the YMCA also led to classes and competition. Dave Raymond and the Tamada's started a special hour to introduce the game to newbies.

In March of 2018 Frank Anselmo and the Tamada's had the first YMCA round robin. George Ibanez and Kathy Neve won as did Ruth Brandt and her partner Steve Barnes. Our oldest player was in his 80's, submarine Bob Flinn and our youngest player teenager Reece Gilbert. Players from all over southern Colorado played and craved more competition. The next round robin at the YMCA had submarine Bob paired with 10 year old Adrianna Robinson; and that duo won Gold. Her twin Andrew Robinson also won gold medals with his partner Ron Bailey. The kids' involvement keeps growing, even in schools. The pickleball game was created for families and all players became family here.

The need for more places to play was evident. Even more round robins at the YMCA became profitable for the students there, as players won medals and donated money. The biggest take away win or lose was this game is so much fun and pickleball players are generously giving to local fundraising!

The YMCA pickleball players also donated money to paint stripes at Pueblo West Civic Center tennis courts; this gave us 4 playing courts there. The Pueblo West Metro Board was visited by Dave Raymond and many players to draw attention to the need for space to play in this growing sport. Dave Raymond joined USAPA as an ambassador which opened some doors to create yet another new play area at CSU-P. He also started playing at REPS.

Kathy and Lee Neve came to play at the YMCA and started their own home town group in the Colorado City/Rye area. The group grew when Kathy started introductory classes and securing time in the local gym. The Neve's and players also striped outside courts in the recreation area at the park.

Sonya and Lyn Neve live in the Ordway/La Junta area and with

ambassador Sheila Groves created many places to play. This group continues to grow through the involvement of families and neighbors in the area.

Sandy Taylor was hooked on pickleball and wanted to create a group in her hometown Beulah. She was able to secure the school and recreation center there and her group of friends fell in love with the game and continues to grow. New Beulah residents brought expertise and kept skills growing in Beulah, Pooh and Steve Potter are active supporters in Beulah keeping the pace for newbies and competitive players.

Mark Jacques from the Pueblo Tennis Center striped 4 courts on a tennis court inside and it became a popular place to play year round but especially in the winter. It was evident that more courts were needed when 26 players would crowd into the 4 courts to play. PTC opened more open play time and created a membership for picklers. Mark inspired some tournaments and clinics to be held there as well. Tamada's would contact players who like to play competitively and round robins were always fun for players. The need for more competition spread and the round robins started to break into levels/age groups. The pickleball players now are a family(O'hana).

In 2021 PTC opened 6 designated pickleball courts outside. The solution to crowding was answered. The play on these courts were continual all day long. The courts were built over an old tennis court and the flaws started to show almost immediately. The play continues but hope for repairs have not been answered yet.

Pueblo picklers expanded to playing in out of town venues. Picklers traveled to tournaments bringing back stories and sometimes medals. Beau Frasquez and Dylan Grace traveled to Indiana to play a PPA (Professional Pickleball Association) event at level 5.0. They came back with experience and knowledge. Beau also created a

pickleball matches that played with the long existing tennis event formerly known as the Paper Cup is now the Candy Cup. Clinics with high level players and pro players become a regular occurrence in order to boost skills in Pueblo.

Sue Coman will travel to nationals in singles in 2022 located in Florida, she won the golden ticket to qualify. The picklers traveling also brought back new formats to play and ideas for more courts in Pueblo.

Many players have brought medal bling home.

Amanda Cesar, city recreational administrator, watched pickleball players tape and untape pickleball courts at City Park to play each day. She approached players to ask the our most requested question "Would you like some designated pickleball courts". In 2019 Richard and Diane Ratliff became USAPA ambassadors and started a committee to help Amanda Cesar apply for GOCO grants for pickleball courts.

The first attempt to apply came back rejected. Diane and Richard and the committee pressed on with Amanda filling in the GOCO critique as to why our application was rejected.

Amanda Cesar's next application was reviewed and that preview to the GOCO committee came back with glowing reviews. The project looked like a sure thing. The second application was rejected again. The Ratliff's and Amanda were devastated and sadness spread among the pickleball family(O'hana). The committee dissolved and COVID shut down play across the city venues.

The Ratliff's created drive-way play, church courts and other creative locations to play through the COVID shut-down of normal playing courts. Diane created an email list that kept players informed of events and tips on play. Her database would later be

utilized in the next surge for city courts by PCPA.

In the meantime COVID disrupted face to face communications. A quick and easy way for players to check when, where and who is playing. Communication had to be created. Shane Trujillo came up with using the "Group Me" app. This tool allowed players to communicate and arrange information. It has been the heart and soul of laughter, organization and updating for nearly 175 players as we line up playing and chide each other about play.

Ratliff's and Raymond's left USAPA ambassadorship so the need for more ambassadors was evident. Byron Brothers was appointed ambassador at large for a short time. Ratliff's and Raymond's leaving the active USAPA ambassadorship would not keep them from being involved with pickleball but left only the Tamada's in that program. The need for more ambassadors is also growing in SOCO.

PTC has a booth each year for tennis at the CSU-P "children's movement and health" event. In 2022 Anne Jackson, Anne's granddaughter Preslie and Kat Beaubien had a PTC sponsored booth with pickleball. There were a lot of students trying out pickleball. CSU-P students plus the athletic director also enjoyed trying pickleball. Anne and Kat are following up on opportunities for students to do pickleball as an intramural game.

Ratliff's and Tamada's continued to keep in touch with city officials as we tried to organize grants and budgets to build courts. Steve Meier and Mike Sexton had kept money in their budget for courts. Mayor Nick Gradisar also had budgeted money for courts. At this time no grants were available to match funds that were set aside for courts in the budget. The courts were needed even more as the pickler numbers were growing 10-20 a month.

Wendy Hunker was dissatisfied with the lack of public courts and

decided to go to the City Council meeting and read a prepared statement to request courts. Picklers were there to support her efforts. The Mayor listened and said yes. Unfortunately the cost of materials rose so quickly the 12 courts were cut to 8 courts. The city did paint stripes on additional courts at Minnequa Park for play. The city had a vision at Mineral Palace Park which had an abandoned tennis court. The vision came true in fall of 2022 opening 8 state of the art pickleball courts.

At the same time a group of volunteers created the Pueblo County Pickleball Association. PCPA would be a non-profit support to pickleball players and playing venues. Initially the officers were Larry Belkin, president; Bruce Dwelle, vice president; Julie Wands, secretary; Vince Ryan, treasurer plus Bill and Sue Coman as tournament directors. USAPA ambassadors Clinton and Kay Tamada also headed the Education and Department of Membership. Julie and Vince resigned their positions early in the development and volunteers Bonnie Barr became treasurer and Laura Holt took over as secretary. This Board would create the non profit status needed to raise and hold funds for the pickleball community. The by-laws were established and the Mineral Palace Park vision was underway. The relationship between PCPA and Pueblo city officials is building for the next great pickleball project, establishing Pueblo as a great pickleball community.

Clinton and Kay delivered in 2020 a bid and suggested modification of Pueblo West Civic Center tennis complex. It would have created 4 designated courts. The Metro Board deferred to recreational director Carol Cosby and she rejected the proposal. The population of players is growing weekly and more courts are still needed.

Richard Putnam needed help with building an inside court at El Centro Park and Recreational Center. We went over to stripe and introduce the game to staff and kids. They all were thrilled with the

new sport opportunity. Richard still supports the center and pickleball play with the kids. Many local schools use pickleball play in their PE classes. It is a favorite activity.

In 2022 USAPA ambassadors Tamada's contacted Walsenburg, Las Animas and Trinidad to help grow their small group of players. Trinidad pickleball family is growing quickly and they have secured the high school's old tennis courts. They are raising funds as is Raton, New Mexico. Stephanie and JP Martinez from Raton have taped courts at the high school and have a friendly group that also is expanding.

La Veta picklers have created a site to play with Roger Fowler leading the way. An old concrete slab with recycled fencing and a lot of players helping their courts should be ready soon. This small community loves pickleball.

9/20/2022 the Mineral Palace Courts had a ribbon cutting ceremony to open the 8 courts. The Mayor spoke and the challenge between Mayor and Steve Meier (recreation director) created the stage for the first game played on the new courts. Mayor Gradisar played with PCPA president Larry Belkin and Clinton Tamada partnered with Steve Meier. Next year we will see if the Mayor and Larry can beat existing winners Steve and Clinton.

The ladies also had an inaugural game. Councilwoman Lori Winner paired with Pooh Potter to take on Bonnie Barr and Kay Tamada. 2023 will have a rematch!

The new Mineral Palace Park courts draw new interest with all ages. New players are showing up and having fun.

Tamada's and Ratliff's provide 2 days a week intro to pickleball times for those who wish to know more about the game at MPP. Education and instruction is a growing need with these courts opening lead to

virtually dozens of new players coming to play each week. Former tennis players, table tennis players and start from step one newbies go to the new pickleball courts.

Amanda Cesar moved to the Mesa area and is launching a large project for a park. This park will include 8 pickleball courts. The open house for that project was supported by pueblo picklers.

Kay Tamada created a flex league program that included 32 teams for the inaugural season. This league joins all the locations all over southern Colorado to play at their level, time and place.

The vision of more pickleball courts, more competitive play, players of all ages playing pickleball is coming to life each day. The television celebrities and pros are making pickleball a commercial entity. This game continues to grow.

MPP has courts numbered and if you notice the numbers start south and go north. Why? The next 4 courts will have consecutive numbers continuing from south to north. Phase II.

Today playing pickler groups are gathering and practicing, playing and bringing friends to this game. Stay tuned to the next addition of SOCO and pickleball updates. This book is designed to document the beginning story of how we got "hooked" on pickleball in Pueblo.

Respectfully compiled by Kay Tamada.