

I'd like to start with a big thanks to my fellow board members: Brenda Dion, Hector Campbell, Walter Brennan, and Erik Hoenisch. The five of us have all had to work more than any of us wanted or expected, to address all the issues we have tried to address throughout the year. Once again, we invite members to join the board and to share the load.

Growth in numbers and access to courts

This year has been one of incredible growth-far beyond what we were expecting a year ago. In my March 2023 newsletter, I announced that we had 87 members and hoped that we would have 100 by the end of the year, which would have been a new record.

In fact, by the end of the year we had over 200 members. And now, in early March 2024, we have 125 active members. (Note: Since renewal occurs on January 1, we expect a drop off in January, with growth in membership during the year). The growth in membership has been partially driven by the "Pickleball Fundamentals" classes that our dedicated volunteer instructors. Brenda will provide details on this.

The growth in membership creates a major challenge-namely how to satisfy the demand given a limited supply of court time. In the summer, access to outdoor courts is constrained by time of day. In the summer we had two 2-hour time slots x 4 courts x 7 days a week, a total of 56 court bookings/week. During the school year, this past year, we have had a total of seven 2-hour bookings x 3 courts, a total of 21 court bookings/week. This challenge, to satisfy demand, is ubiquitous. Just try getting court time in Burnaby or Victoria, for example. We are fortunate here that the Canada Games Centre provides some time every day of the week for pickleball. This is available to both YPA members and the public. The CGC offers open play which clearly is a popular option for many players.

As the demand for court time increased at Takhini last spring and, to a greater extent, this fall, we have had to revise our programming, and booking process, to try to maximise the benefits and access to our members. Some felt we made too many changes or made changes too frequently.

Our Programming

The YPA has offered Open Round Robins over the last year. Any member with a pass could sign up to play. These are social/recreational events and have been quite popular.

As well, we offered a tiered system of competitive round-robins. We started with three levels this fall and expanded to four levels of play. In theory, players within each level are similar in skill and thus can enjoy competitive play amongst their peers. We received considerable positive feedback, from players at all levels. Novices could enjoy playing

other novices without feeling threatened by stronger players. Advanced players had an opportunity to test their skills with their peers. The board felt it was necessary, on occasion, to inform players that they had, in the board's view, signed up for an inappropriate level. This obviously was not a pleasant role for the board. And sometimes players did not readily accept the board's judgments. In any case, if we are going to continue having competitive play at different levels we need to come up with a better solution. Adopting Pickleball Brackets (PB) and requesting that all players establish a rating is one way to objectively rank players within a club, and to use those rankings to group players into competitive groups. We will discuss the pros and cons of adopting PB after the 2024 AGM.

We built "facilitation" (instruction with drills) into the tiered round-robins, with the drills adapted to the different skill levels. Ideally, during the subsequent 1.5 hours of round-robin play, skills practiced in the 30-minute teaching session were reinforced.

Summer at Mt. McIntyre

The weather over the summer of 2023 was particularly delightful. Tennis Yukon (TY) has a lease for exclusive use of the tennis courts. However, over the last several years, TY has agreed to allow us to play pickleball on one of the four tennis courts. Last summer they required us to paint over most of our court lines prior to their annual June tournament, and then re-establish these lines a few days later. This was a lot of work but, given our lack of tenancy, we felt obliged to comply. We hope in the next year to have the lease between TY and the City revised to provide a degree of certainty and entitlement to the Mt. Mc. courts until we have built dedicated outdoor pickleball courts.

Indoor Summer Play

We also had access to the Elijah Smith gym for 3 hours each Tuesday evening.

Yukon Pickleball Day, May 7

Again, this May we participated in Pickleball Day. This gave us another opportunity to introduce people to the game.

Tournaments

We hosted three tournaments this year.

- A fun tournament on June 24, with 32 participants
- Yukon Championship, on August 26, with two levels of play: Intermediate and Open, with 20 players in each level. This was limited to YPA members, which included some players from Skagway.

- A New Year's tournament on January 6. Three levels of play, a total of 44 participants. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make these a success.

Officiating

Pickleball Canada has an officiating program, which is on par with the American program. Many Canadian referees and most, if not all of the highest-level Canadian refs, referee in the U.S. in the winter months and have dual certification. I am on the national board, and felt obliged to become an accredited Level 1 ref, which I now am.

Final Comments

Please consider joining the board. The board ought better to reflect our membership. Thus, we need more women and more novice and intermediate players on the board. And we need more members to help share the load (including helping with tournaments, maintaining the website, monitoring bookings, etc.). We have several challenges ahead, as we seek to increase court availability to meet our burgeoning growth in membership.

Jim Gilpin

March 2024